



Pillar 3: Prevention

Under Pillar 3, Spotlight Initiative supported diverse prevention strategies that have an explicit focus on addressing and transforming harmful social norms, beliefs and attitudes to end violence against women and girls. Spotlight Initiative invested in changemakers and innovative approaches to prevention, engaged social and traditional media to deliver persuasive behaviour change messages, and partnered with diverse stakeholders to develop and institutionalise curricula and launch campaigns to socialise norms that promote gender equality (including engaging with young people, parents and community members, teachers, men and boys, traditional leaders, government representatives, political representatives and community leaders).

The good and innovative practices below include a wide range of examples from different regions. The first set of case studies highlight the importance of mentorship and the creation of safe spaces in Malawi and Zimbabwe. Interventions implemented in Trinidad and Tobago, Papua New Guinea, Tajikistan, and Vanuatu showcase the positive impact of curriculum-based education initiatives. Case studies from Uganda and Tajikistan explore the benefits of facilitating community dialogues. Finally, programmes from Kyrgyzstan, Argentina, Ecuador, El Salvador, and Trinidad and Tobago describe the results and promising practices associated with designing campaigns and creative communication efforts.

Mentorship and safe spaces



3.1 The Safe Space Mentorship Programme in Malawi supports women and girls to raise their voices and challenge social norms

Overview

In Malawi, the high prevalence of gender-based violence and traditional practices, such as child marriage and sexual initiation rituals, is a reflection of entrenched patriarchal social norms and belief systems. Malawi is among the top 20 countries with the highest percentage of women aged 20-24 who were married before they reached ages 15 and 18 (47 percent), and more than 80 percent of the villages in the southern region still practice harmful initiation rituals.¹⁰⁰ Thirty four percent of women aged 15-49 have experienced physical violence, and 21 percent have experienced sexual violence at some point in their lifetime.¹⁰¹

To address the high rates of violence against women and harmful practices in the country, UNFPA through Spotlight Initiative supported the Safe Space Mentorship Programme, a good example of interagency cooperation and engagement of civil society. Through a Training of Trainers model in collaboration with civil society organisations, the programme trained young women as mentors to implement a community building approach to support girls and other young women to challenge harmful social norms and behaviours that perpetuate violence against women and girls. Launched in 2019, the Safe Space Mentorship Programme (hereafter referred to as “Safe Spaces”) is a 6-month programme with weekly mentorship sessions, where girls and young women (aged 10-24) learn life skills, increase their awareness of sexual and reproductive health and rights and strengthen their capacity to report violence and promote positive social norms.

Results

Since its implementation, the Safe Space Mentorship Programme has supported 435 women to become mentors across the six districts in the country.¹⁰² Through 473 safe spaces, the programme has directly reached 37,292 young women and girls as mentees, who are now agents of change in their communities.¹⁰³ Results from this approach are significant and diverse, ranging from: strengthened awareness of women and girls’ rights, greater access to justice after abuse, improved women and girls’ physical and mental health and well-being and more leaders and decision-makers protecting women’s and girls rights.

¹⁰⁰ Initiation rituals or puberty rites are ceremonies of transition from childhood into adulthood, where some of them include harmful practices such as genital operation (female genital mutilation/cutting for girls, circumcision for boys), genital manipulations, learning adolescent/adulthood skills, enforcing social norms (for instance, obedience of wives to husbands) and forced or encouraged heterosexual intercourse.

¹⁰¹ *Ending violence against women and girls in Malawi: What do we know?* (UNICEF Malawi, 2020).

¹⁰² The 2020 Malawi Annual Programme Report. The six districts where Spotlight Initiative was implemented are: Dowa, Machinga, Mzimba, Nkhatabay, Nsanje and Ntchis.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

One of the most significant impacts of the programme was ending child marriage. This occurred through an emphasis on promoting mindset shifts among mentees. These efforts have resulted in zero teenage pregnancies and child marriages during COVID-19 among mentees.

Safe Spaces yielded other important impacts. Overall, 6,152 girls returned to school as a result of the influence of the safe spaces, including 3,836 girls who were mentees. This was achieved through regular awareness campaigns led by mentors and mentees and by engaging school principals to join forces in their advocacy efforts. Some mentees improved their academic results while being part of the programme, while 968 girls sought secondary education. Mentors and mentees identified and referred 13,564 cases of gender-based violence, ranging from sexual, physical, emotional and economic abuse. In the Traditional Authority Sitola, of the 270 gender-based violence cases identified through fifteen safe spaces, five perpetrators were convicted, and 72 cases of child marriage were stopped.

These spaces also facilitated girls' access to services. A total of 30,979 girls accessed various gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health and rights services since the programme's inception.¹⁰⁴ Successful elements that contributed to this result included the fact that the programme was part of the service referral pathway, and that there was a strong collaboration with the police, the community victim support units, one-stop centres and community groups, such as mother groups. This ensured coordination across the gender-based violence support pathway from end-to-end.

The Safe Spaces' enabling approach was another key element which strengthened results. In 2021, public outcry and advocacy by mentees led to the successful arrest and prosecution of an abusive traditional chief in the Mzimba district who sexually assaulted a 16-year-old girl. The Traditional Authorities attempted to cover up the incident, but mentors and mentees sought justice and worked together with other community structures until the village chief was convicted with a prison sentence. The programme also provided advocacy opportunities for young women and girls to engage with traditional leaders and community members and gain their support on ending violence against women and girls and promoting gender equality. Overall, 3,406 meetings were conducted with 17,998 leaders and influential persons, which helped resolve 4,285 gender-based violence cases emanating from Safe Spaces. More than 1,455 young girls and women took on leadership roles as a result of the programme, underscoring an important mindset shift in communities.¹⁰⁵

Another successful component was the Community Development Fund.¹⁰⁶ This fund was connected with the Safe Space Mentorship Programme and designed to help mentees who were gender-based violence survivors rebuild their lives. Designed as an interest-free loan model, mentees had six months to return the funds. In the Traditional Authority Sitola, 198 mentees were survivors of gender-based violence (19 percent of the total) and received funds totalling approximately 26.4 hundred Malawian kwacha, or 16 USD, each. Most of the girls paid the loan back, ensuring the sustainability of the Fund beyond Spotlight Initiative. To support the sustainability of the programme, mentors and mentees from fifteen spaces also started a community gardening project, whereby the returns from sold crops revert to these safe spaces to help finance ongoing costs.

The successful results of the Safe Space Mentorship Programme approach have been recognised by civil society organisations who have replicated the programme in other communities, contributing to its sustainability beyond Spotlight Initiative.¹⁰⁷

Key Elements of Success and Practices for Replication

- **Use a comprehensive approach to programming in a country, connecting different interventions and existing government, public and community services to increase impact.** The Safe Space Mentorship Programme connected with other Spotlight Initiative interventions and community structures in the country and fostered changes across different pillars as a result. For example, the programme contributed to strengthening quality services (Pillar 4) through its connection with services providers and by strengthening referral pathways. It contributed to increasing justice as traditional leaders contributed to resolving gender-based violence cases reported by mentors and mentees. Their engagement with traditional leaders also contributed to new leadership positions supporting social norms (Pillar 3).
- **Ensure local ownership to contribute to a programme's continuity and sustainability beyond the funding cycle.** By leveraging existing structures, engaging with traditional chiefs and being registered with district youth offices, the Safe Spaces model was officially included as an integral part of the referral pathways for gender-based violence survivors and was recognised as a key reference point for any youth work related to violence against women and girls. This strategy created a feeling of community ownership of safe spaces and contributed to its replicability by civil society organisations in other communities, going beyond Spotlight Initiative.

¹⁰⁴ The 2023 Malawi Final Programme Report Draft.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ The Community Development Fund is similar to the Survivor Fund and is also implemented by Spotlight Initiative in Malawi. The difference between the funds is that the Community Development Fund only applies to Safe Space Mentorship Programme mentees.

¹⁰⁷ The 2023 Malawi Final Programme Report Draft.



3.2 Peace Huts in Zimbabwe address gender-based violence locally and collectively

Overview

In Zimbabwe, violence against women persists as a significant human rights violation. Recent data reveals alarming statistics: 39 percent of women reported enduring physical abuse since reaching 15 years of age,¹⁰⁸ and 12 percent experienced sexual violence between the ages of 15 and 49.¹⁰⁹ Rural women and girls continue to experience high levels of gender-based violence due to prevalent social norms and harmful practices.¹¹⁰ Data has shown that domestic violence cases have further increased since the COVID-19 pandemic.¹¹¹

Through Spotlight Initiative, UN Women in Zimbabwe introduced a community-based model (hereafter referred to as the “Peace Hut Model”) in 2021.¹¹² The Peace Hut Model was developed in Manicaland province in the country. Drawing on the cultural significance of a “hut” or a home in the Shona and Ndaou culture, the model brought together community members to engage in discussions that helped find solutions to end violence against women and girls. The main goal of the model is to inspire communities to “act as a family” to address gender-based violence issues collectively.¹¹³ Initially designed to educate chiefs and traditional leaders about gender-based violence and early marriages within communities, the Peace Hut Model extended its reach to also involve families in putting an end to violence against women through facilitated dialogues and conversations.

Results

In the Mutasa district within Manicaland, Spotlight Initiative in Zimbabwe supported more than 15 Peace Huts.¹¹⁴ A meeting would be convened by the village head (also known as mutape) and attended by members of the village development committees, faith-based organisations and community based groups.¹¹⁵ Spotlight Initiative’s implementing partner in Zimbabwe, Women’s Action Group, trained community members on gender-based violence, the gender-based violence referral pathway and gender issues. Once trained, these “gender champions,” who are identified by Women’s Action Group, actively collaborate with the mutape to coordinate and conduct Peace Hut meetings. The meetings also included discussions on harmful practices, sexual and reproductive health rights, as well as gender stereotypes and norms contributing to violence against women and girls. As part of the intervention, participants actively engaged in the #PeaceBegins@Home campaign.¹¹⁶ The main emphasis was on increasing awareness and understanding of conflict resolution and violence prevention. Additionally, the campaign offered psychological support and facilitated referrals to mitigate and address instances of gender-based violence and violence against women as they arose.

Testimonials from Peace Hut participants shared positive experiences related to enhancing their knowledge and understanding of nuances associated with gender-based violence and mentioned how they emerged from the process as dedicated advocates of change.¹¹⁷

“Before joining the programme, I was a reserved person. I didn't like crowds and I never had sympathy for others. I was only concerned about what was going on in my life. Today, I have the confidence to socialise with other people in my community. I learnt that sharing your problems lightens the burden and it has the potential to set you free. I am now a loving and compassionate person. I now help other women facing GBV, and I get feedback from the people I have helped. At peace huts, we discuss and solve issues such as domestic violence and peace. In our community, we have recorded cases of rape, where survivors are mostly young girls.”

A resident and ward advocate in Mutasa district

The Peace Hut Model also focused on transforming negative perceptions of masculinity and successfully involved men and boys in the community in meaningful discussions about gender-based violence. It inspired men to assume the role of gender champions within their communities.

¹⁰⁸ 2019 Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey.

¹⁰⁹ Ending Violence Against Women (UN Women Africa).

¹¹⁰ Gender Based Violence (UNFPA Zimbabwe).

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² The 2021 Zimbabwe Annual Narrative Report, page 40.

¹¹³ The 2023 Zimbabwe Annual Narrative Report Draft, page 29.

¹¹⁴ Peace Huts initiative helps girls stay in school (The Manica Post, July 2023).

¹¹⁵ Spotlight Initiative Newsletter (UN Zimbabwe, August 2021).

¹¹⁶ The “Peace Begins in the Home” International Movement was initiated in 2017 by the women's division of the Global Peace Foundation. It is a proactive effort to promote peace and harmony within families. This global movement uses awareness campaigns and programs to enhance the well-being of families, aiming to cultivate a culture that nurtures healthy and joyful family dynamics. By prioritising the family unit, the movement ultimately strives to contribute to the establishment of peace at the core of every society.

¹¹⁷ Spotlight Initiative Newsletter (UN Zimbabwe, August 2021).

Traditional leaders in other Spotlight Initiative provinces viewed the model as replicable in their areas, based on the positive experience in the Manicaland province. To facilitate this, the Spotlight Initiative programme developed a toolkit to support replication, scalability and sustainability of the model.¹¹⁸

Key Elements of Success and Practices for Replication

- **Design culturally relevant and community-oriented programmes that engage a range of different community stakeholders, such as elders, village committee members and families.** Adapting the Peace Hut Model to the Zimbabwean context, based on lessons learned from Malawi, helped increase the relevance of the initiative and its effectiveness. Specifically, using a concept so intrinsic to the local culture made the awareness raising process accessible and engaging for the people participating.
- **Create a gender champions' network as a way to leverage diverse people's sphere of influence in the community.** In the case of the Peace Hut Model, it brought more awareness and built momentum for ending violence against women and girls in the community. By recognising the relevance and importance of "family as a unit" and involving different members from within the household, generational knowledge and awareness could be built as well as the right tools to deal with conflict and gender-related issues. All of these elements can contribute to successes in the community and have the potential to sustain these efforts moving forward.

Education

3.3 The CHAMP community-based approach in Trinidad and Tobago advances the rights of adolescents

Overview

In Trinidad and Tobago, close to 11 percent of women between 20-24 years are married before the age of 18, increasing their chances of experiencing domestic violence and dropping out of school.¹¹⁹ Early marriage contributes to poorer economic and health outcomes, including a severe impact on adolescent mental health. Adolescent girls may also be more susceptible to gender-based violence and have an increased risk of HIV.¹²⁰ Without adequate access to information on comprehensive sexual education, barriers associated with accessing sexual, reproductive health and rights services and the availability of support mechanisms, girls' well-being and growth can be undermined. This underscores the need to build and deliver programmes that adopt a holistic approach, targeting different facets of their lives and also involving boys in efforts to promote gender equality.

Recognising adolescents as a pivotal target demographic, the Collaborative HIV Prevention and Adolescent Mental Health Programme (hereafter referred to as "CHAMP") was implemented by Spotlight Initiative in Trinidad and Tobago through UNFPA and the Family Planning Association of Trinidad and Tobago. CHAMP engaged with young individuals and their adult caregivers in three regions of the country.¹²¹ Through an ambassador model, community leaders were identified and trained to facilitate dialogues at different levels. An after school initiative was also implemented through a network of civil society organisations for greater youth outreach. While the programme placed a significant emphasis on education, it also incorporated intervention components, including enhancing the individual skills of youth and their parents, improving family dialogue processes and leveraging community resources. It established a bi-lingual gender-based violence hotline to provide psychological support to families and young people in the country. Furthermore, the programme focused on providing comprehensive information to entire families within the target communities, covering topics such as puberty, family violence, sexuality and HIV prevention. It also addressed youth social problem-solving abilities, such as recognition of health risks and signs of mental and psychological distress, as well as assertiveness and refusal training in handling sexual peer pressure.

Results

CHAMP positively impacted adolescents and young people and improved their ability to identify sexual health risks and to reject unwanted sexual advances. Moreover, it helped young people become more assertive when facing sexual peer pressure. Around 25 community leaders were trained as ambassadors, and more than 200 young people and caregivers participated in the programme. The after school online programme expanded its reach through the extensive civil society network in the country and impacted a wide range of diverse youth. The programme supported young people to have sensitive or difficult conversations with adults, build stronger relationships between youth and their families and create a safe space.

¹¹⁸ The 2023 Zimbabwe Final Report Draft, page 29.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Gender-based Violence, HIV, and Key Populations in Latin America and the Caribbean: Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados Country Report (LINKAGES, April 2018), page 4. The Linkages across the Continuum of HIV Services for Key Populations Affected by HIV 5-year project was the largest global project dedicated to key populations.

¹²¹ CHAMP was implemented in the three regions of Tunapuna-Piarco, Mayaro-Rio Claro and Tobago.

In addition, the hotline resulted in increased awareness and knowledge on sexual, reproductive health and rights across a diverse range of adolescents and adults, as well as strengthened access to services. The complementary bi-lingual helpline successfully connected those seeking support with social workers who provided information and referrals to available services. Furthermore, CHAMP ambassadors, youth and persons living with HIV accessed the services through the hotline. Ultimately, calls to the hotline increased by approximately 25 percent from its inception until the end of the programme.

“What we found was that when we did the training with the ambassadors, we got calls from the ambassadors themselves who wanted more support. So we've not only created or developed a community programme, but we had an impact on the ambassadors' lives themselves. Moreover, when the ambassadors themselves implemented [the programme] in communities, we actually had spikes and calls during that time as well.”

Ava Rampersad, Executive Director of Family Planning Association of Trinidad and Tobago

Key Elements of Success and Practices for Replication

- **Design accessible, straightforward and community-based youth initiatives with a clear engagement strategy to improve knowledge and awareness and access to services among the target group.** CHAMP demonstrated a clear potential for scale through its ambassador and training model and the after school programme. Offering a helpline for people to access real-time support made the awareness raising efforts practical and enhanced access to critical services and information.
- **Leverage and strengthen existing relationships to access available resources and build on skill sets amongst the target group.** CHAMP was successful in recognising the importance of optimising existing relationships and available resources by prioritising the enhancement of knowledge and skill sets among community leaders. Through the provision of specific information and skills, including the preparation for sessions on topics such as sexually transmitted infections and relationships, CHAMP strengthened ambassadors' ability to meaningfully engage and communicate with their communities.
- **Facilitate connections amongst ecosystem stakeholders to improve service delivery and demand generation efforts.** Beyond its standalone efforts, CHAMP served as a crucial link, establishing connections with grassroots organisations and community stakeholders. This resulted in increased community interactions with diverse service delivery and referral mechanisms and supported individuals to proactively address their health needs.



3.4 The Parenting for Childhood Development Programme in Papua New Guinea shifts behaviours and norms that perpetuate violence against women and children

Overview

Children commonly experience physical or verbal abuse in Papua New Guinea. Roughly 27 percent of parents/caregivers punish their child, with over 50 percent of them admitting to having called their child names, such as “stupid” or “lazy,” and 66 percent having shouted, yelled or screamed at their child.¹²² Neglect of children, also prevalent in the country, is another form of abuse experienced by children. Disabled and adopted children tend to be more prone to neglect. Under these circumstances, 70 percent of children reported feeling scared and in pain.

The power dynamics within a household, wherein parents have more power than their children, may be used to defend the use of physical and verbal aggression in the name of “child-rearing.” Much in the same way, when men resort to violence to instil fear or assert their authority over their spouses, power inequity prevails.¹²³ Further exacerbating the problem, children who are exposed to violence at home can suffer from trauma, which may increase the risk of either experiencing or perpetuating violence in their adult life. This, therefore, creates a cycle of abuse.¹²⁴

Employing a gender-transformative approach to try to break this cycle of abuse, Spotlight Initiative launched the Parenting for Childhood Development programme in Papua New Guinea. Under the Social Behavior Strategy Change strategy¹²⁵ and in collaboration with UNICEF as the lead implementing UN agency, the Parenting for Childhood Development programme covered 6 provinces in the country: National Capital District, Morobe, Eastern Highlands, Western Highland, Jiwaka and Madang.¹²⁶

Faith-based organisations and civil society organisations conducted 6 to 12 week training workshops for parents and caregivers in the community. The training consisted of six modules covering diverse topics related to children’s development and behaviour, as well as tips on how to take better care of children and employ discipline without physical punishment or emotional abuse. Participating parents received a certificate after completing the training.

Results

A total of 23,315 parents and caregivers were reached by the Parenting for Childhood Development programme in 2023, impacting 16,977 children. In addition, a pool of community-based parenting facilitators were trained to scale the programme to other communities. As of 2022, there were 418 community parenting facilitators (199 male and 219 female)¹²⁷ trained to promote positive parenting in the community and conduct follow-ups with other parents.¹²⁸

An evaluation study of the programme conducted in 2021 showed significant and positive changes in parenting behaviour. The study revealed that a greater proportion of parents had not hit their children in the past three months compared to before the programme (8 percent pre-test versus 77 percent post-test). Another important finding of the study was that fathers exposed to the programme started to play and spend more time with their children (40 percent pre-test versus 81 percent post-test).¹²⁹ Additionally, data collected by implementing partners also reflected changes in parents’ behaviour, including placing greater value on their child’s education and health.¹³⁰

¹²² Evaluation of the UNICEF Parenting For Child Development (P4CD) Programme In Papua New Guinea (UNICEF, 2021).

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Pathways between childhood trauma, intimate partner violence, and harsh parenting: findings from the UN Multi-country Study on Men and Violence in Asia and the Pacific - ScienceDirect (ScienceDirect, 2017).

¹²⁵ Strategy to address behaviour that perpetuates violence against women and children through campaigns that educate people on the negative impact of violence via traditional and digital media.

¹²⁶ The 2023 Papua New Guinea Annual Report Draft, page 7.

¹²⁷ 200 of the community facilitators are school teachers, demonstrating that the programme can be adopted by the education sector.

¹²⁸ The 2022 Papua New Guinea Interim Annual Report, page 29.

¹²⁹ Evaluation of the UNICEF Parenting For Child Development (P4CD) Programme In Papua New Guinea (UNICEF, 2021), page 42.

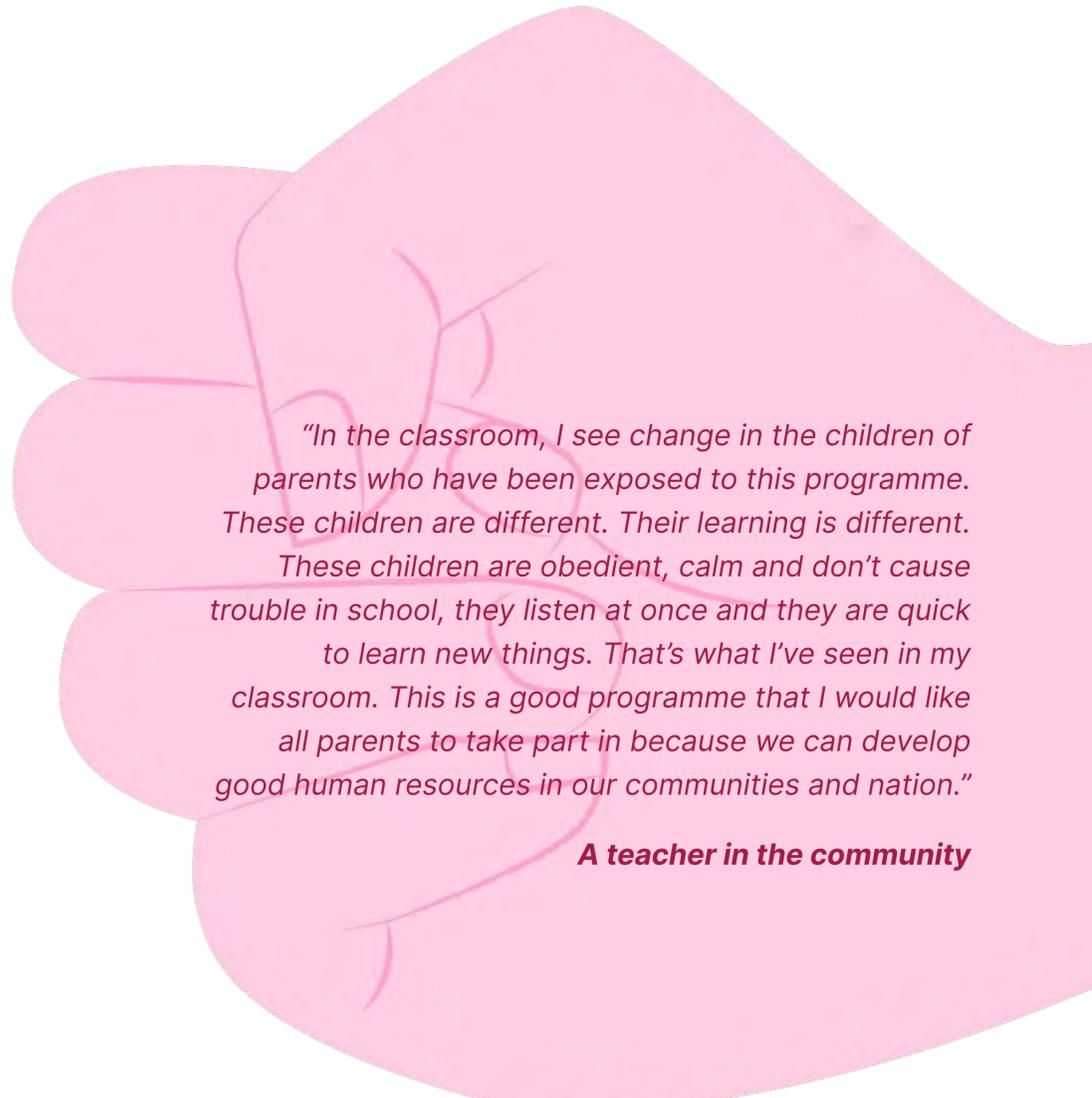
¹³⁰ The 2023 Papua New Guinea Annual Report Draft, page 28.

Testimonies from programme participants also aligned with evaluation findings:¹³¹



"I hit my children when I discipline them; sometimes, when they make me very angry, I use branches from a tree to hit them. Now, I have learned that you can discipline children in a loving and caring way without physically hurting them."

A father of 3 children



"In the classroom, I see change in the children of parents who have been exposed to this programme. These children are different. Their learning is different. These children are obedient, calm and don't cause trouble in school, they listen at once and they are quick to learn new things. That's what I've seen in my classroom. This is a good programme that I would like all parents to take part in because we can develop good human resources in our communities and nation."

A teacher in the community

The evaluation study also found that the Parenting for Childhood Development programme contributed, directly or indirectly, to a reduction in intimate partner violence as parents who underwent the training reported less violence in their households after the programme.¹³²

"This positive parenting programme has shown that it is an important intervention to reduce violence within families and also to change gender social norms, or to end violence against girls and women."

Paula Vargas, UNICEF Chief Child Protection

The Spotlight Initiative programme ensured the continuation and sustainability of the programme through local ownership. For example, Papua New Guinea's National Office of Child Family Services has assigned a child protection officer within its Parenting for Child Development Programme Unit to act as the focal person for the Parenting for Childhood Development programme. Additionally, a national network aimed at training local Parenting for Childhood Development facilitators/trainers was created. A provincial training programme is also in the pipeline, intended to reach more communities across the country.¹³³

Key Elements of Success and Practices for Replication

- **Engage in a community-based approach to increase a programme's reach, uptake and sustainability.** The Parenting for Childhood Development programme in Papua New Guinea built the capacities of local partners that knew the context and had a deeper understanding of the communities. Working with local civil society and faith-based organisations also deepened the programme's sustainability because they intend to continue this work.
- **Localise and contextualise training modules and materials to impart learning more effectively.** The programme ensured that the training materials and modules were aligned with the local culture and thus the topics were easily understood and grasped by the parents who participated in the training. Community facilitators also extended an open and collaborative way of communicating rather than judging the parents, which made them more receptive to adjusting their parenting approach.
- **Develop partnership frameworks and support with local ownership that will allow the government and local organisations to run the programme in the future.** Having the National Office of Child Family Services, for instance, take ownership of the programme is an effective method to achieve sustainability.

¹³¹ Participant testimonials drawn from two sources: [Positive Parenting program preventing violence and creating positive change in households](#) (UNICEF Papua New Guinea, August 2023). [Young Father of three commits to Positive Parenting](#) (UNICEF Papua New Guinea, July 2023).

¹³² [Evaluation of the UNICEF Parenting For Child Development \(P4CD\) Programme In Papua New Guinea](#) (UNICEF, 2021), page 49.

¹³³ [The 2023 Papua New Guinea Annual Report Draft](#), page 27.

3.5 A comprehensive sexual and gender-based violence complaints mechanism for school children and local communities in Tajikistan

Overview

Culturally viewed as an acceptable form of discipline, physical violence against children is a common practice in Tajikistan.¹³⁴ Parents, caregivers and institutions can resort to corporal punishment or aggression (i.e., physical beating with twigs or belts, denial of access to food until household chores are completed)¹³⁵ as a way to instil discipline. This type of abuse is most prevalent among children aged 5-9 years old (75 percent), and the rate among boys (51 percent) and girls (49 percent) is nearly equal.¹³⁶ Culturally, parents value and prefer a male child, which leads to a variety of negative consequences for girls, such as sex-selective abortions, early marriage and a lack of support for a girl's education, which contributes to early school dropout. Sexual abuse committed by a family relative, a friend, or a stranger is also experienced by Tajik boys and girls.¹³⁷

To combat violence against children, under Spotlight Initiative, UNICEF in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Science and Good Neighbors International launched a child protection programme.¹³⁸ The programme aimed to prevent abuse and violence against children in schools, homes and communities by educating and engaging children, schools/teachers and parents on child protection issues.

Results

The programme undertook training consisting of topics such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, positive parenting and discipline, the leave no one behind principle, sexual and gender-based violence, and issues related to violence against children. The programme also set up complaint mechanisms in schools to provide a platform for students to report abuse and institutionalise an accountability system.

Initially introduced to 45 schools, the complaint mechanism was eventually scaled up and implemented in 347 schools. The complaint mechanism was rolled out in schools through the establishment of a drop box and a hotline (usually the mobile phone of the mentor). A complaint review committee, composed of a representative from the community (also known as *mahalla*), a mentor, teachers, active parents, select members of the parents-teachers association and the local police, was set up and trained on how to handle complaints with confidentiality and ensure the safety and interest of the child. The school complaint mechanism was linked with the district's Child Rights Unit that was tasked to work closely with the school and the complaints review committee to monitor and follow up on cases of violence against children.

Good Neighbors International directly interfaced with communities and conducted trainings with members of the community. For example, 58 mentors learned how to handle school complaints, and 29 trainers built their skills and knowledge on the module, "Ways and methods of positive upbringing without violence and discrimination," in turn training 1,250 teachers (877 women and 373 men) to directly talk to parents about positive discipline through the parent-teacher associations. Parents who underwent the training shared how helpful the sessions were in improving their relationship with their children. Overall, the integration of the positive parenting module in schools led to greater uptake and receptivity, an increased level of understanding of children's needs among children, parents and teachers, and reduced violence incidence.¹³⁹

"They learned about how the children feel when they face violence. Their attitudes changed towards their children and now they started paying more attention to the child's needs and education...and providing [the children with] quality time."

Project Coordinator for Good Neighbors International

"We have conducted focus group discussions, and the stakeholders were reporting that violence, including harassment [and] bullying amongst children, was reduced. Also [corporal disciplinary actions by] parents [were reduced]."

Saidahmad Ikromov, UNICEF

"My school has changed not only into a place where I can study, but it also makes me feel comfortable."

A 16-year-old female student

¹³⁴ Safe Schools And Communities: Combating Violence Against Children with Focus on Girls in the Families, Schools and Communities. 2022 Endline Assessment Report, page 4.

¹³⁵ [Ending violence against children](#) (UNICEF Tajikistan).

¹³⁶ Safe Schools And Communities: Combating Violence Against Children with Focus on Girls in the Families, Schools and Communities. 2022 Endline Assessment Report, page 4.

¹³⁷ [Child Abuse in Tajikistan: Authorities Promise to Increase Penalties](#) (Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting, 2021)

¹³⁸ The child protection programme was implemented in the following areas: Rudaki, Vose, Yodov, Isfara, Hisor, Baljuvon, ShakhriNAV and Kulob City.

¹³⁹ Safe Schools And Communities: Combating Violence Against Children with Focus on Girls in the Families, Schools and Communities. 2022 Endline Assessment Report, page 16.

As of 2023, 1,437 reports were received from children (703 boys and 734 girls). The majority of the complaints¹⁴⁰ concerned corporal punishment by teachers, bullying, and girls who were being prevented from going to school.¹⁴¹ An example of a resolved case was shared by a female student:

"My mother and I live in my uncle's house. My uncle provides our life. My uncle won't let me go to school. He always says, 'Who needs girls' education? Better to stay at home and do household chores.' But I am very interested in reading and want to continue my education. I ask you to help me. I also want my uncle not to know that I am complaining, otherwise he will punish me and my mother."

A 9th grade female student

Upon reading the complaint, the committee members, composed of the deputy director of the school, class teacher, head of the community (mahalla) and school mentor, immediately visited the girl's house to talk with her uncle, emphasising that a lack of education would be detrimental to her future. The girl's uncle was convinced, and she has since regularly attended school.

In addition to setting up the formal complaints mechanism at school, the programme also trained 52 school mentors and 1,170 student council members to educate them about sexual and gender-based violence and violence against children. In turn, they utilised what they learned from their training and went on to conduct outreach to 99,284 parents and teachers in their schools and wider community.

Additionally, through Spotlight Initiative, small grants (up to 300 USD) were provided for projects that increase awareness on violence against children and sexual and gender-based violence. One of the grant recipients disseminated information brochures on violence against children within 35 pilot schools, reaching 3,500 children, teachers, and parents. Another grant recipient engaged television and radio shows to discuss violence against children and sexual and gender-based violence. It is estimated that 5.8 million Tajiks (58 percent of the population) were reached through the TV show, while 3 million (30 percent of the population) were reached through the radio show.

The Ministry of Education and Science issued a decree mandating the setup of complaint mechanisms in schools. The decree ensured all schools would fully commit to adopting the complaint mechanism, including after the closure of the Spotlight Initiative programme, and demonstrated the ministry's ownership of the programme.

Key Elements of Success and Practices for Replication

- **Forge strategic collaborations and partnerships across UN agencies, the government and civil society actors that are working on and committed to ending violence against children.** These collaborations support the political will and commitment to addressing child abuse holistically at home and in schools. In this case, Spotlight Initiative through UNICEF, together with the local stakeholders such as the Ministry of Education and Science, schools, Good Neighbors International and parents, were all committed to the programme.
- **Partner with stakeholders that can implement and scale the initiative locally.** In Tajikistan, parent-teacher associations were an avenue to reach more parents in the community. The project also trained and worked with the student councils, which furthered awareness raising about violence against children within schools. These are mechanisms that scaled and sustained the project.
- **Ensure laws and policies guarantee children's rights to a life free from abuse and support institutional processes to ensure access to legal protections.** The policy recommendation that all schools set up a complaint mechanism supported greater uptake of safety mechanisms for children in schools. Through Spotlight Initiative and with the support of UNICEF, amendments to the Law on Child Rights are also being drafted in Tajikistan to strengthen child protection. These amendments have been submitted to parliament for review.

¹⁴⁰ About 41 cases have been resolved by the complaint review committee.

¹⁴¹ The 2023 Tajikistan Final Cumulative Report Draft, page 34.

3.6 Secondary school curriculum revision in Vanuatu mainstreams sexual and reproductive health and rights information in in- and out-of-school settings

Overview

Addressing gender equality and violence against women and girls are urgent issues in Vanuatu. 60 percent of women aged 15-49 have experienced physical and or sexual violence in their lifetime, and 48 percent of women aged 15 have experienced non-partner physical or sexual violence or both. Furthermore, 32 percent of women believe that a man is justified in beating his wife if a bride price¹⁴² has been paid.¹⁴³ Discriminatory gender stereotypes and patriarchal attitudes regarding the roles and responsibilities of women and men in society result in harmful practices, such as underage marriage, teenage pregnancies and bride prices and accusations of witchcraft, many of which have led to violence or femicide. Moreover, information about sexual and reproductive health for adolescents is not widely available in Vanuatu. In a 2019 online survey of young people aged 15-24 in Asia and the Pacific, only 28 percent of respondents indicated that their school taught them about sexual health very well or somewhat well, with cultural and religious beliefs, taboos and stigma cited as key barriers to effective sexual health and rights education. Some parents have prevented their children from attending a sexual health session, while some teachers have indicated discomfort in teaching the material. Given these challenges, successful comprehensive sexuality education programmes require building support and shared ownership among a range of stakeholders, including students, parents, teachers and school administrators, as well community and religious leaders.

In order to address these challenges, through Spotlight Initiative, UNFPA worked with relevant government ministries and stakeholders to develop and revise curricula on Comprehensive Sexuality Education and Family Life Education (hereafter referred to as “CLE/FLE”) to meet international standards.¹⁴⁴ Comprehensive sexuality education positively impacts a range of adolescent sexual and reproductive health outcomes, such as attitudes supporting gender equity, knowledge of sexual and reproductive health and rights, communication skills and sexual and emotional well-being.¹⁴⁵

Results

In Vanuatu, the Spotlight Initiative programme engaged in diverse efforts to build curricula and learning tools that raised awareness in both in- and out-of-school settings for adolescents. The programme provided support to the Ministry of Education and Training’s Curriculum Development Unit to create and update the Comprehensive Sexuality Education and Family Life Education curriculum, along with Teachers’ Guides for school years 7 to 12. The curriculum had nine components and focused on human rights, sexual health and well-being, gender, relationships, communication and decision-making, reproductive health and ending violence against women and girls.¹⁴⁶ Through a multi-sectoral and coordinated approach, the CLE/FLE initiative was jointly led by the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Youth, which better enabled policy implementation from the national level to area council levels.¹⁴⁷

To increase the successful implementation of the new curriculum, 25 “master teachers” were trained to support the curriculum roll-out within school years 11 and 12, and 18 trainers from National Youth Council and youth organisations were trained on the out-of-school modules. These trainings were crucial to the effective delivery of the curriculum as they provided guidance on adapting content to different cultural contexts. In addition, the Ministry of Education and Training instituted a dedicated staff member to build capacity and advocate for girl child protection across the agency.

The results have been significant, as the coordinated approach won Vanuatu first place for their implementation plan out of other Pacific countries at the Pacific Island Nations on Transformative Agenda Phase II Planning and Family Life Education Regional Conference (2022).¹⁴⁸

In 2021, the CLE/FLE curriculum was fully implemented in Vanuatu, with more than 2,000 in-school and 290 out-of-school 11th and 12th grade students participating in comprehensive sexuality education programmes.¹⁴⁹ By engaging both in- and out-of-school programmes in two languages (English and French), this initiative reached a wide range of adolescents and contributed to positive outcomes for adolescent sexual and reproductive health and gender equality.

¹⁴² A bride price is a custom in Vanuatu in which a groom or his family gives money to the bride’s family in exchange for her hand in marriage. *Child, early and forced marriage legislation in 37 Asia-Pacific countries* (Inter-Parliamentary Union and World Health Organization, 2016), page 131.

¹⁴³ *Vanuatu* (UN Women Asia and the Pacific).

¹⁴⁴ *Out-of-School Comprehensive Sexuality Education (Guidelines) launched in the Pacific: And now to roll out the curriculum in Samoa and Vanuatu* (United Nations, 2021).

¹⁴⁵ Goldfarb, E. S., & Lieberman, L. D. (2021, January 1). *Three Decades of Research: The Case for Comprehensive Sex Education*. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, Vol. 68, pp. 13–27.

¹⁴⁶ The resources have been made available in both English and French to facilitate content delivery and meet the needs of a range of students.

¹⁴⁷ *Family Life Education To Be Taught in Schools* (Daily Post Digital Network, December 24, 2022).

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ The 2021 Vanuatu Annual Narrative Programme Report.

Key Elements of Success and Practices for Replication

- **Foster national and local ownership of a comprehensive sexuality education curriculum by engaging different ministries.** By creating a multi-stakeholder mechanism to oversee the comprehensive sexuality education and family life education programme, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Youth in Vanuatu joined forces, maximised resources and successfully extended the reach of the programme beyond school settings.
- **Conduct training of trainers for master teachers that are responsible for comprehensive sexuality education rollout for greater scale.** The training of trainers model of delivery helped scale the comprehensive sexuality education and reach, allowing students to make more informed decisions about their sexual health and well-being. Training of trainers programmes should also provide critical guidance on addressing cultural sensitivity and adapting content to different cultural contexts.
- **Develop both in- and out-of-school programmes that integrate the principle of leaving no one behind and ensure at-risk youth receive critical sexual and reproductive health information.** Out-of-school comprehensive sexuality education and family life education programmes play a crucial role in reaching individuals who may not have access to formal education settings and providing essential information and skills beyond the traditional classroom setting. Moreover, the provision of materials in both English and French also enhanced accessibility and inclusivity.



Community Dialogues



3.7 The Council of Traditional Leaders in Africa commits to ending violence against women and girls in their institutions

Overview

Traditional leaders have been recognised as key agents of change and influence in international development initiatives. In Uganda, traditional leaders and the institutions that they are a part of are tasked with preserving and promoting their cultural heritage.¹⁵⁰ Therefore, Spotlight Initiative in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development adopted an innovative strategy to engage cultural and religious leaders as key influencers for gender equality.¹⁵¹

Through Spotlight Initiative in Uganda, UN Women and the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, along with selected traditional leaders, launched the Council of Traditional and Cultural Leaders in Africa (hereafter referred to as “COTLA”) in 2020. COTLA was positioned as a pan-African movement led by progressive traditional leaders¹⁵² and is anchored around the idea of *Obuntubulamu* in Uganda, which emphasises the notion of a “shared humanity.”¹⁵³ More than 90 individuals, including cultural leaders, government, development agencies, civil society representatives, academics, opinion leaders and women and girls, attended the dissemination event. Leaders from 14 cultural institutions¹⁵⁴ committed to integrating ending violence against women into their institutional agendas.¹⁵⁵

Results

The Council was institutionalised based on successes and lessons learnt from other Spotlight Initiative countries and regions on engaging traditional leaders. As active advocates for gender transformative practices, the Council of Traditional and Cultural Leaders in Africa focused on transforming discriminatory cultural and normative practices that promoted child marriage and female genital mutilation in Africa¹⁵⁶ through improved legal frameworks and public policy efforts and by intensifying grassroots-led movements that involve diverse community actors and women’s groups. Furthermore, COTLA collaborated and aligned with regional organisations, such as the African Union, to maximise their impact on gender-equitable outcomes.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁰ USAID Partners with Cultural Leaders as Community Change Agents (USAID).

¹⁵¹ *Engaging Faith-Based and Religious Leaders in the Spotlight Initiative* (Spotlight Initiative, October 2021).

¹⁵² *Ibid*, page 28.

¹⁵³ Remarks at Launch of the Council of Traditional Leaders of Africa (COTLA), Uganda Chapter (UN Uganda, November 2020).

¹⁵⁴ The cultural institutions include Buganda, Bunyoro, Tooro, Alur, Busoga, Karamoja, Inzhu ya Masaaba, Obusinga Bwa Rwenzururu, Obudingya Bwa Bamba, Ker Kwaro Acholi, Obukama bwa Buruli, Obwakamuswaga bwa Kooki and Bugwe.

¹⁵⁵ The 2019-2023 Uganda Annex D Draft, page 28.

¹⁵⁶ *Engaging Faith-Based and Religious Leaders in the Spotlight Initiative* (Spotlight Initiative, October 2021).

¹⁵⁷ The 2021 Global Annual Narrative Progress Report, page 127.

Some of its initial results included its public commitment to eliminating violence against women and girls and expressing interest to review customary laws that will enable justice for victims and survivors of gender-based violence at the local levels.¹⁵⁸ The Council of Traditional and Cultural Leaders in Africa committed to the following 5 areas of action in 2021:

- Champion the cause of gender equality and positive masculinity through intensified community engagements.
- Double their efforts toward achieving SDG 5 by intensifying advocacy initiatives and policy dialogues to accelerate the end of child marriage and female genital mutilation/cutting by 2030.
- Support and intensify grassroots-led movements against female genital mutilation and other harmful practices by holding regular dialogues (at least once a month) with community actors and women's groups.
- Conduct a gender-responsive review of customary laws that address access to justice for victims/survivors and punishments for perpetrators by 2023.
- Support governments to enact and enforce laws in African countries that protect women and ensure no perpetrator evades justice in our kingdoms and chiefdoms.¹⁵⁹

At the end of 2021, in partnership with the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda, the Council of Traditional and Cultural Leaders in Africa organised and executed a high-profile national symposium,¹⁶⁰ which was officiated by the Minister of State for Culture. It was attended by over 150 key stakeholders, including cultural leaders, senior religious members, government counterparts and international delegates. The event was successful in generating consensus on country-level strategies that are critical to addressing and eliminating gender-based violence.¹⁶¹ Additionally, it effectively aligned with the regional efforts of the African Union in building stronger partnerships with faith-based organisations. One of the speakers, Mr. Joselle Obbo, the King of Tieng Adhola cultural institution, emphasised that while cultural norms and traditional practices are frequently cited as contributing factors that negatively impact women's and girls' rights, positive aspects of culture can also be harnessed to advance gender equality.^{162,163}

"We have structures that spread to the lowest family units and our centuries old values that promote humaneness."

Acholi Paramount Chief Rwot David Achana II

Furthermore, COTLA supported the translation of the Cultural Leaders' toolkit into three local languages (Luganda, Rutooro and Alur) in Uganda.¹⁶⁴ This enhanced interactions with in- and out-of-school youth to strengthen their sexual and reproductive health and rights and provided support to survivors of violence. The distribution of the toolkits was facilitated by 18 male champions representing six cultural institutions (Buganda, Busoga, Tooro, Karamoja, Acholi and Alur).

Continuing its collaboration with the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda, Spotlight Initiative in Uganda coordinated the production of 3,740 copies of Pastoral Letters, conveying messages centred on five themes related to sexual and reproductive health and rights.¹⁶⁵ These, along with additional measures, effectively reached around 500,000 congregants. The incorporation of gender equality messages into sermon plans for church and mosque services has significantly improved the ability of religious institutions to collectively tackle violence against women and girls, violence against children and other harmful practices within the communities they serve.

¹⁵⁸ Commitment of the Council of Traditional Leaders of Africa (COTLA) towards the elimination of violence against women and girls (UN Women).

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Video of the national symposium (live streamed on YouTube on November 29, 2023).

¹⁶¹ The 2021 Global Annual Narrative Progress Report, page 127.

¹⁶² Launched: The Council of Traditional Leaders in Africa Uganda Chapter's strategic documents (Cross Cultural Foundation of Uganda, November 2023).

¹⁶³ Govt ask cultural leaders to fight GBV, teenage pregnancies (Monitor, November 2023).

¹⁶⁴ The 2021 Uganda Annual Narrative Programme Report, page 25.

¹⁶⁵ Country Results Report 2022: Advancing Sustainable Development in a Period of Unprecedented Shocks (UN Uganda, 2023), page 24.

Key Elements of Success and Practices for Replication

- **Align with local cultures and engage traditional leaders to actively combat violence against women and girls.** Spotlight Initiative’s strategic partnership with the Council of Traditional and Cultural Leaders in Africa showcased a culturally sensitive model of change that acknowledged and respected local cultures and traditions. It embraced and celebrated the concept of *Obuntubulamu* in Uganda, which is core to how people organise and live their lives. Moreover, it recognised the contribution and significance of traditional leaders to drive intergenerational change while promoting key principles of gender equality and ending violence against women and girls. The initiative actively involved leaders from 14 cultural institutions who committed to ending violence against women and girls through their religious and traditional agendas.
- **Forge and strengthen strategic partnerships with regional organisations to meet and amplify the programme’s objectives.** COTLA’s success is largely linked to its collaboration and alignment with regional organisations, particularly the African Union and the Inter-Religious Council of Uganda. By connecting with regional bodies and leveraging its experience with the national symposium, the Council of Traditional and Cultural Leaders in Africa maximised its impact on gender-equitable outcomes.
- **Mobilise and support religious leaders to disseminate tailored messaging around gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health and rights to diverse target groups.** The Council of Traditional and Cultural Leaders in Africa has been successful in scaling its reach and expanding its influence through congregations. With approximately 500,000 congregants reached, community-based intervention tools and sermon plans have supported religious institutions to collectively address gender-based violence and female genital mutilation. Similar efforts can be made in other Spotlight Initiative regions to mobilise religious leaders and deliver gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health and rights messaging that resonates with a variety of target groups. The potential for replication lies in the adaptability of the approach to ensure cultural relevance and broad societal reach and support the potential for greater impact.



3.8 Religious leaders as champions of gender equality in Tajikistan

Overview

Faith-based or traditional leaders, chiefs, traditional healers, elders, council members and similar figures are highly influential in the community and as such, command authority in promoting beliefs, norms and practices that either legitimise or stop violence against women and girls.¹⁶⁶

Given their important role in Tajikistan, through Spotlight Initiative, UNFPA worked to form partnerships with religious leaders to eliminate violence against women and girls. In partnership with Tajikistan’s State Agency Committee on Religious Affairs and the Regulation of Traditions, Celebrations and Ceremonies, the “Healthy Lifestyle” programme, which trained Muslim religious leaders (also known as imams) on issues related to sexual and gender-based violence, was implemented.

Results

Training topics under the Healthy Lifestyle programme centred around women’s rights, gender stereotypes, domestic violence, roles and responsibilities of married couples and other family members, responsible parenting, prevention of early marriage, conflict prevention in the family, sexual health and reproductive health and prevention of HIV and sexually transmitted infections. In alignment with the training, a handbook was developed for religious leaders that contained topics around the Healthy Lifestyle programme and how these topics are aligned with verses from the Quran. This handbook served as a useful resource that religious leaders could easily consult as they performed their roles, particularly those related to conflicts within the family, violence against women and girls, and when working with communities. Through this strategy, the training also intended to help religious leaders gain a deeper understanding of verses within the Quran that speak to gender equality.

Overall, 540 religious leaders, including religious officials and rural leaders, were trained. After participating in the training programme, religious leaders had greater awareness of sexual and gender-based violence issues. For instance, when speaking in the mosque, the imams involved in the training were more likely to speak on topics related to gender equality.

“[Religious leaders] were speaking more about the prevention of domestic violence during their activities with the population, compared to those who did not participate. And they were also putting a lot of focus on increasing the role of women and girls and strengthening or improving the role of women and girls and the family.”

Bakhtiyor Yunuszoda, Committee on Religious Affairs and the Regulation of Traditions, Celebrations and Ceremonies

¹⁶⁶ Learning from practice: Engaging faith-based and traditional actors in preventing violence against women and girls (UN Women).

Additionally, religious leaders in rural areas started seeking advice from the Committee on Women and Family Affairs on domestic violence issues. One imam shared that after he participated in the training, he learned how to identify cases of domestic violence and better handle these. Specifically, he began to probe more deeply into women's accounts and not only consider a situation from the husband's point of view.

"Before the training, I admit, I was actually very one-sided. I would only speak to one side, whoever came to me for the complaint...I would listen less and speak more... But after the training, I have learned to listen to the complaints and... speak to both sides and identify the root causes. Now I am doing more investigative work because I want to know why this [conflict] happened and how...I could help to address the causes of these [family] conflicts. It was a change of perspective."

An imam from Hissar city, Tajikistan

As a result of the religious leaders being better equipped to handle family issues, other family members, such as parent in-laws, also began to ask for guidance and support to resolve domestic conflicts.

Armed with a greater understanding of gender equality due to the training, this imam went further to champion women's access to education.

"It's very important from the point of view of Islam and the regulation [law] for girls to continue their education. For example, after the 9th grade, it is the choice of the parents and the student to continue. But they should actually continue, not just to 11th [grade], but also until university. It is very important for women...to have a profession and education."

An imam from Hissar city, Tajikistan

According to the Tajik Family Planning Association, the implementing non-governmental partner of the initiative, one of the key wins of the programme was the increased focus on sexual and reproductive health and rights and gender-based violence topics during "Friday Prayer." Eight Friday Prayer sessions were dedicated to sharing sexual and reproductive health rights and gender-based violence information by the Committee of Religion, Regulation and Traditions and Ceremonies (the session number had increased from an initial 5 prayer sessions). Another success was the strong collaboration between the Committee of Religion, Regulation and Traditions and Ceremonies and the Committee on Women and Family Affairs. The programme allowed for both agencies to work together on issues related to gender-based violence.

The Healthy Lifestyle Programme also resulted in the development of a pre-marriage handbook for couples. This handbook was seen as valuable as many Tajiks marry as young as 18 years old (when many are not yet financially stable, forcing many men to work abroad and leave women at the homes of their in-laws). In many cases, this has led to family conflicts and domestic violence. The pre-marriage handbook featured topics related to the roles of husband, wife and family members within the Islamic belief system (i.e., the woman has the right to decline if she does not want to cook, or the woman has the right to be respected and to be treated as a partner) and promotes a culture of non-violence, reproductive rights, family planning and responsible parenthood.¹⁶⁷ It also encouraged young couples to reflect on their readiness for marriage.

Key Elements of Success and Practices for Replication

- **Create culturally relevant trainings by using and speaking a language that resonates with communities of interest.** Connecting issues related to violence against women and girls and sexual and gender-based violence with religious verses in the Quran supported greater uptake since it was more closely aligned with religious leaders' beliefs. In doing so, the training established more natural links to gender equality and non-violence in the family.
- **Create multi-sector partnerships with groups that have a past history of work with religious leaders.** UNFPA had already established relationships with religious leaders in Tajikistan, prior to Spotlight Initiative. The Committee of Religion, Regulation and Traditions and Ceremonies had also been trained on sexual and gender-based violence and had already been working on mainstreaming messages of gender equality within the teachings of imams prior to Spotlight Initiative's launch in Tajikistan. Leveraging and building upon this past work and network was a critical factor of success.
- **Develop sustainability mechanisms to keep up the momentum of the initiative.** A training of trainers is planned for the future to ensure the continuity of the programme and reach. In addition, the Tajik Family Planning Association has secured additional funding to continue this work of engaging religious leaders. The Committee of Religion, Regulation and Traditions and Ceremonies has also developed an internal strategy to ensure partnership with religious leaders is sustained.

¹⁶⁷ The 2023 Tajikistan Final Cumulative Report Draft, page 32.

Campaigns and Creative Communications

3.9 “Spring in Bishkek” mobile game educates players about women's rights in Kyrgyzstan

Overview

Violence against women and girls is widespread in Central Asia. In Kyrgyzstan, six out of ten women have experienced some form of violence. In addition to high levels of domestic violence (7,665 cases were reported in 2021), bride kidnapping is also highly prevalent in the country.¹⁶⁸ Despite child marriage being illegal, the act of abducting young girls and officiating forced marriages continues to be a problem.¹⁶⁹ One in eleven girls aged 15-19 years in Kyrgyzstan are married, and in 2019, close to 118 criminal cases of bride kidnapping (also known as *ala-kachuu*) were being investigated in the country.¹⁷⁰

Recognising the importance of using innovative, creative and digitally enabled solutions to engage and raise awareness with youth, especially girls, a mobile game called “Spring in Bishkek”¹⁷¹ was co-funded by Sigrid Rausing Trust and the Soros Foundation Kyrgyzstan and delivered by UNSDG with the support of UNICEF under Spotlight Initiative.¹⁷² Using Communication for Development strategies, the game was developed by the Open Line Foundation and showcased respectful model behaviours for youth, particularly teenagers, as well as addressing the issue of *ala-kachuu*.

Results

Through engaging with the game, players gained awareness of gender discrimination and the harmful practice of child marriage and were able to exercise agency and choice in determining the fate of the video game characters as the game unfolded.¹⁷³ The events in the game were inspired by real-life events and actual cases and immersed users in the role of a university student. The players acted as the sole lifeline for a friend whose family neglected to intervene after her abduction.¹⁷⁴ The original target group of the game was young girls, however, the strong messaging around seeking assistance when confronted with a difficult situation was found to resonate with all demographics of players, including boys.¹⁷⁵

Outperforming the original target of 25,000 downloads, the game was downloaded over 160,000 times on Google Play¹⁷⁶ by the end of 2021.¹⁷⁷ The average user rating was 4.9 stars, and it was downloaded by users of diverse age groups in Kazakhstan, Russia, Ukraine and other countries. The social media reviews of the game found that players engaged with the game for two primary reasons: first, due to its focus on the important issue of forced marriage, and second, because of the valuable information presented.¹⁷⁸

One of the major achievements of the game was its ability to positively transform users’ perceptions, attitudes and behaviours towards gender equality. Anecdotal evidence collected during evidence review meetings highlighted that three girls were able to prevent forced marriages after playing the game.¹⁷⁹ Girls who played the game expressed a greater sense of autonomy, an increased sense of agency and a greater ability to express themselves.¹⁸⁰ Testimonials from players illustrated how much they learned from the game and how it has made them feel positive about their own lives.¹⁸¹

“Thank you so much, this is the most incredible and soulful game, it causes so many contradictory emotions, but gives you the feeling of real warmth, love and hope. You made this world a little bit better, can’t wait to see more stories from you! A special WOW to the format of educational notes and tests, which allows you to earn the game currency, this is a very useful and easy-to-use feature!”

Anonymous game reviewer #1

¹⁶⁸ UNODC Marks the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence in Kyrgyzstan (UNODC).

¹⁶⁹ The ongoing fight against child marriage and ‘bride kidnapping’ in Kyrgyzstan (UN, February 2022).

¹⁷⁰ I never said “YES” (UNICEF Europe and Central Asia, November 2019).

¹⁷¹ The Spring in Bishkek website.

¹⁷² The 2020 Kyrgyz Republic Annual Narrative Programme Report, page 24.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Case study on Spring in Bishkek (Rights Colab).

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ The game can be downloaded from the Google Play Store on Android devices.

¹⁷⁷ The 2020 Kyrgyz Republic Annual Narrative Programme Report, page 24.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ The 2021 Global Annual Progress Report.

¹⁸⁰ The 2020-2023 Kyrgyzstan Final Programme Narrative Report Draft, page 35.

¹⁸¹ Reviews from players of Spring in Bishkek (Scafander Games).

“A very interesting game with useful advice which you will remember your whole life. Thank you so much, developers, I learned a lot from this game. I will know my rights now and will know what to do in these situations.”

Anonymous game reviewer #2

“This is just unbelievable! I read all chapters in one breath and I’m still very impressed. Very grateful to those who participated in creating this novel, you are amazing. Thank you so much for writing about these insanely important things, raising awareness about it and, of course, for supporting the girls who had to live this nightmare for real. ♥♥♥”

Anonymous game reviewer #3

Key Elements of Success and Practices for Replication

- **Build gamified educational content that helps improve knowledge and attitudes towards violence against women and harmful practices.** Incorporating educational content on harmful practices, such as bride kidnapping and forced marriage, into a mobile game was an effective strategy to impart valuable knowledge and skills to youth and at-risk girls in an accessible and enjoyable way. This innovative approach created a much stronger impact than initially planned and was successful in democratising access to educational content and resources.
- **Promote games that support girls to reject forced marriages.** “Spring in Bishkek” went beyond a virtual experience and inspired real-world actions that defied stereotypes and addressed an important gender-based violence issue in the country. By letting girls imagine different situations and solutions, the game equipped them with the skills to voice their concerns about forced marriages. Boys who played the game were also educated on how they could stop these harmful practices and be part of the solution. Finally, “Spring in Bishkek” defies stereotypes that only boys play digital or mobile games.
- **Scale up an innovative video game approach and extend its application to other socio-economic issues faced by women and girls.** The success of the game led to the creation of another app-based game called the “Mystery of Sary Kol.”¹⁸² The Open Line Foundation, supported by UNICEF through the Spotlight Initiative in collaboration with a team of international developers, authored and developed the game.¹⁸³ The game’s main objective was to offer a space for girls to envision, make choices and experience independence. In just over two years of its release, it has been downloaded more than 40,000 times.¹⁸⁴

3.10 The #YoMeOcupo campaign in Argentina sparks conversations on men’s household responsibilities

Overview

In Argentina, unpaid care and domestic work is the largest sector in the overall economy, making up 15.9 percent of the Gross Domestic Product.¹⁸⁵ Similar to other economies, up to 75 percent of these tasks are performed by women.¹⁸⁶ The care economy crisis has worsened after the COVID-19 pandemic as the burden of unpaid care increased due to lockdowns. The long-term effects of this disproportionate care burden on women include lower productivity rates and economic employment opportunities for women.¹⁸⁷

Understanding and acknowledging the value of unpaid care and domestic tasks, UNFPA through Spotlight Initiative in Argentina launched the #YoMeOcupo (translated as #ITakeCareOf) campaign which sought to challenge men to take responsibility for household chores.¹⁸⁸ The goal was to recognise and redistribute women’s care load to improve domestic interactions and improve women’s overall quality of life.

Results

The campaign used a video titled *Los Ayudadores*¹⁸⁹ (translated as “The Helpers”) to make the mental load associated with planning and executing domestic tasks more visible. The video depicted women feeling saturated and fatigued with their domestic responsibilities, including childcare, cleaning, shopping for groceries and featured a group of men stepping in to “rescue” them from these responsibilities. In addition to the video, the campaign was active on various social media networks including X (also known as “Twitter”) and developed creative tactics to engage men in domestic work.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸² The *Mystery of Sary Kol* website.

¹⁸³ *Games for change: a mobile game from Kyrgyzstan is helping to break gender stereotypes* (Spotlight Initiative, October 2023).

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ *The Value of Care: A Strategic Economic Sector A Measurement of Unpaid Care and Domestic Work in the Argentine GDP* (Ministry of Economy Argentina, 2021), page 3.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ *Campaña “Yo me ocupo”: por varones menos ayudadores y más responsables* (Unidiversidad, November 2020).

¹⁸⁹ *Los ayudadores - Campaña #YoMeOcupo* (Spotlight Initiative, video on YouTube). (in Spanish)

¹⁹⁰ *#YoMeOcupo: la campaña que le habla a los varones para que se hagan cargo de las tareas domésticas* (Clarín, November 2020). (in Spanish)

The *Los Ayudadores* video has been viewed more than 170,000 times on YouTube since its launch in November 2020. In terms of social media engagement, one of the Twitter posts sharing the video received 1,775 likes and was reposted over 1,300 times.¹⁹¹ The campaign used creative humour to demonstrate how men do not automatically assume domestic responsibilities and need to be told what they should be doing around the house.¹⁹² The video used ironic phrases, such as “Tell me and I’ll do it” and “If you don’t tell me, I won’t know. I’m not a fortune teller,” to highlight the mental load borne by women whereby they have to plan and manage tasks even at home.¹⁹³

Furthermore, it challenged the notion that men assuming care responsibilities should be seen as a sign of “affection” and “attention,” as opposed to something they should be organically contributing to. The campaign's messaging stated that “Being a helper is not enough, nor is waiting for them to ask you”. This was a simple and effective message to target and overcome “micromachismos,” or subtle notions of masculinity and male domination.¹⁹⁴

"If from a young age I've been taught that I can relax with the remote control while my sisters handle household chores, it ingrains the belief that my time holds more value than theirs, simply for my own convenience."

A member of the Institute of Masculinity and Social Change

The campaign was covered by various media outlets, such as *Unidiversidad* and *Clarín*, and a podcast called “FOCO” discussing the importance of care work was also released. As a result, there was a heightened discourse on recognising women’s care burden in the country.

Key Elements of Success and Practices for Replication

- **Use a creative and humorous campaign-based approach to challenge traditional notions of masculinity and the gendered division of labour.** The campaign effectively used humour and clear messaging to engage men on sharing care and domestic responsibilities with women at home. It challenged stereotypes by presenting a lighthearted and impactful narrative that encourages men to reconsider their roles within the household and contribute more equitably to care work.
- **Harness the power of social media, particularly Twitter and YouTube, to achieve extensive outreach and engagement.** The online success was complemented by positive media coverage that underscored the importance of the campaign and contributed to its external validation and success. These efforts amplified the campaign's reach, sparking valuable conversations and reinforcing the importance of addressing gender disparities and norms in care and domestic work.
- **Design digital and multimedia campaigns to reach urban populations and target groups.** The #YoMeOcupo campaign is highly scalable and has direct applicability to other urban geographies targeted by Spotlight Initiative. The creative concept can be easily reproduced across diverse cultural contexts and regions. The campaign’s potential for scalability can expand its impact and contribute to the broader, global conversation about gender roles, domestic responsibilities and the importance of recognising and redistributing care work.

¹⁹¹ A viral [Twitter post](#). (in Spanish)

¹⁹² [Campaña “Yo me ocupo”: por varones menos ayudadores y más responsables](#) (Unidiversidad, November 2020). (in Spanish)

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

3.11 A multi-initiative strategy to prevention in Ecuador using a social-ecological approach

Overview

Entrenched patriarchal and sexist norms reproduce and amplify gender-based violence. The majority of women in Ecuador (65 percent) have experienced some form of gender-based violence during their lifetime.¹⁹⁵ To address the significant rate of violence against women and girls, Spotlight Initiative in Ecuador adopted an ecological approach, which promotes a holistic set of interventions at the social, community, family and individual spheres.¹⁹⁶ An ecological approach allows for an understanding of the multi-causal and intersectoral nature of violence, as well as the identification of risk factors and their relationships in the community and the social, cultural and historical dimensions of the problem. This comprehensive understanding of violence against women and girls has enabled prevention strategies to contribute to healthy, peaceful and diverse communities with zero tolerance for violence against women and girls.¹⁹⁷ Three initiatives led by UNFPA under Spotlight Initiative stood out in terms of innovative approaches that led to significant results and successful national scaling: the campaign *#EseTipoNo* (translated as *#ThisTypeNo*), the mobile application *Juntas* (translated as “Together”) and *Yo Desafío mi Masculinidad* (translated as “I Challenge my Masculinity”) programme.

First, the nation-wide campaign *#EseTipoNo* was developed to challenge stereotypes and socio-cultural practices that justify gender-based violence, while providing information on protection systems, promoting healthy non-violent masculinities and advancing gender equality.¹⁹⁸ Through a consultative process with key stakeholders,¹⁹⁹ Spotlight Initiative and its implementation partner²⁰⁰ designed innovative actions based on human rights and gender equality approaches, contemplating intercultural and intergenerational differences, as well as people with disabilities. An online survey and three focus groups with women and girls were conducted to ensure the relevance and impact of the messages among the target audience. Aligned with the principle of leave no one behind, the campaign was broadcasted in Spanish, Kichwa and Ecuadorian sign language.

Second, following an ecological approach, Spotlight Initiative partnered with *Corporación Nacional de Telecomunicación* (translated as the “National Telecommunications Company”) to update their mobile application *Juntas*, which was created in 2015 to prevent gender-based violence. Through this partnership, Spotlight Initiative aimed to complement the *#EseTipoNo* campaign with the redesigned *Juntas* tool so the public could access information on gender-based violence, seek help and feel supported when facing or at risk of experiencing gender-based violence. Relunched in June 2023 with new functionalities and an improved user experience, the *Juntas* app allowed users to create a network of trust and protection for women, which could be activated in risk situations through the panic button.²⁰¹ In addition, it presented research and information on gender-based violence topics and included a list of service providers for users to directly call the police emergency number (ECU911). Communication with key stakeholders, such as the Ministry of Women and Human Rights and Police Services, ensured that service provider information and contacts remained up-to-date.

To complement the promotion of healthy non-violent masculinities, Spotlight Initiative and its implementing partner²⁰² supported a training programme targeting male youth in six cantons of Ecuador.²⁰³ With a proprietary methodology and digital platform, *Yo Desafío mi Masculinidad* discussed men’s roles in society, non-violent forms of masculinity that support a healthy environment for all, and how to deal with their peers when confronting violent, sexist behaviour.

Results

#EseTipoNo campaign was implemented between November 2021 and November 2022 and reached 10 million people in Ecuador using a multi-channel approach, including television, radio, digital and social media channels and in-person interventions, such as flashmob and theatre plays. A key partnership with DirectTV²⁰⁴ resulted in the campaign being broadcast free of charge, and it quickly spread across the region, reaching 7 million people across 13 Latin America countries. Although the campaign was officially closed in November 2022, some partners are still leveraging its content. For example, Cinemark²⁰⁵ broadcasted the campaign free of charge in all its cinema halls in Ecuador during the 2023 “16 Days of Activism” event to end violence against women.

¹⁹⁵ Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos, 2019.

¹⁹⁶ Ferreto & Incháustegui. Ecological Model for a life free of gender-based violence. Conceptual proposal. National Commission to Prevent and Eradicate Violence against Women. Mexico, 2011.

¹⁹⁷ The 2020 Ecuador Annual Programme Report, page 14.

¹⁹⁸ The *#EseTipoNo* campaign website. (in Spanish)

¹⁹⁹ The consultative process involved the former Secretariat of Human Rights (current Ministry of Women and Human Rights), civil society organisations and the European Union.

²⁰⁰ Up Brand.

²⁰¹ There has been some concern with the use of panic buttons from a functionality perspective, as technology may become obsolete or software upgrades may be needed to keep it active. Fully relying on panic buttons as a safety precaution may also preclude people from researching other avenues for safety. In addition, the design of these features are often linked to less common types of abuse, such as violence or rape from strangers, when the most common type of abuse occurs from an intimate partner. Technology solutions that are developed should always take a holistic approach to addressing the most common type of violence.

²⁰² Sendas Foundation.

²⁰³ Azogues, Chone, Cuenca, Morona, Napo and Portoviejo.

²⁰⁴ DirecTV is an American multichannel video programming distributor based in El Segundo, California.

²⁰⁵ Cinemark is an American cinema chain with a strong presence in North and Latin American countries.

The relaunch of the *Juntas* app with Spotlight Initiative's support took place six months after the massive #EseTipoNo campaign, and had a significant impact on its dissemination. The total number of downloads during the first month of the relaunch was double the same period when the app was first launched in 2015. As of November 2023, a total of 1,431 app downloads have been recorded across the Apple and Google Play stores. Recognised as a unique and innovative gender-based violence prevention tool in Ecuador,²⁰⁶ the application has been a valuable resource, not only for women and men seeking support and information, but also for service providers and duty-bearers. As shared by one member of the National Telecommunications Company, after its relaunch, police officials began using the app in order to access available referral services, such as shelters. This led to conversations with the Ecuador Police Service, who are currently interested in collaborating more closely with the app. Demographic data on the services most frequently searched for and how many times the panic button was pressed provide valuable data points to inform more effective responses that can be adopted by key stakeholders, such as the Ministry of Women and Human Rights.

Yo Desafío mi Masculinidad was implemented between January and April 2022 and trained 70 youth in healthy non-violent masculinities. It also included the development and implementation of six projects by participants in their communities, with an estimated reach of more than 200 youth.²⁰⁷ This was followed by the final campaign organised by Spotlight Initiative, which reached 1.3 million people.²⁰⁸ According to several participants, the approach of bringing together youth from different cantons enriched the discussions and raised awareness about the different levels of socio-cultural norms surrounding sexism in Ecuador. Difficult but necessary conversations linked to the emotional side of this topic were also facilitated. One participant highlighted that the training programme gave him a chance to self-reflect more deeply.

"How do I make sure that whatever I might have done, whatever things and jokes I said, how do I make sure that somehow that happens less and less often? Because I also think stopping it is difficult... But can I make it less often?"

A 27-year-old training participant

The digital platform and training content of *Yo Desafío mi Masculinidad* were recently transferred to a university that will sustain the initiative and offer it free of charge to its students and the public.²⁰⁹

Key Elements of Success and Practices for Replication

- **Adopt a holistic and interconnected set of prevention strategies to promote broader impact.** The Spotlight Initiative programme in Ecuador's ecological approach in developing prevention strategies recognised the need for a mass public awareness campaign, such as #EseTipoNo, to be followed by a longer-lasting gender-based violence prevention tool (*Juntas* app) that can support the public at any time. It also recognised the need to work with men at an individual level to change mindsets and behaviours through the promotion of positive masculinity.
- **Seek strategic partnerships that wish to support awareness raising campaigns and leverage their influence and channels to increase the campaign's reach.** For example, partnership with DirecTV, Ecuador women's football league, and the government of Cuenca all supported the campaign's extensive reach, through free spaces on television channels, cinema halls and banners.
- **Leverage partners' existing resources to support the sustainability of initiatives.** Partnering with the National Telecommunications Company to update their mobile application, for instance, allowed for the *Juntas* app to last well beyond the Spotlight Initiative. The content and digital platform for *Yo Desafío mi Masculinidad* was transferred to a university that already had the digital means to incorporate this training into their curriculum.

²⁰⁶ The *Juntas* app was internationally awarded in Germany by GIZ (2016) and in Spain by *Fundación Corresponsables* (2016), as well as in the country by *Pacto Global Red Ecuador* (2017).

²⁰⁷ The majority of the projects proposed training processes to other young people and small awareness campaigns.

²⁰⁸ The 2023 Ecuador Final Programme Report Draft.

²⁰⁹ Universidad Central de Quito.



3.12 The *Entre Nos* chatbot in El Salvador raises awareness on gender and masculinity

Overview

In the last decade or so, El Salvador has made progress in promoting gender-equitable legal frameworks, improving family planning outcomes (nearly 80 percent of women have satisfied their family planning needs using modern methods) and increasing women's representation in parliament (one third of seats are occupied by women).²¹⁰ However, gender-based violence continues to act as a strong barrier to gender equality. At least one out of every five women aged 15 years and over reported experiencing sexual assault, intimate partner violence or abuse by family members in their lifetime.²¹¹ One of the main contributing factors to high levels of violence is the traditional expression of masculinity. Social norms emphasise traits such as dominance, aggression and control, leading to a culture that normalises violence towards women and girls. This situation is further exacerbated by violence perpetrated by criminal gangs (also known as *maras*) in the country.²¹²

There has been a recent surge in the use of innovative technologies, including chatbots, to support gender-based violence prevention and response efforts. In El Salvador, the *Entre Nos* (translated as “between us,” a term for trust-based relationships and friendships) chatbot²¹³ is an online tool that was developed to engage men and boys on Facebook.²¹⁴ This tool was developed by UNFPA under Spotlight Initiative in El Salvador.²¹⁵

Results

The *Entre Nos* chatbot facilitated interactive discussions for adolescent men and young people on various topics. Some of the focus areas included understanding emotions and unpacking masculinity and other concepts, such as courtship, inequality and more. Moreover, this tool encouraged young people to understand the importance of eliminating violence against women, adolescents and girls in society. The *Entre Nos* chatbot had close to 11,000 interactions within the first month of its launch, and by month five, its network of users had expanded to 489,954 (235,178 boys and 254,776 girls) across the three municipalities of San Salvador, San Martin and Saint Michael.²¹⁶ The chatbot helped young people to understand the importance of addressing and ending violence against women for improved quality of life and overall well-being.

Moreover, the *Entre Nos* chatbot was endorsed by the *Tejedores de Equidad* (also known as “Equity Weavers,” a group of men who are committed to the eradication of violence against women) and was highlighted as successful in promoting healthier notions of masculinity. Another noteworthy aspect of the innovation was the attention paid to reducing the burden of violence prevention, which is disproportionately borne by women and girls, and ensuring that men and boys also stepped up to end gender-based violence.

Key Elements of Success and Practices for Replication

- **Build a creative technological intervention, such as a chatbot, to support young people in challenging traditional notions of masculinity and femininity.** In this case, the *Entre Nos* chatbot proved to be instrumental in unpacking harmful and toxic masculinities and machismo. Supporting masculinities that promote equity can be an effective way to spread these important messages around ending violence against women and girls. It allows for boys and girls to access and explore information in their own time and ask deeper questions to understand these important gender issues.
- **Develop targeted interventions that focus on supporting men and boys to become gender equality champions and advocates.** The initiative focused on a key demographic, namely adolescents and especially boys within El Salvador, through a commonly used platform. Facebook enabled the initiative to reach and engage a large audience within a short period. Furthermore, the digital medium ensured anonymity and allowed adolescents to express themselves within a safe space.
- **Use internet-based technologies and tools that have lower barriers to entry for a wide range of users from different demographic groups.** Chatbots are online tools that can be applied to scale campaigns in other geographies since they are cost effective once set up. They are accessible as long there is an internet connection. The content used by the *Entre Nos* chatbot can also be reproduced and adapted for different contexts and regions.

²¹⁰ El Salvador (UN Women).

²¹¹ *Dos de cada tres mujeres sufren violencia sexual en El Salvador: Encuesta Nacional de Violencia Sexual Contra Las Mujeres 2019* (UNFPA, March 2022). (in Spanish)

²¹² *El Salvador: The right to know and HeForShe* (UN Democracy Fund).

²¹³ The *Entre Nos* Facebook page. (in Spanish)

²¹⁴ The 2020 Global Annual Progress Report, page 155.

²¹⁵ *Entre Nos (Between us): New online tool for teenagers and young people* (UNFPA El Salvador, May 2020).

²¹⁶ The 2023 El Salvador Final Report Draft, pages 71 and 78.

3.13 The Cure Violence community mobilisation model in Honduras helps prevent femicide

Overview

Honduras has the highest femicide rate in Latin America, with 6.2 cases per 100,000 women recorded in 2021.²¹⁷ Between 2020 and 2021, more than 500 women were murdered within the country.²¹⁸ Impunity for these crimes is rampant, with between a 90 percent and 96 percent impunity rate when it comes to cases of femicide and sexual violence in the country.²¹⁹

Recognising this significant challenge and extreme human rights violation, UNICEF and Cure Violence Global, as part of Spotlight Initiative in Honduras, developed a “violence interrupters” programme (hereafter referred to as the “Cure Violence model”) to identify and prevent instances of violence against women and girls through rapid response teams of individuals who attempt to prevent and, if necessary, report on the violent acts being committed on women and children within their communities.²²⁰

Results

The Cure Violence model was implemented in areas with a high prevalence of gang wars and trafficking networks. These challenging environments were characterised by heightened social tension that disproportionately impacted women and children. The methodology focused on changing social and gender norms through community dialogues, youth engagement and mobilising local communities to facilitate cooperation and interaction amongst stakeholders.²²¹ Violence interrupters, as key agents of change, guided discussions and delved into solutions aimed at challenging negative gender stereotypes and addressing discrimination.²²² The goal was to strengthen the capacities of diverse communities to identify risk factors and use collective prevention techniques to stop violence and prevent potential deaths.²²³

Within the first six months of its implementation, the Cure Violence model interrupted 662 violent instances and potentially safeguarded the lives of 133 women.²²⁴ Since then, violence interrupters averted 1,770 highly volatile incidents involving more than 724 women and girls across 25 neighbourhoods within the Choloma and San Pedro Sula areas.²²⁵ Out of the total cases managed, nearly 65 percent²²⁶ of them involved the prevention of femicide. So far, the lives of more than 500 women have been saved, and 52 individuals, primarily women and children, have been relocated to safer, more permanent homes.²²⁷ Violence interrupters have cumulatively spent more than 43,402 hours working with various community members to steadily change social and gender norms.

In one particularly noteworthy incident, a woman and her two children were kidnapped and held hostage by a gang that had previously killed her husband. Given the common practice of gang wars and women getting caught in these disputes, a neighbour reported the incident to the violence interrupter in order to find a way to protect them.²²⁸ A strategy was developed to rescue them from the situation, and once they were found, swift action was taken to find them a new home in a different city.

In addition to preventing instances of violence, the Cure Violence model also reduced reported crimes in the programme area. Previously the area had been known as a “hotspot” for crimes, and in 2019, nearly 38 women had died as a result of violence. This number was reduced by more than half due to the efforts of interrupters, who work tirelessly to build community capacity on risk identification and de-escalation tactics to address violent situations.²²⁹

“I don't care if it's 1 a.m., 3 a.m., 5 a.m.; any time we get a call, we're there.”

A violence interrupter

One of the major achievements of the Cure Violence model has been its ability to engage and encourage people to reflect on and address “harmful masculinity.” Violence interrupters helped the communities to challenge and overcome these negative stereotypes. They influenced young boys and girls to become agents of change among their peers and within “spheres of influence.” As reflected by another violence interrupter, this was achieved by “gaining credibility and people’s trust.”

²¹⁷ [Violence against women, the other pandemic impacting Honduras](#) (UNSDG, December 2021).

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ [Stories of Hope, Courage and Change from Latin America and Africa](#) (Spotlight Initiative, 2021), page 17.

²²⁰ [Trained violence interrupters avert femicide in Honduras](#) (Spotlight Initiative, 2021).

²²¹ [Stories of Hope, Courage and Change from Latin America and Africa](#) (Spotlight Initiative, 2021), page 18.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ [Reducing violence and preventing femicides in Honduran communities](#) (UNICEF Honduras, May 2021).

²²⁴ [Spotlight Initiative Mid-term Assessment Report using ROM review](#) (Spotlight Initiative Honduras), page 66.

²²⁵ [Stories of Hope, Courage and Change from Latin America and Africa](#) (Spotlight Initiative, 2021), page 18.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ [Trained violence interrupters avert femicide in Honduras](#) (Spotlight Initiative, October 2021).

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid.

Key Elements of Success and Practices for Replication

- **Develop community-based gender-based violence prevention and response approaches that successfully engage community members to act as first responders.** The multifaceted methodology combined rapid response techniques with community dialogue, watchdog groups and youth engagement to tackle gender-based violence. Additionally, the Cure Violence model in Honduras focused on changing discriminatory social and gender norms and negative stereotypes to ensure the root cause of violence was addressed.
- **Build new norms about safety, protection and gender equality through community mobility and outreach efforts.** These community watchdog models are effective when they become rallying calls for new norms and behaviours and for holding perpetrators to account for prosocial, equitable and nonviolent behaviour.
- **Use data and analytics to measure programmatic success to strengthen implementation efforts, track planned outcomes and identify and document outcomes that were unintended.** For example, by tracking outcomes systematically, communities were able to witness a demonstrable reduction in crime rates, due to concerted efforts of violence interrupters. This approach ensured that communities and violence interrupters were more likely to stay motivated to continue their efforts as they tracked the reduction in crime rates in their regions.

