

Public Information as a *Mission Critical* Component of West African Peace Operations



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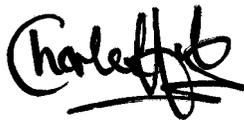
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I wish to dedicate this monograph to Ms. Margaret A. Novicki, in appreciation for her contribution to the development of the Public Information function and the promotion of peace in West Africa. The captivating descriptions of her experiences leave little doubt in my mind that she is the notable revolutionary in this story.

Finally, I would like to give special thanks to my supervisor, Mark Malan, for his enthusiasm, sensibility and faith shown throughout this project and in general – all of which continues to be a humbling and inspirational example.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Charlie Hunt', with a horizontal line drawn underneath the signature.

Charlie Hunt

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² For further information on Training for Peace, see: www.trainingforpeace.org

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In conflict and post-conflict societies, the media acts to socialise – complementing and often substituting for a lack of other capable institutions. In addition to its informational utility, the media is fundamentally a source of entertainment which has the capacity to integrate, amuse and offer continuity. The increased media agency of Public Information (PI) components in peace operations supports their ability to appeal to these most receptive of instincts inherent in humankind, which makes the media and use of PI in peacekeeping such a powerful tool in conflict resolution and post-conflict peacebuilding.

In contemporary multidimensional peace operations, it is commonly accepted that programmes such as, supporting the rule of law, reforming the security sector, and planning for democratic elections are *mission critical*. Such initiatives may well take precedence as core elements of the peace process or war to peace transition. However, peace operations have increasingly become dependent upon the derivation and perpetuation of the consent of local populations for a political process. The ubiquity and utility of the media as a tool to promote, assist and implement such programmes is something that cannot be valued highly enough.

The application of PI in the UN missions in Sierra Leone and Liberia was characterised by innovation and creativity – in what can arguably be considered a revolutionary period of an ostensibly evolutionary process. A wide range of actors throughout the peace support community became clients of an effective PI mission component, establishing the status and worth of public information as a *mission critical* function, essential for the effective pursuit of wider mission goals and objectives. This is particularly true in situations where the information/media environment is degraded, low on capacity, and where credible information is conspicuous in its absence. It is the design, management and implementation of PI that oils the peacekeeping machine, and establishes its credibility and legitimacy in the field and further abroad.

It is vital that the future development of PI in peacekeeping is based on lessons from both good and bad practice, and that these lessons become learnt through the continual development of PI methodologies and concepts. This study highlights the role and development of PI in two contemporary UN missions in West Africa (in Sierra Leone and Liberia), whilst also identifying the challenges and opportunities that the functional expansion of PI in these missions has created.

In the pursuit of any mission's end state – sustainable peace – and the concomitant goals of credible democracy, rule of law and economic development, it is clear that a socially responsible and fully capable PI component is a *sine qua non* for effective peace operations. Indeed, it must be considered as a *mission critical* component of all future operations.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

Historically, the media and methods of disseminating information to a public have had a marked influence over the direction of conflict. Mobilising public opinion in support of a national war effort has long since been the business of those residing in war rooms and the corridors of power. The post-Cold War era has ushered in new parameters for conflict with the loss of bi-polarity facilitating a proliferation of intra-state conflict. Far from negating its influence, new war with its new variables and implications³ has been the setting for perpetuating and even accentuating the impact of media on the direction, perceptions and outcomes of conflict throughout the world.

This evolution has presented those working in conflict resolution with interesting questions and challenges when holding the media and the use of information as influential in the peace process. If engagement with media is empowering in accessing the root causes of conflict and later building peaceful societies, then integrating an appreciation of this into the international mechanisms for peace and security is fundamental to ensuring effective conflict prevention and resolution. In fact, “there is an emerging belief that the media may well be the most effective means of conflict resolution and preventing new wars.”⁴

In its earliest conception, peacekeeping was the military business that underpinned a political and diplomatic process. This resulted in information being disseminated cautiously, if at all. The notion that peacekeeping should involve an informational strategy in support of its mandate was non-existent – although there was some attempt to produce basic public information materials in the earliest peacekeeping operations in the Sinai and the Congo. However, the firm grip on information in peacekeeping missions was seen as an operational necessity and supported throughout the UN at both the field and New York headquarters (HQ) level.

The United Nations Transitional Assistance Group (UNTAG) in Namibia accommodated the birth of Public Information (PI) in peacekeeping, including a media relations office through which a number of radio programmes, a poster campaign and civil society outreach initiatives were pioneered principally in support of elections. Widely regarded as a success, UNTAG’s PI experience

³ See: Kaldor, M. *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era*, Cambridge: Polity, 1999.

⁴ Howard, R.(a) *The Media’s Role in War and Peacebuilding*, DCAF, 2003, <<http://www.impacs.org/files/MediaPrograms/media%20in%20war%20and%20peacebuilding.PDF>> (Accessed 5th June 2006)

highlighted the value of PI to a mission in a strategic sense. It was in the aftermath of UNTAG that PI began to hold greater conceptual importance and became the focus of a more systematic approach to pre-mission planning.

The 1992 pre-operation assessment mission for the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) was the first to fully integrate PI-specialists in the process. A full-scale PI component was considered essential to operational success, and a mission radio station was pioneered and successfully implemented, gaining widespread support from member states and the peacekeeping community alike.

As with the changing nature of conflict, the media context within which peacekeeping missions operate is also dynamic. The technological advancements in the media sphere facilitate coverage of conflict anywhere in the world and the emergence of 24 hour real-time reporting of conflict deemed truly newsworthy has restructured the timescale for dealing with those in the international and global media business. The increased capability of the media to magnify the work of a mission, impact on public opinion towards it and as a result, potentially influence the decisions of the peacekeeping organisation, member states and troop contributing countries; have demanded the development of sophisticated PI-capabilities.⁵

PI in Contemporary Peace Operations: Public Information vs. Information Operations

It must be emphasised that the methods of information exchange and use of intelligence in peace operations should not be confused with the functions of a capable, efficient and distinct PI capability.⁶ This conception of PI requires some justification given the realities of information-usage in contemporary peace operations. It is argued in some quarters that such a component should indeed be prioritised as an intelligence multiplier. It has become increasingly clear that the capacity to collect, analyze and disseminate vital information in a timely manner is essential to successful mandate implementation. The necessarily transparent organisational approach to peacekeeping at the UN hinders the ability to optimize the benefits gained from intelligence. Although there is inevitably some cross-over between the information handling of PI and

⁵ Interview: Ms. Margaret A. Novicki, UN Special Advisor KAIPTC – Accra, Ghana, 20th June 2006. Novicki was Chief of Public Information and Spokesperson for the United Nations Mission in Liberia from September 2003 to November 2004 and for the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone from January 2001 to October 2002. She is currently Director of the United Nations Information Center and UN Special Advisor to the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre in Accra, Ghana.

⁶ *Lessons from ECOWAS Peacekeeping Operations: 1990-2004*, ECOWAS with KAIPTC and UNOWA, March 2005, p.23, <<http://www.un.org/unowa/unowa/reports/ecowas110205.pdf>> (Accessed 5th June 2006)

intelligence; PI exists independently of the increasingly conceptually accepted and efficient gathering and utilization of intelligence in peace support operations.

The creation of both types of capability – for intelligence and PI - is fundamental to the progressive success of peace operations in any setting, but addressing the challenges of intelligence in peace support operations (PSO) is beyond the scope of this project. Rather, there is an important distinction to be made between *Media or Information Operations* and *Public Information*, much of which is bound up in the military-dominant history of peacekeeping. The development of PI as an information source and potential communication channel between the mission and the local/international communities justifies an analysis independent of other informational needs of a mission.

The UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) is ultimately accountable for the implementation of PI activities in the field. However, at the HQ level, PI development and planning is a product of partnership between DPKO and the Department of Public Information (DPI), which is responsible for PI and communication for the whole UN system. In the early days, there was a certain amount of friction between the two entities due to organisational turf issues which inhibited efficient collaboration. Since 1997, there has been a more systematic approach to formalising guidelines and operating procedures for PI in field operations and through the more recent creation of the 'Peace and Security' section within DPI.

The UN's peacekeeping experiences since UNTAG have induced demand for a more sophisticated and context-sensitive PI capability, able to address the wide-ranging impact of various media upon the success of a mission. The devastating efficiency with which *Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines* (RTLM) facilitated the genocide in Rwanda, the belligerency of propaganda campaigns during the Balkans wars and the manipulation of international media by Charles Taylor in the earliest days of the Liberian conflict highlighted the need for such capabilities.

PI activities, amongst many others, have increasingly impacted on mission efficacy as the mandated goals of peace operations have evolved along with the conflicts they are intended to address. For peacekeeping missions, the media's function as an exogenous reporter of conflict, and perhaps as a strong early warning indicator of conflict, has increasingly been transcended by the media's agency in conflict.⁷ Hence, a re-conception of the media as an endogenous actor in the business of peacekeeping has become a pre-requisite to planning and implementing a successful PI strategy.

The evolution of a PI concept and mission component has necessarily been multi-dimensional in approach, attempting to manage the status and reputations that invariably precede and accompany missions, whilst adapting to address media spoilers and overcoming the challenges to using media initiatives in the

⁷ Agency - pertaining to the conduct of an actor as opposed to the context of a structure.

reconstruction process. Although this has been a progression predominantly revealed in the field, the PI capability manifest in the organisational HQ is vital as a structural pillar working in an arena beyond the constraints of the field.

The Under Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Jean-Marie Guéhenno recently emphasised how: “peacekeeping is the culmination, not the replacement, of a political process. It can never be a reaction to a policy vacuum.”⁸ In contrast, the rationale underpinning PI within peace operations is often the need for a response to an information-vacuum or at least, a scarcity of credible information. However, the political process at the heart of modern peacekeeping is inherently reliant on the support of the local population. It is, therefore, in deriving consent amongst this audience for a political process - as much as for the mission presence - that PI has become a critical component of contemporary peacekeeping.

If PI components are actors in, and providers of information to, the mass media; then it is important to appreciate the supportive facets of the media so as to situate PI within it and understand better the intersection between PI in peacekeeping and the media.

Media as a Social Phenomenon

The conduct of the mass media institution is centred around the dissemination and reception of messages, performed by specific actors (regulators, producers, distribution networks, consumers) within a framework of norms and understandings (laws, codes of conduct, audience expectations). The main function of mass media is to create and distribute ‘knowledge’ in the form of information, ideas, entertainment and culture.

Media channels not only provide communication networks, but also construct status relationships in terms of who is likely to listen to whom. The sender-receiver association is traditionally unidirectional, but in general terms, technological progress has created the space for an increasingly interactive relationship. There remains however, a physical and social distance due to the lack of sender-responsibility and normative constraints of journalistic professionalism faced by senders. This asymmetrical relationship is emphasised by the instant contact a single act of mass communication can make with a huge number of receivers. Whilst the debates and intricacies of ‘media effect’ are beyond the scope of the study, suffice to say, the mass media is unique in its ability to engender a more consistent response amongst its audience, when compared to a comparable quantity of receivers reliant on a slower, sequential flow of the same information from person to person.

⁸ *Remarks of Jean-Marie Guéhenno Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations to the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations*, UNDPKO, 27th February 2006, <<http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/articles/article270206.htm>> (Accessed 5th June 2006)

In contemporary society, politics without the media is hard to envisage and vice versa. The media has played a central role in the formation and maintenance of social organisation, providing a vital two-way channel of communication between those in power and those whom they are intended to serve. The social function of the media has been the subject of protracted discourse and will continue to be as long as it retains the ability to shape perceptions and influence people. Mass media provides people with the opportunity to develop empathy for the plight of others and hence creates the space for common understanding and social interaction. This integrative role impacts throughout society from international state-state interaction to the family unit and interpersonal relationships.

The innate ability of the media to reach out to people and stimulate awareness and discussion about contemporary issues makes PI, as a mission media arm, crucial in linking the mission to its external audiences.

Defining PI in Peace Operations

The influence of media in conflict has been universally accepted and is a highly-analysed research field. The more recent development of 'media and peacebuilding' theory has delved deeper into the utility of media agency in peacebuilding. Whilst providing valuable insight, the attention given to initiatives dealing with the mass media has neglected the specific impact of the rapidly developing PI concept and capability within UN peace operations amounting to media in conflict resolution. The concept of 'media intervention' has been the subject of increased analysis at the field level and it is helpful to understand the evolution of PI activity in the context of preceding and concurrent work. In terms of media intervention typology, PI is best described by the following.

1) Pro-active media-based intervention, defined by Howard as:

*"The product of an outside intervener such as a peacekeeping force or a nongovernmental organization and is often deployed in a conflict or post-conflict environment. It can be media intended to counter hate propaganda, or programming to provide immediately practical information such as election and voting practices, refugee reunification, education or health advice."*⁹

It is apparent that the recent development of PI in West African peace operations can be seen as a combination of the above and the following distinct paradigm.

⁹ Howard, R.(b) *An Operational Framework for Media & Peacebuilding*, Institute for Media, Policy and Civil Society (IMPACS), 2003, p.11, <http://www.impacs.org/actions/files/MediaPrograms/framework_apr5.pdf> (Accessed 5th June 2006)

2) Intended outcome programming, which is:

“Specifically intent upon transforming attitudes, promoting reconciliation and reducing conflict. It is not conventional journalism...The content is determined by its appropriateness to fostering peace. The programming and delivery mechanisms can be innovative adaptations of a popular culture such as radio and television soap operas and dramas, street theatre, wall posters, and more.”¹⁰

These functions were once the business of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the wider international community, but have increasingly become integral functions of field operational PI capabilities for missions with expanded multifunctional mandates.

In addition to the UN, a range of supranational organisations such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the European Union (EU) have peacekeeping experience and are also part of the development of PI and media initiatives. However, given the West African focus, it is the experiences of the UN missions within the sub-region that are most pertinent in trying to draw out lessons from and for peace operations in West Africa. Although the UN has been the trail-blazer in the area of PI, it is clear that all peace operations benefit from a minimum PI capacity which can explain their presence to people through various media channels. It is increasingly clear that the more complex the mission objectives, the greater the PI requirement.

In peacekeeping circles, specifically those within UN DPKO, there has been a realisation that media plays an intrinsic role in conflict and subsequent peace processes. This realisation has been gradual and evolutionary. PI has moved from organisational self-promotion via DPI at UN HQ, to the more media savvy peace operations largely born out of the lessons learned during missions such as UNOSOM in Somalia, UNAMIR in Rwanda and UNPROFOR in Bosnia. In contrast, the experiences of the recent UN missions in West Africa allude to a more revolutionary course and one which may have a considerable impact on the future role of PI in peacekeeping.

¹⁰ Ibid.

AIM, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

The aim of this monograph is to analyse the extent to which PI has become *mission critical* in West African peace operations. By extrapolating, analysing and drawing on lessons learned, the aim is to highlight where such a capability can be prioritised institutionally, developed and better utilised in future peace operations in the sub-region. The concept of peacekeeping requires a comprehensive analysis of PI-initiatives and the wider efficacy that this kind of capability has brought to missions.

The study focuses on the experiences of UN peace operations in Sierra Leone and Liberia as specific case studies - United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) and United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) respectively. These cases demonstrate a number of similarities which offer a sound basis for comparative and complementary analysis. The setting for these missions is close enough in space and time to highlight the spill-over of conflict, or perhaps more accurately, its diffusion through the notoriously porous borders of West Africa.

Despite a level of commonality of the two cases, in charting a perceived revolution in UN PI – both conceptually and in its successful implementation – UNAMSIL and UNMIL offer varied experiences due to the chronology of events and institutional learning inherent in the UNMIL PI section. The sheer force, both in magnitude and progressive direction, of development in the field of PI in these two missions alone, requires in-depth analysis in isolation from a wider context. This analysis is resolutely underpinned by a review of the media-architecture for West Africa, in order to provide broader scope for the application of the resultant conclusions and recommendations for future peace operations in the sub-region.

The research methods include a review of existing literature on PI in peacekeeping and participation in the Media in Peace Support Operations training course at the KAIPTC. This is complemented by primary research in the field where personal interviews were conducted with former UNAMSIL and incumbent UNMIL staff from both PI and the wider mission management divisions. The experiences of PI in the case studies will be analysed qualitatively against the success of wider mandated mission goals, not quantitatively in terms of PI effect. This methodology is sufficient to extrapolate achievements in terms of peacekeeping objectives rather than in regard to media effect or via content analysis which is the business of media studies researchers. The remaining gaps and uncertainty this approach leaves will be discussed as a problem for exhaustive critical analysis of PI but also for PI sections themselves in measuring the ongoing efficacy of their own work.

Chapter I has provided a brief overview of the development of PI in UN peacekeeping and highlighted how/why media is central to conflict and ever-more crucial in its resolution. Chapter II constructs a media-architecture for the West African sub-region, extrapolating general themes, explaining the effect

conflict has upon this particular media environment and the context this creates for a PI component in West African peace operations.

Drawing on the experiences of UNAMSIL and UNMIL, Chapter III examines and analyses the structure of PI components, how this has developed in these missions and the lessons these applications have brought about. It highlights lessons learned on conceptual, organisational and methodological levels and demonstrates how the PI component has been *mission critical* to the achievement of mandated mission-goals.

Chapter IV critically analyses the contemporary challenges arising from both traditional and new PI activity in UNAMSIL and UNMIL. Addressing the positive and negative impacts of PI, it illustrates how PI has inadvertently crept into the sphere of peacebuilding, the challenges associated with exit strategy/PI legacy and the continual development of the concept of PI in peacekeeping.

In conclusion, Chapter V asserts that it is clear PI has become a *mission critical* component of contemporary West African peace operations. Whilst it is important to appreciate the value in institutionalising certain key functions, it is only by appreciating those PI effects which must be carefully managed that PI can continue its support for the peace process above and beyond its commitment to the mission itself.

CHAPTER II

THE MEDIA CONTEXT FOR PUBLIC INFORMATION IN WEST AFRICAN PEACE OPERATIONS

INTRODUCTION

In attempting to describe a West African media-architecture, it is important to bear in mind that every conflict situation is unique. Public information initiatives must reflect and respond to particular idiosyncrasies accordingly. There is, however, enormous value in extrapolating trends and patterns across the sub-region. It is upon such a construction that PI-capability can be developed, and perhaps built, enabling greater operational context-sensitivity. However state-specific a conflict may appear, the tendency is for intra-state conflict to produce spill-over effects in neighbouring countries and often further afield through economic disruption, the flow of displaced peoples and other destabilising factors. It is therefore crucial to have an appreciation of the regional interdependencies and similarities in the media sphere so as to develop a capable PI function as part of a holistic response mechanism.

It is also necessary to reconcile the multifarious conceptualisations of a ubiquitous 'media' and have definitional clarity before analysing of this social phenomenon. With the West African region in mind, the media may be defined simply as; "a mechanism through which information and opinion is disseminated to a population."¹¹ Newspapers, radio, and television are the predominant channels used in an organised fashion to communicate information to groups of people, as a service to the public,¹² but this is by no means an exhaustive list. Although peace operations are the subject of current affairs and 'news' programming, it is important not to limit the range of media under analysis to these outputs. The broader entertainment function of these and other media is also pertinent to the subject at hand.

It is important to appreciate the distinction between 'media' and 'journalism'. Journalism is the process of collecting, interpreting and disseminating information. This is an integral part of the constructive capability the 'media' encompasses but is the business of media agents and practitioners rather than the structural institution that 'the media' embodies.

¹¹ Howard, R.; Francis Rolt, F.; van de Veen, H. & Verhoeven, J. *The Power of the Media: A Handbook for Peacebuilders*, European Centre for Conflict Prevention in cooperation with the European Centre for Common Ground and IMPACS, 2003, <http://www.gppac.org/documents/Media_book_nieuw/a_c_introduction.htm> (Accessed 5th June 2006)

¹² Howard, R.(b), op cit, p.4.

THE MEDIA IN THE WEST AFRICAN CONTEXT

The West African sub-region is characterised by a literacy deficit, where an extremely high percentage of adults are illiterate. This soars as high as 70% in Sierra Leone.¹³ Although official figures state 57.5%¹⁴ or 55.8%,¹⁵ some practitioners on the ground estimate Liberian illiteracy to be as high as 80% in reality.¹⁶ This has a huge impact on the relative demand for media products and is ultimately one of the major reasons for the predominance of radio as the most powerful medium in West Africa.

Radio is generally perceived to be the most developed method of communication throughout the region, and in all states there tend to be numerous commercial and private-owned stations, a state-owned public broadcaster and increasingly a proliferation of community radio stations with a county or provincial focus. Popular morning radio programming is based around the daily newspapers which are often read out verbatim and discussed at length. Although this provides newspapers with some exposure, it simultaneously eliminates the need to read them and acts as a further audience-multiplier for radio stations.¹⁷

Although capacities vary across the different countries, relatively low transmission capabilities mean that the signal is often limited in its reach and even upon reception, inconsistent at best. Although radios are abundant across the sub-region, they are still beyond the buying capacity of a huge proportion of the populations and the lack of consistent electricity supply or cost of batteries further exacerbates the deficit.

The press in West African countries is replete with diverse publications but generally lacking in terms of sales and content. Of all main media channels, the literacy-deficit has its biggest repercussions on the newspaper industry. Often prolific in number, the press exists as a business where current and projected sales are largely predicated on continued politicisation of content. Newspapers tend to be relatively short 4-10 page tabloids, few of which are daily and some

¹³ Illiteracy statistics are based on people aged 15 years and above and are based on reference Year 2002/3. UNESCO Literacy statistics for Sierra Leone, <http://www.uis.unesco.org/profiles/EN/GEN/countryProfile_en.aspx?code=6940> (Accessed 5th June 2006)

¹⁴ The World Fact Book, 2006, published by the United States Central Intelligence Agency: <www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/li.html> (Accessed 5th June 2006)

¹⁵ Illiteracy statistics are based on people aged 15 years and above and are based on reference Year 2002/3. UNESCO Literacy statistics for Liberia, <http://www.uis.unesco.org/profiles/EN/GEN/countryProfile_en.aspx?code=4300> (Accessed 5th June 2006)

¹⁶ Interview: Mr. Luiz Da Costa, UNMIL Deputy Special Representative Secretary General for Operations and Rule of Law - Monrovia, Liberia, 9th March 2006.

¹⁷ Interview: Mr. Michael Sahr, UNMIL National Information Officer/Media Relations – Monrovia, Liberia, 10th March 2006.

that can only go to press when they have secured sufficient advertising for each edition. The circulation and distribution of the product is small in comparison to population numbers and there is a culture whereby newspapers are shared and read by a number of people. In effect, this multiplies both the information getting out in society and the influence of the medium, but prevents further sales and improved financial security for newspapers.

Radio and press are the dominant mainstream information channels for West Africans. Television, with its stimulating audio-visual format arguably has a greater 'effect' per unit consumption, but a combination of limited reach and the expense associated with owning a TV set result in extremely limited audiences. These constraints are malleable and, in light of technological advance, evermore surmountable for TV as an independent medium. The current reality is that the economic and access constraints to TV in West Africa produce greater inertia than such technological advances offer momentum. As well as these barriers to reception, TV in West Africa suffers from a lack of production capability. Output is often of a poor standard, or else drawn from foreign TV networks in the form of CNN or BBC news programming, whilst movies from the booming Nigerian film industry are hugely popular across Anglophone nations in the sub-region.¹⁸ The upshot of this combination of constraints is a reduction in the societal impact of TV, which ultimately negates TV's potentially primary position in the media effect hierarchy and hence dampens its role in the West African mainstream mass media.

Cultural Factors

Generally speaking, the world of media in West Africa is dominated by men. The major broadcasters and newspapers are dominated by male executives, producers, editors, writers and presenters. Even the community radio stations and rural newspapers, arguably more isolated from the institutional rigidities present in the urban centres, are characterised by patriarchy.¹⁹ This situation unavoidably impacts on media output and the perceptions of women in society. Stereotypes and cultural discrimination against women are strengthened and recurrently institutionalised.

Studying the sub-regional media audience highlights the centrality of cultural norms in the mechanics of the industry. Those with access to the various media tend to display habitual listening and purchasing behaviour which is deeply ingrained in a hereditary and transmissible culture of media consumption. People develop confidence in and loyalty towards particular media outlets which they then dutifully patronise. The relative infancy and ephemeral nature of many newspapers and radio stations compounds this effect, limiting market demand for

¹⁸ Interview: Mr. Michael Sahr, op cit.

¹⁹ Interview: Mr. Oscar Bloh, Search for Common Ground's Talking Drum Studios – Monrovia, Liberia, 13th March 2006.

more credible and trustworthy information sources. The result is the perpetuation of existing institutions in what is a transient, unstable and unattractive industry for entrants.

Further cultural intricacies include the practice of 'oral reporting', particularly in rural areas where those who do have access to mediated information tend to regurgitate it with family, neighbours, friends and in other community forums. This cultural norm is an information multiplier for those media with reach, most obviously for the radio stations. It is clear that the lack of a comprehensive media consumption pattern in the region leads information to be most efficiently disseminated through civil society structures and informal networks. Hierarchical authority and credibility is often derived from and bound up in traditional chieftaincies and other tribal structures of organisation. Although a slower process, the spread of information through such social association is often the only way for news and opinion to diffuse throughout rural areas.

Ownership, Control and Centralisation

Post-independence West African governance has been plagued by military coups d'état. A culture of secrecy symptomatic of the military has regularly translated into the system and methodology of governance. The media has suffered, as this institutional fear of transparency inevitably impacts on government-media relations as well as the shape taken by the media industry in such environments. At times this has manifested itself in the overt persecution of journalists and media houses, all too regularly involving coercion and physical violence as a means of making the point. Circuitously, the inability to publicly criticise government policy and activity has stunted the growth of investigative journalism and the democratic role of the media as a check on government.

The use of state-owned media as a propaganda tool has been commonplace throughout the sub-region. The reputation of long-running and familiar TV, radio and print media, is often exploited as a mouthpiece for those in power. The intersection between government regulation of media and state broadcasters creates the space for imperfect competition and further restrictions on a thriving independent media. Although military rule has come and gone in many cases, the structural rigidities persist and perpetuate throughout the contemporary media-architecture. One of the major problems associated with this is a prevailing defeatism demonstrated by some media practitioners who perceive insurmountable subjugation and control.²⁰

Another general characteristic which varies across the sub-region is the centralised nature of media in West African states, in terms of both production skills and coverage.²¹ Media institutions are typically housed in the close confines

²⁰ Onadipe, A. & Lord, D. *African Media and Conflict*, Conciliation Resources, 1999, <http://www.c-r.org/pubs/occ_papers/af_media/part2.shtml> (Accessed 5th June 2006)

of capital cities and urban centres – leading to informational neglect of rural populations, who usually comprise the majority. This is truer of print media than radio and television, but even then there exists a fundamental lack of coverage capability throughout the sub-region. A natural consequence of this is a tendency for mainstream media to focus on elite issues relevant to a small fraction of the population – the consumers.

Economic Dependency

The stark reality for West African media institutions, principally the independent organisations, is their dependence on economic factors and the limitations imposed through this dependency. Despite sporadic periods of relative economic prosperity, West African states continue to be burdened by weak and vulnerable economies presenting numerous problems for the media industry. The primary source of revenue for independent media outlets is the advertising space they can sell, and if this income fluctuates, the economic viability of the said newspaper or radio station rapidly diminishes. Domestic advertisers often direct their portfolios away from some non-partisan media outlets in fear of repercussions from the incumbent government and their structural power over industry. This leads to imperfect distribution of these vital takings and incentivises an aligned partisan ethos in struggling media houses. The ensuing climate favours large (trans/multi-national) corporations who transcend the constraints of the local economy and hence derive certain influence over how they are represented in a mass media thoroughly dependent on gaining and maintaining advertising contracts. This can be contrary to the interests of the local population as seen in Nigeria, where *Shell Group* holds such status.²² This is a subtlety of the industry that feeds into wider issues of journalistic credibility and integrity.

For newspapers, sales are also important to the continued functioning of the medium. Population purchasing power is low and whether it is daily or less frequent, for the average citizen buying a newspaper is not a priority.²³ As alluded to above, the penchant of radio stations to read verbatim the day's headline newspaper stories eats into potential sales for the newspaper industry. The market for media products is inevitably crowded and competition is fierce. Exploiting a medium's inimitable features is at the heart of optimising audiences. Short of space for innovation, many media industries in West Africa are self-destructive rather than competitively driven for the good of the industry.

²¹ Interview: Mr. Oscar Bloh, op cit.

²² Onadipe, A. & Lord, D., op cit, http://www.c-r.org/pubs/occ_papers/af_media/part2.shtml

²³ Ibid.

Professional Integrity, Management and Organisation

These dependencies begin to portray the fragilities faced by West African media outlets and highlight the natural reliance on support from external financiers. All too often, this assistance is underpinned by political motivations for self-interested agenda-setting, which acts to perpetuate the cycle of partisan and dictated output.

In addition, the economic environment produces an industry where wages for the average journalist are low and as a direct result, many are forced to seek supplementary earnings. Historically, this has led journalists to use their position to 'write for reward'. This culture of dependency has ultimately compromised professional integrity and contributes to an erosion of media credibility. Across the sub-region, there is little tradition of non-partisan and independent media practice²⁴ which perpetuates such problems and contributes to lower expectations and standards throughout society.

These negative externalities are regularly exacerbated by general mismanagement and inefficient practice.²⁵ When technologies are at a premium, media houses are forced into the inefficient use of labour. For example, the lack of tapes and capacity for documentary footage or photographs leads to the repetition of work where access to a catalogue of previous programming would facilitate a more efficient use of time and resources. Although not critical to the operational feasibility of West African media, it thus accentuates institutional inertia and inhibits progress in line with the technological capabilities that exist. The scarcity of practical, but increasingly fashionable, technologies such as mobile phones, digital cameras and dictaphones often results in a hierarchical distribution system rather than one focused on benefiting the medium in production.

The inescapable prioritising of financial returns, in turn perpetuating a commitment to political allegiances, inhibits the development of staff and in-house capacity. Perhaps bound by a 'Catch-22' situation, the inability to focus on long-term training of staff and maturity of editorial vision for the product maintains the status quo and the insecurities that go with it. A lack of infrastructure means that problems of production and distribution compound the challenges. The technologies necessary for printing and producing newspapers are scarce and media houses are often at the mercy of a monopolistic market where prices are kept high and fragile dependencies are increasingly entrenched.

²⁴ Presentation produced by the UNMIL Public Information Section – September 2005.

²⁵ Interview: Mr. Oscar Bloh, op cit.

International Media Influence

Feeding into the aforementioned consumption behaviour and dating back to colonial times, West African people draw huge amounts of information from international media output such as the British Broadcasting Corporation's World Service (BBC World), Radio France International (RFI) and Voice of America (VOA) to name some of the major players. Programmes such as the daily 'Focus on Africa' on the BBC, are part of the staple diet in many of the Anglophone countries.

These institutions hold a very different standing within the structures of the state compared to their domestic counterparts, in part due to superior outreach and a perceived level of trust and influence. It is often the case that the big stories will break through these media, reinforcing their attraction to audiences and simultaneously disadvantaging domestic equivalents. The international reporters also tend to have much better access to the corridors of power, further impeding local media from performing a democratic role as the '4th Estate' check on government.

The combination of the above characteristics, limitations and rigidities, paints a picture of the media landscape where both senders and receivers are inherently constrained by structural factors which create a self-perpetuating cycle of instability and incredibility in the media sphere.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CONFLICT MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

In general terms, a climate of conflict accentuates the severity of the constraints and the problems mentioned above. In addition, there are of course direct consequences of conflict upon the media.

The local media is usually one of the earliest institutions in society to be disrupted by conflict and the reality is that many practitioners, usually "the best hands",²⁶ will have left the country, let alone the industry. It is important to highlight this chronology, as attempts to control public opinion through the content of media outlets usually precede violent conflict. The nature of media-influence means that abnormal and distinctive trends in the content and strategy of output can represent the starkest of early-warning indicators to ensuing conflict. However, by the time conflict has spread throughout a state or region, the media industry is likely to exist as a smaller, weaker and more persecuted reflection of its former self. The weak structures holding together a fragile media infrastructure often buckle under the pressures of conflict, instigating a collapse of media networks.

²⁶ Interview: Mr. Patrick Coker, UNMIL Civil Affairs Officer – Monrovia, Liberia, 9th March 2006. Mr. Patrick Coker was previously a Public Information Officer in both UNAMSIL and UNMIL.

Depending on the dynamics of conflict, the major belligerents gravitate towards media institutions as a way of inducing opinion in their favour and mobilising support for their cause. An example of this was in Sierra Leone where a sophisticated and media savvy *Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone* (RUF) had secured good access to the BBC's 'Focus on Africa' programme, mentioned above.²⁷ The persecution of non-aligned media houses is often intensified with heightened instability, involving the seizure of equipment and destruction of property. Journalists are regularly subjected to torture and, in the case of state involvement, internment without due process. Local and international journalists are often seen as more akin to combatants than impartial observers and as such, face harassment, assault and deportation or imprisonment.

This deliberate targeting of dissenting voices is central to making the belligerent leaders the predominant voice in society. In light of this, local media becomes polarised, divided and divisive.²⁸ Information is used to confuse, demonise and dehumanise opponents as well as creating a climate of fear and panic.²⁹ In extreme cases, media controlled by parties to the conflict becomes malicious, caustic and virulent. Hate media has been a devastatingly efficient tool in escalating and perpetuating conflict; best documented following the genocide in Rwanda but also demonstrated more recently in West Africa in Côte d'Ivoire. Howard remarks how "even under the most ideal conditions, it appears the media most often gravitates towards a destructive role."³⁰ This increased erosion of public trust in media credibility produces a democratic deficit within civil society, thus creating the space where falsehoods and half-truths endure, ultimately fuelling a climate of instability.

What is left of the domestic media is even more centralised to the urban centres and further limited in its scope for content and outreach. If not controlled as a mouthpiece for one or other war-fighting faction, then the likelihood is that there is a more covert affiliation and output is politicised accordingly. Reporting on conflict, especially by those who have endured prolonged and intermittent war is inevitably affected by previous events and although sub-consciously, it is inevitable that personal bias impacts on reporting. Due to the quantity of journalists who flee from conflict, there are many untrained journalists performing the work.³¹ Journalists are also predisposed to self-censorship, in many cases, for the sake of safety and security, as in Liberia throughout the conflict where roaming militia-men dictated that media work was carried out with a high degree of caution.³²

²⁷ Interview: Ms. Margaret A. Novicki, op cit.

²⁸ Interview: Mr. Oscar Bloh, op cit.

²⁹ Onadipe, A. & Lord, D. op cit, <http://www.c-r.org/pubs/occ_papers/af_media/part2.shtml>

³⁰ Howard, R.(a) op cit.

³¹ Interview: Mr. Patrick Coker, op cit.

³² Interview: Mr. Michael Sahr, op cit.

This is not to say that conflict produces a complete information vacuum. There are always those committed journalists and media institutions that will fight through adversity to continue informing, educating and entertaining the conflict population.³³ It is however, clear that the odds are firmly stacked against the existence of thriving, independent and non-partisan media outlets in this context.

There is a level of certainty that conflict will disrupt economic activity, but it is often the case that a state's economy will be devastated at all levels, from the modern and international trade economy through the informal economy of the urban poor to the subsistence system of rural populations. Onadipe and Lord emphasise how "media outlets are as vulnerable to the economic effects of violence as any other enterprise."³⁴ The degradation of infrastructure in areas of transport, communications, post, printing, electricity and water amongst others, are hugely detrimental to the continued functioning of the media industry as a whole. Access to the materials and resources central to production is minimal, as is the ability for media practitioners to work freely due to movement and security constraints.

The advertising revenue, upon which many outlets are completely dependent, is disrupted; accordingly forcing a depleted media community into further decline. During these times, it is often the existence of the international community and particularly the range of UN agencies that become the largest source of advertising revenue for local media.³⁵

Advertising on radio generally commands much lower income than that which newspapers can. This is crippling when the production and transmission of radio output is laden with relatively large costs; often electricity generation for long hours of broadcasting, paying a range of staff for those same hours and maintaining the transmission capability. However, radio continues to be the best medium for message output. Even during conflict, it has the widest reach, generally able to circumnavigate the broken lines of communication, and the all-important radio receivers are portable and can function independent of mains supply at least. However, it is inevitable that it is only the stations with comparatively strong support that can continue broadcasting. For example, in Liberia following the return to fighting in 1999, only Radio Veritas with support from the Catholic Church, state-funded Liberian Broadcasting Corporation (ELBC) Radio, STAR Radio supported by *Fondation Hirondelle* and Charles Taylor's KISS FM maintained broadcast capability.

³³ Garbeh Davis cited in Onadipe, A. & Lord, D., op cit. <http://www.c-r.org/pubs/occ_papers/af_media/part2.shtml>

³⁴ Onadipe, A. & Lord, D. op cit, <http://www.c-r.org/pubs/occ_papers/af_media/part2.shtml>

³⁵ Interview: Mr. Michael Sahr, op cit; Interview: Mr. Patrick Coker, op cit.

The difficulties involved with securing advertising, accessing affordable printing presses and overcoming increasingly blocked distribution networks, all contribute to inefficient business in newspaper production. The minority who can afford a daily or weekly newspaper before war often slip below the poverty line, for example in Liberia unemployment reached as high as 85% following the protracted conflict.³⁶ As a result, the L\$20 it takes to buy 'The Enquirer' in Monrovia or the 4,000 Cedis for the Ghanaian 'Daily Graphic'³⁷ is necessarily spent on food and the basics that help to avoid the insecurities conflict imposes upon them. This disadvantages the newspapers' income streams but due to the culture of sharing and multiple readers of each newspaper, this also dramatically reduces people's access to information. Editors under financial pressures become more inclined to sensationalise headlines and embellish stories so as to attract customers, further jeopardising the credible information in the public domain and even contributing to instability and unrest. All these things combine to mean that while the use of the printed press is significant, it will typically only reach a limited readership of around 15% of the population.³⁸

Television remains hugely constrained in its outreach and given the tendency for population displacement during conflict, perhaps even more so. It is expected that the state television service will toe the line of the incumbent government but its impact remains ineffective and largely negligible in this context.

The culture of oral reporting is intensified when security is threatened and official information is scarce as a result, perpetuating dependencies on chiefs and other traditional leaders. It is inevitable however, that the civil society networks and social forums at the heart of this process are themselves disrupted by conflict. These are also a channel through which mistruths and falsehoods are reiterated and spread. The word of a mouth which has travelled from the urban capital to the bush relays a story, perhaps something read in a newspaper, which then diffuses throughout the community, suffering from distortions and interpretation out of context. This vulnerability to manipulation gives a very simple process the capability to destabilise a fragile peace and further incite those already in combat. This dissemination and movement of information through channels which are not the mainstream media is a critical component of the informational environment during and post-conflict.

³⁶ The World Fact Book, 2006, published by the United States Central Intelligence Agency: <www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/li.html> (Accessed 5th June 2006)

³⁷ L\$20 and 4,000 Cedis, both approximate to US\$0.40.

³⁸ Interview: Mr. Michael Sahr, op cit.

CONCLUSIONS

The media industries in West African states show similarities in a number of fundamental areas. Radio is the dominant medium in media environments characterised by: political influence and control often concentrated in the urban centres; economic restrictions; and inefficiency perpetuated by a lack of professionalism, strong management or organisation. Status, bringing with it trust and access, is often reserved for international media institutions which impacts on the abilities of national practitioners to be at the forefront of the industry. Alongside the conventional communication channels, traditional methods of information dissemination via oral reporting are supported by civil society structures and a range of informal networks. If one has a broad definition of what the media is, then these cultural idiosyncrasies become even more significant.

The value of generalising media characteristics and trends across West Africa is only as great as a sound appreciation of individual case specifics allows. The media environment during conflict will inevitably be made up of various institutions with disparate agendas and capabilities for advancing that agenda. It is clear that the consequence of the above is a media industry which is increasingly incapable of disseminating credible information to a population, in what is perhaps their time of greatest need.

Whilst this is not an information vacuum, there is clearly a huge information gap. Drawing upon the most effective media approaches, it is this informational space which a PI component in a peace operation must utilise and work within.

CHAPTER III

PUBLIC INFORMATION IN UNAMSIL AND UNMIL

INTRODUCTION

Public Information in peace operations has trodden an evolutionary path since its earliest applications; adapting to varying scenarios, needs and opportunities. Numerous peacekeeping operations co-exist worldwide and the formalisation of experience is necessarily derived from the cross-section. However, it is arguable that PI in peacekeeping experienced a revolutionary period during the UN missions in Sierra Leone and Liberia, and therefore a closer analysis of PI in these missions is desirable.

The United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) was established under UN Security Council resolution (UNSCR) 1270 of 22 October 1999³⁹ to cooperate with the Government and the other parties in implementing the Lomé Peace Agreement and to assist in the implementation of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration plan. On 7 February 2000, the Council revised UNAMSIL's mandate. It also expanded its size, as it did once again on 19 May 2000 and on 30 March 2001.⁴⁰ At its peak, on 31 March 2002, deployment represented the largest peace operation in the world and comprised: 17,368 military personnel including 260 military observers; 87 UN Police; 322 international and 552 local civilian staff.⁴¹

The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) was authorised on 19 September 2003, under UNSCR 1509,⁴² to support the implementation of the ceasefire agreement and the peace process; protect United Nations staff, facilities and civilians; support humanitarian and human rights activities; as well as assist in national security reform, including national police training and formation of a new, restructured military.⁴³ As scheduled, UNMIL took over peacekeeping duties from ECOWAS forces on 1 October 2003. Some 3,500 West African troops who had

³⁹ United Nations Security Council Resolution 1270, <<http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N99/315/02/PDF/N9931502.pdf?OpenElement>> (Accessed 5th June 2006)

⁴⁰ UNAMSIL Facts and Figures, <<http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/missions/unamsil/facts.html>> (Accessed 5th June 2006)

⁴¹ UNAMSIL Homepage, <<http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/missions/unamsil/index.html>> (Accessed 5th June 2006)

⁴² United Nations Security Council Resolution 1509, <<http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N03/525/70/PDF/N0352570.pdf?OpenElement>> (Accessed 5th June 2006)

⁴³ UNMIL Homepage, <<http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/missions/unmil/index.html>> (Accessed 5th June 2006)

been serving with ECOMIL vanguard force were provisionally “re-hatted” as United Nations peacekeepers. As of 30 April 2006 there were 15,891 uniformed personnel, including 14,656 troops and 184 military observers; 1,051 police supported by 506 international civilian personnel, 747 local staff and 262 United Nations Volunteers.⁴⁴

The UN Peacekeeping Best Practices Unit (PBPU) has produced a lessons learned report on the UN mission in Sierra Leone⁴⁵ and a similar analysis of the start-up phase of UNMIL.⁴⁶ Both of these reports contain sections on PI and present useful lessons on timescales, resource and implementation requirements and best practice relating to PI. It is upon these foundations, allied with the insight gained through comprehensive primary research in the field with former UNAMSIL and an extensive cross-section of the incumbent UNMIL PI and mission-management personnel, that PI activities in these two missions can be examined so as to chart this proclaimed revolution in PI practice. This will highlight the extent to which PI has catapulted itself to the fore in supporting wider mission efficacy.

As highlighted in the previous chapter, the media environment in failed state scenarios is severely degraded. By the time these missions deployed, media infrastructure in Sierra Leone and Liberia was largely destroyed. The constraints to output were exacerbated by the absence of reliable electricity supply. What remained of the industry were predominantly untrained employees, with low journalistic standards, producing a climate where rumours and falsehoods were rife. Both societies were characterised by high illiteracy and crippling unemployment in densely populated urban areas, whilst sparsely populated rural areas were inaccessible for mainstream media.⁴⁷

PI in Peacekeeping: The Contemporary Mission Statement

The PI section has historically been a tool for a mission to manage its relations with UNHQ and, via the world’s media, look outwards to international audiences. The most fundamental development in PI in UNAMSIL and UNMIL has been the extent to which the perception of its priority target audience has changed. Peacekeeping operations of this genre are mandated at the culmination of a political process to implement cease-fire and peace agreements, but the ensuing

⁴⁴ UNMIL Facts and Figures, <<http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/missions/unmil/facts.html>> (Accessed 5th June 2006)

⁴⁵ UNPBPU(a) *Lessons Learned from United Nations Peacekeeping Experiences in Sierra Leone*, UN, 2003, <<http://pbpu.unlb.org/pbpu/library/SL-LL%20Report.pdf>> (Accessed 5th June 2006)

⁴⁶ UNPBPU(b) *Lessons Learned Study On The Start-Up Phase Of The United Nations Mission In Liberia*, UN, 2004, <[http://pbpu.unlb.org/pbpu/library/Liberia%20Lessons%20Learned%20\(Final\).pdf](http://pbpu.unlb.org/pbpu/library/Liberia%20Lessons%20Learned%20(Final).pdf)> (Accessed 5th June 2006)

⁴⁷ Interview: Ms. Margaret A. Novicki, op cit.

work of a peacekeeping operation is assisting in the implementation of such agreements and hence the continuation of a political process aimed at durable peace. Conflict in Sierra Leone and Liberia affected the majority, if not all, of the population, be it through displacement, amputation or rape. Hence, it is *they* who sit at the centre of successful societal reconstruction and, in its assistance role, it is essential that the mission has a means of accessing them. Although international audiences remain important to the life of the mission, it has become clear that PI's priority function is to reach out to the local population and it is this realisation that has dramatically altered the way in which PI is done. This can be seen in the mission statement for UNMIL's PI section:

"To communicate effectively UNMIL's progress in fulfilling its mandate to restore peace and security to Liberian and International audiences:

- *The people of Liberia;*
- *Specific Liberian audiences (ex-combatants, IDPs [Internally displaced peoples], youth, women, prospective voters, etc);*
- *Local and international media;*
- *Donors and troop contributing countries;*
- *Liberians in the diaspora*⁴⁸

Many of the PI developments in UNAMSIL and UNMIL concern the methodology and the ingenuity involved in reaching out to these audiences effectively. The nature of peacekeeping dictates that missions are constantly evolving in terms of organisational structure, inter-mission relationships and the expansion of responsibilities to improve efficacy - the PI component is no different in this regard. Changes at this structural level are equally as, if not more, important than the methodology in the formalisation of a PI concept for the West African sub-region and beyond.

Pre-Deployment Assessment Mission and Initial Deployment

Since the planning for the United Nations Mission in Cambodia (UNTAC) in 1992, PI-specialists have become a permanent fixture in pre-deployment assessment missions. The information specialist in the assessment mission is tasked with appraising the media environment in the mission area - identifying the important actors, their institutional and political affiliations, and the coverage and output of local media and the overall mechanics of the industry. This assessment lays the foundations for the formulation of PI-strategy and must accordingly gather the relevant information to guide such a process - including the likely access to modern communications technology as well as more parochial and innovative channels of communication. Ultimately, the goal of the assessment is to construct a mosaic detailing the PI component requirements based on the sociological and anthropological idiosyncrasies unique to the mission area. This facilitates strong recommendations on the mission's overall approach toward the

⁴⁸ UNMIL PI presentation, op cit.

media and the suitable parameters for the PI component. Due to historically inefficient relations between DPKO and DPI and the need for coherence at HQ during this stage, these specialists are drawn from DPI. This was indeed the case with both UNAMSIL and UNMIL, where a member of the DPI (Peace and Security) section headed the pre-deployment PI assessment mission.

In Sierra Leone, the planners of UNAMSIL dramatically underestimated the importance of a capable and effective PI component and consequently UNAMSIL had inadequate resources to support the mission's presence. Following the May 2000 crisis,⁴⁹ it became patently clear that this informational neglect in the operation "proved near fatal to the credibility of the mission."⁵⁰ Even once the need for an expansion of the UNAMSIL PI capacity was more widely recognised, the process of doing so was inefficient and slow.⁵¹ The nature of PI is such that every hour and day, let alone week or month, that passes, represents precious time during which a more capable PI component could be facilitating a much more effectual mission. Lessons were clearly learned from Sierra Leone and the wisdom transferred to Liberia in this sense. The capability for 'quick impact public information' was deemed crucial in the deployment of UNMIL, hence PI staff were integral in the advance party two weeks prior to the arrival of the SRSG, enabling a robust PI campaign at deployment including live broadcast of UNMIL Radio from the very first day of the mission.⁵² This was unprecedented and those involved at the time claim that this quick impact capability improved the success of sensitisation to the mission's presence immeasurably.⁵³ The UNMIL case was not problem-free. There was a lack of technical and logistical expertise to operationalise some equipment⁵⁴ but suffice it to say the improvement over previous mission start-up practice was remarkable.

These examples emphasise why a core PI capacity should be built into the start-up of any mission – with an advanced team capable of providing the necessary set-up for production and broadcast of whatever PI outputs are deemed essential for the deployment of a mission. It is clear from this and the experiences in preceding missions that planning is a make-or-break phase for the eventual efficacy of a PI campaign when the mission deploys. A thorough and culturally

⁴⁹ In May 2000, the mission nearly collapsed when the rebel RUF kidnapped hundreds of peacekeepers and renounced the ceasefire in a move that endangered the credibility of UN peacekeeping.

⁵⁰ UNPBPU(a), op cit, p.65.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Interview: Ms. Margaret A. Novicki, op cit.

⁵³ Krasno, J.(a) *Public Opinion Survey of UNMIL's Work in Liberia*, City College of New York and Yale University: PBPU, March 2006, p.5-6, <http://pbpu.unlb.org/pbpu/library/Liberia_POS_final_report_Mar_29.pdf> (Accessed 5th June 2006)

⁵⁴ UNPBPU(b), op cit, p.14.

sensitive appraisal is vital to securing the minimal human and physical resources necessary for PI to perform this vital role during deployment.

Contextual Sensitivity and PI Strategy

In light of PI centrality in the early stages of a peace operation, it is clear that a PI component requires the resources, organisational structure and personnel necessary for efficient activity in the field. It is, however, only with a sound and extensive appreciation of the context, as mentioned in Chapter II, that the PI component can implement an effective strategy in this crucial phase and beyond. A clear and coherent strategy is necessarily formulated before the mission PI function goes 'live', supporting the mandated objectives and taking advantage of a heightened contextual sensitivity to the characteristics and scope of the target audience to ensure an efficient approach.

In line with the United Nations organisational commitment to respect human rights, tolerance and reconciliation, PI must attempt to combine this political and sociological understanding with an ethical approach to its output and the audiences it is reaching out to. Ultimately, strategy should be underpinned by a commitment to quickly establishing PI as an impartial source of information on the role of the mission and the peace process. The key challenge is to make such information available to as many of those involved in the peace process as possible.⁵⁵

Organisational Structure and Coordination

UNAMSIL and UNMIL are both examples of a civilian-led integrated mission structure which has become recognised wisdom in contemporary mission design. This structural philosophy permeates throughout the mission and is necessarily replicated within the PI section. As highlighted earlier, that which is media is rarely, if ever, distant from the political. The political nature of PI within an inherently political construct such as a peacekeeping operation requires civilian leadership predicated on a politically sensitive understanding of the mission and its day-to-day developments.⁵⁶

The distinction between information and intelligence handling and PI initiatives was made above. However, it is important to remember that, given the nature of modern integrated missions, such a distinction here is for conceptual clarity. In reality, PI output is increasingly the product of cross-cutting coordination and more transparent information sharing, based on congruency across civilian, military and police components and the wider UN family. In both Sierra Leone and Liberia, the mission's PI component has been "delivering a lot of the

⁵⁵ Interview: Ms. Margaret A. Novicki, op cit.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

message for the whole UN community”⁵⁷ over and above its more traditional and explicitly mandated objectives. Within the mission, this is seen as fundamental to maintaining currency, coherency and ultimately its credibility, as PI output increasingly embodies the conspicuous voice of the mission as a whole. As mission structures become progressively more integrated and the boundaries between UN peacekeeping and other UN agencies increasingly blurred in the eyes of the population, it is important to further develop the PI concept to accommodate this.

Civil-Military (-Police) coordination is part of a mission-wide challenge, but the priorities of PI require sufficient space within these comprehensive informational integration mechanisms to achieve the necessary impact across mission personnel. UNAMSIL PI developed a coordination mechanism to ensure that the song-sheet was universal and none of the components were deviating from the score. Such mechanisms need to be based on initial exchange and subsequent confirmation of information. The common requirements are that vertical lines of command and control be integrated with lateral lines of communication and exchange for the efficient gathering, processing and development of mission PI output.

This level of coordination lends itself to efficient use of scarce PI resources and personnel as Military and Police Public Information Officers (PIOs) can shoulder some of the workload if goals are collective. Previously in peacekeeping operations, Military PI or information operations have been characterised by secrecy and opacity. However, it is by institutionalising interdependency that incentive compatibility can be achieved in this area of peace operations historically beset by a lack of coordination.

In both Sierra Leone and Liberia, civilian leadership of PI has acted to improve the coherency of PI output. It is, however, apparent that PI activity remains diffuse across Military and Police PI officers. For example, in both missions the military PI officers have overseen and facilitated the majority of media coverage for the battalions of specific troop contributing countries (TCCs.)⁵⁸ This represents a logical use of expertise and is accentuated by the transitional nature of PI responsibilities from military PI-intensive security issues to a reconstruction and civil assistance focus taken on much more by civilian components. This further highlights the need for integration and broad understanding of the mission needs, as the centralisation of resources within the civilian management of PI can inhibit the efficiency with which other necessary PI activity is carried out.

⁵⁷ Interview: Mr. Ronnie Stokes, UNMIL Director of Administration – Monrovia, Liberia, 10th March 2006.

⁵⁸ Interview: Commander Anders Johansson, UNMIL Chief Military Public Information Officer – Monrovia, Liberia, 7th March 2006.

PI Leadership

PI can be argued to embody more than just the voice of the mission. The ‘face’ of the mission will be temporal and invariably the image that sticks in the minds of the people. The predominant image will, of course, depend upon what is of currency in the mission area, but whatever that activity, there will be a degree of focus on the Mission Spokesperson and/or Chief of PI in their capacity as the focal point, heading-up the official line on all events and developments.

The experience of UNAMSIL shows that these senior roles are best performed with a pro-active approach to information dissemination, necessarily identifying the platforms from which the mission, ideally embodied by the executive and commanding staff, is consistently visible and put in the line-of-fire as it were. Emphasising a mission commitment to transparency goes a long way towards gaining trust. The leadership of a PI section can be central in manufacturing and nurturing relationships with media practitioners, both local and international. As Coker points out:

“Journalists prefer someone they can trust, someone they can relate to, and who shows sympathy and understanding for the constraints under which they operate. Journalists hate a stiff-lipped, cocky, or rigid information officer who churns out press releases and barks when there is a misrepresentation of the facts.”⁵⁹

The sensibility shown towards practitioners in the mission-area will inevitably have a huge bearing on the media response in times of crisis – a deferred utility investment in people. The experiences of UNAMSIL showed that developing relationships based on empathy helped in “cultivating key editors and journalists”⁶⁰ for use in explaining and clarifying the mission’s angle on particular issues. Although this flirts with an ‘unprofessional’ approach, the context of war being waged over the airwaves requires a realistic approach.⁶¹ Aloof behaviour will not only inhibit such potential benefits, but can result in backwards steps, jeopardising and undoing the good work and intentions of various other components across the mission.

In pre-UNMIL Liberia, the UN family had long since been the biggest source of advertising revenue for local media houses. From the beginning, UNMIL PI developed a soft-contract system with local media houses whereby the mission would commit to advertising space for a 6-month period, providing the media with financial security and empowering them at a time where even going to print was a continuous struggle. This was clearly not a sustainable solution, but former PI officer - for both UNAMSIL and UNMIL - Patrick Coker, claims that within a

⁵⁹ Coker, P. ‘The Role of the Media and Public Information’, in Mark Malan *et al* (eds.) *Sierra Leone: Building the road to Recovery*, ISS Monograph No.80, March 2003, p.86.

⁶⁰ UNPBPU(a), op cit, p.66.

⁶¹ Interview: Ms. Margaret A. Novicki, op cit.

matter of months there was a visible change in the industry and many of those practitioners who had dropped their pens came back.⁶² The advertising space offered the opportunity for UNMIL to place verbatim messages, such as the Comprehensive Peace Agreement which many Liberians did not know the detail of, in an increasingly stable press. As well as stimulating the domestic media industry, this aided the development of trust between journalists and the mission and in the short-term offered local newspapers the ability to continue and return to work.

In both Sierra Leone and Liberia, the Chief of PI and the Spokesperson were initially one and the same person which helped to ensure a joined-up approach to management and dissemination of the strategy. It has become increasingly clear that there may be more wisdom in having a Spokesperson working more closely with the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) and a Chief of PI to implement PI strategy. The personality involved in the management of PI is central to its success. Ronnie Stokes, incumbent Director of Administration in UNMIL, explains how:

“A lot...depends on who your Chief of PI is and how inventive and broad they see their role. I think in both...[UNAMSIL and UNMIL] they had good solid leadership which saw a much broader view and saw PI as more than focussing on the UN side of the picture.”⁶³

The work of the Chief of PI, and PI as a whole, will ultimately be bound by the vision of the mission leadership and the role they envisage for PI in achieving the mandate. PI is fundamentally an implementing arm for the wider mission strategy and however talented and creative PI staff are, they are able to do only that which is authorised. Although every mission will necessarily interpret and utilise PI to optimise its own mission strategy, it is clear that the institutional inertia which has subdued the value-added by PI components in the past, remains an important point for advocacy both within new missions and at the HQ level. It is therefore vital that PI is represented sufficiently at the mission-management level to promote and explain the PI-role in wider mission objectives. In both UNAMSIL and UNMIL, this access to the corridors of power has been ensured by formalising the Chief of PI's attendance at weekly senior management meetings and all other management-level gatherings.⁶⁴ In the context of Sierra Leone and Liberia, it is evident that facilitating a close relationship between mission-management and PI-leadership has been decisive in what the mission can gain from and do together with its PI component.

Mutually beneficial personal relationships between senior PI staff and media practitioners have proven to be of great importance to the success in the early

⁶² Interview: Mr. Patrick Coker, op cit.

⁶³ Interview: Mr. Ronnie Stokes, op cit.

⁶⁴ Interview: Ms. Margaret A. Novicki, op cit.

stages following an operation's deployment and it is in this knowledge that future missions must strive to prioritise the development of such relationships. The cases of UNAMSIL and UNMIL have shown that ardent support from the mission leadership, implemented by a pro-active and innovative PI-Chief and team are vital to optimising the PI potential.

PI ACTIVITIES

As highlighted earlier, the process of 'state failure' is synonymous with the degradation of extant media infrastructure, so a peacekeeping operation entering into this environment faces a multiplicity of challenges. When the missions arrived in Sierra Leone and Liberia, people had been through a lengthy war and many were fatigued and unsure with whom they should place their trust and faith after years of unrewarded allegiance to divisive actors. In the context of informational uncertainty and mistrust, trying to disseminate the rationale for intervention in an efficient and accurate manner is difficult, to say the least. Such communication, however, is crucial to the initial perceptions of, and attitudes toward, the mission. The successful explanation of a mission's presence is hugely significant in creating the space and enhancing the security of that space for the rest of the mission to settle and attempt to stabilise the situation.

Although exacerbated by the May 2000 hostage crisis, many of the initial problems suffered by UNAMSIL were largely a consequence of misperception of the mission's role and mandate and how it differed from the ECOWAS fighting force which had preceded it. The PI campaign accompanying a mission's deployment is an exercise in managing the expectations of these audiences. The explanation of a mission's presence and its mandate has moved beyond simple self-promotion and media management to a realisation that the in-country population is the priority target audience. It is their consent which must be derived and their expectations which need to be managed.

Media and External Relations Unit

The Office of the Spokesperson acted as the hub for information in UNAMSIL. In UNMIL, the 'Media and External Relations Unit' materialised as the focal point for facilitating the interaction with and representation of the mission to the local and international media. It is through this cell that journalists and partners can approach the mission for up-to-date information, as well as arrange visits to the mission and media facilities, providing journalists with access to mission personnel in rural communities – often using UN transportation and security. The unit also manages the output of press releases, statements and advisories both within PI and in collaboration with other components and senior mission officials. It coordinates across the PI section and with other partners regarding PI events, campaigns, announcements and all other media-related activity.

The profile of international peace operations and the contentious nature of intervention in an international order predicated upon the inviolability of sovereign states mean that such missions become a magnet for media coverage in the mission area but also in the world's media. The timing and context for UNAMSIL's deployment induced exactly this – a post-Somalia/Rwanda UN peacekeeping mission deployed into a gruesome conflict zone. In general terms, the international media has a very short attention span and it is the deployment of a mission which attracts the most zealous of coverage. Identifying their interests, and providing as much access as possible in a timely manner in this early phase helps to indirectly maintain support from the wider international community. In UNAMSIL, developing the ability to manage the international media was a dramatic turning point for how the mission was perceived externally. Similarly, directly facilitating the informational needs of the TCCs who have a vested interest in the on-going success of the mission helps to perpetuate their political will which is vital to the continuation of the mission itself.⁶⁵

'The CNN effect', whereby public opinion about an on-going crisis or conflict drives intervention⁶⁶ - has oft been cited as the *agent provocateur* in the creation and deployment of peacekeeping missions. This notion is hugely debatable and once a mission is deployed – largely irrelevant. However, the reverse CNN effect is potentially more relevant to the work of PI. This was arguably demonstrated by the U.S. withdrawal from Somalia and loss of public support for NATO air-strikes in Kosovo, where coverage of negative developments and peacekeeper deaths induced a withdrawal reaction in the publics of member states and TCCs. Although the incidents are beyond PI management, there seems to be a threshold below which political will may remain steadfast and the way in which such events are covered can be the fulcrum in this balance. Maintaining a partnership with international media, where they are somewhat dependent on PI and its media relations unit for credible information on the mission, may be crucial when crisis hits and ultimately to maintaining international support for the mission through and beyond the crisis.

The same is true of the local media. In both UNAMSIL and UNMIL, the existence of a focal point dedicated to facilitating and aiding the work of practitioners has been hugely beneficial to the mission in terms of buttressing relationships with local media and simultaneously ensuring that journalists have access to the information they need to do their job. UNAMSIL and UNMIL have provided transport to and from rural areas for local media organisation reporters covering a broader range of stories such as the opening of the Special Court in Sierra Leone. UN aircraft have also provided a courier service for *copy* from the countryside to make it back to Monrovia to the headquarters for dissemination.

⁶⁵ Interview: Ms. Margaret A. Novicki, op cit.

⁶⁶ See: Robinson, P. *The CNN Effect: The Myth of News Media, Foreign Policy and Intervention*, Routledge, 2003.

In the mission-area, there will always be a trade-off between: necessary impact (demonstrating the peacekeeping mission as a capable force) and adopting an amenable and open informational approach. Ultimately, journalists will always have the last word in their media product so it is best to appreciate that before it becomes problematic. In both missions, a proactive and anticipatory approach has been adopted to the needs of media, whereby regular news compilations on mission activity are distributed to both foreign and local news agencies. This helps to drive an informed interest in the mission as opposed to silence until the inevitable interest when crisis hits.

Media Monitoring Unit

Following divisive conflict such as those experienced in Sierra Leone and Liberia, the arrival of a peacekeeping operation is simultaneously welcomed and reviled by disparate parties to the conflict and sections of the local population. This friction is unlikely to disappear completely and one of the priority functions of PI is to protect the mission from unjustified criticism, misinformation and in the extreme, counter false information and messages that are harmful to the mission and the peace process.⁶⁷ As Coker exclaims:

*“Where the media fans the embers of discord, peace is elusive. But where the media becomes a vehicle for the promotion of harmony, the attainment of peace is accelerated.”*⁶⁸

The business of media monitoring lies at the heart of an informed and forward-thinking PI component and can be seen as an early warning system in the pursuit of these objectives. The daily summaries and analyses of local and international media provide the whole mission with an overview of the in-country events, the peace process, broader regional security and the external perceptions of the mission and its work. More specifically, based on such monitoring, the PI-strategy for dealing with bad publicity and media-spoilers is updated daily, allowing for swift and decisive responses to ensure falsehoods and mistruths are dispelled in a transparent and timely fashion using the various channels at PI’s disposal.⁶⁹

The media is a rich source of opinion and feeling towards initiatives both driven and supported by the mission. Having a regular analysis of how programs and events such as disarmament, demobilisation, reintegration and rehabilitation

⁶⁷ ‘Handbook on United Nations Multidimensional Peacekeeping Operations’, CHAPTER IV: Public Information, <<http://pbpu.unlb.org/pbpu/handbook/Handbook/4.%20Public%20Information.html>> (Accessed 5th June 2006)

⁶⁸ Coker, P., op cit, p.86.

⁶⁹ The Media Monitoring capability in UNAMSIL was expanded upon in UNMIL PI where it morphed into a ‘Media Monitoring and Development Unit’. The development component of this will be addressed in Chapter IV.

(DDRR) or the electoral process are perceived provides the mission with a better understanding of how its policy is received and the impact it has on society. This understanding of the (local) media enables the mission to keep on top of how it is perceived and in doing so, maintain a climate of security for the rest of the mission to carry out their roles.

Working with the Toolkit

Throughout the evolution of PI in peacekeeping, certain structures have been formalised as the necessary building blocks for a capable PI section, such as a media relations unit and the ability to counter propaganda with the help of media monitoring. The contextual dependency demands that each application of this formalised approach is different; however, the toolkit necessarily includes certain key units and capabilities. PI sections invariably possess the capacity to produce materials for print publication, TV and video relay, programming for radio broadcast and some capability for public and community outreach.

“Such interventions will take the media and the agencies beyond news and current affairs (to say nothing of PR), and into the more complex areas of non-adversarial talk shows, programme or article exchange between zones of conflict, cartoons (enshrining or breaking down stereotypes of ‘the other’, the enemy), ‘intended outcome’ radio and TV dramas and soap operas, vox pops (giving a voice to the voiceless), comic books, theatre, music and song. Media is all these things, and more; drama, story, character and humour, these are what attract us as humans, regardless of whether we live in war-torn Africa, Western Europe or the US.”⁷⁰

UNAMSIL PI failed to create the required effect in its first year of operation. Following this early incoherency, those involved at the time speak of a restructuring and reform which involved careful targeting of the personnel necessary for the various PI units, whilst harmonising the section as a whole through a synergistic approach, ensuring the work of each sub-section was complementary and mutually reinforcing.⁷¹ The coherency this provided was a key development in the improvement of UNAMSIL’s public image and managing the media. This approach was replicated in UNMIL from the earliest stages and resulted in what is generally accepted to be a huge success in terms of the efficiency of UNMIL PI from the beginning.⁷² It is the significance of such synergy that means no initiative or mandated goal supported by PI is achieved by one unit or another in isolation. Some examples have been taken independently below in an attempt to highlight the importance of various units in achieving an

⁷⁰ Howard, R. *et al*, op cit, <http://www.gppac.org/documents/Media_book_nieuw/a_c_introduction.htm>

⁷¹ Interview: Mr. Patrick Coker, op cit.

⁷² Krasno, J.(a), op cit, p.6.

overall effect in support of the missions and the wider peace processes they were assisting.

As is so central throughout this analysis, the context PI is working within demands some flexibility in what techniques are employed and how exactly this is done. Peacekeeping operations are often the place where resource deficits dictate an inability to implement things as planned and it has been patently clear in UNAMSIL and UNMIL that recognising the real needs and means for information dissemination is the key to successful PI. It is important to appreciate that whatever facilities, capabilities and pre-conceptions the planners might have, the best means of reaching the target population(s) is always the most effective means - regardless of what those techniques require or negate. As the UNMIL Chief Military PIO concludes:

"We're so used to mass communication...but here [in Liberia] really what works best is face-to-face communication...you have to overcome your own prejudices...and take some of your own pride away."⁷³

Formal media channels such as press conferences and press releases, held at comfortable information centres and UNHQ, are necessary and effective when addressing a group of journalists intended as the conduit for the message through local and international media networks. However, these media are intrinsically limited by their reach. When prioritising the local population, large proportions of whom are indeed beyond the reach of such media, the success of PI has demanded creativity and innovation in message dissemination.⁷⁴

Radio Unit

As a relatively new tool in the peacekeeping kit, radio has proven immensely successful in supporting the mission mandate and in increasing the efficacy of PI strategy and output. As described above, radio is the principal medium for information dissemination amongst the populations of Sierra Leone and Liberia. Given the lowest of literacy rates, the lack of access to other mainstream media and a thirst for information deemed credible; a mission radio station can be critical to the success of PI strategy - providing a fast, effective and economical medium for disseminating information over a relatively large geographical space.

The initial challenge of 'selling' the need for a mission radio station is a tough one. There is a natural tendency for existing local radio stations to see the UN's own capability as direct competition and to be angered by the inevitable asymmetry this produces for existing practitioners. In both Sierra Leone and Liberia, local radio stations initially believed the money and resources allocated for UNAMSIL and UNMIL Radios should be used to support and develop local

⁷³ Interview: Cdr. Anders Johansson, op cit.

⁷⁴ Interview: Ms. Margaret A. Novicki, op cit.

capacity, which would then be capable of working in collaboration with the UN. However, a peacekeeping operation is not nor should it be a media foundation.⁷⁵ In these cases, where infrastructure had failed so dramatically, there is less resistance from the state to a completely external broadcaster. However, in the earliest stages of building a relationship with local media executives, there is an overt need to explain the motivations behind an independent station - a process often incorporated in the pre-operation mission and advance team. It is the reliance on consent for peacekeeping operations which dictates some level of dependency in this area, whereby the ability to secure such access to the airwaves is a direct function of the mandating organisation's authority. For UNAMSIL and UNMIL, there was no greater barrier than the perception of the mission radio station and its imposition by those the mission needed to befriend.

Before the advent of UNAMSIL, the attempts of its predecessor, the United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone (UNOMSIL), to produce programmes for airing on local broadcast media produced "unsatisfactory results".⁷⁶ Although there are clear advantages to utilising and supporting local media capacity, it is the nature of PI in peacekeeping that demands that an ability to get a message out be guaranteed. A dependency on external actors can cause problems in terms of access, quality, editorial control and in the extreme, counter-productive output from the very source used by the mission itself.

The equipment necessary for the much more successful Radio UNAMSIL station was drawn from the defunct Angola⁷⁷ mission via the UN logistics base in Brindisi and a donation by the Danish Government.⁷⁸ Early appreciation of PI needs and its greater centrality in UNMIL's pre-mission assessment played their parts in securing from Brindisi the bare necessities for broadcast on mission day one.

Since its inception in UNTAC, the use of a mission radio has increasingly involved initiatives beyond the initial explanation and promotion of the mission's presence. The success of the stations has been predicated on a number of strategies developed in UNAMSIL, closely replicated in UNMIL. Existing radio stations based in Sierra Leone and Liberia use limited FM or shortwave transmission, but both UNAMSIL and UNMIL Radios have utilised the technological advantage gained by FM transmission and frequency boosters situated around the country.⁷⁹ This provided the missions with an increasing

⁷⁵ Ibid.

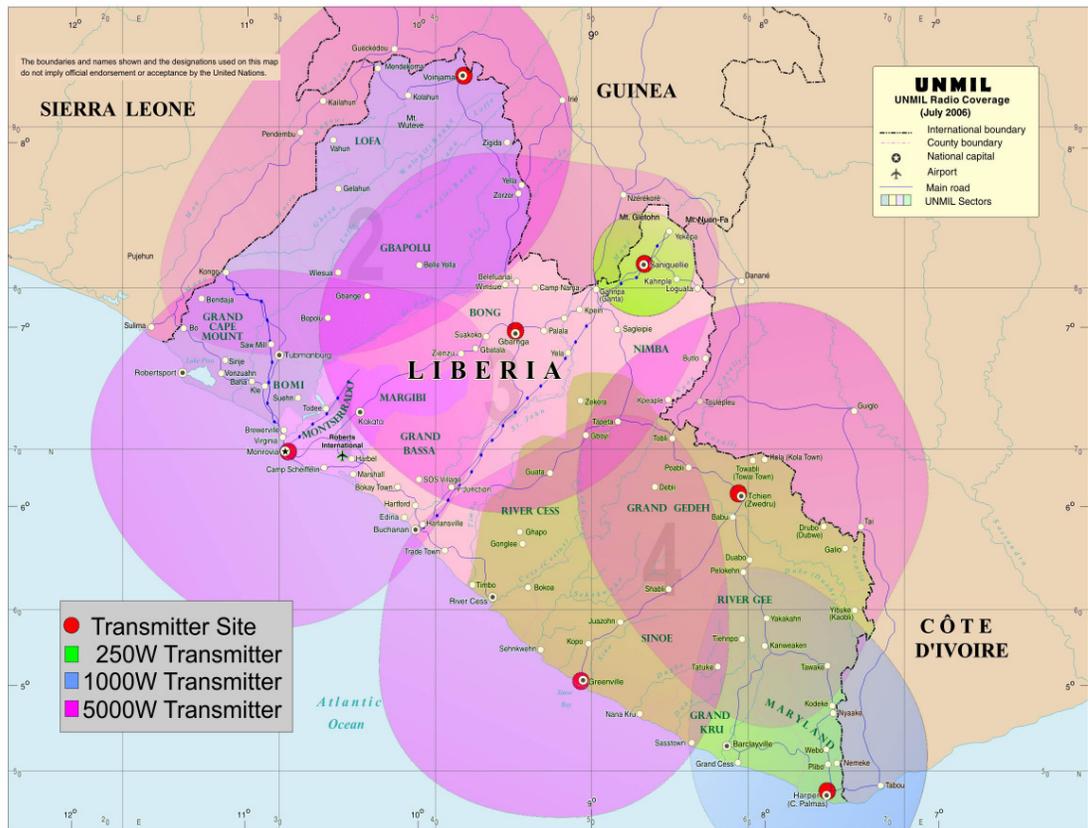
⁷⁶ UNPBPU(a), op cit, p.68.

⁷⁷ The United Nations Angola Verification Mission UNAVEM III. See: http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/co_mission/unavem_f.htm (Accessed 15th June 2006)

⁷⁸ UNPBPU(a), op cit, p.68-9.

⁷⁹ Two ways in which information is encoded into radio waves is *frequency modulation* (FM) and *amplitude modulation* (AM – the most common modulation of shortwave broadcasting). In FM, the radio waves frequency is increased or decreased slightly to represent the corresponding compressions and rarefactions of the sound wave. In AM, it is the amplitude of the wave which is

breadth of coverage, culminating in UNMIL Radio currently covering approximately 95% of Liberian territory on FM frequencies which are of a good quality and are relatively easy to find.⁸⁰



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This has been essential in terms of reaching out to the rural populations as well as large areas of the border region, covering parts of neighbouring Sierra Leone, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire. Radio UNAMSIL was much the same. Radio transmission overlapping sovereign borders is controversial in terms of media legalities, but when one considers the demographics of refugees in camps and settlements just beyond the legal borders, the efficacy of repatriation programmes is clearly heightened by the ability to reach those in need of

increased or decreased slightly to represent the relevant deformations of the sound wave. Both signals are susceptible to slight changes in amplitude. With an AM broadcast, these changes result in static. With an FM broadcast, since the audio signal is conveyed through changes in frequency, slight changes in amplitude do not affect the quality of reception. In analogue form, reception of AM broadcasts is generally inferior to and less comprehensive than that of good quality FM transmission – this however requires a network of frequency boosters throughout the desired area.

⁸⁰ Interview: Mr. Kojo Roberts-Mensah, Chief of UNMIL Radio – Monrovia, Liberia, 10th March 2006. Kojo previously worked with Radio UNAMSIL.

⁸¹ UNMIL Radio coverage as of August 2005. UNMIL PI presentation, op. cit.

information and reassurance about the security situation – a hugely influential factor in decisions to return home. UNMIL Radio has indeed undertaken a sustained commitment to programming focusing on repatriation and providing refugees with credible information, managing realistic expectations and documenting the experiences of those who have returned as examples of the reality. This functional expansion for mission radio has been a huge development in the application of PI in peacekeeping, where it is providing services and working in areas previously deemed the territory of UNHCR.⁸² This is symptomatic of the developments that an increasingly integrated mission structure has induced. UNMIL radio has been one of the biggest proponents of integration as it has offered the platform for a great range of actors to get their message out in support of the peace process, over and above support of the mission itself. As with much of the development of PI in peacekeeping, it is a simple consequence of supply and demand. Chief of UNMIL Radio, Kojo Roberts-Mensah explains:

“What’s happened has been very simple, because we’ve been able to create a good enough product, that is a radio station that works and is achieving the aim which is to inform and educate the people of Liberia on every aspect of the peace process; people have bought into it...Therefore it’s easier to collaborate with everybody else because they see that ‘yes, this thing works.’”⁸³

The use of numerous local languages and dialects alongside official spoken languages in programming has acted to swell audiences and produce a sensibility which indisputably aids the development of a relationship between the receiver and the sender. Operating for 24 hours a day, seven days a week provided the mission with the capacity necessary for targeted programming designed around listening behaviour and patterns. For example, radio was instrumental in promoting the DDDR in both Sierra Leone and Liberia, airing regular programmes on the rationale, process and realistic expectations for the programme. Furthermore, the ability to broadcast through the night enabled PI-strategy to exploit the behavioural patterns of ex-combatants congregating and listening to radio late at night and hence strategise a targeted sensitisation campaign on DDDR during those hours. UNMIL PI also used the radio to reach out to the rebel factions and particularly the ex-GOL (Government of Liberia) local commanders, who had poor communication with their General Command.⁸⁴ This created the space and level of engagement in isolation from their superiors to challenge them about their opinions and perceptions of what DDDR would bring them.

This comparative advantage over other radio stations and other conventional media has produced a new level of efficiency for disseminating information to a

⁸² Interview: Mr. Kojo Roberts-Mensah, op cit.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Interview: Ms. Margaret A. Novicki, op cit.

significantly enlarged potential audience. It is the combination of these capabilities and strategies that have helped provide the population with elusive information crucial to deriving consent for the peace process and ultimately contributing to the successful achievement of a multitude of mission goals.

Like many of the PI units, UNMIL Radio benefited from the transfer of human resources from UNAMSIL PI and using those experiences has gone on to enhance the product. The increase in the distribution of programming to community radio stations for re-broadcasting, interactive phone-in programmes, and the training and involvement of local journalists are some examples of where UNMIL Radio has raised the bar and increased population-access to UN information. Programming aimed at involving children, a focus on human rights and health issues, live coverage of elections and the development of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) have all expanded the content and level of public opinion voiced on the medium.⁸⁵

Radio has always played an important role in PI's ability to support peacekeeping missions, but it seems that UNAMSIL and UNMIL Radios highlight how, given high illiteracy levels and abnormally broad transmission coverage, it can have a bigger role than ever, developing more fine-tuned and better-delivered programming in support of the mission and the wider peace process. It is clear that UNAMSIL and subsequently UNMIL Radios have been revolutionary in terms of the breadth of output and role in assisting the peace process over and above the obligation towards the well-being of the mission. This is unprecedented and can be seen as one of the biggest impacts on the business of PI in peacekeeping.

However, even if UN radio broadcasts to 95% of the national territory and beyond, this does not mean that 95% of the population get to hear it. As highlighted in Chapter II, the success of radio initiatives is fundamentally dependent on the ability to receive them. In both Sierra Leone and Liberia, there were significant donations of non-battery wind-up radios from various NGOs. Despite this, there were still many locations where a radio, wind-up or otherwise, was a luxury and hence the wide reach of the mission radio stations was at times fallacious. If most households, IDP settlements and refugee camps do not have radio and/or are unable to maintain it due to the cost of batteries or electricity, then the effect of this medium is severely reduced. It is in part due to these limitations that Community Outreach has taken on such huge importance in these missions and peacekeeping PI in the sub-region.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

Community Outreach Unit

Community Outreach (CO) essentially describes the collection of techniques employed by PI components in order to achieve objectives of reaching out to remote and/or otherwise inaccessible audiences. Expanding on the logical use of radio as the predominant medium, CO projects have been designed to target those groups indifferent towards or out of reach of radio programming and other media available to PI.

Even if the publications section prints and distributes 2 million fliers and raises 50 billboards, illiteracy rates as high as 80% limit their impact. It is also clear that people's mistrust of the radio and the printed word leaves an information gap.⁸⁶ The target audiences of huge importance to both UNAMSIL and UNMIL (i.e. ex-combatants, IDPs, refugees, women and children) tend to suffer some or all of these constraints and reaching them has required an approach which understands the entertainment capacity of media but simultaneously harnesses it as an opportunity for a message to be disseminated. Howard *et al* highlight how:

*"People in conflict zones, even refugees, continue to go about their usual lives, perhaps in a more circumscribed way, but they still listen to and make music, dance, laugh at cartoons and TV comedies, tell stories and exchange ideas with a neighbour. They form their own opinions by sifting carefully through all the information and opinion gathered from these different sources. Life doesn't begin and end with news and current affairs. In fact, in most conflict zones people quickly grow tired of political speeches, debates, and reports of more violence - the subject of the albeit very important current affairs programmes. Listeners tune out and lose hope, seeking solace in radio or TV drama and music programmes."*⁸⁷

Taking advantage of this characteristic in (post-)conflict populations, the 'Community Liaison and Public Outreach Unit' in UNAMSIL employed theatre groups, traditional dance troupes and musicians to perform dramas, comedies, dances and songs in local languages explaining the mission mandate, the areas of deployment and the workings of the DRR programme to grass-roots audiences across the country.⁸⁸ In Sierra Leone, CO events produced some of the most symbolic turning points in the life of the mission. One of the most significant occasions was a peace concert organised by outreach using famous Sierra Leonean musicians held in Makeni, the RUF HQ and strong-hold, bringing together ten government ministers who were sitting side by side with RUF

⁸⁶ Interview: Mr. Kingsley Ighobor, UNMIL Head of Community Outreach – Monrovia, Liberia, 9th March 2006. Kingsley was also Head of the Community Liaison and Public Outreach Unit in UNAMSIL.

⁸⁷ Howard, R. *et al*, op cit, <http://www.gppac.org/documents/Media_book_nieuw/a_c_introduction.htm>

⁸⁸ Interview: Kingsley Ighobor, op cit; UNPBPU(a), op cit, p.68.

leaders. The climax saw representatives from the government, UNAMSIL and the RUF on stage singing and dancing together. As well as breaking some of the tension between these important actors, the symbolism for the people of Makeni and all those who saw media coverage of it after the event was clear.⁸⁹

These experiences and the transfer of human resources from UNAMSIL gave UNMIL a head-start in what has proven to be an incredibly effective tool in this context. The UNMIL 'Community Outreach Unit' built upon the successes in UNAMSIL, using the template created there, moving on to even greater accomplishment and support for the mission. In addition to the awareness raising events using theatre, dance, music and other traditional media, CO innovated further to devise football tournaments bringing together ex-combatants, peace concerts, the production of reconciliatory music albums as well as quiz competitions and high-school debates on peace and reconciliation. All of these events and initiatives are flooded with posters, fliers, t-shirts, key-rings and cartoons – all deliberately 'on-message' in support of the peace process and various components of it. A recent initiative pioneered in January 2006 was to link up with the mobile phone networks and send out SMS-text messages to Liberian mobile phone users on the issue of rape and gender-based violence (GBV). Of an estimated post-war population of 3 million,⁹⁰ this method reaches approximately 500,000 people, 80% of which are 18 years old and above.⁹¹ The persistent inventiveness in reaching the target audiences is how CO maintains its currency and value.

A large part of CO strategy is directed by the analysis of the media monitoring unit. For example, an increase in rape cases in a particular town or sector has triggered a series of targeted anti-rape and GBV awareness events. The team are fondly referred to as the 'Rapid Deployment Force' which is capable of 'going in' and preparing the ground for what are mission-wide initiatives. When certain areas of Liberia have been on the verge of relapsing into conflict, the CO unit has initiated a quick reaction team, often including women's groups as 'fire-fighters' armed with fliers and t-shirts, imploring people that resorting to violence is not good for anyone. In a more mission-focused sense, UNMIL outreach has consistently been at the frontline in the promotion of: DDDR; the electoral process; Security Sector Reform (SSR); the return of IDPs; the TRC process; discussing rape and other GBV; HIV/AIDS awareness; as well as addressing the legislative process during discussions preceding the approval of the recent rape law.

⁸⁹ Interview: Ms. Margaret A. Novicki, op cit.; Coker, P., op cit, p.82.

⁹⁰ Estimate based on July 2005 figures. See: <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/li.html> (Accessed 5th June 2006)

⁹¹ Interview: Mr. Kingsley Ighobor, op cit.

The UNMIL Deputy SRSG for Operations and the Rule of Law states that:

*“[Community Outreach] has furthered our objectives by reaching to that community level...where other traditional media has not been very effective. Our Community Outreach is tremendously successful and a very important tool for the leadership of the mission.”*⁹²

The effectiveness of CO is not surprising when its context is a conflict-ridden society where populations are extremely receptive to information presented in an entertaining format.⁹³ One of the most interesting developments in CO is its propensity to engage with the population and work with civil society. It puts a human face to the mission and this engagement with civil society has helped to develop relationships with a wide range of community leaders such as local NGOs, religious institutions and youth networks. This has cultivated an inclusive process whereby the mission can overtly avoid prescription and allow civil society to take the initiative. In addition to facilitating outreach events and programmes, this opens up a host of informal networks, through which information is moved at a rapid rate. Experience has highlighted that following an outreach event in one region of the country, the message often outpaces the ‘road-show’ to its next destination.⁹⁴ As highlighted earlier, these informal networks represent a more traditional spread of information in societies such as Sierra Leone and Liberia. One of the biggest information multipliers for UNAMSIL and UNMIL has been tapping into these.⁹⁵ As Malan puts it:

*“Civil society may appropriately be conceived as a network of informal and formal relationships, groups and organizations that binds a society together, a network that can provide both essential information and the environment within which the levels of trust and sense of community necessary for durable peace are constructed.”*⁹⁶

One of the biggest benefits for the mission is the way in which these relationships create a two-way street and a grass-roots forum from which the mission can receive authentic feedback from the population whom it is there to assist. In this way, the increased linkages with civil society act to enhance and buttress the peace process. This process and the wider work of CO amplify PI’s support for mission efficacy. Its ability to engage with the population has propelled PI as a

⁹² Interview: Mr. Luiz Da Costa, op cit.

⁹³ Howard, R.(b), op cit, p.9.

⁹⁴ Interview: Cdr. Anders Johansson, op cit.

⁹⁵ UNPBPU(a), op cit, p.68.

⁹⁶ Malan, M. ‘Harnessing CSO Research Capability In Service of African Conflict Prevention Strategies’, KAIPTC Paper No.10, September 2005, p.2,
<<http://www.kaiptc.org/kaiptc/KAIPTC%20Paper%20no.10%20Malan%20Sept%202005.pdf>>
(Accessed 5th June 2006)

key actor in driving the political process that peacekeeping missions exist to support.

The innovative nature of CO initiatives can be both empowering and frustrating. During the Liberian presidential elections, both the football tournaments and the SMS-text messaging enterprise were postponed to avoid association with the candidacy of a former professional footballer and the use of the mobile phone technology by another candidate. Ultimately, responsible and informed CO and general PI leadership should be able to manage these sensitivities sufficiently, so that creativity in implementation continues.

The lag-time in conceptualising and formalising the in-mission advances into policy guidance at the HQ level means that the true value of CO to PI in peacekeeping is yet to be fully realised. UN peacekeeping is an institution which is relatively new to accepting the importance of PI in general terms and it will clearly take some time before such an unstructured and community-level capability is given the recognition it demands. The Head of CO for UNMIL claims that “seeing is believing” and that even the most senior of mission-management have made good this mantra.⁹⁷ Although there is no ‘one size fits all’ when it comes to CO in its application, the ability of a mission to reach out to the grass-roots of society and engage with civil society in support of the peace process is fundamentally what successful contemporary peacekeeping is about. It is this experience and the lessons learned from it that must be taken from UNAMSIL and UNMIL and used in future peace operations in the sub-region and beyond.

TV and Video Unit

As described in Chapter II, the West African sub-region is not conducive to the conventional impact of television due to the distinct lack of transmission and reception capability. The accepted power of TV/film as a combination of powerful imagery with its informative capabilities and accessibility for the illiterate, mean that the challenge for PI has been in bringing this medium to the masses. The ‘TV and Video Unit’, present in both UNAMSIL and UNMIL has produced educational cartoons and shows, civic education documentaries, public service announcements on specific themes, as well as video and photograph footage of on-going mission activities.⁹⁸ This output is shown in regular slots on local TV channels. However, the biggest innovation in this area was to target existing video clubs beyond the reach of the existing TV networks. In both Sierra Leone and Liberia, there is a culture of clubs where football matches, popular TV shows and movies are shown to large congregations. In collaboration with the Community Outreach unit, the TV and Video unit has taken advantage of this trend, engaging with video clubs everywhere, from the urban capitals to the most remote of bush settlements where the programme will be interspersed by UN PI

⁹⁷ Interview: Mr. Kingsley Ighobor, op cit.

⁹⁸ UNMIL PI presentation, op cit.

video products. As well as overcoming the technology gap/deficit, this system utilises a naturally occurring social forum where people inevitably discussing the moral of the Nigerian movie or the man of the match in the game, are presented with new subject matter to address. When disseminating a message against GBV or the workings of the TRC, a healthy forum to elaborate upon such PI products is vital in stimulating and propagating discussion, thereby involving people throughout the country in the debate and the peace process.

The production of video materials is also of vital importance to keeping the international community up-to-date on developments and providing footage of troops for the domestic media in respective TCCs. Whether this is disseminated directly by PI or distributed via HQ, this is part of the wider role PI has in maintaining the political support of the international community and the major troop contributors.

Publications/Print Unit

Printed materials have been used to communicate the UN message directly to the local population, the parties to the conflict, local authorities and external decision-makers. This method of dissemination is limited by the need for literacy and the physical distribution challenges.

The rebel control of territory and the belligerency towards UNAMSIL restricted its access to the rural areas, but one of the developments in UNMIL was to produce region-specific publications, focused to those sectors deemed fragile or vulnerable. 'BOMI Journal', a monthly publication for Sector II in the north of Liberia, provides a targeted audience with articles, interviews and messages on issues relevant to the area. A similar outcome is intended (but using a slightly different approach) in Harper and its environs where UNMIL PI helps to edit a local newspaper 'The Sentinel' which is free of charge and includes a section called 'UN Forum'. These approaches use local Liberian journalists and accessible formats to further explain the activities of the UN and its role in issues affecting people in these areas.

The continued production of photo-features, billboards, stickers, fliers and posters in support of events arranged by other PI mission components is an important conveyance of concrete evidence of the mission's presence for the local population. In line with the expansion in PI responsibilities, the publications unit is tasked with producing output for other sections of the mission. As well as military or police-specific publications; units such as the electoral, human rights and mine action sections make use of the publications capability.

In addressing the informational needs of the local and international media, the above products, as well as more generic mission newsletters, play a supporting role in highlighting what the mission is doing and how this impacts on local society, the peace process and wider regional and international security. This

has been supplemented by the direct distribution of mission brochures, monthly newsletters and quarterly magazines for external target audiences, diplomatic missions and the relevant offices at HQ. These publications have also been a sound means of internal communication throughout the mission, exposing what is an enormous amount of people to the work of their colleagues, from UNVs to troops on the ground.⁹⁹ The production of a mission website supplementing the mission page on the UNHQ website is a relatively new addition and has been utilised in UNMIL to further the outreach of PI and its support of the mission.

Regional/Sector PIO's

Following the example of the UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC), UNMIL has utilised regional/sector PI officers so as to facilitate many of the events and initiatives mentioned above with a specific focus on a particular area of the country. They have been used quite literally as regional PI agents and as such, represent a focal point for: providing community radio stations with UN radio programming; arranging community outreach and video club events; distributing sector-specific publications; as well as facilitating the media coverage of special events taking place outside of the urban centres. They also provide a regional media monitoring unit, extrapolating trends in the various regions. Similar to CO, these PI officers have presented a human face to the UNMIL in rural areas unfamiliar with the mission presence in Freetown or Monrovia. This has helped represent the mission to local media and community organisations.¹⁰⁰

CONCLUSIONS

Categorical support for the mission and the peace process remains the overarching goal and obligation for PI in peacekeeping. Maintaining and cultivating links with the spectrum of media actors is important for the continued recognition of the mission in the mass media, which in turn helps to derive and perpetuate the necessary consent and support from TCCs and member states. The mission in Sierra Leone, preceding the hostage crisis of May 2000, highlighted how failing to manage the local population's expectations can exacerbate any negative perceptions of credibility and severely hamper the abilities of the mission to carry out its mandate. The reworked PI in UNAMSIL and subsequent application of lessons in UNMIL showed how a proactive and context-sensitive approach to disseminating the mission's purpose and mandate from the very beginning is likely to be significant in reaching the necessary audiences and supporting an environment conducive to mission success.

PI has provided information and a platform for communication to a wide range of external audiences but remains an important tool for information dissemination within the mission itself. It has become clear in Sierra Leone and Liberia that the

⁹⁹ See peak mission deployment above, p.25-6.

¹⁰⁰ UNMIL PI presentation, op cit.

increasing agency of media in conflict and its resolution is mirrored by the PI component's involvement in the media sphere and its ability to support the peace process. Many of the PI strategies employed in UNAMSIL and UNMIL are reminiscent of outputs visible in previous missions, tailored to suit the unique informational challenges these conflicts have presented. However, the level of innovation and creativity shown within the parameters of existing concepts and methodology has been unprecedented and arguably a revolutionary phase of what has been an evolutionary process since its inception 17 years ago.

The examples of initiatives PI has supported, particularly the situation with the DD(RR) programme in Liberia, highlight that the mission and the wider peace support community have become clients of PI and are increasingly dependent on its work to ease and support their multifarious roles. In this regard, PI has irrefutably become *mission critical* where the context permits the use of information to have such a huge impact on the peace process and hence, the overall efficacy of the peacekeeping mission.

It is important to stress the value of synergy and unit complementarities to the results witnessed in UNAMSIL and UNMIL PI. For example, the CO team could not be so successful without taking along boxes full of message-emblazoned leaflets, fliers, posters and t-shirts produced through the publications unit; TV and video unit big-screens for showing civic education documentaries; the radio station's technical equipment; at a site arranged, planned and promoted by the regional PIOs; managed and overseen by the media and external relations unit; based upon the demand for sensitisation and education derived from the work of the media monitoring unit. It takes a comprehensive and holistic approach to make these things work and the development of management and organisational systems has significantly improved the efficacy of PI work.

The transfer of human resources from UNAMSIL to UNMIL brought with it a level of experience and understanding of the regional media and informational context from a neighbouring West African country. There is great value in formalising and conceptualising what was bundled up in this transfer to ensure that the successes of these missions are not simply lost with these personnel. It is essential that lessons are learned in this personality-driven area of output methodology and strategy of PI as well as noting the lessons learned with regard to pre-deployment planning, resource requirements and organisational structure.

It is only by drawing on the experiences of such personnel that the contemporary challenges and opportunities for PI in the sub-region and beyond can be clearly identified and tackled at HQ level for the efficient development of PI components in future peace operations.

CHAPTER IV

THE NEW PUBLIC INFORMATION CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter highlighted how PI has been propelled to the frontline of peacekeeping in support of a broad range of mission objectives and beyond in the peace process. It perhaps gives the impression that the PI components in UNAMSIL and UNMIL have been extremely progressive and that their activity has been characterised by widespread success and positive influence. It is however, important to recognise and appreciate the bi-products, consequences and opportunities the expansion of PI has produced for the local media industry, the mission itself and the likelihood for sustainable peace. In the pursuit of socially responsible peacekeeping operations, it is important that missions aim to minimise the level of intrusion and the depth of any institutional footprint left in their wake. The revolution in PI during UNAMSIL and UNMIL has undoubtedly improved the ability of the mission to address the existing obstacles to conscientious PI. It has, however, simultaneously exposed how the expanded function of PI in these missions has itself created new and diverse challenges.

“PEACE PROPAGANDA”

As PI has developed its proactive and increasingly inclusive approach, it has naturally become more of a “media animal” – i.e. a media agent as well as client. This was unquestionably the case in Sierra Leone and Liberia. In both UNAMSIL and UNMIL, the mission radio stations eventually gained the respect of most local and indeed international media institutions as a reliable and credible source of information on the peace process. This resulted in the stations becoming hugely popular with the general public and has had two contrasting consequences for the mission. Whilst increasing the listenership and the efficacy of its message-output, it has also engendered expectations of UN radio as a regular impartial medium and is inevitably analysed and criticised as such. On the contrary, mission radio stations should rightly be viewed as the mouth-piece of the mission as their very existence is mandated in support of it. Given this situation, it is important for an extra-sensitive strategy in terms of what is precluded from the agenda and what is forcefully promoted. In general, PI’s obligation to the mission itself is juxtaposed with the population’s dependency upon it for credible information when it is at a premium.

The challenge for PI conceptually is that if the imposition of the mission and creation of independent media capabilities promotes PI as a powerful in-country media institution, then as its proprietor it is prudent for the UN to ask whether it is working within an ethical framework. PI output is naturally underpinned by

motives of peace and reconciliation and this raises interesting questions about the credibility of propagandising peace as opposed to any other objective. Peace propaganda and using comparatively advantageous media channels to broadcast peaceful messages has clear and often laudable results, but it can be counter-productive if people feel like they are being prescribed to. As Onadipe highlights:

*“There is a certain tension between using the news media for specific and directed purposes and, at the same time, trying to carry the message that a professional and free media milieu should not be controlled.”*¹⁰¹

The UN has distanced itself from the language of psychological or information operations as these carry distinctly negative connotations. PI campaigns have however been explicit in their ‘sensitisation’ objective which, by definition, carries an ‘intended outcome’ or desired ‘behavioural change’. A challenging example of this is the anti-rape road show across Liberia. The message that rape is wrong and illegal is fully intended to be acted upon and the very existence of such initiatives is predicated on the fact that there is behaviour to change or stop. The whole reasoning behind the targeting of certain audiences is the perceived need to affect their specific behaviour. Chief Military PIO for UNMIL said that:

*“We shouldn’t be afraid of admitting that we want to influence somebody with information, because that’s really what we’re doing. We call it a ‘sensitisation campaign’, fine, I have no problem using that terminology but we should understand what we’re trying to do when we’re sensitising somebody.”*¹⁰²

When the subject-matter is rape and GBV, HIV/Aids or DDDR, the societal benefits are more clearly determinable. The robust support provided by UNAMSIL and UNMIL PI for interim and newly appointed governments is perhaps more contentious.¹⁰³ The controversy lies with the extent to which the anticipated media effect is for the benefit of the actors within the process over and above the population and peace process itself. There will always be disparate opinion as to whose interests are prioritised; but ultimately, the achievement of the mission is inextricably linked to the success of the peace process. All media has influence. Whether overtly intentional or not, the output will be a product of its creator’s social conditioning – there is no such thing as absolute objectivity in journalism. What is needed is clear conceptual direction for PI in peace operations, justifying its techniques in terms of credible media/journalistic methodology rather than pretending it is not the intention to influence.

¹⁰¹ Paper presented by Onadipe, A. (2004) *The Media, Communication and Public Awareness in DDR Processes* at a workshop ‘Identifying Lessons from DDR Experiences in Africa’, 10-12 August 2004, KAIPTC, Accra, Ghana.

¹⁰² Interview: Cdr. Anders Johansson, op cit.

¹⁰³ UNPBPU(a), op cit, p.69; Interview: Mr. Kojo Roberts-Mensah, op cit.

The traditional journalistic norms of fairness, accuracy, balance and objectivity, encompassed by a liberal narrative of the media,¹⁰⁴ have been the foundations upon which the conduct of information collection, interpretation and dissemination has been premised. It is the wisdom of the objectivity criterion that has been questioned, particularly amongst those addressing media roles in conflict and its resolution. If the media's agency in conflict and its resolution is universally accepted, then structurally inhibiting the power of this tool seems to give primacy to the sanctity of a 'professional media' construct over and above the well-being of humanity; that is in this situation, the pursuit of conflict-free society. Deconstructed, this debate presents the question of what is ontologically prior. Promoting the media's 'responsibility to protect' has been at the heart of a developing media and peacebuilding paradigm. Howard writes how: "in many modern conflict environments, it is increasingly obvious the professional norms of journalism do not trump fundamental moral obligations."¹⁰⁵

The context is of course vital to this, and here is not the place to dispute the pros and cons of comprehensive journalistic professionalism as the net best option. However controversial and debated in the sphere of journalism; the unique nature of PI in peacekeeping provides a very real-time application of media and information in conflict and post-conflict societies. It is important that DPI and DPKO look to ground PI activities in 'media and peacebuilding' theory such as developing concepts of 'peace journalism'.¹⁰⁶ Offering some clarity on these initiatives will help to prevent allegations of unethical use of media and act to enhance the credibility of future PI components in missions.

MEASURING SUCCESS

When the conduct of PI in peacekeeping is potentially destabilising, it is important that a mission knows that the action it is taking is having a positive impact on the peace process and perceptions thereof. Measuring the efficacy of PI output is inherently difficult to do when even the most basic of conventional indicators, such as listener and readership figures, are almost impossible to ascertain. To whatever extent there is an envisaged 'behavioural change' or an 'intended outcome', quantifying and/or qualifying the success of targeted PI-initiatives remains a retrospective activity in missions – to be executed in slower time, if at all. Oscar Bloh of *Search for Common Ground* (SFCG)¹⁰⁷ in Liberia explains:

¹⁰⁴ Briggs, A. & Cobley, P. (eds) *The Media: An Introduction*, Longman, 1998; Street, J. *Mass Media, Politics and Democracy*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2001.

¹⁰⁵ Howard, R.(b), op cit, p.9.

¹⁰⁶ For more information on 'peace journalism' - see: <www.TRANSCEND.org>

¹⁰⁷ *Search for Common Ground* is a conflict transformation NGO which has conducted projects in both Sierra Leone and Liberia. See: www.sfcg.org

“We keep bombarding the airwaves...assuming that people are making use of it, but we don't know because we don't get the feedback.”¹⁰⁸

The reality is that in both Sierra Leone and Liberia, some of the major initiatives PI has supported do indeed produce some pertinent results. For example, the number of ex-combatants disarmed during DDDR or the voter turn-out for an election, are both quantifiable. There remains, however, a degree of distance between PI-activity and the end-state. The UNMIL PI campaign during the Liberian presidential elections implemented civic education and awareness on matters of voter registration through its CO. It also broadcast uniquely exhaustive coverage of the election process on UNMIL Radio alongside many other integrated efforts which undoubtedly had a huge role in the eventual turnout and success of the elections. UNMIL's role however, was explicitly in partnership with the National Elections Commission of Liberia (NEC) and other actors – which prevents PI from utilising voting statistics as solid evidence in support of its campaign efficacy. Various PI units have developed their own appraisal systems and indicators to try and measure their impact, but beyond simple surveying pre- and post-sensitisation campaign and noting the relative health of radio phone-in shows, there is little in the way of systematic research.

Ultimately for the mission, a primary end-product is successful elections and the realisation of this indicates a positive impact of a PI campaign. PI fundamentally acts in support of the mission rather than the elections, but it is clear, that in UNAMSIL and UNMIL, where other sources of information have been scarce and limited, the impact of UN PI in support of mandated objectives have become part of a much broader capability able to affect the target audience's approach to a multiplicity of issues. For example, UNMIL PI has proactively tackled health issues confronting Liberians – from HIV/Aids to potential outbreak of avian influenza.

In this capacity PI itself, through radio and CO particularly, has become a tool in building sustainable peace and helps to create a semblance of normalcy which is of benefit to the mission. It is therefore important for PI as an independent actor to understand the root of its success and indeed its failures so as to optimise its contribution to society and consequently to the mission. This requires some measurement of efficacy from which PI can continuously update and develop its output, hence maintaining a strategy with currency and solid foundations. It may be the case that, given the infancy of the work in this context, the lack of measurability of such initiatives needs to be understood as a necessary limitation; enabling and encouraging creative and innovative approaches which appear to be efficacious solutions to very unique challenges.¹⁰⁹ The barriers to measuring efficacy need to be overcome, however slowly, and the first steps will involve creating the capacity within separate units or PI as a whole to focus on

¹⁰⁸ Interview: Mr. Oscar Bloh, op cit.

¹⁰⁹ Howard, R.(b) op cit, p.12.

this. Heads of separate units in both missions claimed that their job specification is not to focus on quantifying the media effect, but simply to create a product that supports the mission. The two things are mutually dependent and if more capacity is needed to intensify the focus on this then that is something that should be strongly considered. This situation is somewhat replicated with regard to the use of feedback from PI activity.

OPTIMISING FEEDBACK FROM PI

The inability to discretely measure the success of PI-activity emphasises the reliance on intermittent and spontaneous feedback from the local population to better understand the impact of PI-activity. In both Sierra Leone and Liberia, the increased interactivity of UN radio programming has opened up radio as a tool for communication between the population and the mission rather than a simple vehicle for PI. Furthermore, the prolific use of CO and the relationships this has nurtured with civil society means that PI personnel are regularly on the ground discussing the most topical issues at the grass-roots level. This presents both PI and the wider mission with a rich source of information on perceptions of its work and the impact it is having on ordinary people's lives.

The media monitoring unit provides an obvious and clearly traceable source of feedback to the mission leadership; particularly in terms of how to prevent, repair or recover from negative publicity. As mentioned in the context of PI leadership's access to mission management, mechanisms do exist for information gleaned from PI activity to be fed back up the chain to policy and planning and, in turn, the mission leadership. This is crucial to the mission getting a handle on feelings on the ground. In UNAMSIL and UNMIL, the majority of this feedback has been carried out in a forum where the demand is for a summarised and composite view across the country where an amount of detail is inevitably lost in the synopsis. It is apparent that the development of PI capabilities such as radio and CO has precipitated potential for improved input to the mission beyond that which is utilised at present - potential a mission would clearly benefit from tapping into. During discussions about this, Deputy SRSG Da Costa agreed:

"The value of that information is that it's information that is not filtered. It truly reflects the feeling, the understanding, the aspirations of a community and that is invaluable in terms of us redefining and understanding how the process is evolving, how decisions that we are making are impacting in communities. After all, it is ultimately the support and assistance to these communities that will be the measure of our success."¹¹⁰

As with the minimal efficacy measurements, the staff at the station or on the ground are not formally tasked with targeting feedback, nor trained in surveying and reporting. The creation of an intermediary or specialist position tasked with this focus would begin to bridge the gap. This would enable the collection of this

¹¹⁰ Interview: Mr. Luiz Da Costa, op cit.

information without jeopardising the spontaneous reaction that such media and situations induce. As an extension of this, it could be argued that the media monitoring unit should be tasked with screening its own media, particularly that programming on the mission radio station that creates a forum for debate and interaction, at times throughout the mission more fervent and vibrant than in any other media.¹¹¹ Building the capacity to perform this and expanding the channels of communication for feeding this opinion and perception back to mission leadership are the main challenges, but as the practice of PI-activity increasingly offers access to the grass-roots population it is necessary for PI to adapt and evolve to maximise these self-created opportunities.

In essence, PI is fundamentally a tool for flooding society with ‘information, information, information’; assuming people know little, but indeed want, value and use information. It is the extent of transition from such traditional PI techniques to becoming a communicator, creating the platform for a conversation to occur, that will dictate how much PI can be the mission’s portal to public opinion. The increasing role of mission radio in publicly airing local perceptions and opinions offers the driving force behind any such transition. Oscar Bloh supplicates that; “if peace involves restructuring relationships then of course PI needs to involve more communication.”¹¹²

It is clear there are times when PI must retain its PI status due to its obligation to mission-welfare. As the mission matures and enters different phases of reconciliation and rebuilding, the ability of PI to multi-task and adjust is empowering to the mission as a whole. This should be at the sharp-end of developing the PI concept at the structural level.

LOCAL MEDIA DEVELOPMENT

A very deliberate impact and one of the most intriguing developments in the West African missions has been the increase in the amount of local media development undertaken by PI. Traditionally, there has been a distinction between the domain of peacekeepers and that which is in the peacebuilding sphere. This fundamentally comes down to budgeting and the complexities involved with UN member states funding peace operations.¹¹³ The development of peacekeeping towards multidimensional missions, such as UNAMSIL and UNMIL, has blurred the boundaries as peacekeepers engage in activities such as road-building and delivery of aid from the earliest stages of the mission. This has also been the case with PI, whereby PI in peacekeeping, conventionally in support of the mission, has taken on a peacebuilding role in wider support of government, civil society organisations and capacity-building amongst the local media. Just as usable roads and urgent aid distribution are crucial to the wider

¹¹¹ Interview: Mr. Kojo Roberts-Mensah, op cit.

¹¹² Interview: Mr. Oscar Bloh, op cit.

¹¹³ Interview: Mr. Luiz Da Costa, op cit.

work of the mission, the ability for PI to efficiently get its message out to the local population is dependent on a certain level of capacity in the domestic media. The ability of the mission to move forward with the peace process is largely dependent on media practitioners who are sufficiently resourced, trained and aware of their potentially destructive role in the conflict.

As an extension of the work of the media monitoring unit, PI has been explicit in its attempt to build capacity and support media development. This was initially incorporated into PI strategy during UNAMSIL and intensified considerably in UNMIL with the creation of the 'Media Monitoring and Development Unit'.¹¹⁴ As mentioned above, some of the earliest PI strategies involved capacity-building through the advertising contract scheme. Working in partnership with the Press Union of Liberia and other media development stakeholders, UNMIL have sponsored media training courses for over 300 Liberian journalists in professional ethics and practices - promoting qualities compatible with peacebuilding such as responsible, ethnically tolerant, violence-averse and non-sensationalist reporting. The mission has arranged and conducted workshops on professional elections reporting for journalists from across the country's community radio stations as well as the Monrovia-based practitioners. This acted to accentuate the effect of UNMIL's own elections PI campaign and simultaneously present the mission and Liberians with a more informed and prepared electorate partaking in a more efficiently covered election.

Projecting its strategy in this area, UNMIL PI has hosted 'training the trainers' workshops for journalists and PI-specialists allowing for existing capacity to be enhanced through the sustainable training of local journalists. There has also been a continual effort in assisting the rebuilding and reinforcement of national media institutions such as the Liberian Media Review Board and supporting processes of media law reform.

The training of journalists, and the development of the media infrastructure within which they work, is seen as crucial to promoting balanced reporting conducive to peaceful society – particularly in a context such as Sierra Leone or Liberia where capacity is so low and the media industry degraded over a relatively long period of time. The big question is whether this should be a role, or necessarily a goal of PI in peace operations; or whether it should be exclusively the territory of UN development agencies and external organisations. Based on his experience in Liberia, Stokes claims that:

¹¹⁴ Interview: Ms. Margaret A. Novicki, op cit.

“It is probably a little bit of both. If you can improve the quality of those journalists, help them understand the values a little bit more...it helps to build that ethical base. It’s one of the things that I’ve seen here that has been very beneficial but you probably wouldn’t find it as something that’s seen as part of our traditional role.”¹¹⁵

Eventually, the responsibility for media capacity-building goes over to the private, governmental and non-governmental agencies and like any form of peacebuilding, “external support for peacebuilding is an adjunct to local peacebuilding efforts and not a substitute for them.”¹¹⁶ The wider role of the media in peacebuilding is far-reaching and beyond the scope of this project; however, suffice it to say that if PI can lay some foundations for this process then it has two important effects. Firstly and in the short-term, it offers the mission the space and level of predictability in the local media to fulfil its immediate goals. This is something that seemingly cannot be achieved by the external actors at such an early stage. Secondly, the more protracted process of peacebuilding undoubtedly benefits from a calmer and more stable media environment. The universal target of strengthening the prospects for durable peace is seemingly more attainable through PI’s contribution to media development, helping to renovate the industry into a proactive and constructive partner in the endeavour.¹¹⁷

The increasingly integrated function of PI as both peacekeeper and peacebuilder presents conceptual issues which, based upon the experiences in UNAMSIL and UNMIL, are relatively easy to circumnavigate in real-time in the field. The major stumbling block in this enterprise is its funding. Both UNAMSIL and UNMIL conducted their capacity-building work through creative use of their budgets, organising their work in such a way that, whilst delivering the mission messages, PI in effect provided mentoring and a useful training tool for local media houses. It seems that the benefits of capacity-building are clear on the ground in-mission and that it is overcoming structural inertia at HQ that holds the key to formalising this progression in the work of PI in peace operations. If the politics of peacekeeping are too ‘high’ and the bureaucracy surrounding mission budgets too far removed from realities in the field, then it must be through innovative partnerships that the presence and influence of mission PI can be utilised in supporting constructive media development in the peace process from the earliest possible time.

One potential partnership that offers interesting options for PI is the introduction of the UN Peacebuilding Commission.¹¹⁸ The notion of starting out with peacekeeping and peacebuilding initiatives on a parallel track, not just

¹¹⁵ Interview: Mr. Ronnie Stokes, op cit.

¹¹⁶ Howard, R.(b), op cit, p.5.

¹¹⁷ Onadipe, A. Paper at KAIPTC workshop, op cit.

¹¹⁸ See: <<http://www.un.org/peace/peacebuilding/>> (Accessed 5th June 2006)

conceptually but also in bringing together the dominant financiers, contributors and stakeholders, presents precisely this opportunity in theory. Optimising such possibilities will require much improved relations between UN country teams and missions, but in this case, where the mandates of the mission and UNDP dovetail on an issue such as media development, the Peacebuilding Commission might provide the platform from which the access and capabilities of the separate entities can be harnessed collectively.

For example, funding through *USAID* helped to establish 22 community radio stations throughout Liberia, providing equipment and training. Projects such as these offer great support for fledgling media development, but in this case the funding has now ended.¹¹⁹ Ensuring sustainability in these pursuits is arguably more important than instigating them in the first place. The initial activities of the Peacebuilding Commission should be carefully monitored to establish its latent capability in the media development arena.

PI-NGO COLLABORATION

Peace operations never exist in isolation and hence the work of PI is never completely independent. The pre-, during- and post-conflict environment is usually replete with actors ranging from the wider UN family, such as UNDP, to the international and local NGO community working in the area of media and its role in the peace process. The linkages between a peacekeeping operation's PI component and surrounding media actors have been historically weak, but there has been a notable development of the relationship between PI and NGO partners in these missions, particularly in UNMIL.¹²⁰

In Liberia, SFCG's 'Talking Drum Studios' collaboration on production and programming has been with UN agencies rather than the mission. However, UNMIL PI and SFCG have worked in partnership to deliver some of the media training mentioned above. As part of the increased media development activity, UNMIL PI has pioneered a bi-monthly 'clearing house' meeting of media actors which functions as a forum for sharing information, experiences, upcoming events and initiatives so as to prevent duplication of campaigns and training drives. Media NGO practitioners say that this has created an important space and strong foundations for greater coherency but lament the lack of strategic planning and results-based development.¹²¹ This lack of result-centric analysis once again highlights the need for a methodology capable of measuring the efficacy of policy and guiding planning of future collective media development activity as well as that of PI independently.

¹¹⁹ Interview: Mr. Oscar Bloh, op cit.

¹²⁰ Interview: Ms. Margaret Novicki, op cit.

¹²¹ Interview: Mr. Oscar Bloh, op cit.

Fondation Hirondelle (FH) have been a strong advocate and partner of *STAR Radio*, an independent station whose funding is channelled through FH but is in the process of taking full ownership of the station's functioning. As mentioned above, UNMIL PI has created efficient mechanisms for dealing with requests and queries through a clear and accessible focal point in its media relations unit. Comments from those at SFCG's 'Talking Drum Studios' supported the success of such systems facilitating NGOs and local media in gaining the information deemed vital to credible and balanced reporting which is simultaneously beneficial and in the interests of the UN.¹²² This is part of what the incumbent News Editor at *STAR Radio* called a "sustained collaboration" between UNMIL PI and themselves.¹²³ It also highlights a measure of transparency and efficiency that has not been experienced in interaction with the wider UN family, where journalists and media managers complained of bureaucracy and inertia in getting the information needed.¹²⁴

The PI component's increasing involvement with these external actors also creates opportunities for improving its own efficacy. As mentioned above, the successes of the mission and other radio stations in promoting peace have been severely hampered by the lack of reception capability throughout the country. Governmental and non-governmental agencies such as *USAID* and *MercyCorps* are involved with providing wind-up radios, particularly in West Africa. However, in Liberia a shipment of *USAID* sponsored receivers was looted at the port and failed to arrive with their intended targets.¹²⁵ Using PI as the point of contact, the secure arrival and distribution of these radios could be greatly facilitated by the mission to the benefit of all. It is through this sort of collaboration that PI can create value and continue to be a driving force within the mission. Taking advantage of its international profile, PI can also play an important role in encouraging external assistance in the realm of media development.

This engagement is a positive step and again something relatively new to the concept of PI in peacekeeping. It feeds into the development of greater media savvy and the fostering of relationships beneficial to both the image of the UN mission and the peace process as a direct result. PI in UNAMSIL and UNMIL have cast their net further and wider than the existing UN PI concept dictates and as a result is now tapping into the network of actors working in media development. These relationships will naturally be dependent on the phase of the mission and the priorities of PI. However, in the absence of a holistic peacebuilding collaboration, the earlier such partnerships can be initiated, the earlier PI can offer its support to more joined-up media development and capacity building where a proactive media can be a huge factor in propagating a

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Interview: Mr. Joseph M. Cheeseman, News Editor *STAR Radio* – Monrovia, Liberia, 13th March 2006.

¹²⁴ Ibid; Interview: Mr. Oscar Bloh, op cit.

¹²⁵ Interview: Mr. Oscar Bloh, op cit.

culture of peace and empowering a population in their departure from conflict. An expansion of PI conceptually to formalise commitment to such collaboration will go a long way to bolstering the PI toolkit and continue the development of PI as a critical device in pursuit of durable peace, over and above the well-being of the mission itself.

THE PI FOOTPRINT

It is well documented that peacekeeping operations have a huge impact on the host country. One of the biggest challenges for missions is how to manage this. Working with partners in the field seems a logical solution to ensuring the media environment remains progressive and conducive to peacebuilding efforts in the aftermath of the mission. The PI component has unavoidable impacts on the media landscape and the effect it has on the local media infrastructure is largely predicated upon its comparative advantage over the extant industry.

As the most tangible of PI media, there is a paradoxical view that a successful UN radio provides good competition for existing radio stations and somehow drags up their standards.¹²⁶ UN radio seems to be a necessary evil in this regard as its staunch support for the peace process is essential given a media environment degraded to the level witnessed in Sierra Leone and Liberia. It does perhaps offer the opportunity to encourage a change in audience preferences, familiarising them with more informative or investigative journalism,¹²⁷ but to claim that any media institution, be it independent or state-run, benefits from this competition is to avoid the realities of a mission's impact on existing infrastructure. What PI in peacekeeping does provide, is an environment more conducive to development and open debate amongst practitioners.

The time constraints on a peace operation require that work is planned and carried out at a rapid pace. PI components are often accused of cherry-picking the most competent national media practitioners, achieved by offering favourable salaries which invariably skews the labour market for the industry like any other INGO.¹²⁸ The selection criteria for these employees are also central to maintaining PI and mission credibility. In Liberia, the recruitment to UNMIL Radio of a number of journalists from Charles Taylor's vehemently anti-UN radio station, Kiss FM, jeopardised the station's integrity amongst existing media practitioners and of course through their reporting and broadcasting. In fact, in Liberia, these particular journalists were recruited due their unemployed status at the time, Taylor's media having been disbanded, and hence this strategy avoided

¹²⁶ UNPBPU(a), op cit, p.69.

¹²⁷ Interview: Mr. Kojo Roberts-Mensah, op cit.

¹²⁸ Carnahan, M.; Durch, W. & Gilmore, S. *Economic Impact of Peacekeeping*, DPKO PBPU, 2006, p.32, <http://pbpu.unlb.org/pbpu/library/EIP_FINAL_Report_March20_2006doc.pdf> (Accessed 5th June 2006)

cherry-picking.¹²⁹ It is vital that PI remains careful in this process to avoid misperceptions.

As mentioned previously, the UN tends to be the largest source of advertising revenue for the media industry in a post-conflict setting. To avoid allegations of bias and to ensure a blanket approach to its outreach, the UN tends to patronise all media houses irrespective of their political allegiances or level of professional journalism. As a result, UNMIL PI has been accused of extending an olive-branch to undeserving bodies.¹³⁰

EXIT STRATEGY AND THE PUBLIC INFORMATION LEGACY

As a mission draws down towards its eventual exit, the need for PI activity is once again intensified. Similar to the beginning of a mission, the draw-down needs to be accompanied by a lot of information to explain the rationale for departure and to reassure the population about government's capability to maintain security and work with its more traditional partners to support the on-going peacebuilding process. PI is once again the tool for managing the population's expectations about the mandate and the obligations of the peacekeeping mission, often in a climate of uncertainty and fear of being left vulnerable.

Peacekeeping is ultimately the business of putting yourself out of a job, not creating dependencies. Whilst the mission and PI must pave the way for its exit in this fashion, there are many considerations concerning the huge impact the mission has on society and how its departure might negatively affect the preservation of an environment conducive to peaceful development. The relationships between the government, UN country groups/agencies, the NGO community and donor partners are all crucial in this post-mission setting and will necessarily be involved in the solution to deficits in the media sphere. PI in UNAMSIL and UNMIL have both had a huge impact on the functioning of their respective media environments and on the quantity of information reaching the population. Ultimately, the PI component of a peacekeeping mission is temporary and it is inevitable that it will recede and eventually cease to exist in the same form. It is however, in appreciating the consequences of a departing PI section and considering the possible transfer of responsibility and capability where PI can make a strong contribution to the sustainability of the peace it leaves behind. Da Costa describes how:

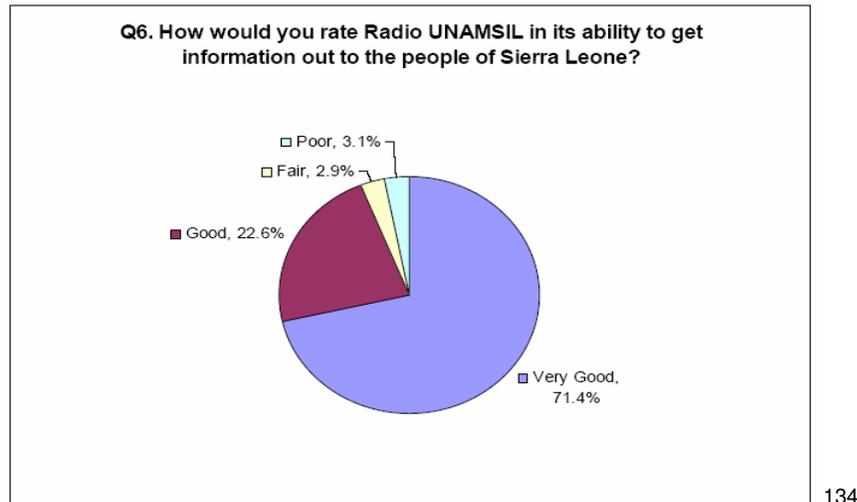
"The strategy is to ensure there is a successor arrangement...the political office...which is an integrated office with the country team that has the capacity and the institutional responsibility of continuing whatever process, whatever contribution the peacekeeping mission may have made. We will, at some point in

¹²⁹ Interview: Ms. Margaret A. Novicki, op cit.

¹³⁰ Onadipe, A. Paper at KAIPTC workshop, op cit.

*time, hopefully hand-over to our national counter-parts responsibilities. In those areas we will help them strengthen and develop their national capacities with the support of UNDP and UNESCO and the donor community. We would not like to see the investment that has been made not being capitalised upon as a long-term contribution to the government and the people of Liberia.*¹³¹

In a public opinion survey based on the work of UNAMSIL, many respondents claimed UNAMSIL radio was one of the best things the mission had done and that equally, the notion of its discontinuation with the mission's withdrawal was potentially one of the worst things it could do.¹³² A similar survey based on the work of UNMIL in Liberia produced much the same response, many stating that UNMIL radio and its capacity to communicate and disseminate information was amongst the best things the mission had brought to Liberia.¹³³ According to the surveys, the general opinion about the respective radio stations was found to be very positive:

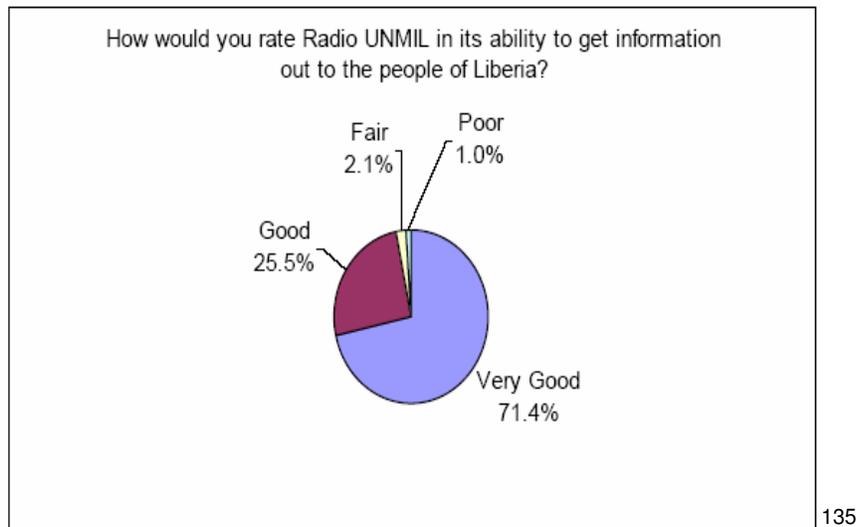


¹³¹ Interview: Mr. Luiz Da Costa, op cit.

¹³² Krasno, J.(b) *Public Opinion Survey of UNAMSIL's Work in Sierra Leone*, City College of New York and Yale University: UNPBPU, July 2005, p.26, <[http://pbpu.unlb.org/pbpu/library/UNAMSIL-Public%20Opinion%20Survey%20Full%20Report%20\(19%20July%202005\).pdf](http://pbpu.unlb.org/pbpu/library/UNAMSIL-Public%20Opinion%20Survey%20Full%20Report%20(19%20July%202005).pdf)> (Accessed 5th June 2006)

¹³³ Krasno, J.(a), op cit, p.21-22.

¹³⁴ Krasno, J.(b), op cit, p14.



Although this is by no means conclusive, it alludes to a feeling amongst the populations in question that the draw-down of the mission and its PI capability, particularly that of the radio station, is viewed with apprehension as the possible prelude to re-opening the information-gap and potentially regressing in terms of informed and participatory citizens in the reconstruction process.

In Sierra Leone the public dependency on Radio UNAMSIL was arguably greater than is the case now in Liberia. Large numbers of Sierra Leoneans perceived the UN station as their contact across their country and with the rest of the world. The same survey referred to above recommended that the radio station be retained and stated that even changing its name could provoke mistrust amongst the population.¹³⁶ Following the mission's departure in December 2005, Radio UNAMSIL has been absorbed by the PI section of the United Nations Integrated Office for Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL) with its stated mission to "promote national dialogue and inform and educate the public on the consolidation of peace, democracy and reforms in Sierra Leone."¹³⁷ Since the departure of UNAMSIL, however, Radio UNAMSIL has been under-staffed and given little chance to continue in the same vein. The former head of the Elections Information unit in UNAMSIL PI and incumbent Chief of UNMIL Radio believes this approach has underutilised the capacity created and developed during the peace operation and has failed to capitalise on this powerful tool in support of the peacebuilding process.¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Krasno, J.(a), op cit, p14.

¹³⁶ Krasno, J.(b), op cit, p.30.

¹³⁷ See UNIOSIL website, <<http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/missions/uniosil/background.htm>> (Accessed 5th June 2006)

¹³⁸ Interview: Mr. Kojo Roberts-Mensah, op cit.

UNIOSIL's intention is to train national staff for an eventual handover of Radio UNAMSIL to the UN country team and Sierra Leonean ownership/Government of Sierra Leone by mid-2006.¹³⁹ The plan to hand over control to the government is also controversial when you are dealing with the country's first ever nation-wide radio station. Such comparative advantage in transmission over other indigenous stations means that ceding control to the state is arguably to give government the monopoly over the most accessible media, potentially jeopardising the independence a fledgling post-conflict media environment - particularly given the history of state misuse of media in the sub-region.

In Liberia there has been a fairly robust broadcast community whereby the likes of Radio Veritas, the Liberian Broadcasting Corporation (ELBC) and a post-conflict proliferation of community radio stations offer alternative information sources. Oscar Bloh purports that the people of Liberia prefer and are more attuned to listening to community radio, but that a greater dependency on UNMIL Radio has been created due to the capacity deficit. It is perhaps only once the capacity of national and community radio stations has been increased that dependency upon the UN radio station will diminish.

The legacy of the mission radio station is essentially tied up in its technology, its programming capacity and the level of trust it has derived from the population. For this capability to remain a positive force for peace, it must be controlled by those with the same overriding purpose. In the interim, it seems that the incorporation of mission radio into the subsequent UN political office is the logical step and the most supportive of the peace process. The station must be staffed with sufficient skills and experience such that the capacity is utilised. It seems prudent that the political mission and its various components ensure its continuation is justified by optimal and constructive output.

Aside from mission radio, CO has had such success in reaching detached communities in both Sierra Leone and Liberia that it also seems sensible to continue this method of information dissemination once the mission has left. Although there are no physical structures for transferral or re-distribution, the expertise embodied by those national staff previously working in CO in the peacekeeping mission provides vital human resources for the UN agencies, governmental and non-governmental organisations continuing the peacebuilding process. The links to civil society and informal networks developed and nurtured by CO will continue to offer an extremely efficient channel for informing the wider population, but are likely to weaken and stagnate if they are not maintained and utilised. It is too early to deduce that the lack of CO post-UNAMSIL has been detrimental to peacebuilding in Sierra Leone. However, it is suggested that the PI

¹³⁹ 'First report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone', UN Document, S/2006/269, 28th April 2006, <<http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/325/47/PDF/N0632547.pdf?OpenElement>> (Accessed 5th June 2006); UNIOSIL website, op cit.

section of any successor political office in Liberia should endeavour to utilise the potential bound up in the experience of UNMIL PI CO.

A number of NGOs and UN agencies have taken ownership of specific CO projects in the past so as to ensure continuity. The process has begun already in UNMIL where UNDP is taking over initiatives such as the high school project originally set up by CO.¹⁴⁰ This forward-planning helps to dampen the effect of PI's withdrawal. These relationships and the positive image CO has shaped for the UN will long-outlive the missions and will directly improve the ability of the successor UN presence to do its work. Beyond this, CO has had an impact on a rejuvenated popular culture. Some of the most famous and influential musicians, comedians and artists of all descriptions have incorporated positive societal change into their work. Popular songs, theatre productions and a wide range of artistic and cultural practices which raise awareness about reconciliation, human rights, GBV, HIV/Aids and corruption fuel a culture of peace which reaches far and wide. It will be one of the biggest legacies that PI and indeed the mission can leave.

It is apparent that these two media – radio and CO - are those which will leave the biggest void following the mission's exit and perhaps the hardest of all PI functions for successor arrangements and national actors to replicate without some transfer of physical or human resources. Stokes claims that:

*“Our legacy is that we’re going to leave a fairly strong, solid PI team of nationals when it’s all said and done who I would think will play an important role in the future of the country, one way or the other, whether that’s in private sector or whatever.”*¹⁴¹

Utilising this pool of expertise will be particularly important in the aftermath of the mission. It may be that the loss of the PI office as a focal point and source of direction for media activity will be missed most. It is perhaps in developing closer and more amicable links between the mission PI and the UN country group that the transition can be managed and less conspicuous.

CONCLUSIONS

PI in UNAMSIL and UNMIL have pushed the envelope significantly and with these new frontiers and opportunities, new challenges have emerged. If PI is increasingly visible and audible as a force for peace, then it is necessary for those who plan and develop the PI concept to appreciate the need for justifiable and accountable methodology. It must also look to build the capacity for monitoring its own efficacy and making better use of the access PI initiatives provide to grass-roots populations and civil society. The increasing involvement

¹⁴⁰ See page 42.

¹⁴¹ Interview: Mr. Ronnie Stokes, op cit.

of PI in media development, training and the transition of some components from PI vehicle to a communication tool has dramatically altered the way in which PI is used in peacekeeping operations.

In the absence of a comprehensive collective approach to peacebuilding, though potentially in the pipeline with the recently created UN Peacebuilding Commission, PI components must continue to engage in partnerships with other actors in the field to optimise the support PI in peacekeeping can offer in the earliest days of post-conflict media development and laying the foundations for longer-term peacebuilding. A PI component will inevitably have both positive and negative impacts on the local media infrastructure. What is vital is that there is a proactive and predictive approach to the potential effect and controlling the depth of the footprint. This will support the eventual process of moulding the contours of the post-mission PI legacy.

As the functions of PI expand and multiply, it is vital that the organisational concept keeps pace and that provisions are made for the increased responsibilities. Whilst accepting that its re-application will be unique, the evolution of peacekeeping is fundamentally dependent on learning lessons and maintaining progressive momentum as a result. As PI becomes increasingly *mission critical*, it is only by formalising and eventually institutionalising experience and PI wisdom that future missions, particularly those in the sub-region or displaying similar characteristics in the media and information environment, can benefit and UN DPKO can guarantee institutional learning.

Just as people need information and continue to engage with media throughout conflict, the end of the mission is no different. If an information space has been created by the mission's PI presence and then evacuated, it is inevitable that something else will fill it.¹⁴² The emergence of UN radio and the development of community linkages through outreach demand a systematic approach to a PI exit strategy. UNIOSIL will provide a good example of how the absorption by the political mission and eventual handover of the radio station works in the post-mission environment and, as has so often been the case; UNMIL PI will benefit directly from its experience and ideally enhance the process. Although it is beyond the remit of the peacekeeping mission by definition, it is prudent for the peacekeeping organisation to ensure the investment made by the mission in technologies, human expertise and networks are not lost or left to decay. The implementation of peace agreements and the realisation of durable peace go far beyond the withdrawal of the peacekeeping mission and the PI concept must learn from and formalise exit strategies which are of greatest benefit to that which it leaves behind.

¹⁴² Interview: Mr. Kingsley Ighobor, op cit.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

SUMMARY

Due to the proliferation of intra-state conflict since the early 1990s, West Africa has become a prime training ground for peacekeepers in the field and a learning experience of equal, if not greater, magnitude for those tasked with design and development of peacekeeping operations at the structural level. The use and development of PI in UNAMSIL and UNMIL epitomises this.

The lack of thorough analysis of PI in peacekeeping and its centrality in contemporary peace operations in the sub-region presents a knowledge-deficit for peacekeepers. Once overcome and formalised, this will aid planning for PI in future missions by those international, regional and sub-regional organisations attempting to address matters of peace and security in Africa.

The media architecture in West Africa is characterised by high levels of illiteracy; production and distribution is centralised in the urban centres with large rural publics with little access to mainstream media. The constraints and occupational hazards suffered by media practitioners and institutions produce a fragile industry with ephemeral outputs. In a climate of conflict, the media is extremely vulnerable to manipulation and belligerent control and is inevitably one of the first institutions to be targeted. The degradation of state institutions witnessed in Sierra Leone and Liberia is mirrored in the media sphere, where infrastructure was largely destroyed and the information environment became a haven for divisive mistruths and enduring falsehoods. This describes the context for a PI component of a peace operation at deployment. Ultimately, the success of PI throughout a peace operation is dependent on the pre-deployment assessment mission's ability to analyse these characteristics and identify information space which PI will utilise and work within.

LESSONS NOTED

Given enduring resource short-falls and intermittent lack of political will for peacekeeping operations in West Africa, it seems strange to ask whether a particular component is *critical* to the mission. Its failure to be so would presumably negate its existence. What is most important to ask and to realise is whether the component is *mission critical* and hence, crucial to the effective functioning of the mission holistically rather than in facilitating a particular facet of the mandate. The revolution in PI throughout UNAMSIL and UNMIL has perhaps done more to promote PI to such status that any other developments since its inception.

This paper has highlighted some of the PI methodology and concepts that have clearly improved the efficacy of peace operations in achieving mandated goals in the West African setting. These range from successfully disseminating the mission's mandate and managing expectations in the early deployment phase of a mission, to spearheading sensitisation campaigns in DDRR, repatriation/resettlement and elections amongst a multiplicity of others. Ultimately, complex conflicts – such as those in Sierra Leone and Liberia – require a complex peace process that optimises the benefits and political space created by a PI component, as exhibited through the case studies in Chapter 3. This offers a number of lessons from and for West Africa.

The existence of PI is predicated on its categorical support for the mission. The PI strategy developed for optimising the welfare of the mission has been reconceived somewhat and this has manifested itself in a reprioritisation of the primary target audiences. It is clear that there has been an observable shift from output for an internal and extended audience based on self-promotion and mission 'PR', to an approach where the message is truly intended for the people that the mission is there to help and assist. This focus on deriving local support and consent for the political process underpinning peace operations is at the heart of contemporary peacekeeping and something PI has the capacity to do better than any other component of the mission.

The success of PI in UNAMSIL and UNMIL has been empowered by solid organisational structure and management. The interdependence of various PI units and strategies require a synergistic approach to optimise its capabilities. The full range of units has been important but the mission radio stations and community outreach units have offered unprecedented support to this end.

The UN operations in Sierra Leone and Liberia have also highlighted how every component of the mission and indeed the wider peace support community will naturally become clients of a successful and effective PI component. This creates dependencies upon the PI component and expands its function as the conspicuous voice, and increasingly the embodiment, of the peace process and its various initiatives. Admittedly, the media environment and informational traditions in West Africa empower a PI component with media and transmission capability otherwise unknown in the domestic media industry. This dynamic will inevitably transpire elsewhere where informational needs and constraints replicate those in Sierra Leone and Liberia. Provided there is continued innovation in PI techniques, recognising PI as a central pillar for peacekeeping operations offers mission planners the opportunity to integrate linkages with PI in operational policy and concept and further optimise their contribution to the mission and the peace process.

THE CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

A mission must consider its footprint on the host country, and the influence of PI on the media and information environment is an important facet of this. The impact during the mission must be clearly understood and every attempt made to minimise the negative effects of mission termination. Once the information-gap has been utilised by a mission, the PI exit strategy and the legacy it leaves behind are fundamental to maintaining support for the peace process and the successor peacebuilding presence. The successful management of the mission footprint will be endogenous in the production of the desired end-state – i.e. the durability of peace achieved. It requires considerable foresight, sensitivity and appreciation of the context.

The UN should be rigorous in underpinning its PI activity in media and journalism theory so as to engage its detractors. It should then be candid in expressing the philosophy and justification for its public information and media strategies. The conflict between producing ‘intended outcome’ programming whilst championing free and diverse media as part of liberal democracy remains paradoxical and requires a measure of explanation – particularly when one’s target audience is understandably suspicious. It seems clear however, that when one prioritises the maintenance of peace there is scope for continued innovation in this area. Reconciling ethical practice and UN good practice with the realities on the ground needs to be a priority for those at the sharp-end of PI strategy at HQ and in the wider peacekeeping community.

It appears that only by increasing capacity can PI in peacekeeping begin to harness the potential that its expanded functions are providing. If PI is to continue its rapid development then it will need a point of reference from which to analyse the efficacy of existing and new initiatives. Only then can the continued development be results-driven and truly aim to benefit the target audience rather than simply buttress the mission. The same is true of the opportunities for optimising the feedback gained from increasingly interactive and communicative PI units such as Radio and Community Outreach. Until there are personnel tasked with the sensitive extrapolation of feedback from the grass-roots, PI and the wider missions will waste an empowering opportunity to listen to their hosts.

Those in the field claim that perceptions of PI are changing and it is progressively acknowledged that PI, and its ability to engage with media and local populations, is indisputably a force multiplier.

The lessons from UNAMSIL were arguably learned by the human resources transferred between UNAMSIL and UNMIL PI components. It is crucial that the experience and knowledge bound up in these personnel is not allowed to slip away in the rotation. It is from such individuals that the PI concept can benefit hugely. The extent to which this realisation is appreciated and acted upon beyond these missions will indeed set the parameters to what can be achieved in

light of such developments. For PI to continue to effectively meet the changing needs of peace operations, the concept must be allowed to grow and benefit from the experience of its previous applications. The speed at which such media initiatives have integrated into peacekeeping practice has outpaced any explicit doctrinal development and the analysis of PI remains at the level of conceptual debates.

However, it is ultimately at the HQ level where best practice is institutionalised but also where bad/worst practice must be appreciated and minimised in what peacekeeping understands as its PI concept. The increased efficiency of collaboration between DPKO and DPI at UNHQ should help to ensure this is achieved, but continued advocacy and promotion of PI will remain a necessity during the planning and budgeting process. To this end, a number of meetings bringing together Chiefs of PI and staff from the field, DPKO and DPI (Peace and Security) representatives have served as a forum for sharing experience and reaching consensus on best practice. However, the actual output from these has been minimal and largely unpublished. The process of formalising best practice and concept at HQ is endless and there remains a need for analysis of recent and on-going mission experience so as to continuously update the concept underpinning PI in peacekeeping. Ideally, once a comprehensive operational policy document has been finalised, more frequent workshops could bring together the relevant personnel to update it and sustain currency.

The politics of peacekeeping may continue to restrict the extent to which there can be an integrated approach towards supporting the reconstruction and development of the post-conflict media environment. It is, however, by learning from previous experiences; pushing the envelope with each new opportunity; engaging in mutually beneficial partnerships and laying solid foundations; that a PI component in peacekeeping operations can credibly claim to strive for durable peace rather than an exit strategy.

In conclusion, although two UN missions in West Africa have been the primary focus of analysis, it should be noted that many of the core lessons that have emerged are also applicable to the broader African peace support environment. In particular, the mission-critical nature of PI should be accepted and embraced by those who are working to establish multidimensional African peacekeeping capabilities at the continental and the regional levels.

APPENDIX A

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ASF	African Standby Force
AU	African Union
CO	Community Outreach
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
DDRR	Disarmament, Demobilisation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration
DPI	Department for Public Information
DPKO	(United Nations) Department of Peacekeeping Operations
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
(D)SRSG	(Deputy) Special Representative of the Secretary-General
ELBC	Liberian Broadcasting Corporation
EU	European Union
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GOL	Government of Liberia
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus / Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
(I)NGO	(International) Non-Governmental Organisation
IO	International Organisation
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
LURD	Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy
MODEL	Movement for Democracy in Liberia
MONUC	United Nations Organisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NEC	National Elections Commission
PBPU	Peacekeeping Best Practices Unit (UN DPKO)
PI	Public Information
PIO	Public Information Officer
PSO	Peace Support Operation

RTL	Radio Télévision Libre des Milles Collines
RUF	Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone
SEA	Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
SSR	Security Sector Reform
TCC	Troop Contributing Country
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UNAMIR	United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda
UNAMSIL	United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIOSIL	United Nations Integrated Office for Sierra Leone
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia
UNOCI	United Nations Operation in Cote d'Ivoire
UNOMIL	United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia
UNOMSIL	United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone
UNOSOM	United Nations Operation in Somalia
UNTAC	United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia
UNTAG	United Nations Transitional Assistance Group



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