The UN presence transitioned again in August 2008 with the establishment of the UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL). The Office is mandated to support the government in resolving tensions and addressing areas of potential conflict; monitoring and promoting human rights and rule of law; strengthening good governance; assisting with the constitutional review; and coordinating the work of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), and the UN Country Team. In September 2009, UNIPSIL’s mandate was extended until 30 September 2010 with a request for the Office’s eventual transition into a UN Country Team presence, with special focus on issues surrounding preparations for the 2012 elections.

As one of the first fully integrated political missions, UNIPSIL is unique in several ways. It is headed by an Executive Representative of the Secretary-General (ERSG), a post currently held by Michael von der Schulenburg, who also serves as the Resident Representative of the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the UN Resident Coordinator. The ERSG model is not widely utilized but works well in this particular context because it is accompanied by a peacebuilding strategy that aligns all aspects of the UN’s country presence, and thus having one person in charge streamlines the decision-making process and complements integration.

UNIPSIL also has one of the most targeted mandates of UN political missions. This was actively lobbied for by the ERSG so that the mission could have a focused strategy—providing the political platform, aid coordination and support (through a multi-donor trust fund), and technical advice—to assist the government with their own institution building and peace consolidation efforts. This is achieved by linking the mission’s guiding framework, the Joint Vision for the UN Family in Sierra Leone, to the government’s own Agenda for Change, which articulates its four main peacebuilding priorities as reliable power supply; increased productivity in agriculture and fisheries; improved infrastructure; and improved health and other social services.

Covering the period of 2009-2012, the Joint Vision was developed in order to highlight the common priorities of the mission’s political, development and human rights mandates, and to provide a framework that offers full integration at the program, planning, evaluation and operational levels of the following four issues: integrating rural areas into the national economy; economic and social integration of the youth; equitable and affordable access to health; and accessible and credible public service. To allow for accurate monitoring, each agency retains its own workplan and deliverables. The idea of having one vision for the entire UN family is still an incredibly innovative one, despite the fact it has streamlined what was originally thirty-two different strategies into one, and has the government’s own priorities at its core.

UNIPSIL comprises an office to support the ERSG and then five substantive sections: Political Affairs and Peace Consolidation; Human Rights and Rule of Law; Democratic Institutions; Police and Security; and a Joint Strategic Planning Unit which is tasked with ensuring synergy across all of the mission’s activities. The Planning Unit also links the strategies of UNIPSIL with those of the government, donors and the PBC. The mission has plans for a total of eight regional field offices to connect with local communities, assist with implementation of UN programs and enable more effective outreach. Additionally, these field offices will provide space for liaison offices of local civil society and NGOs.

Key Developments

While Sierra Leone has made admirable progress towards stabilization, the country still struggles with poor socio-economic indicators, corruption, drug trafficking, and severe youth unemployment—all