



Pillar 1: Laws & policies

Pillar 1 focuses on ensuring that strong laws and policies to end violence against women⁶ and girls and harmful practices are developed, implemented and translated into national plans in line with international human rights standards. Spotlight Initiative programmes have made great progress working on creating new laws and policies at the national and local levels, revising and updating national legal structures to be aligned with international protocols and aligned with principles of leaving no one behind, ensuring gender equity and protections exist in informal and religious legal structures, enhancing coordination and alignment across states and regions, and strengthening the ability of key partners and stakeholders to advocate for reforms at grassroots, local, subnational and national levels.

The following good and innovative practices share cases of new national and subnational laws and policies that were implemented to end violence against women and girls, including in Mexico, Ecuador, and Zimbabwe. Ensuring that regional and country-level action plans are also in place is a key focus in this section, highlighted by the below case studies of the Africa Regional Programme and Trinidad and Tobago.

New national and subnational laws and policies



1.1 Legal reforms in Mexico safeguard the rights of orphans of femicide

Overview

Femicide refers to the death of a woman as the result of violence from an intimate partner, or a harmful practice that involves the killing of a woman perpetuated by gender norms. This term is often used in Latin America to emphasise the alarming rates of brutality and murder experienced by women.⁷ Mexico is considered one of the most dangerous places for women. Statistics have revealed that around 10 women are murdered every day in the country.⁸

Femicides in Mexico are known to occur more often in border areas, such as Chihuahua State. Ciudad Juárez, which is a city in Chihuahua, has especially high rates of femicides, accounting for 31 percent of the 139 percent increase in femicides in Mexico from 2015-2019.⁹ In the region, there have been 2,300 femicide cases documented in the last 30 years.¹⁰

From 2017 to 2021, approximately 30,889 girls, boys and adolescents have been orphaned due to femicide. Mexico has one of the highest rates of orphaned children in Latin America.¹¹ The orphaned children, together with the surviving caregivers, are vulnerable to lifelong trauma from femicide. They also often suffer from emotional and financial difficulties due to the loss of their mother, and state support to these orphaned children is inadequate.¹²

Against this backdrop, UN Women through Spotlight Initiative supported legal reforms to protect surviving children of femicide cases in the Chihuahua State of Mexico.

⁶ The term "violence against women," as described in Article 1 of the [Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women](#) (OHCHR), means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.

⁷ [Femicide in Latin America](#) (UN Women, 2013).

⁸ ["We're here to tell it:" Mexican women break silence over femicides](#) (UN OHCHR, 2023).

⁹ [Femicides: Gender Violence in Mexico](#) (The Agora, 2023).

¹⁰ [The Crosses of Ciudad Juárez](#) (UNESCO).

¹¹ [Greta Rico](#) (International Women in Photography Association, 2022).

¹² [Orphans, the collateral victims of femicide](#) (El Universal, 2019).

Results

The Spotlight Initiative programme convened relevant stakeholders across various levels (federal, state and municipal) and supported consultative workshops with local stakeholders to identify legal gaps and corresponding legal reforms in addressing violence against women and girls, including femicide. The workshops also included discussions on how to harmonise federal and state legal frameworks with human rights and ending violence against women and girls-related treaties, conventions and international instruments signed by Mexico.¹³ These workshops were attended by federal lawmakers, local legislators, lawyers, legal advisors, civil society groups, women's organisations, scholars, activists and local representatives.¹⁴ The consultative sessions led to the identification of priority issues that needed legal reform – one of which was related to orphans of femicide.¹⁵ Spotlight Initiative's technical team prepared recommended legal reforms pertaining to orphans of femicide, which were presented to the Congress of Chihuahua State.

Pushing for legislative reform within the Mexican Congress requires consensus among lawmakers for a legal reform to materialise. However, the country's lawmaking landscape is composed of various political parties with diverse positions and interests, making it difficult to arrive at a consensus. To navigate around this challenge, Spotlight Initiative promoted the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding among lawmakers. This served as an instrument of commitment and a way to unite and build alliances across lawmakers amid their different political affiliations. The Memorandum of Understanding was instrumental in the receptiveness and eventual adoption of the Chihuahua State Congress of the legal reforms needed.

As a result of engaging with the stakeholders through consultative sessions and securing the support of lawmakers, four laws were eventually reformed in Chihuahua State in 2023 aimed at recognising and guaranteeing the rights of children and adolescents orphaned due to femicide:¹⁶

1. State Law on the Right of Women to a Life Free of Violence
2. Law on the Rights of Girls, Boys and Adolescents of the State of Chihuahua
3. Law that Regulates the Provision of Care Services, Comprehensive Child Care and Development of the State of Chihuahua
4. Law to Prevent and Eradicate Discrimination in the State of Chihuahua

Key Elements of Success and Practices for Replication

- **Conduct a participatory multi-stakeholder assessment to form a solid baseline for targeted legal reform.** An assessment facilitated by Spotlight Initiative established a baseline from which the team could work and introduce legal reforms to support orphans of femicide. This success was also significantly attributed to the participatory approach that actively engaged diverse and relevant stakeholders. By soliciting inputs directly from groups possessing invaluable first-hand experience of femicide, the assessment captured an important social issue emanating from femicides, which is the lack of a strong legal framework to support children who lost their mothers due to femicide.
- **Use creative techniques to address tensions in political culture that can hinder the achievement of legal reforms.** The Mexican Congress is composed of lawmakers from different political parties. This made it challenging to gain consensus to have a legal reform approved. The Memorandum of Understanding signed by lawmakers was a strategic tactic that built alliances and commitment among lawmakers across different political affiliations. In the end, the legal reforms to protect femicide orphans were achieved.



¹³ The 2020 Mexico Annual Report, page 7.

¹⁴ The 2019 Mexico Annual Report, page 19.

¹⁵ The 2020 Mexico Annual Report, page 25.

¹⁶ The 2023 Mexico Annual Report Draft, page 7.



1.2 A Femicide Reparation Policy for survivors and their families in Ecuador

Overview

Violence against women and femicide are some of the most serious challenges in Ecuador's gender equality agenda. Statistics show that 65 out of 100 women in Ecuador have suffered some type of violence throughout their lives.¹⁷ Femicide and other violent deaths of women have significantly increased in the country between 2014 and 2023. While in 2014, 69 violent deaths of women were officially registered (including 26 cases classified as femicide); by 2023, this number had risen to 584 (with 105 cases classified as femicide).¹⁸ The alarming rates indicate the urgent need to prevent and reduce the impact of femicide and other violent deaths of women in Ecuador.

Despite the approval of the “Comprehensive Organic Law to Prevent and Eradicate Violence against Women” in February 2018, survivors of gender-based violence and families of femicide victims still struggle to access and find justice. Measures under this law often fail to acknowledge the severity of damage and distress experienced by the victims, their families and the survivors. There is also limited knowledge and understanding of accessible reparation measures available for survivors of gender-based violence and families of femicide victims.

Recognising the need for effective implementation of reparation measures aligned with the Comprehensive Organic Law, UNDP through Spotlight Initiative and the former Secretariat of Human Rights in Ecuador (later replaced by the Ministry of Women and Human Rights that was created in November 2022) developed and proposed the “Public Policy for the Comprehensive Reparation for Survivors and Families of Victims of Violence against Women and Femicide” (hereafter referred to as the “Femicide Reparation Policy”).¹⁹

The Femicide Reparation Policy aimed to strengthen criminal investigation of femicide in the national context. It also focused on building national capacity to implement reparation measures and ensure that the rights of survivors and families of victims were met. It provided a comprehensive understanding of reparation measures involving four dimensions: upholding legal and human rights; ensuring compensation, restitution, rehabilitation and non-repetition; providing comprehensive protection; and strengthening prevention of gender-based violence against women and girls and people of diverse genders.

Results

Led by the former Secretariat of Human Rights/current Ministry of Women and Human Rights, the document was the result of a co-creation process. The initial steps were taken in 2021 and involved a stakeholder mapping, analysis of the national legal framework on the subject and its jurisprudence, as well as international standards and jurisprudence. A first draft of the Femicide Reparation Policy was developed and further revised by Spotlight Initiative in collaboration with the Secretariat of National Planning and focal points of 22 government institutions that form the National System for the Prevention and Eradication of Violence against Women. This was followed by a three-month consultative process involving judicial and other institutional actors, such as members of local departments of human rights, survivors and family members of victims, academic specialists, women's social movements, members of the Civil Society Reference Group of Spotlight Initiative and service providers. Through this extensive consultation process, the final Femicide Reparation Policy proposal integrated diverse perspectives and standardised definitions encompassing legal, psychological and social aspects of reparation, thereby providing a comprehensive reparation strategy.

The ultimate goal of this initiative, which was a signed agreement between the President of the Republic, the Attorney General and the President of the Judicial Council establishing the implementation of the Femicide Reparation Policy with adequate resources assigned for it, has not been achieved yet. The approval process of the policy has been delayed several times due to ministerial changes that eliminated the Secretariat of Human Rights and created the Ministry of Women and Human Rights in 2022, as well as the President's departure and premature change of government at the end of 2023.²⁰ As of November 2023, the document was being reviewed by the new Minister of the Ministry of Women and Human Rights, who assumed the position in November 2023.

¹⁷ The 2023 Ecuador Final Programme Report Draft. Data extracted from Femicide Statistics in Ecuador.

¹⁸ Official statistical data from the [Judicial Council](#) website. (in Spanish)

¹⁹ [Proyecto de política pública para la reparación integral de víctimas y sobrevivientes de violencia contra las mujeres y miembros del grupo familiar, y femicidio](#) (UNDP, 2022). (in Spanish)

²⁰ In May 2023, the former President of Ecuador, Guillermo Lasso, used a mechanism called *Muerte Cruzada* (translated as “Cross Death”) that allows the executive and legislative to dissolve each other in advance to call elections. New elections were finalised in October 2023.

Despite delays, the completion of the first policy document on femicide reparation measures in the country was an important milestone of Spotlight Initiative. The development of the Femicide Reparation Policy has been instrumental in building a common understanding and knowledge on existing judicial provisions and mechanisms available to respond to the legal needs and rights of survivors and families of victims of violence against women and femicide.

The policy socialisation strategy,²¹ implemented by Spotlight Initiative in partnership with government counterparts, also facilitated its institutionalisation, especially at local level. For example, two local Councils for the Protection of Rights are monitoring the application of policy, such as the presence of the prosecutor in all investigative procedures, including during forensic medical analysis.

Another success worth mentioning was the strengthening of women's organisations and movements as a result of the policy development and socialisation processes, such as *Red de Mujeres Amazónicas*. This network brought together more than 50 women to advocate for the implementation of the Femicide Reparation Policy and is currently contributing to other policy reform initiatives.²² *Madres Coraje* (also known as "Brave Mothers") was another movement strengthened during this period, whereby mothers of femicide victims organised, built momentum and advocated for clear reparation measures in the National Assembly and in the Judicial Council.

Key Elements of Success and Practices for Replication

- **Adopt a multi-stakeholder collaborative process to integrate diverse perspectives and a shared understanding of what needs to be addressed by a policy.** The participatory process to develop the Femicide Reparation Policy led to a shared understanding of the problem of femicide and the need for reparation as well as prevention. It was recognised that efforts to prevent it in the first place also needed to be included in the proposed policy.
- **Develop a communication strategy with key partners to socialise and advocate for the implementation of a policy.** The effective socialisation process implemented by Spotlight Initiative in partnership with government counterparts allowed for the institutionalisation of the policy at some levels even without its official approval, which demonstrates clear local ownership.
- **The inclusion of those most affected in policy-making processes is a good practice that should be replicated to strengthen movements and advocacy efforts.** The involvement of families of femicide victims in the Femicide Reparation Policy development process supported individuals to come together and build movements and organisations to advocate for its implementation.



²¹ The communication strategy included round tables and secondary hearings to the National Court of Justice, the Constitutional Court, civil society organisations, women's movements, international cooperation, Ministry of Finance, the families of victims of femicide, and the development of specific products, such as videos, infographics and social media posts tailored to different audiences, including officials of the Judiciary Council, National Assembly, Attorney General's Office, Public Defender's Office, Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labor, Cantonal Councils for the Protection of Rights, and Cantonal Boards for the Protection of Rights.

²² Such as their involvement in the design and validation of the draft reform of the Organic Law for the Comprehensive Planning of the Amazonian Special Territorial Constituency. This proposal passed the first debate in the National Assembly, with the commitment to include it in the nearest legislative agenda for a second debate.

1.3 Women with disabilities in Zimbabwe influencing policy decisions and plans

Overview

People with disabilities account for about 9 percent of the population in Zimbabwe, or 1.2 million people.²³ Women and girls with disabilities are one of the most vulnerable groups in society.²⁴ They are up to 10 times more likely to experience violence compared to women and girls without disabilities, and women living with disabilities are 2 to 4 times more likely to experience intimate partner violence.²⁵

People living with disabilities are usually not visible in political processes or political leadership and generally experience high levels of discrimination in society. The political landscape in Zimbabwe is male-dominated, and it is harder for women with disabilities to enter politics compared to their abled counterparts. Further, women with disabilities rarely take part in politics or voting.²⁶ Women and girls with disabilities often have limited physical mobility, further constraining their active participation in political and national events.²⁷

In response to these issues, through Spotlight Initiative, UNDP strengthened the capacities of women and girls with disabilities and organisations of people with disabilities (OPDs) to dialogue directly with lawmakers and engage in meaningful discussions around disability-related laws.²⁸ Spotlight Initiative, through local civil society partners, facilitated the participation of women and girls with disabilities and OPDs in consultation sessions to create policies on disabilities and also sensitised government actors on disability issues.

Results

As a result of these efforts, more than 1,200 women and girls with disabilities, as well as representatives of people with disabilities, were trained to participate in national consultation hearings with parliamentarians.²⁹ Training materials included summarised versions of the constitution in braille and audio CDs and DVDs focused on topics such as gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health. Women and girls were also educated on specific laws (e.g., the Constitutional Amendment Bill) and how to participate in policy making.³⁰ As a result, women and girls with disabilities and their representatives attended a public hearing on the “Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment No.2 Bill,”³¹ which focused on allowing persons with disabilities to hold government positions. Women and girls with disabilities and OPDs also prepared and submitted a position paper to the Parliament in July 2020,³² outlining their perspectives and recommendations on representation, political participation and the quota system.³³

In partnership with the nongovernmental organisation, Leonard Cheshire Disability Zimbabwe, 83 women and girls and seven OPDs participated in the national budget hearing held on October 12-16, 2020 across the country.³⁴

“Meaningful participation of women and girls with disabilities in political and public life has been a core principle of LCDZ [Leonard Cheshire Disability Zimbabwe] under Spotlight Initiative. Capacitating women and girls with disabilities to participate in national and subnational decision-making processes and strengthening the capacity of local leadership and community cadres to support this vulnerable group will go a long way in addressing their unique challenges and building a more inclusive society.”

Isabel Chipunza, Project Officer at Leonard Cheshire Disability Zimbabwe

Participating women and men with disabilities advocated and shared their positions with the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Budget, Finance and Economic Development. Their views during the public hearing were documented and formed a position paper that was submitted to the parliament.³⁵ During the budget sessions, individuals with disabilities also urged the committee to honour its commitment of disability inclusion by allocating a sufficient budget for disability-related issues and programmes. Budget allocation issues for people with disabilities were framed as human rights issues, rather than as charitable acts or as medical assistance. They also tackled issues related to disability grants, income tax thresholds, tax rebates and priority areas.

²³ “Hear us too!” How to improve the lives and rights of persons with disabilities in Zimbabwe? (UNESCO, 2020).

²⁴ Amplifying the voices of women and girls with disabilities in Zimbabwe: a comprehensive study (UNESCO, 2020).

²⁵ Spotlight Initiative supports women and girls with disabilities to become financially independent in Zimbabwe (Spotlight Initiative, 2022).

²⁶ Local Governance in Zimbabwe: Inclusion and Participation of Women with Disabilities (Deaf Women Included and Local Development Research and Advocacy Trust, 2023).

²⁷ Disabled women suffer from political exclusion (The Chronicle, 2022).

²⁸ The 2020 Zimbabwe Annual Report, page 6 and 9.

²⁹ Spotlight Initiative supports women and girls with disabilities to become financially independent in Zimbabwe (Spotlight Initiative, June 2022).

³⁰ The 2020 Zimbabwe Annual Report, page 36.

³¹ The Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No. 2) Act (2021).

³² The 2020 Zimbabwe Annual Report, page 9.

³³ Ibid, page 36.

³⁴ Spotlight Initiative supports women and girls with disabilities to become financially independent in Zimbabwe (Spotlight Initiative, June 2022).

³⁵ Ibid.

“As girls and women with disabilities, we want access to loans for projects to sustain our livelihoods. The Government of Zimbabwe should ensure that the budget caters for our economic empowerment, which will enable us to fight poverty and stand against several violations and discriminations we face in society.”

A woman with disability representative in Mount Darwin district in Mashonaland Central province

In collaboration with Leonard Cheshire Disability Zimbabwe and the Federation of Disabled Persons in Zimbabwe, 218 women with disabilities³⁶ were trained to lobby and dialogue with lawmakers in public consultations for the “National Disability Policy.” The National Disability Policy ensures that public places are equipped with disability-friendly facilities and services, such as ramps for wheelchairs and restrooms for persons with disabilities, and increases the availability of communication materials in braille and/or access to sign language interpretation. During consultation sessions for the National Disability Policy in Harare and Central and West Mashonaland, women with disabilities shared firsthand accounts of violence. One of the experiences shared was that of an albino woman with three children. She narrated that due to the colour of her skin and the superstitious beliefs around it, her in-laws did not allow her to touch kitchen utensils, nor was she allowed to do household chores. She also experienced physical violence from her in-laws. A partially-sighted woman recounted that she was not interested in getting married, but had been forced into a marriage by her parents.

The experiences that women with disabilities shared during the consultation sessions were consolidated into an advocacy paper for the National Disability Policy and submitted to the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare. The advocacy paper also underscored legal and administrative interventions to end violence against women and girls with disabilities.³⁷ Critical issues identified in the advocacy and position paper included stronger protections from forced marriage, protections from domestic violence, the right to property, equality and non-discrimination, access to assistive devices and access to medical services, among others.³⁸ Spotlight Initiative also facilitated a session that brought together disability champions and OPDs, Senators from provinces and Parliamentarians, government representatives from the Ministry of Public Service, Labour and Social Welfare and representatives from the Women’s Coalition of Zimbabwe. The event was designed to train the government representatives in employing disability-inclusive language when drafting laws. It was also an opportunity for the Federation of Disabled Persons in Zimbabwe to present the content of the sector’s advocacy paper to the lawmakers.³⁹ All of this work led to the eventual adoption and launch of the National Disability Policy in 2021, a first in Zimbabwe.⁴⁰

Key Elements of Success and Practices for Replication

- **Develop training content and curriculum tailored to the needs of the community.** Using braille, audio and video materials helped equip women and girls with diverse disabilities with the ability to consume knowledge and training products according to their needs.
- **Include marginalised voices and demands in public policy dialogues and position papers.** The strategic focus of the programme on engaging women living with disabilities through concrete discussions on budgets and policies that had relevance to their lives allowed for their experiences of discrimination and lack of inclusion to be shared in a space where productive action could be taken. In terms of programme implementation, this approach not only increased the agency of women with disabilities but was also an effective tactic to advance their interests and recommendations through advocacy papers and lobbying to meaningfully shape policies and laws in the country.

³⁶ The women are from the area of Harare (Epworth and Hopely), Mashonaland Central (Guruve, Rushinga and Shamva), Mashonaland West (Zvimba, Karoi, Makonde and Kariba), Umzingwane, Buhera and Mutasa.

³⁷ The 2020 Zimbabwe Annual Report, page 37.

³⁸ Ibid, page 10.

³⁹ The 2022 Zimbabwe Annual Report Draft, page 36.

⁴⁰ [National Disability Policy \[Zimbabwe\]](#) (June 2021).

Regional and country-level action plans on ending violence against women and girls

1.4 Regional Action Plan for Africa consolidates and streamlines initiatives to eliminate violence against women and girls

Overview

Africa has a high incidence of gender-based violence and one of the highest occurrences of intimate partner violence (33 percent) among women aged 15-49 years old.⁴¹ Further exacerbating the situation, there was a rise in the incidence of gender-based violence during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁴² Child marriage was rampant, with 31 percent of girls aged 20 to 24 married before the age of 18.⁴³ One in four women have undergone female genital mutilation.⁴⁴

Around 65 percent of countries in Sub-Saharan Africa have laws against domestic violence although they are not fully enforced. Additionally, only 37 percent of Sub-Saharan African countries have laws that address physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence.⁴⁵ Only 26 out of 55 African Union Member States have national action plans.⁴⁶

In response to the high levels of violence on the continent, the limitations of laws around ending violence against women and girls and the lack of adequate national action plans, Spotlight Initiative's Africa Regional Programme supported the development of a Regional Action Plan for Africa on Eliminating Violence Against Women and Girls (hereafter referred to as the "Regional Action Plan"). National and regional action plans are roadmaps that detail the strategy for addressing violence against women and girls and also hold the government accountable for its commitments. Developing a regional framework helps guide member states in creating their own national action plans and can also reinforce the importance of member states delivering on their commitments to ending violence against women and girls. A regional framework can also fuel synergies gained through a common action plan and facilitate smooth coordination amongst African Member States.⁴⁷

Results

In close collaboration and consultation with the African Union Commission and UNDP, Spotlight Initiative mobilised stakeholders and facilitated a consultative process to develop the first-ever Regional Action Plan on eliminating violence against women and girls. In 2021, Spotlight Initiative's Africa Regional Programme supported the first consultative session for the Regional Action Plan with diverse stakeholders participating from the African Union, Regional Economic Communities, Member States and civil society organisations.⁴⁸ Conducted virtually, the consultation allowed the participants to share their knowledge and experiences and brainstorm together to identify priorities, interventions and strategies. State budgets and monitoring and compliance were also addressed in the virtual consultation. Discussion results were used as inputs for the Regional Action Plan.

"Such regional platforms provide us with an understanding and evidence of the positive role of supportive partnerships and the need to continue the engagement to ensure the protection of women's rights in the continent. It is thus critical to continuously engage so that we develop the right tools and continue to find solutions together and hold the Member States accountable to implementation of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment instruments."

Victoria Maloka, Acting Director, Women, Gender and Youth Directorate, African Union Commission

Spotlight Initiative's Africa Regional Programme facilitated a regional evidence-based mapping and assessment to determine the status of the implementation of different laws/policies, action plans, financing, and capabilities of states in ending violence against women and girls.⁴⁹ The findings from the mapping and assessment revealed that while ending violence against women and girls-related frameworks, regional strategies and action plans were in place, there were significant implementation gaps that hindered efforts to end gender-based violence.⁵⁰ Gaps that emerged from the assessment included the limited capacity of Regional Economic Communities to coordinate member states in implementing initiatives on ending violence against women and girls, the non-uniformity of policies across member countries, inconsistent and inadequate budget/funding for gender-based violence and a lack of mechanisms to monitor and report on efforts to end violence against women and girls. The findings from the regional evidence-based mapping were also integrated into the Regional Action Plan.⁵¹ Equality Now, a civil society partner, mobilised over 40 members of the Solidarity for African

⁴¹ Violence against women and girls – what the data tell us (World Bank, 2022).

⁴² Gender-Based Violence In Africa During the COVID-19 Pandemic (AUC-WGDD, UN Women, OHCHR and UNFPA, 2020).

⁴³ Gender-based violence (UNFPA East and Southern Africa Regional Office).

⁴⁴ Facts and figures: Ending violence against women (UN Women Africa).

⁴⁵ Gender-based violence (UNFPA East and Southern Africa Regional Office).

⁴⁶ Regional partners develop first Regional Action Plan for Africa on Elimination of Violence Against Women and Girls (UNDP Africa, 2021).

⁴⁷ The 2021 Africa Regional Programme Annual Report, page 33.

⁴⁸ Regional partners develop first Regional Action Plan for Africa on Elimination of Violence Against Women and Girls (UNDP, December 2021).

⁴⁹ The 2020 Africa Regional Programme Annual Report, page 15.

⁵⁰ The 2021 Africa Regional Programme Final Annual Report, page 33.

⁵¹ Regional partners develop first Regional Action Plan for Africa on Elimination of Violence Against Women and Girls (UNDP Africa, 2021).

Women's Rights to gather feedback for integration into development of the Regional Action Plan.⁵² A monitoring and evaluation framework was embedded in the Regional Action Plan to ensure proper monitoring and accountability from duty-bearers. The Regional Action Plan details the coordinated actions, structures, mechanisms, strategies and investments both at regional and national levels to address violence against women and children.⁵³ Ultimately, the policy provides the blueprint for duty-bearers to deliver on their ending violence against women and girls commitments.⁵⁴

In collaboration with the African Union Commission, the Regional Action Plan was validated by stakeholders in a workshop in 2022. The validation workshop brought together 38 representatives (28 females and 10 males) from the African Union Commission's Women, Gender and Youth Directorate, Regional Economic Communities, Member States, civil society organisations and implementing UN agencies.⁵⁵ With the strong presence of the African Union in the partnership, the Regional Action Plan was further refined by aligning it with African Union policies and frameworks. In November 2023, the Regional Action Plan was submitted to the African Union Commission and was adopted by the ministerial segment of the 8th Specialized Technical Committee on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, composed of African Union Ministers in charge of Gender and Women's Affairs.⁵⁶

Key Elements of Success and Practices for Replication

- **Conduct an evidence-based mapping to effectively understand ending violence against women and girls in a given country or region.** The regional mapping and assessment undertaken contributed to understanding the prevalence of violence against women and girls and the gaps in existing policies and implementation. Some of this analysis paved the way for the creation of the first-ever Regional Action Plan.
- **Employ strategies that will consolidate and activate relevant stakeholders to address violence against women and girls in their context.** In this case, the development of a Regional Action Plan provided the policy incentive and framework to mobilise action on this issue. This strategy was particularly important given that nearly 50 percent of the countries in the region did not have national action plans for their work, so this acted as a prompt for countries to focus on the issue domestically.
- **Engage in an inclusive and consultative process when developing a policy.** The development of the Regional Action Plan was a participatory and collaborative process representing major stakeholders across national governments, the African Union, civil society organisations and other regional bodies. This facilitated exchanges amongst key stakeholders and people who have significant first-hand knowledge of the gender-based violence situation in their own countries and could provide relevant recommendations. The participatory process also promoted accountability among key implementers and decision-makers.
- **Embed financial allocations and monitoring mechanisms through gender budgets and evaluation of the plans or policies.** This is vital to ensure interventions can be implemented, as well as to measure the success of implementation, understand gaps and replicate best practices.

⁵² The 2021 Africa Regional Programme Final Annual Report, page 23.

⁵³ Ibid, page 49.

⁵⁴ The 2023 Africa Regional Programme Annual Report Draft, page 44.

⁵⁵ The 2022 Africa Regional Programme Interim Annual Report, page 48.

⁵⁶ The 2023 Africa Regional Programme Annual Report Draft, page 44.

1.5 The National Strategic Action Plan in Trinidad and Tobago supports interagency coordination and delivery of gender-responsive services

Overview

In Trinidad and Tobago, one in three women report having experienced intimate partner violence.⁵⁷ The lifetime prevalence rate among women who have experienced physical, sexual, psychological and/or economic violence is 44 percent in the country.⁵⁸ Despite having legal protections in place, such as the Domestic Violence Act of 1991, the Sexual Offences Act of 2012 and the Children Act of 2012, a comprehensive mechanism and national action plan that responds to the urgent needs of gender-based violence survivors in the country was missing.⁵⁹

Acknowledging this urgent need, through Spotlight Initiative, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women, UNHCR, ILO and PAHO/WHO agencies supported the Gender and Child Affairs Division of the Office of the Prime Minister to revise and introduce the five-year National Strategic Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Sexual Violence (hereafter referred to as the “National Strategic Action Plan”) for the period 2023-2027. The National Strategic Action Plan was rooted in international commitments⁶⁰ and focused on a comprehensive approach through multi-sectoral collaboration to address gender-based violence and its detrimental effects, while enhancing the rights and safety of all women, girls, men and boys.

The National Strategic Action Plan was informed by a baseline review of legislative, policy, programmatic action and local multi-sectoral responses to gender-based violence and sexual violence. This research was conducted by the government in 2015 and involved multi-sectoral stakeholders. In that same year, UN Women started to support the government in building a first draft of a Strategic Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Sexual Violence for the period 2016-2020, based on the baseline study. However, this work faced opposition and resistance from religious groups and did not make legislative progress with the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago. In 2020, Spotlight Initiative and the Gender and Child Affairs Division recovered this project, and reviewed and drafted the National Strategic Action Plan for 2023-2027. Three committees were formed to advance this agenda,⁶¹ and several rounds of multi-stakeholder meetings and consultations were conducted, involving the European Union and UN agencies through Spotlight Initiative, together with civil society, international donor agencies and the private sector. Recommendations emerging from the consultations were incorporated and reflected in the final document and framework. The framework was centred around prevention, protection, prosecution, punishment and effective provision of redress for survivors of gender-based violence, with an intergenerational and inclusive perspective.

Results

Concrete results of the National Strategic Action Plan have not yet been evaluated because the implementation is recent. However, its approval by the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago in early 2023 was a significant achievement. The Gender and Children's Affairs Division's ownership of the plan was instrumental in reaching this milestone, along with the adoption of a strong advocacy and lobbying strategy developed with Spotlight Initiative. The strategy encompassed development partners, major stakeholders in government, including local governments (regional corporations and Tobago House of Assembly) and women's movements to ensure that all were aware of the importance of having the National Strategic Action Plan in place for addressing gender-based violence. A study of the economic cost of family violence in three regions of Trinidad and Tobago was developed by a network of non-governmental organisations and funded by UNFPA in 2022 through Spotlight Initiative. This supported the advocacy strategy and laid the groundwork for an understanding within the government and the private sector of how expensive gender-based violence and sexual violence is for the country and society.⁶² Existing platforms were also leveraged, such as the Inter-Ministerial Committee that coordinates strategies to reduce domestic violence in the country, and government counterparts became allies to execute the advocacy strategy. Among development partners, the British High Commission, the United States Embassy and the Canadian High Commission were engaged and became part of the advocacy efforts through diplomatic notes to the Government. Additionally, the general public, especially adolescents and youth, were made aware of the importance of the plan and engaged in social media campaigns through memes and other tools. The advocacy strategy also addressed opposition, notably from faith-based civil society organisations, by engaging in continuous interaction and discussions with these stakeholders. This ensured the appropriate handling of resistance or delays, ultimately facilitating the plan's approval.

⁵⁷ PAHO Trinidad and Tobago builds capacity to respond to gender-based violence under the Spotlight Initiative (Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization, 2021).

⁵⁸ *Intimate Partner Violence in Five CARICOM Countries: Findings from National Prevalence Surveys on Violence Against Women* (Caribbean Development Bank and UN Women, 2020), page 16.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ This includes the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The plan also focused on strengthening interagency policy and advocacy efforts. It derives its objectives from seminal sources, such as the UN General Assembly.

⁶¹ The three committees formed to advance the agenda included a national steering committee headed by the Minister of Social Development and Family Services, an operational steering committee and an inter-ministerial committee.

⁶² *A Study of the Economic Cost of Family Violence In Tunapuna/Piarco, Mayaro/Rio Claro And Tobago* (Network of NGOs of Trinidad and Tobago for the Advancement of Women, 2022).

The approval of the National Strategic Action Plan positioned gender-based violence high on the national list of priorities and provided a comprehensive, costed and time-bound plan with a strong monitoring framework and operational plan. It also provided a blueprint for the State and its agencies to ensure the transfer and sustainability of Spotlight Initiative. This was based on lessons learned and good practices from the programme's implementation, integrating existing interventions by state agencies and civil society partners.

Another significant achievement was the inclusion of a gender-responsive and inclusive approach. The National Strategic Action Plan recognised that people with disabilities, trafficked people, sex workers and migrants/displaced people are highly vulnerable to gender-based violence and sexual violence. It also recognised the nature of their vulnerabilities linked to gender identity, social and economic status and age. These considerations were reflected in explicit measures and services within the framework of the National Strategic Action Plan.

Key Elements of Success and Practices for Replication

- **Adopt a multi-stakeholder participatory approach to develop a comprehensive and actionable strategic action plan with budget lines and an operational framework outlining activities and result metrics.** The multi-stakeholder consultative process in Trinidad and Tobago contributed to the development and delivery of the National Strategic Action Plan with a costed operational framework. It also included activities and results aligned with Spotlight Initiative, contributing to the sustainability of the programme.
- **Identify and leverage national champions of policy reforms to implement effective and successful advocacy strategies.** After unsuccessful attempts to move forward with a strategic action plan on gender-based violence and sexual violence, it finally came to fruition with the support of Spotlight Initiative. A national champion was found in the Division of Gender and Children's Affairs, who supported the review of the plan (first drafted in 2015) and promoted the advocacy strategy until its final approval in 2023.
- **Build on and leverage past work and initiatives, such as those related to policy and law changes which often require long-term efforts and funding.** Spotlight Initiative recovered the National Strategic Action Plan through heightened political will and funding support from the Trinidad and Tobago government. The National Strategic Action Plan's approval highlighted the importance of consistent, long-term efforts and sustained, adequate funding to advance past work more effectively.

