

Visual summary of thematic areas

This section focuses on surfacing key lessons learned across multiple cross-cutting themes and countries.



In total, 13 themes emerged for deeper exploration with a focus on common trends throughout Spotlight Initiative programmes and its implementation.⁴⁹² This section may be used by experts, programme designers, politicians or civil society organisations that are working in these areas for potential adaptation and implementation of evidence-based programming in different contexts.



1 Centering gender-based violence as a high-level political priority can ensure active government involvement in programme design and secure dedicated budget lines and funds for strong political commitment. It also establishes partnerships between government and civil society organisations to sustain initiatives and extend their impact to the most marginalised communities.



2 Addressing challenges and sociocultural norms in a given context can reduce gender inequalities and discrimination. When complemented with community support, programmes can transform socio-cultural norms and shift narratives toward more equitable and inclusive practices.



3 Addressing child marriage and harmful practices can improve levels of awareness among individuals and communities, the utilisation of services, and prompt action against the harmful practice. Well-defined action plans, leveraging the influence of traditional leaders, and effective allocation of resources reduces instances of violence experienced by young women and adolescent girls.



4 Promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights in order to end sexual violence can increase access to services, mitigate violence and improve health outcomes among women and girls. Strategies to support this include integrating sexual and reproductive health and rights into national laws and policies, mainstreaming information through education systems, and incorporating HIV and AIDS awareness and destigmatisation into ongoing and planned efforts.



5 Engaging youth/adolescents and girls can create meaningful and sustainable change. Developing community-focused initiatives, partnering with educational institutions, utilising digital channels, and promoting youth-led advocacy programmes helps improve individual, household and community-level sexual reproductive health and rights outcomes.



6 Engaging men and boys can address problematic notions of toxic masculinities. Engaging community leaders and role models, creating peer opportunities for healthy relationships among men and boys, targeting schools for awareness activities, and utilising creative methods like media and theatre are effective strategies for changing social norms around gender-based violence.



7 Engaging religious, traditional and faith-based leaders can build their capacities to act as agents of change. Key strategies for engaging religious and faith-based leaders include collaborating with them to establish by-laws and pass legislation, and working with religious networks to provide sustainable solutions for influencing social norms.



8 Engaging the private sector can support the development of robust workplace policies and provide workers with access to support mechanisms that address gender-based violence. It also supports the fortification of leadership and political desire to tackle workplace violence and demonstrate commitment towards gender equality.



9 Engaging with the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus can establish safe environments and enhance access to essential services for survivors, especially in war and conflict-affected contexts. Humanitarian partnerships help improve safety and reduce violence and harmful practices against vulnerable women and girls.



10 Adapting to COVID-19, conflict and other crises can ensure the provision of direct support and emergency services to women and girls. Virtual innovations have enabled uninterrupted and wider-reaching services. Complementarily, new partnerships and flexible funding models have supported the achievement of intended gender equality outcomes despite changing circumstances.



11 Embedding design perspectives can improve programme relevance and resonance with different target groups, especially when aligned with local culture. Implementing a thorough context, gender and power analysis, along with utilising past evidence and learnings, leads to more effective gender equality outcomes.



12 Supporting UN reform and multi-sector governance structures can enhance coordination across agencies and organisations working towards ending violence against women. Regional collaborations strengthen programmes, optimise resource use, boost efficiency and reduce duplication of efforts.



13 Ensuring the sustainability of programming and exit strategies can build systems and standardised processes owned by national stakeholders, including governments and civil society organisations. Securing funding before programme closure ensures continuity, while implementing tracking mechanisms supports future fundraising efforts.

⁴⁹² These themes were derived from coding annual reports, annexes and knowledge management briefs and identifying top thematic trends that spanned across pillars and through consultation with the Spotlight Initiative Knowledge Management team.

Key Lessons Learned Across Cross-Cutting Themes



1 Centering gender-based violence as a high-level political priority

Through its country and regional programmes, Spotlight Initiative has worked to ensure that violence against women and girls was a high-level political priority in government bodies and in leadership positions more broadly. High-level political support is crucial for securing domestic commitments, gender equitable policy-making, and ending impunity. Lessons learned in this thematic area include encouraging active governmental participation in the design and governance of a country programme, establishing partnerships between government actors and with civil society organisations to support sustainability, and ensuring budget lines and funds are in place to demonstrate commitment.

Lesson Learned #1: Encouraging active governmental participation in the design process and governance of a country's programme to combat violence against women and girls strengthens the implementation and prioritisation of its actions.

Spotlight Initiative countries in **Argentina**, **Ecuador**, **Papua New Guinea**, and **Uganda** all made progress on engaging government officials as a key strategy to end violence against women and girls. For example, in **Argentina**, Spotlight Initiative collaborated with the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights of the Nation and the Ministry of Women, Gender and Diversity to support quality services to victims of domestic violence. Good progress was made in the country in expanding the reach of the Corps of Lawyers, which offers free legal representation and advice. In October 2021, the management of sexual abuse cases of children was transferred from the Corps to the supervision of the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights of the Nation, deepening government ownership of this line of work and ultimately its sustainability. In **Papua New Guinea**, following the murder of a 19-year-old mother in 2020 by her husband, vigils and protests sprung up, including one that was led by former Chief Migration Officer Solomon Kantha and attended by Prime Minister James Marape. Their participation in the vigil resulted in greater national visibility and commitment from other ministers and governors, who signed a pledge to end gender-based violence. (See more in [case study 2.2](#) under Pillar 2, and see also [case study 7.3](#), which details this work in **Liberia** across multiple pillars.)

In contrast, when there has not been stable leadership, or a reluctance more broadly to engage around the topic of gender-based violence and women's rights, the positioning of gender-based at the highest level was more challenging to progress.

Lesson Learned #2: Establishing partnerships between government actors and with civil society organisations assures the continuity of ending violence against women and girls initiatives and expands the reach to the most marginalised.

Research has demonstrated that feminist movements and civil society organisations are key actors in keeping issues related to violence against women and girls on political agendas. To maximise the engagement and support of government actors, Spotlight Initiative has supported diverse government and civil society collaborations across multiple country contexts, including **Belize**, **Kyrgyzstan**, and **Vanuatu**.

For example, in 2020 and 2021, seven key ministries in **Belize**, including the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health and Wellness and the National Women's Commission, partnered with civil society organisations. These partnerships were pivotal to securing high-level political buy-in from the government and fostering long-term national ownership over Spotlight Initiative and work on ending violence against women and girls more broadly. Partnerships with government entities helped ensure the sustainability of activities as actions that were undertaken sought to build capacity and integrate ending violence against women and girls into various national plans, policies and programmes. Moreover, these partnerships were instrumental in strengthening the legal and policy environment for ending violence against women and girls, as well as strengthening capacity for prevention and service delivery.

Spotlight Initiative in **Kyrgyzstan** focused on strengthening national parliamentary bodies, specifically the Parliamentary Council on the Rights of Women, Children and Gender Equality, as a strategy for building bridges between state actors and women's rights organisations to keep gender-based violence high on the political agenda. The results have included the development of a strategic action plan for 2023-2026, which deepened civic engagement in law-making by involving women's rights groups, survivors of gender-based violence, civil society organisations and other activists in the design of legislation and policies. For another example that details multi-stakeholder government and civil society collaborations, see more in [case study 1.1](#) of the Chihuahua State Congress in **Mexico** to support orphans under Pillar 1.

Lesson Learned #3: Ensuring budget lines and funds are in place demonstrates high-level political commitment and action.

In order to achieve results in ending violence against women and girls, it is crucial to have adequate budgeting and planning for interventions. Having adequate capital allocated to address violence against women and girls demonstrates a political commitment to addressing the issue. For example, in **Papua New Guinea, Liberia, Ecuador, and Nigeria**, Spotlight Initiative programmes deepened skills development with governments to better integrate violence against women and girls into plans and budgets and forged a closer relationship with political stakeholders to increase awareness about the issue and support its prioritisation.

In **Papua New Guinea**, Spotlight Initiative worked to strengthen the government's capacity to address violence against women and girls. Results included annual budgetary support from the government for gender-based violence programming, the establishment of provincial gender-based violence secretariats and a Permanent Parliamentary Committee on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment and Gender-Based Violence. (See more in [case study 2.2](#) under Pillar 2.)

Spotlight Initiative's collaboration with the government in **Liberia** led to the implementation of a national Gender Responsive Planning and Budgeting coordination unit in the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection and Ministry of Justice to support gender-responsive budgeting. Funding support to this gender budgeting work yielded significant impacts, moving from no money allocated to gender issues in the budget in 2020 to 380,000 USD in 2021 and 500,000 USD in 2022. Additionally, this initiative developed the capacities of 40 civil society organisations, promoting social monitoring on government expenditures. All these changes were highly influenced by the establishment of Gender Responsive Planning and Budgeting units and the government's engagement and prioritisation of gender equality. (See more in [case study 7.3](#), which details this work across multiple pillars.)

Political meetings, regional events and external political pressure can also increase attention to gender budgets. Dialogues with peers and between governments can help set collaborative agendas and move towards the common goal of ending violence against women and girls. For example, in **Ecuador**, senior UN officials were able to discuss with the government the importance of prioritising gender-based violence interventions during high level missions. Following these discussions, the President of Ecuador decided to support activities funded by Spotlight Initiative and to invest 24 million USD towards ending violence against women and girls projects. (See more in [case study 1.2](#) under Pillar 1 and see also the results and good practices in **Timor-Leste** in [case study 2.1](#) under Pillar 2.)

2 Addressing challenges and sociocultural norms in the context



Spotlight Initiative uses a comprehensive and systems-change approach to addressing and ending violence against women and girls, with a particular focus on shifting sociocultural norms that deepen or maintain unjust practices and inequalities. Lessons surfaced from Spotlight Initiative's norm change work ranged from mobilising youth as future leaders of change, targeting girls as agents of change on behalf of their fellow women and girls and working through community leaders to mobilise movements fighting discriminatory practices. Additionally, the programmes showcased opportunities to leverage communications and technologies as effective tools for change and opportunities by partnering with admired celebrities and figureheads. Each of these models detail an effort to shift cultural and social norms that perpetuate ending violence against women and girls in various geopolitical contexts. Overall, initiatives that proved to be the most consistently effective often ensured gender inclusion, focused on shifting stereotypes, social norms and behaviours, addressed traditional or religious practices and shifted mindsets at a younger age to sustain longer-term outcomes.

Lesson Learned #1: Community support can help to transform social and cultural norms that maintain gender inequalities or discrimination in efforts to end violence against women and girls.

Engaging the community is a critical step to creating local ownership and sustaining intended outcomes. This is especially true for efforts designed to affect change by shifting sociocultural norms since norms are largely formed by society, which then influence the behaviours and psychology of the individual. Spotlight Initiative's programmes in countries such as **Liberia, Honduras, and Mozambique** offer unique examples of how to engage the community to challenge inequalities. In **Liberia**, community involvement was key in advancing behaviour change, especially around sexual gender-based violence and other harmful practices, such as female genital mutilation, that are sensitive topics in Liberian society and deeply rooted in traditional norms and culture. Rural-based women's organisations, such as the Lorkiamon Women's Group in Sacleapea, Nimba County, created improved awareness of the negative outcomes of sexual and gender-based violence and the rights of women and girls through social and political pressure. This included spreading messages about the importance of

ending violence, ensuring rights and services reached the most vulnerable and remote societies, that cases were followed up with and perpetrators brought to account, and that survivors were provided services to recover. In **Mozambique**, Spotlight Initiative's work has resulted in strong community mobilisation and commitment to ending violence against women and girls. Partners conducted outreach to community activists and mentors through community dialogues, sports and cultural events and participatory theatre, which reached over 180,000 people, to promote broader awareness of sexual gender-based violence and to increase public commitments to ending violence against women and girls and denounce harmful practices. Among the many outcomes, in 2021, dialogues led to the identification and reporting of 239 cases of child marriage and abuse. 89 percent of the cases had a just resolution supporting the survivor. For another innovative example of community mobilisation, see more in [case study 3.13](#) on the "Cure Violence" model preventing femicide in **Honduras** under Pillar 3.

Peer-to-peer counseling, support and movement building against gender-based violence, child marriage and sexual violence have also proven to be common among Spotlight Initiative partners, including reported success stories in **Ecuador, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Tajikistan, and Uganda**, among others. Bringing groups together with shared experiences has resulted in creating a powerful catalyst for ending violence against women and girls. See more in [case study 3.1](#) of the Malawi Safe Space Mentorship Programme, which helped women and girls raise their voices and challenge social norms under Pillar 3. Mobilising civil society, community leaders and youth can create a critical mass that supports attitude, norm or behavioural change.

Lesson Learned #2: Leveraging the credibility of existing leaders, celebrities and people in positions of power shifts narratives and can support more equitable practices.

Celebrity endorsements, or the "influencer approach," has been a successful marketing strategy when seeking to build product affinity. A similar approach has been adapted for international development work. This change model was highlighted in Spotlight Initiative countries in **Tajikistan, Malawi, Uganda, and Mozambique**, to name a few.

In **Tajikistan**, athletes have become a part of the influencer approach that Spotlight Initiative uses. During two summer training camps, professional athletes discussed issues of gender sensitivity in the sports environment, prevention of violence and discrimination against women and people with disabilities, and the development of positive masculinity in the fight against gender stereotypes and violence. The athletes also held a series of practical exercises to engage girls in sports. To demonstrate their commitment to advocating for the prevention of gender-based violence, the summer camp participants organised an interactive awareness raising session on gender-based violence prevention concluding with a master class on self-defence and badminton, including young athletes, their parents and the general population. The event was followed by several social media activities by sports influencers, specifically Taekwondo champions, who disseminated key messages on ending violence against women and girls through their social media accounts on a daily basis. In many Spotlight Initiative countries, such as **Malawi, Uganda, and Mozambique**, efforts have been successful in engaging religious leaders and well-known community leaders, which has helped transform social norms related to violence against women and girls. For a deeper dive on the role of traditional leaders, see the [lessons learned on engaging religious, traditional and faith-based leaders](#).

Lesson Learned #3: Models that leverage modern tools in communications, technology and media amplify behavioural change messaging with greater speed and reach to broader audiences.

Leveraging technology and social media adds value to programme implementation and movement building by sharing success stories, influential commentary, and achieving greater reach more efficiently. Reports that highlight this strategy were shared by programmes in **Kyrgyzstan, Belize, Uganda, Mozambique, Niger**, the **Safe and Fair Programme**, and **Vanuatu**. In **Kyrgyzstan**, the Spotlight Initiative programme team focused on leveraging technology and video games as educational tools to end violence against women and girls, with the production of the "Spring in Bishkek" game. (See more in [case study 3.9](#) under Pillar 3.)

In **Belize**, the Productive Organization for Women in Action (POWA) hosted a series of live shows, entitled "MENtors," on Facebook⁴⁹³ on Sundays to promote positive male behaviour in Belize. These shows evolved into a public awareness campaign and had a total of 7,480 viewers.⁴⁹⁴ In **Uganda**, Spotlight Initiative supported civil society organisations with multimedia campaigns that reached over 19 million people, advocating for mindset and practice change towards stopping violence against women and girls. Media monitoring captured 89,623 Twitter users and 25,580 Facebook posters demonstrating change in attitudes towards gender-based violence and challenging harmful social norms on VAWG. In **Mozambique**, a free platform was developed, SMS Biz, that allowed young people to ask questions and access information

⁴⁹³ The MENtors Facebook page.

⁴⁹⁴ [In Belize, women in transition are finding their POWA](#) (Spotlight Initiative, April 2021).

on topics including sexual and reproductive health, teenage pregnancies, gender-based violence, HIV, child marriage, and COVID-19.⁴⁹⁵ The medium allowed them to broach topics that they may not have been comfortable addressing in person. SMS Biz provided life saving information to youth, helping to prevent unplanned pregnancies, HIV transmission and/or child marriage. To reach even more adolescents and youth, the Spotlight Initiative is supporting the platform's expansion and training more counsellors to increase the response capacity of the platform. Through the **Safe and Fair Programme**, partners in the **Philippines** reached an estimated 66,000 Facebook users with a first-ever web series, the *Babaeng Biya* (translated as "hero") web series. The series, titled "Women Voyager Heroes in the Time of COVID-19," featured stories of Filipina women migrant workers and their struggles with violence during the pandemic. Similar to the early outcomes of the #MeToo movement, interactions with the online audience were highly interactive, resulting in more than 800 comments on the live web session. This phenomenon resulted in large-scale media attention, new collaborations, and a 16-day campaign to raise awareness of gender-based violence for female migrant workers. For another example of behaviour change, see more in [case study 3.12](#) under Pillar 3, which describes the *Entre Nos* chatbot which is used in **El Salvador** to shift perceptions of toxic masculinity in boys and young men. See also [case study 3.10](#) under Pillar 3, describing the *Los Ayudadores* campaign in **Argentina**.



3 Addressing child marriage and harmful practices

Child marriage is a significant human rights issue, harmful practice and form of violence against women that disproportionately impacts girls.⁴⁹⁶ It is estimated that across the world, 1 in 5 girls are married before the age of 18, and this number almost doubles in least developed countries (to 36 percent).⁴⁹⁷ The real prevalence of child marriages is difficult to track because it is often not formally registered in some communities. For girls, the repercussions of early marriage are deep and significant, curtailing positive life pathways and opportunities. For example, girls that are married are less likely to stay in school, which constrains economic autonomy and growth. They are more likely to live in poverty and without access to resources to change their situations. The vast majority of girls are married against their will and experience sexual violence and early pregnancy, which brings about its own health complications for the mother and child. Child marriage often increases in contexts of humanitarian crisis, disasters and refugee situations, due to increased social and economic pressures and safety concerns.

In order to address this harmful practice, Spotlight Initiative engages in a wide set of transformative activities designed to end child marriage and collaborates with the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage.⁴⁹⁸ Spotlight Initiative's comprehensive approach focuses deeply on normative change and promotes changes in policy reform and advocacy for equal age of marriage, implementation and reporting mechanisms for child marriages, raising awareness of how child marriage is detrimental for girls, and engaging traditional leaders and communities to stop the practice. The following lessons learned were identified by Spotlight Initiative programmes as promising strategies for ending child marriage in different contexts.

Lesson Learned #1: Ensuring policies have action plans with identified costs and resources leads to better implementation of efforts to end child marriage.

The first step to ending child marriage is to ensure that appropriate legislation is in place so that the legal age of marriage is 18 years for both boys and girls. Once laws have been passed, it is important that communities are aware of these laws and that there are mechanisms and resources in place to ensure the law is respected, as Spotlight Initiative in **Zimbabwe**, the **Africa Regional Programme**, and **Malawi** have been working on.

Well-resourced and costed action plans help to ensure adequate implementation of the law. Across the **Africa Regional Programme**, 23 countries costed regional, national and subnational action plans with monitoring and evaluation frameworks for ending child marriage and promoting women's and girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights. For example, Spotlight Initiative in **Zimbabwe** promoted the first costed implementation plan for the National Action Plan for ending child marriage. This was an important step towards implementing the constitutional provision of 18 years as the legal age of marriage.

To address the issue of high dropout rates among girls that had been victims of child marriage, Spotlight Initiative supported scholarship programmes and worked with schools to develop dedicated strategies for bringing girls back into school. For example, as referenced in [case study 7.1](#) on Malawi's comprehensive approach across multiple pillars, the Police Service collaborated with traditional chiefs and other community structures to track child marriage and gender-based violence

⁴⁹⁵ [Lifesaving information, just a text message away](#) (Spotlight Initiative, July 2020).

⁴⁹⁶ Child marriage is defined as marriage before the age of 18.

⁴⁹⁷ [Child Marriage](#) (UNFPA).

⁴⁹⁸ [UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage](#) (UNICEF, July 2023).

cases through the Safe Schools Programme and the One School One Police Officer Initiative. Both Spotlight Initiative interventions facilitated police investigations and prosecutions. As a result, 52 child marriage or violence cases were reported by adolescent girls and boys, through school complaints boxes placed in 135 schools. Of these cases, 25 were concluded, 17 resulted in convictions, 8 in acquittals and the remaining 12 are still being handled in court.

Lesson Learned #2: Connecting with and leveraging the influence of traditional religious leaders and community leaders helps to spread awareness and encourage the abolition of child marriage.

Spotlight Initiative programmes have focused on engaging traditional religious leaders and other influential community members as key advocates for changing social norms related to ending child marriage. Spotlight Initiative through the **Africa Regional Programme** presented a regional framework to eradicate child marriage in 2020. The African Union Goodwill Ambassador, religious and traditional leaders, as well as youth, were engaged to advocate and build collective momentum for action on ending child marriage. In 2021, this partnership with the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme on ending child marriage resulted in data-driven gender transformative approaches to change, as well as a tool to implement across four countries to systematically engage key players within the ecosystem, including boys, men and gatekeepers and policymakers to collectively transform unequal gender norms. This transformative programming is being rolled out in Ethiopia, India, Mozambique and Niger, with plans for a roll-out in Burkina Faso and Bangladesh in 2022, followed by two other countries in 2023.

Spotlight Initiative in **Mali, Malawi, and Liberia** were among the programmes that engaged traditional and local leaders. Overall, from 2018 to 2023, 4,399 religious leaders and 7,279 community leaders in **Mali** were trained on ending child marriage and harmful practices, and many of them publicly supported the ending of violence against women and girls and child marriage. For example, the Chief Canton of Illela spread messages about the importance of ending child marriage and increased awareness of the decree against child marriage in his communities. The Chief also shared anti-child marriage messages with 226 other village chiefs, who then shared the messages in their respective communities. As a result of these activities, in 2019, 40 child marriages were cancelled in Canton and the girls were able to continue their education. 371 rural communities signed official declarations abandoning harmful practices in 2021. In **Liberia**, in the Obanlikwu community of Cross River state, Spotlight Initiative engaged a diverse set of influential stakeholders, including religious and traditional leaders at the local level and women's groups, which supported the community to abolish a harmful tradition. In this area, girl children are used to settle the debts of their parents or grandparents through marriage, a practice called "money woman." This practice has now been abolished. The success was achieved through a multi-pronged strategy, which engaged influential community members, civil society and religious leaders at regional, national and local levels.

Lesson Learned #3: Shifting social norms in communities through raising awareness of reporting mechanisms helps to end the harmful practice.

Addressing the normative dimension of child marriage is critical to ensure that this harmful practice is eliminated. Spotlight Initiative in countries such as **Malawi, Zimbabwe and Nigeria** engaged in different strategies to change social norms and behaviors connected to child marriage. Establishing peer-to-peer and community reporting mechanisms helps to hold perpetrators accountable and establishes new social norms in communities that forbid the practice of child marriage. For example, in **Malawi**, through the Safe Space Mentorship Programme, mentors and mentees worked in gender-based violence patrols with traditional chiefs to contribute to community reporting of child marriage and gender-based violence cases. Overall, 17 percent of all gender-based violence cases in Malawi were reported by the mentor and mentees involved in the programme between 2019-2023. (See more in [case study 3.1](#) under Pillar 3.)

Spotlight Initiative in **Nigeria** trained 252 community surveillance committees in 2021 to champion gender equality and end violence against women and girls. They connected community members to critical service provision points. The community surveillance committees used social media tools during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as WhatsApp and other mobile apps, to report cases of violence and were successful in addressing harmful practices. For example, in 2020, they prevented a nine-year-old girl from being married to a 74-year-old man. They worked with the community and traditional leaders to annul the marriage and integrate the girl back into school. In addition, model husband clubs across 129 villages in Nigeria were successful in managing gender-based violence and preventing cases of child marriage.

Lesson Learned #4: Using creative communication techniques helps to raise the visibility of child marriage and other harmful practices and promote a call to action to stop it.

Diverse multimedia communication is helpful in reaching different groups of people with the message that ending child marriage is critical and gender equality is non-negotiable. Spotlight Initiative programmes in **Niger** and **Kyrgyzstan** shared examples of this. In **Niger**, on the International Day of the Girl, Spotlight Initiative launched messages to end child marriage and other forms of discrimination and violence in Niger. The message that child marriage was against the law quickly increased the visibility of the new law, which criminalized child marriage. In other communities, Spotlight Initiative supported door-to-door megaphone campaigns, educating community members on ending sexual and gender-based violence and informing girls and women where to seek support during the COVID-19 pandemic. In **Kyrgyzstan**, the Spotlight Initiative programme launched a mobile game, called “Spring in Bishkek,” which uses communication for development strategies to educate players about women’s rights and change their beliefs and attitudes around forced marriage and abductions. The game addresses *ala kachuu* (translated as “to take away and run”) or the practice of bride kidnapping, whereby a man kidnaps a girl or woman and often rapes her and forces her to marry him. Families often do not report incidents of bride kidnapping to police due to fear of reputational harms. The goal of the game is to increase and change behaviour towards this practice and gender equality overall. (See more in [case study 3.9](#) under Pillar 3.)



4 Promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights in order to end sexual violence



Spotlight Initiative prioritises strengthening women's and girls' awareness and understanding of their sexual and reproductive health and rights, including the link between violence against women and girls and HIV/AIDS. Spotlight Initiative has demonstrated its commitment to sexual and reproductive health and rights, with over 100 million USD invested throughout the African region. Evidence has shown the links between high rates of violence against women and girls and marginalised groups and sexual and reproductive health and rights. For example, LGBTQI+ people, people living with disabilities and people living with HIV and AIDS experience higher rates of violence and gender-based violence overall; out-of-school drop-outs face a higher degree of early pregnancies and child marriages; and migrant workers face greater abuse when they are unable to access information regarding sexual and reproductive health and rights. Appropriate awareness, services, and justice mechanisms must be available so that women and girls, including those with diverse identities, are safe and live free from discrimination.

Some lessons learned that emerged from Spotlight Initiative programming on sexual and reproductive health and rights include leveraging formal and informal education systems to mainstream information about sexual and reproductive health and rights, particularly for youth; strengthening knowledge of and access to services and one-stop centres to support women's and girls' safety and improve health outcomes; and building the power and agency of women and girls to lead to stronger sexual health and boundaries and a sense of self-assurance.

Lesson Learned #1: Ensuring national laws, policies and plans integrate sexual and reproductive health and rights supports sustained attention to the issue.

Spotlight Initiative programmes apply a gender lens to ensure violence against women and girls and sexual and reproductive health and rights is embedded into policy and national plans. This way the issue of sexual health and reproductive rights, which can be contentious in some countries, has sustained attention and financing in different institutions. Spotlight Initiative programmes in **Liberia, Uganda, Zimbabwe, and Malawi**, among many others, all addressed the integration of sexual and reproductive health and rights into national policies and plans.

In **Liberia**, the national declaration on ending gender-based violence set up the policy framework to protect women's and people's rights. (See more in [case study 7.3](#), which details this work across multiple pillars.) In the country, Spotlight Initiative supported the development of the Comprehensive Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Integrated Services Manual, which helped health centres to address sexual and reproductive health and rights more effectively. In **Uganda**, Spotlight Initiative supported the development of the National Compendium of Gender-Based Violence, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights and Harmful Practices for Service Providers, creating standardised policies to strengthen service providers' knowledge of sexual and reproductive health and rights and the links to violence against women and girls.

In terms of higher education, Spotlight Initiative in **Malawi** developed the Gender and Anti-Sexual Harassment Policy, which was adopted by 22 universities. The policy improves access to and information on referral pathways, and sexual and reproductive health and rights services, including family planning and HIV prevention or care. The policy also banned discrimination against pregnant women and addressed a critical gap and rising need to tackle sexual harassment, sexual assault and discrimination of women on university campuses.

Lesson Learned #2: Leveraging formal and informal education systems to mainstream sexual and reproductive health and rights information, particularly with youth, can mitigate violence against women and girls and provide important information to safeguard health.

Awareness of one's rights, sexual health and bodily integrity is central to protecting women and girls from abuse, harassment and violence. Too often sexual and reproductive health and rights are taboo subjects, and as such, opportunities for raising awareness and discussion, both formally and informally, are critical. Many Spotlight Initiative programmes in the **Africa Region, Belize, Honduras, Latin America Region, Pacific Region, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Samoa, Uganda, and Vanuatu** worked through formal and informal education systems to address sexual and reproductive health and rights. Educating youth is of primary importance in order to integrate an understanding of the consequences of violence against women and girls in a community.

In countries like **Uganda** and **Vanuatu**, where approximately half of the population are youth, educational systems have become a central resource for providing accurate information regarding sexual and reproductive health and rights and violence against women and girls through comprehensive sexuality education. This enables a shift in mindsets across the next generation. In **Uganda**, where violence against women and girls remains prevalent, Spotlight Initiative supported the Ministry of Education and Sports to develop sexuality education operational guidelines for in-school adolescents at all levels. In addition, the Ministry of Education and Sports developed the National Menstrual Health Management Guidelines, which contributed to the integration of sexuality education in the 9th-11th grade curriculum. Reproductive health is now a cross-cutting issue across subjects. Following this initiative, the Ministry of Education and Sports rolled out key interventions to prevent and respond to violence against children in schools, including girls. These included the use of national reporting guidelines and the promotion of an integrated response to violence against children in schools and sexual exploitation and abuse. Understanding that financial resources are central for sexual and reproductive health and rights curricula to be implemented, Spotlight Initiative also supported capacity development of civil society organisations to engage and advocate at a technical level for family planning financing. In **Vanuatu**, despite significant socio-political challenges and a tropical cyclone, Spotlight Initiative helped strengthen in-school Family Life Education delivery in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Training and civil society organisations. (See more in [case study 3.6](#) under Pillar 3.) In **Nigeria**, the Second Chance programme reached 231,00 youth, women and girls with integrated sexual and reproductive health and rights information and offered them the chance to be educated.

Furthermore, school clubs in **Uganda** and young mentorship programmes in **Mozambique** also served as platforms to equip adolescents with life skills and increase their knowledge on human rights and gender, adolescent issues, sexual health rights, child rights, teenage pregnancy, child marriage, menstrual hygiene and related issues. In **Uganda**, Spotlight Initiative developed a sexual and reproductive health and rights quiz on a mobile application to increase reach to a wider audience using edutainment strategies.

Lesson Learned #3: Strengthening knowledge of and access to services and one-stop centres supports women's and girls' safety and stronger health outcomes.

In **Malawi**, Spotlight Initiative facilitated care in hard-to-reach and rural communities through remote care management protocols and through deploying motorcycles and vehicles to child protection workers, as well as 940 bicycles to community groups, such as youth networks, mother groups and community policy forums. All of these efforts allowed for rural women and girls to more easily access sexual and reproductive health and rights services, marking an innovative practice for the principle of leaving no one behind.

Accessible information on family planning, sexual or reproductive health and reliable access to service centres and providers that support sexual violence, harassment or violence against women and girls is critical. Spotlight Initiative programmes in many countries place a central focus on access to knowledge resources and services.

In **Cambodia, Indonesia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Malaysia**, Spotlight Initiative's **Safe and Fair Programme** partnered with local government offices and community-based organisations, established agreements to disseminate information, and provided front-line support in legal assistance, trainings and outreach activities on labour rights, violence against women and trafficking in persons. Lessons from the ASEAN region shows that one of the most important tools that women migrants need during their migration route are contact numbers for support agencies in case of situations of distress, including exposure to violence and abuse.

Many Spotlight Initiative programmes utilised a one-stop centre approach to service delivery in the case of sexual and reproductive health and rights services, with significant positive outcomes, including in **Belize, Indonesia, Liberia, Mali, Malawi, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Tajikistan, Uganda, and Zimbabwe**. These crisis centres were critical as they served as first responders in crises, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite facing many challenges, the crisis centres continued to promote and support girls, women and transgender people, often in the most difficult and vulnerable situations. Taking responsibility for first contact with survivors of violence, the centres also document cases and collect valuable evidence on systemic human rights violations. Their impact is hindered only by a lack of adequate and proportionate funding and the lack of inclusive and anti-discriminatory policies and regulations to reinforce their work.

In **Mali**, for example, one-stop centres supported by Spotlight Initiative provided integrated assistance to abused women and girls through the provision of medical, sexual and reproductive health and rights, psychosocial and legal support in one place. The services created increased confidence in the community that it was safe to report violence and seek help on violence, including sexual violence, family abuse and sexual and reproductive health and rights issues. For example, a

mother in Bamako acted when her 6-year-old daughter told her that she had been sexually assaulted by her uncle. Despite pressure from her family who wished to avoid stigma, she decided to get help. The local one-stop centre provided her and her daughter with the physical, legal and psychological care they needed. The case was reported to the police, and she received legal counsel to bring the perpetrator to justice. The case was reported on television 40.8 million times and radio broadcasting 4.6 million times, sparking increased dialogue and awareness in the community. In the weeks following the news, the number of people visiting the one-stop centre in Bamako increased by more than 65 percent.

In **Nigeria**, sexual and reproductive health and rights services are also incorporated into the operations of the one-stop centres supported by Spotlight Initiative. Women and girl survivors of sexual violence are provided with information on sexual and reproductive health and rights and services, in addition to psychosocial support and counselling. One-stop centres also provide improved access to fistula repairs by women and girls across supported states.

Lesson Learned #4: Building the power and agency of women and girls leads to stronger sexual health and boundaries and a sense of self-assurance that trickles over to other areas of their lives.

Spotlight Initiative is deeply committed to women's movement-building, focusing on building power and agency at the collective and individual levels. When it comes to sexual and reproductive health and rights, which is deeply personal and affects the body and emotions, supporting women and girls to strengthen their power, voice and agency is critical for better health and life outcomes. Spotlight Initiative in **Thailand** through the **Safe and Fair Programme**, **Zimbabwe**, **Belize**, and **Jamaica** focused on supporting women's and girls' power, voice and agency to increase their negotiating power and independence to break cycles of violence.

In **Thailand**, the **Safe and Fair Programme** provided information to 90 women migrant workers through a series of four workshops. The trainings addressed what women migrant workers could do when they face occupational safety and health risks, including violence against women, sexual harassment and sexual and reproductive health and rights issues, as well as how to organize through forming Worker Welfare Committees in their workplaces, in accordance with Thai labour law. With higher levels of skills, women migrant workers have more negotiating power and a better market position, making them less dependent on brokers and potentially abusive employers.

In **Belize**, Spotlight Initiative strengthened the capacities of women's groups to establish and run community programmes that were gender-responsive. Through this initiative, 54 women's groups and 74 Women Community Mobilizers participated in workshops to strengthen their abilities to integrate gender-based violence response in existing programmes such as economic empowerment, skills building, protection of the environment and HIV/AIDS support for women and girls and men and boys. For example, the Productive Organization for Women in Action (POWA) helped survivors get back on their feet through information and training sessions covering their human and legal rights, parenting techniques, entrepreneurial skills, and domestic and sexual violence.⁴⁹⁹ In **Jamaica**, Spotlight Initiative supported funding for business and life skills training programmes that helped provide the financial security and independence necessary to break the cycle of violence for domestic violence survivors.⁵⁰⁰

Lesson Learned #5: Ensuring HIV and AIDS awareness and de-stigmatization is part of sexual and reproductive health and rights and ending violence against women and girls work supports stronger health and life outcomes for women and girls.

Spotlight Initiative programmes in many countries, including in Malawi, Mozambique, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uganda, placed a dedicated focus on engaging in HIV/AIDS awareness raising activities, network strengthening and work to advance gender equality. For example, in **Malawi**, Spotlight Initiative increased its support to the Female Sex Workers Association, supporting the growth of a network to facilitate connection among women living with HIV and AIDS under a broader movement for strengthened sexual and reproductive health and rights in the country.

Other Spotlight Initiative programmes focused on increasing access to a holistic set of services through mobile clinics and other community engagement methods. In **Uganda**, Spotlight Initiative through their partners, the African Women Leaders Leadership Institute Mentorship Programme and the Uganda Network of Young People Living with HIV & AIDS, mentored young women, including those from marginalised groups, to enhance their leadership and voice. The Uganda Network of Young People Living with HIV & AIDS's "Y+ Beauty Pageant" offered a space for youth to challenge stigma and discrimination of young people living with HIV. The 2019 Y+ male and female champions spoke out about their HIV status and broke the silence. As a result, their leadership in the community was strengthened, and they engaged with district leaders and

⁴⁹⁹ In Belize, women in transition are finding their POWA (Spotlight Initiative, April 2021).

⁵⁰⁰ "I'm not running anymore" - How economic empowerment is breaking the cycle of violence in Jamaica (Spotlight Initiative, 2023).

adolescents in the community about their needs. In **Trinidad and Tobago**, Spotlight Initiative supported the Collaborative HIV Prevention and Adolescent Mental Health Programme (CHAMP) model for out-of-school youth. The CHAMP programme strengthens communication between parents and youth around sensitive issues and helps raise awareness of sexual and reproductive health and rights in families, including family violence. Previous results found the model effective in addressing HIV and in preventing violence against women and girls, and more recently, positive impact has been seen in youth being less likely to respond to peer pressure or engage in early sexual activity. (See more in [case study 3.3](#) under Pillar 3.)

5 Engaging youth/adolescents and girls



Engaging young people in economic and social development efforts is critical to addressing and overcoming global and local socio-economic challenges. Youth are a key demographic, with close to 1.2 billion globally aged between 15 and 24.⁵⁰¹ Poverty, sexual and gender-based violence, child marriage and prevalent socio-normative practices continue to be important factors in determining whether diverse youth and girls can develop the required skills to build economic independence, gain social recognition and access resources to support their future growth.

Globally, one in every three young women (15-24 years) is likely to be subjected to physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner or sexual violence by a non-partner.⁵⁰² Girls from ethnic and religious minorities, indigenous girls, girls with disabilities and those in situations of armed conflict, humanitarian crisis and displacement, are even more prone to violence. Furthermore, LGBTQI+ youth face multiple risks of violence as a result of the discrimination and stigma they experience. Despite a clear global thrust on improving education outcomes, reducing violence and increasing employment rates, a large number of girls and youth continue to be out of school, out of work and prone to extreme forms of sexual and gender-based violence.

Recognising these challenges and a continued need to introduce and support youth-based programming efforts, Spotlight Initiative works on engaging youth and girls by employing a variety of approaches, including designing strategies that enable creative self-expression, supporting peer-to-peer learning, driving youth advocacy and leveraging digital and technological presence in emerging economies. Insights from Spotlight Initiative's youth engagement initiatives can contribute to improving future programming and policy globally.

Lesson Learned #1: Developing out-of-school community-focused initiatives that enable creative self-expression, mentoring and peer-to-peer learning can result in improved social norms and behaviours toward sexual and gender-based violence at the individual, household and community levels.

Out-of-school initiatives that meaningfully and creatively engage youth, parents and the wider community positively impact individual and collective attitudes and behaviours toward young people's sexual and reproductive health and rights. They have also helped in systematically addressing and accessing comprehensive support and packages of available sexual and gender-based violence services including those that focus on mental health and psychological well-being. Spotlight Initiative's programmes across **Mozambique**, **Papua New Guinea**, and **Honduras** have been successful in adopting and introducing out-of-school youth engagement strategies to shift harmful attitudes and overcome problematic normative barriers. For example, in Papua New Guinea, a peer-to-peer learning and mentoring programme engaged 6,394 young people across 37 diverse communities. The intervention focused on sexual and reproductive health and rights and sexual and gender-based violence information sharing through educational sessions organised in community resource centres. This effort has established a strong groundwork for promoting peer-to-peer learning, positively influencing household-level changes and engaging community members to address sexual and gender-based violence and promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights in the intervention context.

In **Mozambique**, Spotlight Initiative actively engaged adolescents through *artivism* (art and activism) to positively impact social norms and disseminate messages to end sexual and gender-based violence. The intervention led by partner Associação Sócio Cultural Horizonte Azul used creative self-expression in the form of paintings and murals, spoken poetry and presentations, theatre, dance and radio soaps as a method for delivering messaging on ending all forms of sexual and gender-based violence. Topics such as women's and girls' rights, girls' access to school, child marriage and sexual and reproductive health were covered with 3,000 young people and a linked outreach of 15,000 household members. The strategy was also supported by community authorities and local leaders, demonstrating its high community uptake and impact.

⁵⁰¹ The [UN's page](#) on the state of the world's youth.

⁵⁰² Sexual and gender-based violence statistics from [UN women Facts and Figures on Ending Violence Against Women](#) and [WHO's press release](#). Devastatingly pervasive: 1 in 3 women globally experience violence.

To engage parents, educators and community council representatives in **Honduras**, Spotlight Initiative curated training spaces that included content related to sexual and gender-based violence in the form of photographs, postal art and engravings. These materials were designed to stimulate discussions and foster community interactions. 5,738 fathers, mothers, caregivers and community members participated in artistic workshops, mediation actions and symbolic events in public spaces to recognise roles and value gender equality. Moreover, 2,043 adolescents and adult men who participated in these learning processes demonstrated positive attitudes and behaviours toward positive masculinity and gender equality.

Lesson Learned #2: Partnering with schools and educational institutions is an effective way to reduce, prevent and monitor instances of sexual and gender-based violence and ensure wider policy buy-in with local and national governments.

Schools provide the required institutional and social support to challenge harmful traditions and practices and are instrumental in the delivery of comprehensive sexuality education, sexual and reproductive health and rights and sexual and gender-based violence programmes. They help ensure that young people are a part of student-centric strategies, such as school clubs that drive them to become future agents of change. Moreover, successful school-level initiatives have stronger policy buy-in and demonstrate greater potential for scale. Spotlight Initiative's programmes in **Mali** and **Nigeria** are partnering with schools to set up school clubs led by youth and girls to end sexual and gender-based violence and promote sexual and reproductive health and rights.

In **Mali**, Spotlight Initiative, in coordination with civil society partners, adopted an innovative strategy of working with students, teachers, the school administration and the Parents' Association to build the capacities of students and educators on the prevention of and response to sexual and gender-based violence. School clubs, including a 10 member team (comprised of five boys and five girls) and teachers, were set up to develop and disseminate a "charter of good practice", which defined the teachers' and students' code of conduct to strengthen sexual and gender-based mechanisms in schools. These clubs explored ways to reduce instances of sexual harassment, intentional bodily harm and psychological abuse. 2,080 student members from 208 clubs and 663 teachers developed and used these charters of good practices and model lessons to prevent sexual and gender-based violence. Furthermore, in 2021, the Académies d'Enseignement, or the regional government's education body, recognised this initiative as an effective way to support and manage sexual and gender-based violence cases in and around the target schools.

In **Nigeria**, 52 members of staff and students from three tertiary institutions of Lagos and Abuja received training on preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence cases on campus. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the teams continued to provide remote support and referrals to sexual and gender-based violence services. Following this effort, Spotlight Initiative developed guidelines for the prevention of and response to school-related sexual and gender-based violence in tertiary institutions across Nigeria, with Lagos State University being the first to adopt them. These guidelines have now been approved and serve as a reference framework for six tertiary institutions in Lagos and Abuja, all committed to implementing sexual and gender-based violence response activities and utilising the newly established protocol.

Lesson Learned #3: Using digital and virtual channels is necessary to engage youth, especially girls, in problem-solving and awareness generation activities to change their socio-normative perceptions, attitudes and behaviours towards sexual and gender-based violence.

Spotlight Initiative uses innovative communication and engagement channels, such as instant messaging services, digital visualisation tools and virtual platforms, to raise awareness about sexual and gender-based violence and explore ways to address it. Mobile phones, the internet and digital technology act as catalysts for economic growth and have increasingly become an effective way to engage young people and connect them to information, services and opportunities. Spotlight Initiative's programmes in **Niger**, **El Salvador**, and **Mexico** have demonstrated how diverse digital and internet-based outreach approaches can be used to address sexual and gender-based violence and positively impact young people's sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Strengthening adolescent girls' networks through platforms such as WhatsApp has been effective in building their knowledge and skills to engage on issues of relevance and importance, such as exploring ways to end violence against women and girls. In the Maradi region of **Niger**, Spotlight Initiative used the instant messaging platform to create a support network for girls and also reduce the digital divide between girls and boys. 450 girls from 45 villages in the target municipalities were selected following a community workshop to participate in the programme. They demonstrated clear leadership skills and commitment to ending violence against women and girls and a desire to change their circumstances. The intervention resulted in girls feeling more confident, exhibiting strong critical thinking and acting as a cohesive unit to meet a common goal. With information exchange being a strong focus, they contributed to sexual and gender-based violence case management and child protection committees.

In **El Salvador**, young women (aged 15-25 years) were selected from the municipalities of San Matín and San Salvador to engage in a technology-enabled experiential and explorative intervention that focused on developing strategies to prevent sexual and gender-based violence. Using reflection and critical thinking, an interactive virtual space was combined with face-to-face engagement techniques for girls to identify and prevent violent threats and attacks. Developed by the Muchas Más Association, a young women's organisation, *Muchas Más Beat* (translated as "Many More Beat"), used informative videos, weekly challenges, infographics and communities of practice to unpack and deep dive into different topics related to ending violence against women and girls and sexual and reproductive health and rights. 28 young women and adolescents were also trained in electronic music production as a method of self-expression and creative engagement. Due to the intervention's success and impact, it has been replicated in Honduras and Guatemala.

Lesson Learned #4: Youth-led advocacy initiatives addressing sexual and gender-based violence bring the required innovative approaches, energy and perspective to create meaningful and sustainable change for young people.

Youth-led programming is a proven way to support young people to voice their opinions and concerns. They can find solutions that are informed by their shared experiences, struggles and challenges. Spotlight Initiative in **Timor-Leste** and **Malawi** along with the **Africa Regional Programme** is collaborating with young people in meaningful ways to amplify their voices and engage them in the local, regional and global dialogue on ending sexual and gender-based violence.

Spotlight Initiative's **Africa Regional Programme** engaged close to 250 participants from 40 African countries at the second African Union Conference on Positive Masculinity in Dakar. The conference focused on reviewing the implementation status of the Kinshasa Declaration.⁵⁰³ The event acknowledged the role of young people as champions to drive positive masculinity. Updates were sought from the group on actions stemming from the initial call on positive masculinity in 2021. Participants discussed challenges in promoting positive masculinity, exchanged their experiences and shared findings from the "International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES)."⁵⁰⁴ The consultation resulted in a document that included concrete recommendations from the conference representatives.⁵⁰⁵ The recommendations focused on promoting best practices for positive masculinity, furthering the Kinshasa Declaration commitments, engaging young men in combating gender-based violence and understanding masculinities in the context of crisis, conflict and peacebuilding.

Similarly, in **Malawi**, a Young Feminist Network, the first of its kind, was set up to facilitate dialogue and activism for gender equality and social justice.⁵⁰⁶ Adopting the leave no one behind principle, the Network aimed to support young women and men to play a role in advocating for human rights. Members of the Network were trained in identifying policy issues, reaching the right audiences and developing and delivering impactful advocacy messages. It also contributed to the largest women's movement in the country, and its objective was to facilitate intersectional and intergenerational dialogue on ending violence against women and girls and ensure gender equality.

"The launch of the network gave me high hopes of a new era where young women can fulfil their passion to be great leaders and play an active role in changing the country, especially as [it] pertains to ending violence against women and girls. We need to ensure that our generation of young women can meaningfully contribute to policy changes and economic development. The Malawi chapter can help achieve the objectives of AWLN and strengthen more grassroots networks through the Spotlight Initiative to reach remote areas of the country."

A young feminist activist from Malawi

⁵⁰³ The declaration was developed during the First African Union Conference in Kinshasa.

⁵⁰⁴ Understanding Masculinities: Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) (UN Women Palestine, 2018).

⁵⁰⁵ Positive Masculinity Conference materials, including the youth consultation recommendations.

⁵⁰⁶ Young women leaders in Malawi are ready to build back better from COVID-19 (Spotlight Initiative, May 2021).

6 Engaging men and boys



Engaging men and boys is a central strategy that Spotlight Initiative programmes use. In order to achieve gender equality it is essential that men and boys are part of the solution. Gender roles, norms and status affects everyone – men, women and other diverse gender identities. As such, all must be involved in transforming the status quo of gender inequality, gender bias, and violence and discrimination.

Spotlight Initiative places a dedicated focus on engaging men and boys in the change process. In particular, work promoting positive masculinities and transforming norms of inequality in communities has taken centre stage. A variety of lessons have been identified, including taking a holistic approach to addressing patriarchal masculinities, from raising awareness in central institutions such as the home, school and community, to engaging influencers, leaders and role models, mobilising peer networks for healthy relationships and raising community and societal awareness about positive norms for gender equality and to stop violent behaviour.

Lesson Learned #1: Engaging leaders and role models in the community is a powerful mechanism for changing social norms around toxic masculinities and gender-based violence.

Behavioural change research has shown that people are more likely to change behaviours when someone they trust recommends them to change. Many Spotlight Initiative programmes are engaging with this strategy in diverse ways by partnering with role models, celebrities and traditional or religious leaders. Spotlight Initiative programmes in **Nigeria** and **Argentina** have engaged sports stars in football to denounce violence against women and girls and promote respectful behaviours. In **Tajikistan**, the Initiative is engaging celebrities to be gender champions and encouraging men and boys to join efforts to end violence against women. These efforts helped to raise awareness that gender-based violence is a problem that needs to be addressed.

Many Spotlight Initiative programmes engage traditional or religious leaders to positively influence communities. When traditional and religious leaders challenge traditional harmful practices, it has particular resonance in challenging dominant patriarchal norms. For example, in **Mozambique**, religious leaders were trained on preventing child marriage and gender-based violence and shared messages in religious services, reaching over 672,000 people. They were also trained in reporting violence to the appropriate authorities. In **El Salvador**, Spotlight Initiative supported the integration of Christian biblical theological arguments on ending violence against women and girls into a broader curriculum on pastoral action to prevent violence, promoting dialogue and reaching a traditionally excluded community. Similarly in **Tajikistan**, a training module on Islam and Gender was drafted together with the Committee of Religious Affairs and Regulations of Traditions, which is used to train imams and religious leaders in community mosques to help prevent domestic violence. (See more in [case study 3.8](#) under Pillar 3.)

Lesson Learned #2: Creating peer opportunities for men and boys to have healthy, respectful and equitable relationships.

Spotlight Initiative programmes facilitated the development of positive social norms through peer-based connections and through spaces where open conversations about masculinities and healthy relationships were shared. In **Jamaica**, safe spaces for engaging men were created, including men across diverse segments of society. The programme helped unpack how negative conceptions of masculinity impacted men and explored more gender equitable versions of masculinity. These safe spaces also allowed men to learn how to become advocates, deepening their understanding of their role in creating safe and equal spaces for women and ending violence against women and girls. In **El Salvador**, a promising practice of peer spaces amongst boys that supported collective discussion around masculinities through AI chatbots was piloted. The *Entre Nos* chatbot (translated as “between us”, a Salvadoran phrase widely used in relationships of trust and friendship) was launched on Facebook. The chatbot helps users understand what violence looks like, how to prevent it at home and in public, and how to become an advocate for ending violence against women and girls. The chatbot has had great uptake. (See more in [case study 3.12](#) under Pillar 3.)

In **Mali**, the Model Husbands club is a voluntary space that brings men together to collectively reflect and take action to become a model husband. The clubs are participatory and open spaces for discussion, sharing and decision-making built on the values of active listening, equality and respect. The sessions are led by men in the group and involve reflecting on their own behaviour and committing to raise the awareness of others to take positive action and promote women’s and children’s rights. The Model Husbands have been powerful forces for change in communities where they are operating, raising awareness of women’s and children’s rights and even preventing domestic violence and child marriage in some communities. A man from one Model Husband Club shared: *“I confess that the actions of this project have already paid off because in our village every night there is at least one woman who cried under her husband's baton. It's been more than three months since we heard this.”*

Lesson Learned #3: Targeting schools as sites to roll out comprehensive and wide-reaching awareness raising activities on masculinities and violence against women and girls.

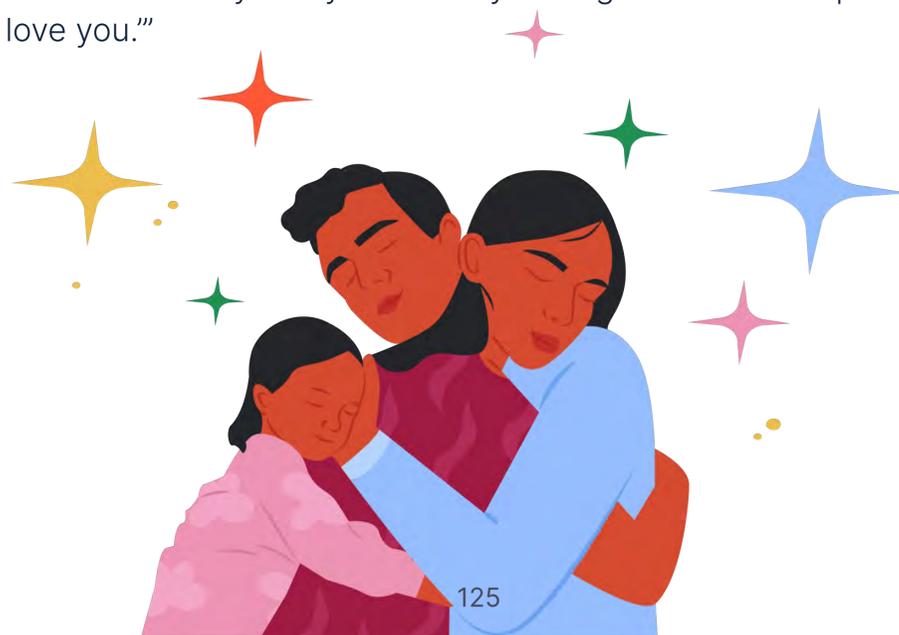
Schools are prime spots to implement awareness raising activities to end violence against women and girls. Spotlight Initiative engaged in diverse initiatives in **Malawi** and **Nigeria**, for example, from working with educators to creating awareness raising programmes with students. In **Malawi**, as of 2023, 1,394 boys participated in the Boys Transformation Training Programme, which focused on positive gender norms and saying no to violence. This was followed by some of the participants training their peers to speak up against violence. Ultimately, 465,943 youth (229,634 boys and 236,309 girls) from 6 districts were reporting or condemning violence. In **Nigeria**, school principals, teachers and school counsellors were trained on how to become champions within their schools around gender-based violence. The champions established school clubs to help raise boys' awareness of gender-based violence and become advocates for gender equality. The clubs helped boys initiate conversations around negative norms associated with masculinity and its connections to violence against women and girls, and directed them to speak up if they see or hear harmful gender stereotypes or witness violence against girls or women.

Lesson Learned #4: Engaging in creative ways to raise awareness, such as media, theatre or campaigns, helps to increase the visibility of anti-violence messages.

Spotlight Initiative programmes are supporting boys' and men's critical awareness of gender stereotypes and cultural norms that foster or maintain gender inequalities or violence against women and girls through creative use of media, theatre or campaigning. In **Tajikistan**, Spotlight Initiative delivered theatre skits for university students to share information on street harassment, dating violence, early and forced marriages, sexual and gender-based violence and bullying. In **Timor-Leste**, the Initiative used the 16 Days to End Violence Against Women campaign as an opportunity to share information on the 10th anniversary of the passing of the Law Against Domestic Violence and to reinforce messages around gender equitable relationships.

In **Samoa**, the Initiative used traditional dance and storytelling in their 16 Days of Healing campaign and spoke about ending violence by using existing community norms to underscore how commitment to ending violence against women and girls has always been part of the culture. Another effective strategy has been to support boys and men to make commitments not to use physical, psychological or emotional violence, and to speak out when they see harassing, gender stereotypical, degrading remarks or violent behaviour imposed by others. In **Argentina**, the *#AmigoDateCuenta* (translated as *#FriendTakeNotice*) campaign was launched, aimed at encouraging male adolescents to question machismo and end violent forms of masculinity and complicity in maintaining gender-based violence and harassment in their lives. The campaign shared videos and animations featuring five men engaging in different activities, including football, music, rugby and social activism, and depicts various scenarios, such as friends observing sexual harassment, consent in sexual relations and men taking part in house cleaning and care duties. The campaign offered a creative and relatable way to tackle these social norms and educate men and boys. The Argentine Football Association was a key supporter of the campaign, airing it on their channels and clubs. Disney/FOX also donated a space for broadcasting on their channels.

The home is also a powerful place to debunk gender roles and stereotypes, for example by reinforcing the idea that boys should express the full range of human emotions. It can also foster understanding that bullying, intimidation and aggression are not appropriate responses to challenging situations. The family unit is an important place for modelling healthy, equitable and loving adult relationships. In **Grenada**, an innovative campaign to support positive parenting practices was launched by the National Parenting Programme called "Step up your Parenting Game." The campaign focused on reaching parents and guardians and promoting positive parenting practices designed to end family abuse. The messages were displayed on radio, print and on buses that travelled throughout the country, including to remote villages. In **Honduras**, Spotlight Initiative and partners ran a campaign on Father's Day called "The Dad I Want," which challenged norms related to men's emotional openness and traditional notions of masculinity. They did this by having children write phrases about the dad they wanted, such as "a dad who tells me, 'I love you.'"



7 Engaging religious, traditional and faith-based leaders



The relationship between gender equality and religion is complex and varies significantly across different cultures and religious traditions. Cultural factors often intertwine with religious beliefs to shape attitudes toward gender roles, which can manifest in discriminatory practices. However, religious traditions are not static and evolve and adapt over time. Religious, traditional and faith-based leaders often hold significant influence within their communities, making them valuable allies in promoting positive change. They can also provide a source of social, moral and ethical guidance and support for their community members, including women and girls experiencing violence. Faith settings are therefore an important place to implement activities that address gender inequality and prevent violence against women and girls.

Multiple Spotlight Initiative programmes have engaged religious, traditional and faith-based leaders in efforts to shift social norms and eliminate violence against women and girls. Spotlight Initiative has engaged religious, traditional and faith leaders by building their understanding of forms of violence, training them to respond to disclosures of violence with a focus on safety, increasing their knowledge and awareness, advocating for legislation and policy reform and developing strategies and action plans to end violence against women and girls.

Lesson Learned #1: Building religious, traditional and faith-based leaders' capacity to be agents of change and shift social norms.

By changing the mindsets of religious, traditional and faith-based leaders, harmful social norms can be challenged and perspectives shifted. Spotlight Initiative has worked to demonstrate how traditional and religious texts and teachings can promote gender equality and condemn violence. Through training and capacity building, Spotlight Initiative has promoted community engagement and developed action plans that can improve gender-based violence prevention and help victims access assistance. Given the special status of religious, traditional and faith-based leaders in the community, they are well positioned to act as change agents.

Through workshops, seminars and awareness campaigns within religious and traditional settings, Spotlight Initiative has worked to educate leaders and community members on the issue of violence against women and girls. In **Mozambique**, over 800 community, religious and traditional leaders in 11 implementing districts received training on gender-based violence, with 30 community leaders leading interventions in their communities to counter violence as a result. In addition, four forums were held (three at the provincial level and one at the national level), aimed at strengthening the capacity of religious, traditional and faith-based leaders to support efforts to end gender-based violence, as well as providing a space for exchanging ideas and experiences among participants. In **Mali**, the Chief of the Canton of Illela supported efforts to combat child marriage, through bringing awareness to communities in his canton about the decree against child marriage. Through this initiative, over 200 village chiefs were mobilised and sensitised on the decree, resulting in the interruption of approximately 40 child marriages in the canton, allowing the girls involved to return to school. In **Uganda**, the Council of Traditional Leaders in Africa Uganda Chapter, the Prime Minister and 14 cultural leaders made public commitments to support programmes on sexual and gender-based violence. A draft Charter for the Uganda Chapter and an interim work plan was adopted by the cultural leaders. These engagements have been successful, with many traditional, religious and faith-based leaders taking the lead in denouncing gender-based violence and taking steps to end violence in their communities. In **Liberia**, Spotlight Initiative has developed partnerships with traditional leaders to bring an end to harmful practices, such as female genital mutilation. (See more in [case study 4.11](#) under Pillar 4.)

In **Niger**, Spotlight Initiative developed a two-tiered strategy to promote mass mobilisation and increase community engagement on gender-based violence. 40 traditional leaders and 60 religious leaders were trained on religious interpretations and discourse about women's and girls' rights and gender-based violence. Following this training, the leaders facilitated inter-community meetings in the target villages, reaching more than 11,000 people.

In addition, they facilitated awareness sessions which garnered more than 483,000 participants. A significant outcome of these efforts was the development of 75 cantonal action plans that embody the commitment of local leaders to eliminate gender-based violence in their local communities. Spotlight Initiative has also helped to establish collaborations between the police and traditional leaders in the production of annually documented data at the regional and national level in Niger. In 2020, this partnership enabled two field data collection missions and the reporting of 2,789 cases of gender-based violence to the police and gendarmerie.

Lesson Learned #2: Working together to establish by-laws and pass legislation can help ensure the enforcement of legislation and the engagement of religious, traditional and faith-based leaders in wider efforts to end gender-based violence.

Laws that criminalise violence against women and girls play an important symbolic role by indicating that such behaviour is socially unacceptable. Though the creation of legislation may prohibit various forms of gender-based violence, it is not typically sufficient to eradicate the practice. Engaging religious, traditional and faith-based leaders in the law and policy field can heighten the effectiveness of legal steps, as well as help to shift social norms. Through partnering with religious, traditional and faith-based leaders, Spotlight Initiative has contributed to establishing by-laws, developing policy, and passing legislation aimed at reducing violence and monitoring its implementation. In addition, gaining the support of religious, traditional and faith-based leaders has helped ensure that legislation is enforced.

In **Nigeria**, over 1,500 faith-based and religious leaders were sensitised and engaged on the issue of violence against girls. Spotlight Initiative organised a conference with over 500 religious, traditional and faith-based leaders to increase awareness and bring about these leaders' commitments to preventing and responding to violence, leading to the implementation of an accountability framework which was adopted in six states in 2020. Following this conference, many traditional leaders established by-laws in their domains to curtail gender-based violence and actively engaged in sensitization of their communities. Traditional leaders in the Sokoto and Adamawa states also took an active role in ensuring that religious tenets were properly accommodated in the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Laws, which were successfully passed in 2021. Adopted in all 36 states in Nigeria, Violence Against Persons Prohibition laws provide an evidence based framework aligned with international human rights standards that prohibit all forms of violence against women. In addition, multi-sectoral costed action plans, along with monitoring and evaluation frameworks, were developed to implement the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act. These actions indicate increased political support for eliminating violence against women and girls.

In **Mozambique**, 30 traditional and community leaders led interventions at the community level to counter violence against women and girls. They have contributed to the legal resolution of 45 cases of gender-based violence out of 93, and facilitated the rescue of 25 girls from child marriages. In 2022, Spotlight Initiative promoted active engagement with traditional and religious leaders in the Chicualacuala (Gaza) District, which proved effective in disseminating information about violence against women and girls and harmful practices. 27 meetings with 329 traditional and religious leaders, influencers, neighborhood secretaries and matrons on child marriage and gender-based violence prevention and response were facilitated, reaching 3,364 people. Consequently, community leaders were able to dissolve four child marriages in the area. Traditional and community leaders are increasingly recognised by communities as taking responsibility to denounce cases and seek guidance to resolve family issues related to gender-based violence.

Lesson Learned #3: Working with religious networks and coalitions through a regional approach can have a far reaching impact and provide sustainable solutions that extend beyond a project timeline.

Networks and coalitions have long provided a mechanism for members of different communities to learn about one another's beliefs and pursue action on shared social justice objectives. They can also link religious leaders and actors working on preventing incitement to violence in different regions, amplify counter messages and alternative narratives, as well as support the sharing of good practices and lessons learned. In addition, approaches that are tailored to regional contexts ensure that strategies are culturally sensitive and have a wide reaching impact.

The **Pacific Regional Programme** partnered with the Pacific Conference of Churches to use a spiritual framework for the prevention of violence against women and girls, an innovative practice that enables churches to become safe spaces and communities for vulnerable populations. Innovative collaborative approaches have been incorporated into the Strategic Plan, which includes the promotion of social and behaviour change towards gender-equitable, child-friendly and violence-free norms and clear outcomes for religious leaders and faith communities. In addition, a Training of Trainers programme was carried out in three countries to test and verify child protection resources grounded in Christian messages and values. Given the important role the church plays in the Pacific islands, engaging religious networks and coalitions in the Pacific through a spiritual framework has advanced positive social norms.

The **Africa Regional Programme** established a partnership with the African Council of Religious Leaders and engaged with members of the Inter-Faith Councils at national level to address the interpretation of sacred scriptures in relation to child marriage. In collaboration with Religions for Peace-African Council of Religious Leaders and the Joint Learning Initiative for Faith and Local Communities, new guidance was produced on how to engage and communicate with religious leaders on violence against children, child marriage and female genital mutilation. A series of six regional webinars were organized with religious leaders from Kenya, Malawi, South Sudan, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe on different topics, including how to

prevent, address and respond to violence against children, child marriage and female genital mutilation. Results from these webinars include awareness and uptake of the new guidance as well as the establishment of a community of practice.

Through engaging religious, traditional and faith-based leaders and incorporating their perspectives, interventions are more likely to be culturally sensitive and well-received and can enhance the credibility of anti-gender-based violence initiatives, encouraging community members to actively participate. Networks and coalitions can also better support sustainability of impact, as these networks can continue to function even after specific project-based interventions come to an end.

8 Engaging the private sector

Engaging the private sector is strategic for promoting gender equality and addressing violence against women and girls and for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Businesses are increasingly aware of their role in promoting human rights, gender equality and implementing global rights agreements. Research shows that violence against women and girls reduces women's income by 30 percent due to lost work opportunities, compared to those that do not experience violence. It is also estimated that women seeking violence-related services spend approximately 22 percent of their income on legal aid, health-related support and other expenditures to mitigate the impact of the violence experienced. In total, the estimated cost of violence against women and girls is 1.7 trillion USD (the combined GDP of approximately 100 countries).⁵⁰⁷

Spotlight Initiative recognises that engaging the private sector, including in the workplace, provides an opportunity to address discriminatory behaviours, social norms and practices that undergird violence against women and girls and gender inequality in social institutions, across companies and the marketplace and in communities. In the workplace, this can include promoting fair labour practices, facilitating greater numbers of women leaders and managers, ensuring equal pay for equal work, implementing sexual harassment and anti-discrimination policies and providing access to violence against women and girls services and support (such as creating safety plans) to advance efforts for ending violence against women and girls.

Lesson Learned #1: Increasing the visibility and awareness of violence against women and girls can strengthen leadership and political buy-in to address violence in the workplace.

The workplace can be a powerful entry point to address violence against women and girls and gender equality issues related to a toxic and unequal workplace. By surfacing where inequalities exist within a corporation, this data can be used to lay the groundwork for creating a stronger organisational culture that respects people regardless of their gender, racial or ethnic background, class, age, ability status, sexual orientation, geography, etc. Spotlight Initiative programmes in **Belize** and the **Latin American Regional Programme** have been innovating in this area of work, increasing the visibility of violence against women and girls issues in the corporate space over the past few years.

Data that surfaces discrimination and violence against women and girls is critical to raising awareness of the problem. An innovative tool developed by the **Latin American Regional Programme** was the Diagnostic Tool on Violence against Women. The goal of the tool is to lay bare the sexist behaviour in the leadership and culture of an organisation and to identify organisational practices that can be integrated to prevent and address violence against women and girls. The survey is answered online through the *Indic@Igualdad* platform, and asks staff to report on the following areas: gender equality and bullying, staff knowledge of protocols and processes to address sexual harassment, bullying and discrimination, presence of workplace harassment and hostile behaviors, sexual harassment, and staff confidence in the organisation's ability to respond and address cases of VAW. From the results, an Organisational Violence Index is created with a score ranging from 0 to 100.

Spotlight Initiative in **Belize** engaged 15 private sector companies in a campaign to raise awareness of violence against women and girls and access to services that were available to women experiencing violence. This was delivered through displaying posters with messages on ending domestic violence, child marriage and human trafficking on and around the companies' premises. These campaign messages were seen by men and women working in these companies to bring visibility to these issues and to challenge gender roles and social norms that promote family violence.

In **Jamaica**, 30 businesses participated in the "Promoting from Violence in our Workplaces and Communities" workshop facilitated by Spotlight Initiative, which is aimed at capacitating companies to develop and implement company gender-based violence policies on domestic violence, sexual harassment in the workplace and awareness on gender-based violence support services. The seven Women's Empowerment Principles (WEP) were introduced to educate companies on these issues before they were encouraged to become WEP signatories.

⁵⁰⁷ "Imperative to Invest: How addressing violence against women and girls today reduces violence over time, fosters peace and stability, and enables people to reach their full potential - all of which advances us towards the SDGs" (Dalberg, 2022).

More recently, companies are also becoming more transparent about their environmental and social justice commitments through reporting on environmental, social and governance impact metrics and investing in corporate social responsibility initiatives. Data and tracking on these areas offer significant opportunities to ensure gender equality in corporations, although “impact washing”⁵⁰⁸ still remains a key challenge that many Spotlight Initiative programmes have highlighted in their context. This underscores the importance of transparent corporate metrics tracking commitments and actions related to gender equality and violence against women and girls. Lesson 4 below shares further details on Women’s Empowerment Principles and the UNDP Gender Equality Seal.

Lesson Learned #2: Developing strong policies and ensuring workers have access to support mechanisms is critical to transform internal practices in the private sector.

Spotlight Initiative countries are mobilising the development of strong policies that protect women from violence and share critical information to increase their access to support services. In **Zimbabwe** and **Malawi**, sexual harassment policies were developed at multiple levels. In **Zimbabwe**, Spotlight Initiative in collaboration with the Zimbabwe Gender Commission filled a critical gap by supporting companies to develop gender-based violence and sexual harassment policies through the creation of the “Strategy for the elimination of sexual harassment and gender-based violence in the workplace in Zimbabwe, 2021-2025.” The strategy was developed and guided by the ILO Convention 190 on eliminating violence and harassment in the workplace, and was developed through a consultative process based on feedback from diverse stakeholders including the government, trade unions, private sector, civil society and employer organisations. The aim was to protect all workers against sexual and gender-based violence, create safe work spaces and ultimately contribute to a reduction in gender-based violence and sexual harassment across the country. In addition, Spotlight Initiative and the Zimbabwe Gender Commission used the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence to raise visibility of the launch of the national strategy and to highlight the development of a national anti-sexual harassment law.

In **Malawi**, legal cases were highlighted to stimulate greater attention to the issue of sexual harassment within the workplace among both workers and corporate leaders. The Malawi Commission with support from Spotlight Initiative leveraged a 2017 legal case of alleged sexual harassment of employees at the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation,⁵⁰⁹ which offered a significant visibility moment around the occurrence of sexual harassment in the workplace. Due to the increased visibility that this case brought to the issue, the Commission saw increases in sexual harassment complaints being lodged as well as an increase in requests from the private and public sectors to review sexual harassment workplace policies (such as in the Ministry of Forestry and Natural Resources, the Malawi Police Service and the National Youth Council of Malawi). The Commission also supported a new sexual harassment policy for the public sector with the Ministry of Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare, and the Department of Human Resource, Management and Development technical working group.

Lesson Learned #3: Developing trust and building multi-sectoral partnerships, including with non-traditional actors, is essential to success in working with the private sector.

Building multi-sectoral partnerships was identified by Spotlight Initiative programmes in **Mexico**, **Zimbabwe**, and **Trinidad and Tobago** as a key strategy to support work to end violence against women and girls and increase gender equality. One of the most important first steps identified was to build relationships of trust with the private sector and other stakeholders to foster partnerships and support collaborative efforts. Spotlight Initiative in **Zimbabwe** noted how critical it was to better understand the positions and concerns of different local groups and staff working in corporations. For example, understanding how much they knew about violence against women and girls in the workplace, the extent to which management supported a gender equality agenda, what the culture was in terms of respect for women and other relevant factors were important for understanding how best to start engaging. The Spotlight Initiative team noted that entrenched social norms related to women’s “honour” and the fact that violence against women and girls was often seen as a taboo issue and a private matter were key challenges that had to be addressed in the company. Demand for partnership and to work together increased once companies felt secure and trust had been gained.

In **Mexico**, the COVID-19 pandemic sharply increased domestic violence related calls to 911 by 46 percent in the first few months of 2020. There was significant demand for shelters and not enough rooms available. To respond to this, Spotlight Initiative, together with the national government, local governments and a hotel corporation, built a multi-stakeholder partnership to provide free accommodation in hotels for women experiencing violence as a short-term strategy until the government could identify proper shelter or support networks for longer term stay and support. (See more in [case study 4.1](#) under Pillar 4.) Additionally, Spotlight Initiative in **Trinidad and Tobago** underscored the importance of engaging non-traditional actors to end violence against women and girls. Spotlight Initiative partnered with the National Trade Union

⁵⁰⁸ Impact washing is when a company or investors classify or market and business or portfolio as achieving or having impact when it does not, it is a traditional asset.

⁵⁰⁹ The Malawi team adhered to the principles of confidentiality, anonymity and do no harm throughout this process, while raising attention to this important issue.

Centre of Trinidad and Tobago and the Employers Consultative Association to lead gender-based violence awareness workshops for their members. The Unions created their own workplace policies and reviewed them with the Employers Consultative Association. Subsequently, they held joint workshops where the Unions shared their policies with employers to find common ground and differences. Through discussions, they created a Joint Gender-Based Violence Workplace Policy, which was legally binding in trade unions and covered important areas like confidentiality, support for survivors, safety planning, training, and monitoring. Both organisations also provided training programmes, wherein 86 small and medium-sized enterprises and 160 members from 20 unions learned about gender issues and how to create safe and inclusive workplaces free from violence, discrimination, and harassment.

Lesson Learned #4: Processes that help companies demonstrate their commitment and improve their practices toward greater equality can be expanded and scaled up through benchmarking and institutional change initiatives.

Spotlight Initiative's **Latin American Regional Programme, Guyana, Uganda, and Zimbabwe** programmes promoted a deeper institutional change in corporations through the Gender Equality Seal and the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEP).⁵¹⁰ The Women's Empowerment Principles are a set of principles informed by international human rights and labour rights standards that were established by the UN Global Compact and UN Women. They underscore that businesses are responsible for gender equality across the company and its value chain, the marketplace and broader community. Chief Executive Officers demonstrate a commitment to this goal by signing the Women's Empowerment Principles and by taking action to support business practices that advance women's rights, such as through equal pay, zero tolerance for sexual harassment and ensuring gender-responsive supply chains. Globally, there are 5,800 organisations that are signatories to WEP, and they go through a six step process that includes signature and commitment to the principles, gathering data, and engaging leadership and external stakeholders to address issues through the value chain, as well as reporting.

In **Guyana**, Spotlight Initiative is supporting private sector initiatives to use the Women's Empowerment Principles. First steps in the process included mapping enterprises in private sector companies, nongovernmental organisations and governments that could benefit from WEP. Next, a series of webinars were held to increase awareness of the Women's Empowerment Principles, which resulted in 18 organisations expressing interest in joining the programme and developing gender action plans and gender gap analysis tools. Spotlight Initiative's team learned additional data was needed to persuade leaders of the importance of signing the Women's Empowerment Principles and to create safer spaces. The team opened up conversations on lessons learned around women's economic autonomy and rights, as it was connected to the Women's Empowerment Principle 3: Employee Health, Well-Being and Safety. They recommended that teams connect with Business Sector Advisory Councils in their country offices to engage in advocacy for this issue and to identify resource mobilisation opportunities.

A further process to stimulate institutional change that has been developed and promoted by the United Nations Development Programme is the Gender Equality Seal process. This is being used in multiple Spotlight Initiative programmes, including the **Latin American Programme** and in **Uganda**. UN country offices and the private sector engage in a multi-year process to build a gender equality lens and analysis of the organisation and implement an organisational change plan to strengthen gender equality. This includes sections on workplace policies and ending violence against women and girls. Organisations are then assessed by external gender experts and given a Gold, Silver or Bronze ranking. In **Uganda**, 90 companies committed to implement the Gender Equality Seal and engaged in the first phases of the process, which entailed an internal diagnosis of their organisational processes from a gender-responsive perspective. Based on this, they developed action plans to address gaps. In the **Latin American Regional Programme**, UNDP and Spotlight Initiative formed a strategic alliance with the "Gender Equality Seal for Private Companies" (also known as *El Sello de Igualdad de Género para el Sector Privado*).⁵¹¹ The programme engages the private sector, government and civil society in addressing and preventing the impact of COVID-19 and increased rates of violence against women, and aims to strengthen national public policy response to facilitate support to networks and access to services for women in the labour market who may be facing violence at home. Ten companies implemented the Gender Seal:⁵¹² Cementos Argos in Colombia, Honduras, Panama and Dominican Republic; Ege Haina; Grupo Mutual; AVON in Costa Rica; Garnier & Garnier; Desarrollos Inmobiliarios; Garnier Arquitectos and Property Pro. Five companies designed an action plan to address organisational violence based on their Gender Equality Seal assessments.

⁵¹⁰ The [Women's Empowerment Principles](#) website.

⁵¹¹ The [Gender Equality Seal for Private Companies](#) website.

⁵¹² The capacity building process includes workshops on the following topics: a) ABC of violence against women, b) best care practices for cases of workplace and sexual harassment in the workplace, c) best prevention and care practices in violence against women matter in the context of COVID-19) non-violent leadership, e) positive masculinities, f) strategic planning to strengthen prevention and care mechanisms for violent against women cases.



9 Engaging with the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus

The concept of a “humanitarian-development-peace nexus” was developed to focus global conversations on sustainable development and long lasting solutions to meet the needs of the most vulnerable during climate shocks, disasters and conflicts. The nexus approach emphasises the importance of coordination across institutions that meets both immediate needs and at the same time ensures longer term investments that are addressing systemic causes of conflict and vulnerability, so that communities can build back stronger.⁵¹³

Spotlight Initiative operates in countries experiencing conflict, disasters and recovery zones. In these situations, women’s and girls’ access to services can be interrupted or limited. The lack of basic infrastructure combined with political instability, deterioration of the rule of law and lack of economic opportunities can contribute to increased violence against women and girls and the normalisation of gender-based violence. In collaboration with civil society organisations, international institutions and governments, Spotlight Initiative is implementing the nexus approach through preventative measures to ensure a safe environment and continued service delivery for women and girls. These measures seek to enhance gender justice by addressing poverty, inequality and the lack of functioning accountability systems through agile and responsive programmes.

The following lessons were identified through Spotlight Initiative work connected to the “humanitarian-development-peace nexus,” including the importance of safe environments and improving knowledge and training on violence against women, which creates awareness, fosters prevention and enhances responses. Partnerships that bring together government and civil society, as well as take into account the needs of vulnerable women and girls can help support efforts to end violence against women and girls in fragile contexts.

Lesson Learned #1: Establishing safe environments and increasing access to essential services can support reductions in violence against women and girls.

In disaster, conflict and post-disaster and conflict situations, basic infrastructure can be lacking. Simple improvements, such as better street lighting, emergency housing structures and sanitary facilities, can serve as quick wins to support women and girls’ sense of safety. Many Spotlight Initiative programmes are working on ensuring safe environments, such as in **Uganda** and **Liberia**.

In **Uganda**, Spotlight Initiative has taken several approaches to establish safe environments for women and girls in refugee settlements. The construction of four blocks of five ventilated improved pit latrines for girls in Kyaka II and Imvep Refugee settlements addressed the sexual and reproductive health and rights of vulnerable girls. To further reduce risks, water taps were moved closer to refugee camps, and those with high safety risks, such as women and children headed households, were moved closer to the facilities. A total of 271 solar street lights were installed in refugee settlements. This improved safety and reduced sexual and gender-based violence risks, and allowed women to stay outdoors longer and feel safer while taking part in livelihood activities. Improved social interaction and education were also reported, as some students use the lighting for evening studies. A comprehensive approach that includes lighting, water and sanctuary facilities can reduce violence against women and girls, improve women and girls’ sense of safety and well-being and contribute to improved economic circumstances.

In **Liberia**, in collaboration with partners, Spotlight Initiative implemented a pilot project and constructed 25 durable shelters in the Bahn Settlement in Nimba County. This activity was critical in ensuring the protection of single mothers and their daughters from abuse, as well as reducing other forms of vulnerability faced by them, including forced marriage, rape, sex trafficking and domestic abuse, among others. By ensuring their access to sustainable shelter, Spotlight Initiative contributed to the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence and providing safety, security and dignity to displaced women.

Lesson Learned #2: Working together through partnerships can improve safe conditions and reduce violence against women and girls for vulnerable women and girls.

The nexus approach emphasises working in partnership with government agencies and civil society organisations for agile responses to crisis situations, by providing direct and flexible funding to partners and ensuring continuity and long-term support of service provision. Spotlight Initiative programmes, such as those in **Vanuatu**, **Jamaica**, and the **Caribbean**, have been working toward strengthening national and local capacities and resourcing leadership appropriately (including local and national authorities and legitimate non-state actors) to improve conditions for vulnerable women and girls.

⁵¹³ Emma Fanning and Jessica Fullwood-Thomas (2019). [The Humanitarian-DevelopmentPeace Nexus: What does it mean for multi-mandated organizations?](#) Oxfam Discussion Paper.

In **Vanuatu**, in the aftermath of the tropical cyclone Harold and COVID-19, the country lacked the necessary resources to address both humanitarian response and development programming simultaneously. Spotlight Initiative, through close collaboration with the National Disaster Management Office, strengthened institutional capacity and supported the Ministry of Health to increase the capacity of the health services system. Through working with these government agencies, Spotlight Initiative ensured that ending violence against women and girls is addressed in all contexts, even in emergencies such as the cyclone and COVID-19. In addition, Spotlight Initiative identified new partnerships for implementation, including diverse civil society partners from community groups, organisations and networks. Through these partnerships and collaborations, Spotlight Initiative has ensured that clear messaging and information about gender-based violence prevention, risk mitigation and response services are included in the day-to-day management of humanitarian situations.

Under the **Caribbean Regional Programme** and for the first time in the region, guidelines on the integration of VAWG/FV into disaster risk reduction/management,⁵¹⁴ including the COVID-19 pandemic response, were developed in 2021. This was a significant achievement in positioning gender and VAWG/FV considerations in the work of the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency. A signed letter of agreement with the government agency ensured a commitment to continue this work in the future, and a training module was further developed to strengthen the capacity of additional persons.

Lesson Learned #3: Increasing knowledge and capacities on violence against women and girls can lead to effective frameworks that can reduce harmful practices.

Raising awareness and increasing knowledge on violence against women and girls can help prevent gender-based violence in fragile situations, such as post-conflict and disaster situations. Spotlight Initiative is well placed to advance efforts to end violence against women and girls through knowledge transfer and training programmes in many different contexts, including in **Vanuatu** and **Uganda**.

In **Vanuatu**, Spotlight Initiative advocated to strengthen in-school Family Life Education that promotes gender-equitable, child-friendly and violence free norms, attitudes and behaviours in the country. This was done in accordance with International Guidance in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Training and civil society organisations. Despite difficulties experienced during the Tropical Cyclone Harold response efforts, Spotlight Initiative supported the orientation and training of supervisors for community facilitators. As a result of these efforts, in 2021, the community facilitators were still able to lead important dialogues on ending family violence in selected communities and utilise their training and knowledge to facilitate a social movement among community leaders and youth in Vanuatu.

In **Uganda**, violence against women and girls, harmful practices and sexual and reproductive health and rights laws were translated for people in refugee settlements, where 155 refugees in Rhino settlement in Arua district benefited from information on gender-based violence interventions and referral pathways to access legal aid services. This was coupled with specialised training for duty-bearers on the application of new and revised laws and policies on violence against women and girls and sexual and reproductive health and rights in refugee settings. As a result of Spotlight Initiative's support to the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development and the Uganda Human Rights Commission, 211 officials were trained on how to enhance human rights knowledge and its application to violence against women and girls and sexual and reproductive health and rights. This training resulted in a stronger application of human rights principles in the formulation and development of human rights-based compliant ordinances on alcohol and drug abuse, violence against women and girls and sexual and reproductive health and rights. The examples above illustrate measures that can be scaled up in situations of climate disaster, crisis and conflict and adapted to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable.

⁵¹⁴ [Guidelines on the Integration of Violence Against Women and Girls including Family Violence in Disaster Risk Management in the Caribbean](#) (UNDP, 2023).

10 Adapting to COVID-19, conflict and other crises



With increasing natural and climate related disasters, wars, conflicts and health epidemics, the ability to adapt to extreme crises, threats or political opposition and backlash have become more important than ever. Although these circumstances present significant challenges to preventing violence against women and girls and supporting women and girls, they can also present opportunities to innovate and learn.

Despite challenging circumstances during COVID-19 and other crises, Spotlight Initiative supported flexible and adaptable programming, including flexible budgeting, which enabled responsive and innovative programmes. Responses included the adaptation to virtual services for women and girls to avoid interruptions and the provision of direct support and emergency services through local grassroots organisations. In some cases, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic mobilised the women's movement and brought national attention to violence against women and girls.

Lesson Learned #1: Direct support and emergency services reaching large numbers of women and girls in emergency situations, such as COVID-19 and other disasters, are often best delivered by local grassroots organisations.

The COVID-19 pandemic created many implementation challenges due to restrictions on travel and in-person meetings. Spotlight Initiative grantees provided direct and immediate practical support to women and girls in a variety of forms in an effort to respond to the impact of COVID-19. Direct support was often provided in the form of food, hygiene supplies, sanitation and/or other emergency needs and delivered by those in communities that had strong networks and outreach, most often local civil society organisations. This underscores the importance of building strong grassroots CSO partners and networks, as these can be redirected to meet emerging needs.

For example, in **Côte d'Ivoire**, Conscience et Vie distributed food packages to self-identified sex workers living with HIV who lost their income due to COVID-19. In **Zimbabwe**, the Bethany Project distributed dignity kits, including sanitary pads for adolescent girls. In **Ethiopia**, Ethiopiad, through its co-implementing partner Association for Women's Sanctuary and Development, provided relief items such as food and personal protection equipment, such as hand sanitizer and soap, to low-income women-headed households and former safe house residents. In **Chad**, help centres supported emergency shelter for women survivors and sanitary kits and ration bags were distributed. 1,230 women and girls, including women with disabilities, and women survivors and their families, were supported with food and non-food items by the United Funding and Development for Underage Mothers in **Liberia**. In **Uganda**, the Integrated Disabled Women Activities provided 300 women and girls with disabilities with food and other relief items.

Lesson Learned #2: Virtual innovations allowed services for women and girls to remain uninterrupted with wider reach.

Spotlight Initiative programmes experienced positive unintended results as a result of changing modalities and adopting mitigating measures due to the circumstances of COVID-19. Technology offered innovative ways to continue providing support and raise awareness. Many Spotlight Initiative partners facilitated virtual meetings and workshops in the **Africa Regional Programme, Chad, Jamaica, Zimbabwe, and Uganda**.

In **Zimbabwe**, virtual safe spaces reached over eighty girls and young women, providing a forum where they could discuss sexual and gender-based violence, as well as how to stay safe, healthy and well-informed so they could recognize, react and report incidents of violence. In **Uganda**, a free SMS mobile application, U-Report, allowed users to make reports in real time on issues affecting them and their communities. Eventually, over 350,000 Ugandans were registered in the app across the country. Similar innovations to mitigate and sustain delivery and access to essential integrated gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health and rights services included apps, such as GETIN⁵¹⁵ and SafePal,⁵¹⁶ as well as fuel vouchers for outreach.

In **Jamaica**, the development and launch of the "Hope" (also known as "Helping Our People Emerge") App increased legal literacy and awareness about services available for survivors of gender-based violence, in particular among marginalised communities. In **Chad**, a 24/7 helpline was set up and trained paralegals provided counselling, as well as legal support and advice on protection measures for survivors and those at risk of violence. By shifting the implementation modality, services for women and girls were not interrupted. Although the restrictions from the COVID-19 pandemic have been lifted, virtual meetings and events have proven to be an important part of a comprehensive strategy to end violence against women and girls.

⁵¹⁵ GETIN is a community referral system (mobile and web) to support outreach pregnant women in rural communities and seeks to strengthen the current community Health Follow-up system and have a positive impact on maternal health in Uganda.

⁵¹⁶ SafePal is a platform that young people (10-24 years) can use to confidentially report cases of sexual violence and get linked to the nearest service providers for help.

Lesson Learned #3: New partnerships and flexible funding models helped achieve intended outcomes in light of changing circumstances.

Reflections and learnings from adaptations in contexts, such as conflict and COVID-19, enabled Spotlight Initiative within the **Latin American Regional Programme** and **Timor-Leste**, to strategically revise and refocus its interventions. This also included shifting funds towards gender-based violence, sexual violence and sexual and reproductive health and rights interventions that met the needs and responded to situations of women and girls in light of the changing circumstances.

In **Timor-Leste**, partnerships with civil society organisations enabled many activities at the municipal level to continue, even though travel restrictions were in place, due to their existing strong local networks. This demonstrates the importance of working through local civil society in situations of crisis. In addition, COVID-19 mitigation and response plans were developed with partners and included guidance on how to organise events safely, as well as ensuring partner budgets included funds for PPE. Funds were shifted between activities and pillars when it became clear that progress was not possible on previously planned activities. In the **Pacific Region**, when the pandemic began, it was difficult to continue programming as most partners became focused on COVID-19 response. Many programmes used this as an opportunity to channel funds to civil society partners to rapidly respond to the spike in violence against women and girls and support prevention efforts during this critical time.

In the **Latin America Regional Programme**, funds originally allocated to travel and events were redirected and used to develop research on the impact of COVID-19 on violence against women and girls. This resulted in additional programming that was not expected, such as applying behavioural science to the analysis of violence against women and girls in the regional context. Partners innovated, transforming face-to-face methodologies to virtual collaborations.

Lesson Learned #4: Responses to COVID-19 mobilised women's movements and brought national attention to violence against women and girls.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought national and global attention to the issue of violence against women and girls, highlighting existing challenges and exacerbating certain risk factors. The recognition of inequalities, such as disparities in economic opportunities, healthcare access and the burden of caregiving, has contributed to a broader understanding of the root causes of violence against women and girls. Spotlight Initiative partners in **Honduras** and **Nigeria** capitalised on the increased attention given to violence against women and girls due to the COVID-19 crisis to raise awareness and increase women's engagement in the effort to end violence against women and girls.

For example, in the In Imo state in **Nigeria**, Spotlight Initiative partner Alliances for Africa quickly took steps to mitigate the surge in violence against women and girls during the pandemic.⁵¹⁷ They mobilised support for the inclusion of women in all COVID-19 taskforce committees, and ensured accountability in the distribution of government relief materials through close monitoring. In addition, they provided information about effective prevention measures by broadcasting reliable information on COVID-19. This swift action resulted in strengthened coalitions and increased trust between state and civil society actors to address violence against women and girls.

"Interestingly, the situation created an opportunity for the advancement of women's rights as it glaringly exposed [infringements on women's rights]. It was also an opportunity that is currently changing narratives, as everyone is adding their voices towards holding the government accountable for injustices on women and girls across the country."

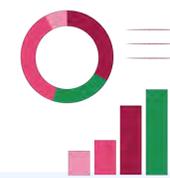
Iheoma Obibi, Executive Director, Alliances for Africa, Nigeria

The Centro de Estudios de Mujeres, a women-led organisation implementing a project in **Honduras** in partnership with Plataforma 25 de Noviembre, a network of 22 women's organisations, and CARE Honduras, reoriented their work to focus on virtual activities to raise awareness. This work included an online campaign raising awareness of the increase in various forms of violence against women and girls as a result of confinement measures. This campaign rallied the feminist movement to pursue a common goal together. As a result of their consistent advocacy for an emergency law on violence against women and girls, the Honduras Parliament approved a new piece of legislation.

While the pandemic brought attention to violence against women and girls, it also emphasised the need for sustained efforts to address the root causes of violence against women, promote gender equality and strengthen support systems for survivors.

⁵¹⁷ [Women and girls directly benefited in 2020](#) (UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women, June 2021).

11 Embedding design perspectives for developing good programming



Developing clear design frameworks and perspectives helps ensure that a programme is targeted and focused on addressing the specific aspects of gender-based violence that are most relevant to the target community. It facilitates the involvement of key stakeholders, including survivors, community leaders, law enforcement, and service providers. Furthermore, it ensures the efficient allocation of resources, ensuring that funds, personnel, and other resources are directed towards the most critical areas of the programme.

Spotlight Initiative's country programmes were developed with this in mind and began their design process with in-depth review and research on the country or regional context, including identifying trends in violence against women and girls and other harmful practices, the state of service provision and referral in the country, the existing legal and policy framework, the major normative barriers to progress, and the state of women's movements and civil society.

Lesson Learned #1: Implementing a strong context, gender and power analysis, in addition to drawing on past evidence and learnings, yields more effective results.

Research has shown that attention to gender and power analysis in the programme design phase yields more effective results and in particular supports gender-responsive and transformative results.⁵¹⁸ Spotlight Initiative programmes in **Ecuador, Kyrgyzstan, and Uganda** underscored the importance of gender analysis, with notable results.

Gathering evidence and learning after programme implementation was an important way for programmes to ensure more effective results over time. For example, in **Kyrgyzstan**, mid-way through the implementation of the programme in 2021, the team conducted an expectations mapping exercise to understand key stakeholders' views on the progress of the country programme based on the originally intended objectives and on new political and institutional changes in the country. The results were then used to formulate strategic, programmatic and operational recommendations, to deepen its work on the three dimensions of change to end violence against women and girls (household, cognitive behavioural and society levels) and to conduct a do no harm/conflict sensitivity analysis. This effort to conduct assessments for the purpose of learning and making programme adjustments based on implementations to date supported greater programme effectiveness.

Spotlight Initiative in **Argentina** shared the centrality of sharing information on project progress, risks and areas for deeper reflection with leaders in partner institutions to ensure joint commitment and action on adapting programming, which supported overall programme effectiveness.

Lesson Learned #2: Integrating concepts and tools which are aligned with the local culture supports more relevant programming and the potential for deeper resonance.

Spotlight Initiative has always placed a strong focus on engaging local communities and leaders in the fight against violence against women and girls. In order to be effective, programme strategy designs need to take local cultural practices and concepts into account where possible. There are many strong examples of embedding this design principle into programme strategies for outreach possibilities. For example, the earlier [case study 3.2](#) on the peace hut model in **Zimbabwe** exemplified this approach, using community dialogues as a safe space to discuss issues of violence and transform perspectives and behaviour. Similarly, the SASA! model⁵¹⁹ has been used across many Spotlight Initiative contexts, including in **Uganda** and **Haiti**.

Another model used in many contexts is engaging in religious analysis to promote gender equality. For example, multiple Spotlight Initiative programmes, such as in **Tajikistan**, have been working on identifying verses in the Quran that promote gender equality. In addition, they have disseminated messages of anti-violence by connecting with religious leaders and asking them to share these messages in their sermons, supporting greater possibility for uptake and influence of these equity norms. For detailed results in this area, see the Tajikistan [case study 3.8](#) under Pillar 3.

⁵¹⁸ Evaluation of UNDP's contribution to gender equality and women's empowerment (UNDP, 2015).

⁵¹⁹ Learn more about the [SASA! approach](#).

Lesson Learned #3: Conduct a multi-stakeholder partnership mapping, including of UN agencies, governments and civil society, to reduce duplication and ensure coordinated efforts to end violence against women and girls.

Engaging in landscape mapping and context analysis to understand the groups working in a country or community, the pressing issues, challenges, needs and gaps is critical to developing good programming. This way, in the early stages of programme design and development, synergies and gaps can be addressed. A partnership analysis also helps to reduce duplication and create more coordinated efforts to end violence against women and girls as well as more targeted programming that does not reinvent the wheel.

Many Spotlight Initiative countries focused on mapping partnerships as a first step in programme design, including in **Mozambique** and **Zimbabwe**. After mapping partnerships, deeper dialogues must occur to further determine each partners' strengths and added value in the context. Spotlight Initiative country programmes in **Argentina**, **Central Asia**, **Mozambique**, and **Uganda** did this well, maximising their ability to be more targeted and strategic in collaboration.

For example, the importance of collaborative planning was highlighted by Spotlight Initiative programmes in **Central Asia**, which engaged with the various UN agencies and the European Union to develop their annual work plan. This enabled stronger in-country collaboration and encouraged different UN agencies to share technical expertise, reducing silos and avoiding duplication of efforts. In **Uganda**, Spotlight Initiative enhanced coherence and alignment between civil society, UN and government, enhancing their multi sector and multi partner approach to addressing GBV and harmful practices, for example, through progress on the "One Protection System" and reinforcing past efforts of the Medico-Legal Task Force. They also underscored the importance of inclusive national level coordination structures and processes for subnational level implementation.

12 Supporting UN reform and multi-sector governance structures



The United Nations Delivering as One reform⁵²⁰ enhanced coordination among UN agencies and bodies for more effective governance and improved communication and collaboration mechanisms that address global challenges, such as gender inequality. Leveraging each UN agency's area of expertise through effective coordination and collaboration allows for more comprehensive programming and more efficient and effective implementation that reduces duplication.

Spotlight Initiative is the first UN reform demonstration fund, and country programmes are overseen by the Resident Coordinator. This unique coordination role has been a key indicator of Spotlight Initiative's progress in operating and delivering jointly, contributing to a more harmonised approach across agencies. The Resident Coordinator's Office, along with the leadership of implementing UN agencies, has created a space to facilitate more effective and results driven work of Spotlight Initiative country programmes to reduce duplication, improve collaboration and collective planning, and resource mobilisation.

Lesson Learned #1: Improved coordination across UN agencies and implementing organisations contributes to improved efficiency and effectiveness to end violence against women and girls.

Differences exist across UN agencies in their operational and programmatic procedures. This can make it challenging to reach a consensus on approaches for implementation, as well as offer consistency in the information collected from implementing partners. The Resident Coordinator's Office helps to streamline management and reporting across UN agencies, contributing to the UN Delivering as One reform, as well as efficient and effective programming.

Revised coordination and organisational architecture have led a number of Spotlight Initiative programmes to contribute to the UN Delivering as One reform, such as in **Belize**, **Grenada**, **Mozambique**, and **Uganda**. For example, in **Mozambique**, the leadership tasks were shared across agencies, including UN Women and UNFPA, and together they endorsed a new interagency coordination approach to strengthen results-based management and delivery. Similarly, in **Uganda**, the Spotlight Initiative Programme Coordinator was formally included as a member of the UN Deputies Group, under a revised coordination architecture. This new organisational structure ensured coordination cohesion and the Spotlight Initiative Coordinator was able to contribute to the Resident Coordinator's Office Gender Advisory function and oversee Spotlight Initiative's programming on gender-based violence.

In **Belize**, programme governance and coordination were improved through the development of a standard operating procedure, which strengthened the coordination and technical coherence of Spotlight Initiative in Belize. The standard operating procedure outlines roles and functions at various levels and illustrates how various roles interlink. The standard

⁵²⁰ More about the United Nations [Delivering as One](#) reform.

operating procedure also outlines mechanisms for ensuring effective reporting, coordination and accountability to guide programme governance and coordination, for supporting implementation. In **Grenada**, the Resident Coordinator's Office has also developed effective coordination among different agencies and presents Spotlight Initiative as a cohesive team during interactions with external partners. This has allowed Spotlight Initiative to minimise duplication in programme partnerships and strategically work to strengthen and expand partnerships for the Initiative. In **Kyrgyzstan**, the Resident Coordinator as the (co)chair of the steering committee meetings ensured high level engagement of key stakeholders, as well as the coordination of implementing UN agencies for programme implementation. The role of the Resident Coordinator has also enhanced the inclusion of the national team members.⁵²¹

"He [the RC] includes the PCU in all UNCT retreats where only the heads [country representatives] are participating... Our inclusion in this meeting is very important because as national team members, we sometimes have different perspectives and different priorities. To recognise and discuss these differences is very fruitful."

A key informant in the Resident Coordinator's Office in Kyrgyzstan

In **Mexico**, implementing UN agencies have managed to work in a way that cohesively brings together the mandates of different UN agencies. Spotlight Initiative has worked with implementing partners, such as UNICEF and UNFPA, which resulted in significant progress on issues such as the prevention and sexual and reproductive health and rights pillars. Coordination across agencies has complemented and improved the quality and impact of the interventions, as well as increased the number of interventions.

Lesson Learned #2: Regional collaborations can result in strengthened programmes, better use of resources and the advancement of regional protocols.

The **Latin American Regional Programme** strengthened the capacities of the public prosecutor's offices by supporting the guidelines of the Specialized Gender Network of the Ibero-American Association of Public Prosecutors. This initiative brought together the national programmes of Spotlight Initiative in Argentina, Ecuador, El Salvador and Mexico with the UN Women Offices in Brazil, Chile and Colombia and the OHCHR. Through a face-to-face meeting with the participation of 15 prosecutors and representatives of specialised gender units, a proposal of guidelines for the members of the Ibero-American Association of Public Prosecutors, which was later approved by the General Assembly, was developed. This activity shows the positive impact of working across countries, with the joint support of different UN agencies, the Regional Programme and the national programmes of Spotlight Initiative in the Latin America region. This meeting made possible the advancement of the Sexual Violence Investigation Protocol in the region. In addition, the development of Specialized Gender Network practices can be adapted and replicated, as well as for other regions of the world.

Through regular meetings with implementing partners, the **Africa Regional Programme** was able to facilitate a cohesive regional strategy, foster better coordination, and enable the sharing of experiences and best practices across member states. In partnership with the African Union Commission, the first-ever Regional Action Plan,⁵²² which included a monitoring and evaluation framework, was developed and validated. This plan enabled member states to develop and implement comprehensive National Action Plans to prevent and respond to ending violence against women and girls. The framework also provided key guidance and helped translate regional commitments into concrete strategies and actions at both regional and national levels. In addition, a Facilitator's Training Manual was created to ensure a successful implementation of the plan by member states. This manual was used in a Training of Trainers workshop, which aimed to enhance the capacity of the participants⁵²³ through increased lobbying, advocacy, and negotiation skills. The workshop also fostered cross-learning among participants on good practices in the development and implementation of Action Plans and increased financing for the plan. The regional coordination and the development of a plan coupled with training helped to ensure that member states deliver on their commitments to ending violence against women and girls.

The **Grenada** country programme collaborates with Spotlight Initiative's **Caribbean Regional Programme**. This collaboration has created opportunities for the Regional Programme and the Grenada Programme to reinforce both programmes through work on gender-responsive budgeting, capacity development for women's rights and civil society organisations based on a regional model, participation of organisations at the regional retreat, research on the economic costs of violence against women and girls and support from the regional monitoring and evaluation and communications specialists. The pooling of resources at the national and regional levels allowed for shared strategies and activities that resulted in strengthened outputs of both programmes.

⁵²¹ The 2022 Kyrgyzstan Mid-Term Assessment Report.

⁵²² The plan was validated in 2022 with key stakeholders from the African Union Commission, Regional Economic Community, Member States, civil society organisations, and Recipient United Nations Organizations.

⁵²³ Participants included African Union Commission, Regional Economic Community regional parliamentarians, and civil society organisations. The 2020-2023 Africa Regional Programme Final Narrative Programme Report.

Lesson Learned #3: Simplifying procedures can improve efficiency and minimise duplication.

Implementing partners and government counterparts have observed and addressed duplication of activities across many Spotlight Initiative programmes, including in **Belize** and **Honduras**. Minimising the duplication of activities is essential to optimise resources, enhance efficiency and ensure that efforts are focused and impactful.

In **Belize**, simplified application forms were developed for civil society organisations to apply for Spotlight Initiative support. Through this procedure, organisations were only required to submit one application, which was then advanced with the support of the relevant implementing UN agency. Overall, this new way of working as one UN team improved not only programme management but also the quality of activities in Belize.

An interagency toolbox was developed in **Honduras** in an effort to merge existing communication products, resources and tools from across UN agencies. It was shared widely across Spotlight Initiative programmes and, eventually, across the Latin America region at large. This work has the potential to increase the impact of communications and visibility by reducing duplication of work, enabling UN agencies to leverage each other's expertise and streamline the dissemination of information.

Lesson Learned #4: The UN Resident Coordinators' oversight elevates the importance of ending violence against women and girls at the local and national level.

Ending violence against women and girls is a complex undertaking which requires active leadership to create a vision around shared goals. Dynamic leadership from Resident Coordinators can provide leadership for effective programme implementation across strategic stakeholders. Resident Coordinators can serve as advocates for ending violence against women and girls at the local, state and national levels, as well as lobby policymakers to allocate resources and enact or strengthen legislation on issues related to gender-based violence, as seen in **Uganda** and **Timor-Leste**, for example.

In **Uganda**, the Spotlight Initiative programme coordination team was situated in the Resident Coordinator's Office, which allowed the Spotlight Initiative programme coordinator to be a part of meetings of the Resident Coordinator's Office and a member of the Human Rights and Gender Advisory Group. This arrangement fostered strong partnerships between the UN Resident Coordinator and the Ministry of Gender, as well as other government ministries, departments and agencies at both national and sub-national levels. Joint planning across ministries, departments and agencies facilitated broad-based inputs into programme development and implementation.

In **Timor-Leste**, the Resident Coordinator's Office engaged in 25 strategic meetings with the implementing UN agencies and the Civil Society Reference Group. Efforts to foster strategic national and international partnerships were led by members of the Civil Society Reference Group (CSRG), who represented Spotlight Initiative internationally and nationally, including in each programme target municipality. The CSRG served as contact points and monitored the programme's activities and provided technical guidance and inputs to the implementation of the programme. This engagement at the national level resulted in a sense of ownership of the programme among civil society and has contributed to the programme's long-term sustainability. The active and engaged leadership by the Resident Coordinator was a key factor in the success of the programme implementation. Specifically, it was vital in building and maintaining effective and efficient programme management, ensuring technical coordination, joint planning and interagency collaboration. As illustrated in the cases above, collaboration and coordination across UN agencies, as well as implementing partners, can lead to strengthened outcomes.

13 Ensuring the sustainability of programming and exit strategies



A well planned sustainability or exit strategy is essential for the closure of gender-based violence programming and must respect ethical principles in every step of the exit or transition process. This ensures that survivors continue to access necessary services and support once financial support ends. It also preserves the successes and achievements of the interventions. Sustainability plans provide a path for long-term impact while keeping underlying principles intact (e.g. civil society partnership, leave no one behind, do no harm). This matters because frontline advocates could be put at increased risk when women who speak out and organise suddenly experience a vacuum of support, partners or services.

In this context, Spotlight Initiative conceives of sustainability or an exit strategy as a pathway to ensuring continuity of impacts after a programme ends. Country initiatives include building standardised processes integrated into the national development agenda, developing tracking and documentation mechanisms that support future funding strategies, and designing strategies that actively ensure that harm and risks to survivors are reduced.

Lesson Learned #1: Building systems and standardised processes that are owned by national stakeholders, including governments and civil society organisations and duty-bearers, ensures longer term sustainability.

Work to instil gender equitable policies, including laws to end violence against women and girls and gender-based violence, new gender bodies and mechanisms for gender mainstreaming and comprehensive sexuality education in the national curriculum, supports the continuity of a base level of rights protections in a country. For example, in **Ecuador**, the strengthening of institutional gender units in the Ministry of Education, the Legislative Assembly and other government departments deepened attention to gender issues in the government and ministries that will last years beyond Spotlight Initiative. Similarly, in **Zimbabwe**, the mainstreaming of gender, disability and violence against women and girls into district and village development plans resulted in the inclusion of violence against women and girls in local development plans with gender budgets attached, underscoring the longer term sustainability and financial stability of these efforts.

Influencing high level political leaders and local governments to support ending violence against women and girls initiatives helps build medium-term momentum and political support. For example, in **Nigeria, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan**, the President and the Prime Minister have officially expressed their strong support for the elimination of violence against women and girls, lending longer term priority and political commitment to this issue.

Investing in national and local capacity building of government, the justice sector, police, educational system and civil society to recognize and end violence against women and girls is one important implementation strategy that can yield long-term results. Spotlight Initiative programmes, for example in **El Salvador, Guyana, Liberia, and Malawi**, focused extensively on capacity building. Capacity development of key stakeholders in the government, service providers, the police and justice sectors, educators, private sector and civil society created the foundation for ending violence against women and girls concepts to take root in people's personal and professional lives. For example, in **Malawi**, gender sensitive trainings on survivor-centred reporting for Police Public Relations Officers and the media continues to yield results beyond the initial training sessions. In **El Salvador**, civil society organisations contributed to new areas of research on justice, social auditing for women's organisations and special care services.

This work led to the increased civil society capacity to monitor services for women and girls through the Violence Observatory. In **Liberia**, national institutions, stakeholders and civil society organisations strengthened their technical capacity to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence and harmful practices at the national, sub-national and community levels. In **Guyana**, Spotlight Initiative proposed to train approximately 6,000 officers (the entire police service) to ensure continuity and sustainability of access to justice.

Lesson Learned #2: Developing exit strategies and funding sustainability in advance of programme closure supports the continuation of programme activities after initial seed funding.

Spotlight Initiative aims to ensure that all countries have exit plans that describe how the programme intends to withdraw its resources, while ensuring that beneficiaries and survivors are not exposed to further risk or actual harm as a consequence of the transition. At times this will mean planning for additional resources where it is not possible to exit entirely, and at other times, requires finding the right partners to take the work forward.

Developing detailed exit plans with financing needs identified per country yields concrete and actionable insights to take forward the most important outcomes from Spotlight Initiative's work. Some Spotlight Initiative countries, such as **Zimbabwe** and **Malawi**, have taken the lead in conducting an in-depth programme and financial exit analysis, identifying which activities should be continued, discontinued or have some elements dropped. In **Zimbabwe**, this analysis was followed up with the amount of capital needed to continue to implement desired selected activities in the future and identifying responsible parties and next steps. Engaging in such a strategic analysis helps the team plan systematically and identify gaps in budgets, staff and resources quickly. A further example of exit strategy development is in **Mali**, where Spotlight Initiative launched ten one-stop centres in 2021, supporting 896 gender-based violence survivors. All ten centres have been transferred to government ownership to ensure the sustainability of services.

Anchoring ongoing plans, strategies and policies on ending violence against women and girls with commitments, accountability mechanisms, and resources, such as gender-responsive budgeting and pooled funding mechanisms which can be tracked publicly, is also an important sustainability practice to implement. As mentioned in Pillar 2, many Spotlight Initiative countries, such as **Papua New Guinea**, **Liberia**, and **Timor-Leste**, are making progress on gender-responsive budgeting. (See more on Timor-Leste in [case study 2.1](#) under Pillar 2.) This work can be continued with civil society stakeholders that have been trained to hold governments accountable to national and local budgets.

The creation, resourcing and support of women's rights networks and partnerships to collectively advocate for ending violence against women and girls and sexual and gender-based violence creates a sustainable advocacy base. In **Nigeria**, a coalition of civil society organisations was created - the Network Against Gender-Based Violence Against Women and Girls - to advocate for and educate the public on the harmful nature of sexual and gender-based violence. The coalition continues to strengthen and amplify the voice of women's movements in addressing sexual and gender-based violence beyond Spotlight Initiative's support. In **Niger**, the Platform of Women Leaders of Niger was established to support the ongoing networking and advocacy of women's rights organisations and to offer regional coordination around gender-based violence.

Lesson Learned #3: Ensuring that tracking mechanisms are put in place to support fundraising and showcase the effectiveness of interventions.

Dedicating attention to tracking the effectiveness of interventions and ensuring evidence is being gathered throughout a programme lifecycle is critical to understanding its strengths and weaknesses, strengthening implementation over time and building the evidence base of what is working. Spotlight Initiative has a significant focus on evidence building and lessons learned sharing across its programmes. For example, at the **Global Secretariat** level, Spotlight Initiative's SHINE learning conversations have created an online community of practice which has provided rich cross-national and regional learnings to strengthen programme interventions.⁵²⁴ In addition to developing a community of practice, Spotlight Initiative's **Global Secretariat** has developed a knowledge tracking tool⁵²⁵ that can be used across country programmes and regions. Data and evidence gathered such as this are essential to fundraising.

Spotlight Initiative has similarly placed a unique focus on participatory monitoring, evaluation and learning, which deepens collaboration with local communities and civil society organisations. This type of collaborative analysis has been occurring in **Honduras**, **Kyrgyzstan**, and **Malawi**, and supports local knowledge and research skills and more relevant interpretation of evaluation findings and recommendations. In **Honduras**, participatory monitoring and evaluation processes were integrated into "CREARTE," a programme with artistic and cultural activities that help to challenge gendered social norms and promote behaviour change. The programme involved diverse marginalised communities, including young people, in focus groups and consultations to understand which of its interventions have helped challenge gender norms in care and domestic settings and in the workplace. The participatory approach in assessing the programme outcomes helped to better respond to the community needs and understand how to mobilise other relevant strategies in the future. This lesson underscores the importance of evidence, research and assessment of the theory of change, which should continue to be locally owned and carried out by local, national and/or regional stakeholders, including government and civil society.

⁵²⁴ The SHINE communities of practice website.

⁵²⁵ The Spotlight Initiative Fund [knowledge tracking](#) website.