



Pillar 6: Women's movements

Pillar 6 lies at the heart of Spotlight Initiative's model with its focus on supporting women's movements and local women's rights and feminist organisations. Spotlight Initiative takes an evidence-based approach to prioritising this pillar as research has clearly shown the outsized role that women's movements hold in contributing to national agendas of action and progress on ending violence against women. This pillar focuses on supporting organising, advocacy and the increased influence of civil society organisations and women's rights organisations and movements, increasing the strength and capacity of women's organisations and movements, supporting landscape analysis and mappings to support greater effectiveness of civil society solutions, creating new bodies of feminist knowledge, practice and agenda setting, and strengthening coalitions, networks and advocacy to end violence against women and girls. In addition, a significant focus of this pillar is on the deepened capacity and funding of civil society, especially feminist and women's rights organisations and movements, as key stakeholders to end violence against women and girls.

The following good and innovative practices detail cases contributing to Pillar 6. This includes Spotlight Initiative's work in funding civil society through two UN Funds: the Trust Fund to End Violence against Women and the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund, as well as network and coalition building happening in the Safe and Fair Programme in the Philippines, Tajikistan, the Pacific Region, and Latin America Region.

Funding mechanisms



6.1 Funding civil society and grassroots communities through the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women and the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund

Overview

In order to ensure that a significant proportion of funding reaches grassroots communities, Spotlight Initiative partnered with two global funds, the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women (UN Trust Fund) and the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF).

The UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women provides multi-year grants that prioritise funding to smaller and grassroots organisations to initiatives that address, reduce or eliminate violence against women and girls. The UN Trust Fund also places prioritisation on capacity development. The Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund gives grants to support women and women's rights organisations that work on conflict and crises, support the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence and promote peace in their communities. Both of these funds were chosen as Spotlight Initiative partners because of their unique access and networks to grassroots feminist civil society organisations in countries all over the world. There have also been special funding windows rolled out by these two funds, particularly during COVID-19, that facilitated quick access to core resources for civil society organisations.

Results

Since the beginning of Spotlight Initiative in 2017, a total of 36.8 million USD in grants has gone to support women's movements and address violence against women and girls. Remarkably, nearly all of this funding has reached community organisations, with 82 percent of it going to local groups and 94 percent supporting women-led organisations that are working on women's rights and feminism.⁴⁰⁹ This is the power of working through intermediary funds, such as the UN Trust Fund and WPHF. Both already had direct and established access to local organisations, which would otherwise have been challenging to reach due to administrative and logistical barriers.

⁴⁰⁹ The 2022 Global Annual Narrative Progress Report, page 53.

Over the 5 years, these grants have reached over 32 million people, making a significant difference in the lives of women and girls. For example, in Zimbabwe, the UN Trust Fund worked with a women-led group called Family AIDS Caring Trust. The project, “Voices from the Fringes,” focused on increasing sexual and reproductive health knowledge and aimed to reduce violence against girls and young women, including female sex workers. Results from a study showed that 98 percent of the female sex workers who had been involved in this project felt an increase in their sense of safety. WPHF grantees in Uganda supported several civil society organisations that came together to manage cases of violence against women and girls, helping to settle over 2,600 domestic cases through mediation and reconciliation. This collective work helped to move cases forward quicker and supported faster resolutions. These are just two brief examples of success from many grants over the years. Together, these partnerships demonstrate the power of Spotlight Initiative's model of supporting local civil society and women's organisations in order to foster lasting and meaningful change.

Key Elements of Success and Practices for Replication

- **Support intermediary funds as an effective strategy for reach when a funding agency does not have the networks in place or the capacity to reach small or local groups and grassroots organisations, especially those that may be unregistered.** The UN Trust Fund and WPHF, as well as women's funds and other intermediary funders, are key partners in the change process.
- **Move funding to grassroots communities.** Ensuring that funding gets to local communities that are on the frontlines of addressing violence against women and girls in conflict and crisis scenarios is critical. In addition, opening up spaces where frontline communities and activists can have a seat at peacemaking tables and in leadership positions in addressing conflicts and crises has also been found to be key to sustainable peace.
- **Partner with civil society and those closest to the problem to develop solutions for impact.** Spotlight Initiative's model is unique as it prioritises reach, both in terms of country and regional partnerships and implementations with civil society, while simultaneously advancing Pillar 6 on women's movements. This dual strategy enables greater efficiency and on the ground impact. As funding and capital allocations are channelled directly to these initiatives and partnerships, programming to end violence against women and girls in a country deepens and widens its impact.



Network and coalition building



6.2 First-ever transnational federation of Filipino domestic and care workers unions and associations

Overview

Domestic work and care work are sectors dominated by women, and the work done by migrant workers in this sector is often hidden inside the homes of their employers. A recent nationwide survey of over 1,000 Filipino youth revealed that approximately 58 percent felt that they would not be consistently safe working abroad as an Overseas Filipino Worker. 30 percent of respondents reported that they knew of an Overseas Filipino Worker friend or relative who had experienced violence against women, and 24 percent stated that these victims were not able to seek help for the violence they experienced.⁴¹⁰ Workers are particularly vulnerable when they are working outside of their native country, and being part of a union enables them to gain access to important support services and greater opportunities for collective bargaining.

In 2004, the trade union *Sentro ng mga Nagkakaisa at Progresibong Manggagawa* (SENTRO, formerly known as the Alliance of Progressive Labor) partnered with the Asian Migrant Center, the Migrant Forum in Asia and the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions to mainstream and expand social movement trade union work among Filipino and other Asian migrant workers. This organising effort in Hong Kong laid the groundwork for Pinay Careworkers Transnational (PINAY), which was founded in December 2022. PINAY brings together Filipina domestic workers' (migrant and local) and careworkers' unions and associations based in Malaysia, Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, Kuwait, Jordan, Bahrain, Qatar and the Philippines. This federation represents, advocates, and advances the rights, welfare, interests and agenda of more than 7,000 domestic and care workers transnationally. PINAY is hailed as an important breakthrough achievement as labour organising efforts across multiple countries are often curtailed and can be extremely challenging to sustain.

Through Spotlight Initiative's Safe and Fair Programme, ILO and UN Women have supported PINAY to advance the rights of women migrant workers (nationals and overseas workers alike). Organising across multiple countries and contexts has improved ways of working with diverse partners and in delivering information and support services to migrant and national domestic and care workers.

Results

Years of organising and past efforts of civil society actors and labour unions within individual countries have led to the eventual success of building a transnational network. Long-standing legal, structural and procedural obstacles initially prevented and hindered the unionisation of migrant, domestic and care workers, but through persistence and grassroots organising, Overseas Filipino Workers built individual and organisational capacity and promoted collective bargaining and representation of domestic and care workers through their trade unions and associations. This organising work and the networking of domestic and care worker groups expanded to other countries and territories thereafter.⁴¹¹

"As migrant domestic workers, many members of PINAY do not yet enjoy even the most fundamental labour rights in the respective countries of destination. Many, for example, are not recognised as workers and therefore fall beyond the scope of local labour laws. As part of informal economies, our organisations do not reflect the traditional relationships with employers and governments as formal trade unions. Nevertheless, we still strive to secure freedom of association and collective bargaining and other basic level rights for our affiliates and Filipino migrant domestic workers and individual care workers."

Ms Shiella Estrada, President of Pinay Careworkers Transnational, Philippines

Creating this network of domestic and care workers' organisations has contributed to further strengthening the technical, logistical, advocacy and/or financial sustainability of unions and associations across the region. PINAY's model of unionism and organising has also managed, in some cases, to sidestep administrative and procedural restrictions, such as migrant workers not being recognised or allowed to register as unions or associations in countries of destination. With PINAY as a registered trade union federation based in the Philippines, the various Filipino domestic worker and care worker organisations can leverage their position by becoming trade union chapters both in and outside the Philippines.

⁴¹⁰ Safe and Fair Programme in the Philippines and Edukasyon.ph Wrap Up International Women's Month Celebration with "Ang Mama Kong BiyaHero" Campaign (Spotlight Initiative, April 2022).

⁴¹¹ Migrant workers' rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining (virtual roundtable) (ILO, November 2023).

Key Elements of Success and Practices for Replication

- **Identify common objectives among care workers.** Organising around shared objectives, such as the payment of regular union dues, in order to build and sustain a collective union consciousness and identity, is critical to the formation of transnational networks.
- **Collaboration and movement building across diverse partner organisations and unions within and across countries leads to stronger labour positioning.** The case of PINAY shows the power in cross-sector and national collaborations, which consolidate the demands and agendas of migrant workers.
- **Recognise that labour organising efforts for federations require perseverance and funds for long-term sustainability.** Working across multiple countries and contexts to convene and spearhead a federation like PINAY requires self-organising and self-reliance, as well as strong solidarity and coordination actions with and between trade unions, international labour and social movements that advance shared advocacy agendas.



6.3 The School of Gender Activists in Tajikistan builds a cadre of local experts

Overview

Civil society organisations have been instrumental in addressing social concerns in Tajikistan, including election monitoring, environmental stewardship, education, economic inclusivity and gender equity. Within the gender space, civil society organisations have been at the forefront of advancing women's education, increasing women's political participation, addressing gender-based violence,⁴¹² and providing services to survivors.⁴¹³

Nevertheless, civil society organisations continue to face a range of challenges that impede their work. The civil society sector is highly fragmented, and multiple barriers continue to hinder information sharing, dialogue and partnership building between organisations and the government. As such, Spotlight Initiative in Tajikistan prioritised the provision of support to and investment in civil society organisations.⁴¹⁴

During the early implementation of Spotlight Initiative, it became apparent that there were few gender experts in the country.⁴¹⁵ To address this challenge, the School of Gender Activists was launched in 2021, led by UN Women under Spotlight Initiative. The first of its kind, the initiative sought to create a roster of local gender experts across different agencies that could be tapped as key resource persons in efforts to address gender-based violence in Tajikistan. The School of Gender Activists has also presented an opportunity to convene and mobilise gender experts, fostering greater collaboration, partnership and knowledge exchange among them.⁴¹⁶

Results

Sixty participants graduated in the first and second phases of the School of Gender Activists initiative.⁴¹⁷ Phase 1 participants included civil society representatives and young professionals, while Phase 2 specifically targeted youth aged 18-35 to nurture emerging gender specialists. Adhering to the principle of leave no one behind, the School of Gender Activists also involved women living with HIV and people with disabilities.

Topics studied under the School of Gender Activists programme include gender rights, gender equality concepts, local and international laws and standards on gender, gender budgeting, feminist history, gender advocacy, gender analysis and tools to identify and prevent gender-based violence. Participants received first-hand exposure to gender-related initiatives through visits to government agencies (including the parliament, ombudsman and the supreme court), and government officials, civil society representatives and women leaders in Tajikistan were invited to training sessions to share insights on gender-centric work practices. Students were also given the opportunity to attend a planning session of the Committee of Women and Family Affairs. During the session, the Committee of Women and Family Affairs representatives co-created a plan together with the School of Gender Activists participants, which was then endorsed by higher officials of the Committee. Engaging in the planning session allowed the participants to apply the theories acquired from the School of Gender Activists training to hands-on practical experience.

The training also made participants reflect on their own gender biases, with one student reflecting that her experience in the training led to household chores being distributed equally between herself and her husband. Another graduate reflected on how his perspective on women's participation in the labour market changed after studying at the School of Gender Activists.⁴¹⁸

⁴¹² The 2019 Tajikistan Country Programme Document.

⁴¹³ *The Role of NGOs in Independent Tajikistan* (International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, March 2013).

⁴¹⁴ The 2019 Tajikistan Country Programme Document.

⁴¹⁵ The 2020 Tajikistan Annual Narrative Programme Report, page 38.

⁴¹⁶ The 2021 Tajikistan Annual Narrative Programme Report, page 29 and 35.

⁴¹⁷ The 2023 Tajikistan Annual Report Draft, page 8.

⁴¹⁸ First-hand success stories of graduates of the School of Gender Activists, page 2-3.

“In our area, stereotypes against women are widespread. I am very glad that I studied at SGA [because] the knowledge I gained changed my whole life. In our family, [my wife and I] developed mutual understanding and support. I allowed my wife to work, despite numerous conversations with relatives. We are grateful to everyone who created SGA.”

A male graduate of the School of Gender Activists programme in Dushanbe

Overall, the training was of great benefit to the graduates’ career progressions. For some, the knowledge gained from the training supported them to produce winning proposals for grants.

“Our organization won a US Embassy grant (\$41,760) to empower women from marginalized groups, low-income and rural communities to participate in the labor market. I believe that success became possible, in many respects, thanks to the knowledge acquired, information about crisis centers and specialists whom I met at the SGA. While filling out the application, reviewing the correct approach to gender issues played a big role for me, and I used in the application those approaches that we were trained for.”

Zebo Bidieva, head of an NGO for the deaf and deaf-blind

Some School of Gender Activists graduates advanced their careers through becoming members of organisational advisory boards of UN agencies or gender specialists in their organisations.⁴¹⁹ Some graduates also began to train others within their work and communities on gender rights and concepts.

“Because of this initiative, we have good specialists...who will advocate [for gender] issues not only at the national level but also [at the] international level. They will be involved in implementing different types of activities...we will involve them in our high-level activities...we will listen to their ideas, [and their] voices will be heard. [We will] promote them up to the highest level of the government to...bring the change in gender-related issues in the country.”

Javohir Akobirova, Head of Gender Development, Committee of Women and Family Affairs

In 2023, graduates of the School of Gender Activists continued to support the advancement of women’s rights. During the development of the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, for example, the graduates were invited to lobby for the inclusion of the elimination of gender-based violence.⁴²⁰

Elevated as gender experts, the School of Gender Activists graduates also delivered training within their own communities, which reached 200 men and women community leaders. The School of Gender Activist graduates stayed in touch and continually collaborated and exchanged expertise on gender-related work. The sustained synergy among participants, together with the training of additional leaders by the graduates, signifies a growing and more robust network of local gender experts in Tajikistan. The School of Gender Activists also created a platform to facilitate knowledge exchange and partnership among civil society members working to end gender-based violence.⁴²¹

A notable result of the School of Gender Activists was that it created an increased demand for gender experts. Civil society organisations and government entities expressed interest in replicating the School of Gender Activists programme in other locations in Tajikistan, as well as in other countries in Central Asia.⁴²²

Key Elements of Success and Practices for Replication

- **Ensure that an adequate pool of gender experts exist in a country that can be flexibly deployed across diverse government, service provision, duty-bearers and civil society agencies.** Rolling out the programme was a strategic method to compensate for the lack of local gender experts in Tajikistan. The graduates eventually became experts in gender-related endeavours and also trained other community members, presenting the opportunity to develop further sets of gender experts in Tajikistan.
- **Build networks, linkages and movements out of the collaboration and partnership formed from training programmes.** Training, workshops or any other learning events often convene like-minded individuals, which opens up opportunities to link, collaborate and foster networks or movements.
- **Create training programmes that contain a diverse range of topics, are delivered by experts, and offer experiential learning experiences.** The School of Gender Activists curriculum encompassed a range of gender topics that were presented by subject matter experts and reinforced with practical learning experiences.

⁴¹⁹ The 2022 Tajikistan Interim Annual Report, page 41.

⁴²⁰ The 2023 Tajikistan Annual Report Draft, page 50.

⁴²¹ Ibid.

⁴²² Ibid.

6.4 The Pacific Feminist Community of Practice advances best practices in feminist discourse and movement building

Overview

The Pacific region has some of the world's highest recorded rates of violence against women and girls, with almost 2 out of every 3 women impacted by physical or sexual violence in their lifetime – double the global average.⁴²³ With profound shifts occurring in the current socioeconomic, ecological and climate landscape and a global and local backlash against gender justice and women's human rights, peer-to-peer capacity strengthening with smaller, grassroots organisations is crucially important to bolster the Pacific women's movement.

Through Spotlight Initiative's Pacific Regional Programme, the Pacific Feminist Community of Practice (hereafter referred to as "PacFemCOP") was launched in 2021 and moderated by DIVA for Equality in Fiji. Through a co-creation and co-design approach deeply rooted in feminist values, a variety of best practices in feminist discourse and movement building in the Pacific Island region were documented. In cultivating this community space, Pacific feminists have been able to further assert and amplify their regional solidarity and autonomy.

Results

Despite the challenges of COVID-19, the PacFemCOP platform and its staffed Secretariat created connection and solidarity between 20 civil society organisations and approximately 80 activists and diverse movements from across the Pacific region. These practices have contributed to bridging the divide within and between Pacific island countries.⁴²⁴

"As south feminists, we navigate both our individual contexts in Fiji and the Pacific regional context. So in order for us to be able to do feminist work effectively, core collaborations have to be clear and strong from within the Pacific region, founded and facilitated within small island societies, States and territories."

Diva for Equality

The community's lived understanding that the "personal is political" underscored and affirmed the importance of alignment in structure, content and processes to ensure effective sustainable work.

The Community of Practice has been led by Diva for Equality and included networking and thought partnerships around six *freeskools*, which are a series of teachings, dialogues, thought analysis and practice around various topics. These topics include: an introduction to feminism, including movement definitions and concepts; feminist approaches to gender, ecological and climate justice; elimination of violence against women and girls; how to mobilise, organise and action for change; poverty to power, examining feminist approaches to economic justice and human rights in the Pacific and globally; and sexual and reproductive health and rights, SOGIESC, bodily autonomy and integrity.⁴²⁵ These intersectional and intergenerational sessions were designed to follow on a body of praxis from feminist social movements. More than 35 resources and videos are freely available online.

"The movement can disrupt, clarify, critique and re-negotiate over time without destroying good, solid feminist social movement work, whether inside or outside and beyond national States, and societal norms and practices. Feminists believe in material and structural change to build socio-economic, ecological and climate justice, beyond that, we negotiate on how, why, with whom and when it happens. This Pacific feminist community of practice will support Pacific collective and individual work, for just, ethical, safe and inclusive realities and futures, for all."

Diva for Equality

Pacific voices and peoples have gathered together around key issues such as violence against women and girls, climate crisis, economic insecurity and other issues. Dialogues happening in relation to the Community of Practice in these spaces have had some results, such as deepened community-based organising. For example, Pacific feminist activists informed inputs into the 66th session of the Commission on the Status of Women and the 2022 United Nations Climate Change Conference.

⁴²³ Pacific Partnership to End Violence Against Women and Girls (UN Women Asia and the Pacific).

⁴²⁴ Text from the Diva for Equality website.

⁴²⁵ The entire *freeskools* video series can be found on the [PacFEMCOP webpage](#), as well as on [YouTube](#).

By the end of the first stage of the programme in December 2022, Diva for Equality had engaged 95 participants from 45 groups across 14 island States and territories. This example underscores the importance of knowledge sharing and strategy reflections across the Pacific, as it provides the access to knowledge needed to strengthen diverse activists and movements in the region, as well as helps to support the alignment of joint action.

Key Elements of Success and Practices for Replication

- **Cultivate communities of practice as a way to educate and galvanise around shared and country-specific feminist advocacy asks and strategies.** Regional knowledge centres such as PacFemCOP offer unique opportunities for activists in different countries to learn what strategies are being used in other contexts, offering inspiration for adoption in their own contexts, potential for connecting with similar actors across regions and creating opportunities for shared collective actions across the region and even internationally.
- **Provide free online resources to increase the visibility and accessibility of feminist analysis.** When gender analysis tools like the educational series of *freeskool* videos are made available online, the general public have an opportunity to access the praxis and better understand the context in the region.
- **Build partnerships that truly demonstrate the power of UN reform and joint action through co-design, equal partnership and transparent communication.** The UN team and DIVA for Equality were able to navigate the procurement process together to implement their vision of a regional movement-building hybrid platform that brought together civil society organisations and diverse activists across the region.

6.5 The Esperanza Protocol for the protection of women human rights defenders in Latin America

Overview

According to Front Line Defenders' Global Analysis 2019, Latin America is the most dangerous region in the world for human rights defenders.⁴²⁶ This alarming and lamentable statistic remained the same in 2022.⁴²⁷ Women human rights defenders in Latin American countries have long played a central role in the fight against violence against women and girls, such as the Mesoamerican Initiative of Women Human Rights Defenders, a collective founded in 2010 of nearly 3,000 activists and 300 organisations across El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, Mexico and Nicaragua.⁴²⁸ As human rights defenders, women defenders are disproportionately exposed to sexual and other forms of gender-based violence, and their safety, as well as that of their families, is often jeopardised as a consequence of their work and advocacy.

Despite the prevalence and gravity of threats, 67 percent of human rights defenders reported that they would still persevere with their work.⁴²⁹ Recognising that women human rights defenders face particular risks in calling for change and accountability in their communities, Spotlight Initiative's Latin America Regional Programme supported the work of human rights defenders across the region and supported the finalisation of the Esperanza Protocol (hereafter referred to as "PLE").⁴³⁰ This work was coordinated by UN Women, UNDP and UNFPA, with active participation of intergovernmental mechanisms, civil society organisations, and other UN agencies.

The Protocol invokes hope (*esperanza* in Spanish) for two reasons:⁴³¹ first, because its primary aim is to ensure a hopeful future for human rights defenders. The second is in honour of La Esperanza, a town in western Honduras that is the hometown of Berta Cáceres, indigenous-rights activist, feminist, and environmentalist who was murdered in 2016 after 33 uninvestigated threats.

Ms. Cáceres' murder is unfortunately not an isolated case. 75 percent of documented cases in the region involve a murder that followed a series of repeated extreme threats or security incidents. The Esperanza Protocol honours her memory and is designed to support states and civil society to demand measures that protect human rights defenders and ensure justice for the victims.

Results

The Esperanza Protocol took 5 years to develop and publish in December 2021, but it is now hailed as the first international standard for the investigation of and response to threats and attacks against rights defenders, where few concrete guidelines existed before this time beyond general standards of due diligence.

⁴²⁶ Global Analysis 2019 (Front Line Defenders).

⁴²⁷ Global Analysis 2022 (Front Line Defenders).

⁴²⁸ The Mesoamerican Initiative of Women Human Rights Defenders website.

⁴²⁹ Survey findings: Towards an Effective Investigation of Threats against Human Rights Defenders (CEJIL and UN Women, 2022), page 22.

⁴³⁰ Better protection for women human rights defenders in Latin America (Spotlight Initiative, November 2020).

⁴³¹ Text from the Esperanza Protocol website.

In order to develop the PLE, various broad consultations were held with more than 100 women human rights defenders in different countries and regions to ensure that their experiences were included in the working drafts of the Protocol. A coalition of more than 20 civil society organisations, women's and feminist organisations, spearheaded by the Center for Justice and International Law, worked diligently towards developing public policy guidelines for a systematic and diligent criminal investigation. A specific focus on the security needs of WHRDs was included, highlighting their vital contribution to strengthening democracy.

"Human rights defenders are a network, and each one of us is a knot within that network. Our protection must be seen as a collective responsibility."

Jéssica Isla, Honduran human rights defender

"With the protocol, we want to change how threats are treated, they are a key weapon in intimidating women human rights defenders. We must improve the response of institutions [to women's complaints] to be able to stop the cycle of pain and silence."

Viviana Krsticevic, Executive Director of CEJIL

The protocol is a critical step forward. Next, state protection and justice for women human rights defenders requires attention, as the report from the PLE survey findings underscores: *"States need to do more to protect the lives and integrity of human rights defenders around the world. States must recognize the importance of the work of HRDs and must take action to eliminate threats against HRDs from State actors. States must set forth policies that would improve trust in their institutions and conduct full investigations into all threats against HRDs. HRDs should be able to feel confident in reporting threats to authorities and be assured that the State will do everything within its power to protect them."*⁴³²

While the first step of developing the protocol is in place, the next step that needs considerable attention and support is on ensuring the implementation of the protocol and on eliminating high levels of state impunity that exist now.

Key Elements of Success and Practices for Replication

- **Develop international standards as a first step toward combating impunity.** Protocols such as PLE help create the framework to encourage state institutions to take a comprehensive approach to combating impunity for sexual and gender-based violence crimes and enable duty-bearers to handle cases more appropriately in the future.
- **Use international and national protocols as a monitoring tool domestically to hold governments to account.** International protocols like this set the standard for ensuring the state's commitment to protecting women human rights defenders. Any country that is facing issues with violence against a women human rights defender can benefit from the guidelines for a diligent and full criminal investigation.
- **Contribute funds for the development or completion of a guideline and protocol like PLE for far reaching impact.** The Esperanza Protocol is referenced and used globally and sets an international standard for these types of criminal investigations. It must be fully implemented to save lives and ensure the safety of human rights defenders and their critical work.

⁴³² Survey findings: [Towards an Effective Investigation of Threats against Human Rights Defenders](#) (CEJIL and UN Women, 2022), page 38.

6.6 A Civil Society National Reference Group contributes to the success of Spotlight Initiative in Samoa

Overview

Gender-based violence is a significant issue in Samoa, where 38 percent of women aged 15-49 have experienced physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime.⁴³³ 35 percent of women and 26 percent of men stated that they believed a husband was justified in beating his wife in at least one circumstance.⁴³⁴ Furthermore, 78 percent of married women reported that their husband had displayed controlling behaviours.⁴³⁵ The acceptance and normalisation of violence against women and girls can lead to increased shame and stigma and discourage survivors from reporting their experience and seeking safety and support.

Despite ongoing efforts, violence against women and girls remains a complex and persistent issue in Samoa, requiring continued commitment from government, civil society and the community to effectively address it. Spotlight Initiative has led prevention efforts in Samoa, addressing the need to transform the root causes that lead to violence against women and girls. A Civil Society National Reference Group (CSNRG) was formed to ensure representation from civil society and other stakeholders in decision-making related to Spotlight Initiative programming, as well as to advise and advocate for the realisation of programme objectives and hold the programme accountable for its commitments. In Samoa, Spotlight Initiative focused on preventing violence through evidence-based programmes and strengthening essential services for survivors of domestic violence. The formation of the CSNRG was one of the key elements of the programme's success.

Results

To amplify the voice and ownership of civil society in the programme, a diverse CSNRG was formed and trained in order to increase the capacity of the CSNRG. This careful planning and engagement has led to international recognition for Spotlight Initiative in Samoa.

In order to put together an effective CSNRG, the Samoa team reached out to teams in Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea for their guidance and to share information, especially on Pacific specific contexts. An interim CSNRG in Samoa was first established to provide inputs on the Country Programme Document, ensuring civil society organisations were reflected as partners in the design and implementation of the initiative.⁴³⁶ The interim CSNRG commented on the gaps not captured or addressed in existing violence interventions and suggested effective strategies to approach and engage traditional leaders and village councils to facilitate behavioural change and attitudes towards violence against women and girls. The group also promoted the meaningful engagement of civil society and government stakeholders to foster greater ownership and encouraged Spotlight Initiative to invest in local interventions. In addition, strong communication was prioritised to ensure that key messages and information on ending violence against women and girls reached a broad audience.

After the design phase, ten individuals with different professional capacities and varying age, gender and disability were selected to form the CSNRG.⁴³⁷ The group provided a fair and balanced perspective and ensured the leave no one behind principle was carried out in the planning and implementation of the Spotlight Initiative programme in Samoa.

"The programme continues to achieve results because the Spotlight Initiative team listened and designed interventions to suit the context of our communities, their level of knowledge, and their capacities to deliver."

Fagalima Tuatagaloa, Co-Chair CSNRG, Samoa

In order to prepare the members of the CSNRG for their responsibilities, an induction training was jointly coordinated and facilitated by the UN Resident Coordinator's Office, together with UN Women and supported by UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA and UNESCO.⁴³⁸ The training aimed to familiarise the CSNRG members with Spotlight Initiative, the expectations of their roles as members of the CSNRG, and to facilitate meaningful collaborations with the UN, partners and stakeholders in the implementation of all interventions and activities.⁴³⁹ The training also provided the opportunity to develop a work plan, which guided the delivery of their functions. One of the key outputs of the work plan was that the CSNRG led the 16 Days of Healing Campaign in Samoa, a national campaign that demonstrated the leading and important role of civil society organisations and communities in ending violence against women and girls.⁴⁴⁰ These preparatory activities ensured that the CSNRG was a critical function in the governing architecture of Spotlight Initiative's programme in Samoa.

⁴³³ Gender Equality Brief for Samoa (UN Women, 2022).

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

⁴³⁶ The process for the permanent CSNRG commenced after the design phase, therefore the interim CSNRG was set-up to ensure input from all stakeholders.

⁴³⁷ CSNRG ready to progress its role in the Spotlight Initiative Samoa programme (UN Cook Islands, Niue, Samoa and Tokelau, 2020).

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

⁴³⁹ National Reference Group, a strong force behind the Spotlight Initiative (UN Cook Islands, Niue, Samoa and Tokelau, 2021).

⁴⁴⁰ Samoa launches 16 Days of Healing campaign (Spotlight Initiative, December 2020).

After the CSNRG was formalised, quarterly meetings with UN agencies were held to understand how the programme was progressing. These meetings were an essential platform that allowed the CSNRG to be the voice of civil society and advise the UN on gaps in programming and services, as well as opportunities, to advance the programme.

In recognition of the excellent design of the programme, Spotlight Initiative in Samoa won the Leave No One Behind Award in 2022.⁴⁴¹ The programme, in coordination with UNDP, UNESCO, UN Women, UNICEF, UNFPA and the UN Resident Coordinator's Office, worked closely with the CSNRG to ensure that in ending domestic and intimate partner violence in Samoa, the dignity of victims was protected, while root causes of violence were also identified and addressed.

"Finally, Samoa and our efforts towards ending violence against women have been recognized."

Fagalima Tuatagaloa, Co-Chair CSNRG, when receiving the award

Key Elements of Success and Practices for Replication

- **Include individuals and organisations in CSNRGs that represent and reflect the diversity of civil society.** Engaging citizens who work and represent civil society at the national and local level and understand the cultural and religious principles of the country is important to get a wide range of inputs and perspectives. Forging a qualified and diverse membership, the group was well positioned to oversee and contribute meaningfully to various stages of Spotlight Initiative programming.
- **Engage CSNRG members from the inception and design of the programme through to its implementation and delivery.** The CSNRG in Samoa provided valuable inputs that ensured that interventions were responsive to the needs and realities of the communities affected, which contributed to the programme's success.
- **Organise and facilitate a training of the CSNRG to familiarise the members with Spotlight Initiative and the expectations of their roles.** The training allowed the CSNRG to orient themselves around their duties, as well as provided an opportunity to develop a work plan. This initial groundwork helped the CSNRG remain engaged throughout the programme, bringing the voice of civil society and contributing to the effective design and implementation of the programme.
- **Integrate regular meetings with the CSNRG into the work plan.** Regularly scheduled meetings provide an opportunity to engage with UN agencies and understand how the programme is progressing. These meetings were an essential platform that allowed the CSNRG to provide valuable advice to advance the Spotlight Initiative programme in Samoa.



⁴⁴¹ [Samoa Spotlight Initiative programme wins Leave No One Behind Award](#) (Government of Samoa, September 2022).