

Introduction

This section illustrates innovative and good practices under each of the six pillars and includes several case studies using a synergistic approach. See the text box for definitions of these key terms. Most pillars have around four to eight good or innovative practices. However, given the greater funding allocated to Pillar 3 on Prevention and Pillar 4 on Services, each of these pillars feature 13 cases. Every case study briefly introduces the context, often including statistics on specific violence rates in a country or region, shares Spotlight Initiative's intervention designed to address the violence issue, highlights the main results and concludes with practices that led to its success, scale-up or sustainability. It is important to note that the context is key in any initiative to end violence against women and girls. A thorough context and power analysis is required to address the ever-shifting landscape in strategic and flexible ways.

Innovative practice

An innovative practice is a new solution (method/idea/product) with the transformative ability to accelerate impact. Innovation can entail improved ways of working with new and diverse partners; can be fuelled by science and technology; or can involve new social and business models, behavioural insights or path-breaking improvements in delivering essential services and products, among other solutions. It does not have to involve technology; most important is that innovation is a break from previous practice with the potential to produce significant positive impact.

Good practice

A good practice is a practice that has been proven to work well and produce good results and is therefore recommended as a model. It is a successful experience that has been tested and validated, in the broad sense, and that has been repeated and deserves to be shared, so that a greater number of people can adopt it.

Lesson Learned

A lesson learned is the knowledge, experience or understanding generated from implementation of Spotlight Initiative that can be used to inform and improve future efforts. It can cover all aspects of the programme, such as quality programming in the Initiative, ways of working in the UN (particularly in terms of interagency coordination, in the spirit of UN reform) or other areas within the field of ending violence against women and girls more broadly. It is often drawn from the actions taken to address a challenge encountered during implementation, which has been properly examined with a critical lens to identify insights and solutions. Capturing lessons learned should be an ongoing process throughout all phases of the Initiative to have a continuous feedback loop.

At the end of each case study, there are successful elements for potential adaptation to other country contexts or thematics and elements that support possibilities towards scale or replication. These, however, should be reflected on with caution because scaling up in this work of transforming norms and cultures of inequalities risks diluting results and impact. As such, there must be mechanisms in place to ensure the integrity and depth of the work. Much of the work related to ending violence against women and girls takes considerable time due to the contextual complexities, histories of violence and the ways in which violence is woven into cultural and normative mechanisms. An essential step is to ensure proper education and awareness of how these patriarchal normative patterns occur and only then can these discriminatory norms be transformed into behaviours, practices and institutions of equality. Efforts that dilute this fundamental and essential principle for the sake of scale should seriously be examined, as the quick win that may transpire may come at the cost of real and deeper sustainable change.

Visual summary of initiatives across pillars



PILLAR 1: LAWS AND POLICIES

- 1 Legal reforms in Mexico safeguard the rights of orphans of femicide
- 2 Femicide Reparation Policy for survivors and their families in Ecuador
- 3 Women with disabilities in Zimbabwe influencing policy decisions and plans
- 4 Regional Action Plan for Africa to eliminate VAWG
- 5 National Strategic Action Plan in Trinidad and Tobago supports interagency coordination



PILLAR 2: INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING

- 1 Greater budget allocation in Timor-Leste for women's rights
- 2 Parliamentary Committee on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Papua New Guinea
- 3 Chiefs Forums in Malawi as key allies on ending VAWG
- 4 Revised protocol addressing GBV cases in higher education in Ecuador



PILLAR 3: PREVENTION

- 1 Safe Space Mentorship Programme in Malawi challenges social norms
- 2 Peace Huts in Zimbabwe address GBV locally and collectively
- 3 CHAMP community-based approach in Trinidad and Tobago empowers adolescents
- 4 Parenting for Childhood Development Programme in Papua New Guinea shifts behaviours that perpetuate VAWG
- 5 Comprehensive SGBV complaints mechanism for school children in Tajikistan
- 6 Secondary school curriculum revision in Vanuatu mainstreams SRHR information
- 7 The Council of Traditional Leaders in Africa commits to ending VAWG in their institutions
- 8 Religious leaders as champions of gender equality in Tajikistan
- 9 "Spring in Bishkek" mobile game educates on women's rights in Kyrgyzstan
- 10 #YoMeOcupo campaign in Argentina about men's household responsibilities
- 11 Multi-initiative strategy to prevention in Ecuador
- 12 *Entre Nos* chatbot in El Salvador raises awareness on gender and masculinity
- 13 Cure Violence community mobilisation model in Honduras helps prevent femicide



PILLAR 4: QUALITY ESSENTIAL SERVICES

- 1 Temporary refuge for women survivors and their families in Mexico
- 2 Mobile women's centres in rural Belize bridge the gap in access to basic services
- 3 Bus of Solidarity in Kyrgyzstan delivers gender-sensitive legal services
- 4 Taxi drivers in Niger promote safe public spaces for women and girls
- 5 GBV helplines in Samoa provide services during the COVID-19 pandemic
- 6 Integration of VAWG in emergency response plans promotes access to services and referral in Tajikistan
- 7 Mobile one-stop centre model in Zimbabwe improves access to essential services in hard-to-reach areas
- 8 Decentralised one-stop centres in Mali provide essential services
- 9 Specialised DVICs at police stations in Jamaica improve access to justice
- 10 Community and Survivor Funds in Malawi ensure economic justice for survivors
- 11 Alternative livelihoods for traditional zoes in Liberia reduces the practice of FGM
- 12 Model protocols in Indonesia for handling GBV cases of women migrant workers
- 13 Gender Responsive Policing Training in Trinidad and Tobago



PILLAR 5: DATA

- 1 *InfoViolência* digital database for GBV cases in Mozambique
- 2 PRMIS in Grenada for monitoring crime data
- 3 Primero System in Trinidad and Tobago for case management on violence against children
- 4 *Flores en el Aire*, a qualitative data approach in Ecuador
- 5 Cross-dimensional and cross-national research on femicide in Latin America
- 6 Mobile SAV App in Liberia for reporting cases of rape, physical and domestic violence
- 7 DNA lab in Uganda strengthens prosecution of VAWG cases
- 8 Innovation hacklabs in Africa spark new ideas and technology



PILLAR 6: WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS

- 1 Funding civil society and grassroots communities through the UN Trust Fund to ERAW and WPHF
- 2 Transnational federation of Filipino domestic and care workers unions and associations
- 3 School of Gender Activists in Tajikistan builds a cadre of local experts
- 4 PacFemCOP advances best practices in feminist discourse and movement building
- 5 The Esperanza Protocol for the protection of women HRDs in Latin America
- 6 CSNRG contributes to the success of Spotlight Initiative in Samoa

SYNERGIES ACROSS MULTIPLE PILLARS: A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH TO ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

1 A comprehensive approach to end violence against women and girls in Malawi

2 The establishment of the Multi-Sectoral Mechanism of Integrated Care for Women Victims of Violence in Mozambique

3 The declaration of rape as a national emergency in Liberia results in a National Anti-Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Roadmap



Pillar 1: Laws & policies

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

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

New national and subnational laws and policies



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

Overview

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Results

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

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

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

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

Key Elements of Success and Practices for Replication

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



¹³ The 2020 Mexico Annual Report, page 7.

¹⁴ The 2019 Mexico Annual Report, page 19.

¹⁵ The 2020 Mexico Annual Report, page 25.

¹⁶ The 2023 Mexico Annual Report Draft, page 7.



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

Overview

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

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

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

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

Results

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Key Elements of Success and Practices for Replication

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



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

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

1.3 Women with disabilities in Zimbabwe influencing policy decisions and plans

Overview

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

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

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

Results

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

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

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

Isabel Chipunza, Project Officer at Leonard Cheshire Disability Zimbabwe

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

³⁰ The 2020 Zimbabwe Annual Report, page 36.

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

³² The 2020 Zimbabwe Annual Report, page 9.

³³ Ibid, page 36.

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

³⁵ Ibid.

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

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

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

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

Key Elements of Success and Practices for Replication

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

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

³⁷ The 2020 Zimbabwe Annual Report, page 37.

³⁸ Ibid, page 10.

³⁹ The 2022 Zimbabwe Annual Report Draft, page 36.

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

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

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

Overview

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

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

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

Results

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Key Elements of Success and Practices for Replication

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

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

⁵³ Ibid, page 49.

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

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

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

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

Overview

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

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

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

Results

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

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

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

⁵⁹ Ibid.

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

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

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

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

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

Key Elements of Success and Practices for Replication

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





Pillar 2: Institutional strengthening

Under Pillar 2, Spotlight Initiative prioritises institutional strengthening to ensure that laws and policies that prevent and respond to violence against women and girls and harmful practices are implemented, well-funded, effective and sustainable over time across diverse sectors. Institutions play a crucial role in ending violence against women by providing the resources, frameworks and action for awareness, prevention and response. This pillar focuses on strengthening multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder coordination mechanisms, ensuring that sector and national action plans address violence against women and girls, strengthening capacity development within institutions, such as gender-lens training of ministries, duty-bearers and secondary and higher education counterparts, and implementing gender-responsive planning and budgeting.

The following good and innovative cases are shared in the section below. In Timor-Leste and Papua New Guinea, good and innovative gender-responsive budgeting practices are described. In Malawi, successful innovative gender lens-trainings for government, duty-bearers and engagement of traditional leaders are shared. In Ecuador, good practices related to the development of gender equitable national and higher level curriculum are detailed.

Gender-responsive budgets

2.1 Greater budget allocation in Timor-Leste for women's rights and to end violence against women and girls

Overview

Sexual and gender-based violence are critical issues in post-conflict Timor-Leste. Almost 67 percent of women have experienced intimate partner violence, and more than 74 percent of women believe that a man is justified in physically beating his wife.⁶³ Furthermore, 37 percent of married women that have experienced violence from their partners described domestic violence as normal and, in some cases, noted that violence was a daily occurrence.⁶⁴ In order to effectively address domestic violence, national budgets must be in place to support critical and life saving services and prevention activities.

In Timor-Leste, the percentage of the national budget allocated to the prevention and elimination of violence against women and girls became a significant point of concern, following a drastic funding reduction between 2019 and 2020.⁶⁵ In 2019, 0.6 percent of the budget (10.4 million USD) was allocated to gender equality initiatives. This was reduced to a mere 0.1 percent of the budget (1.4 million USD) in 2020. Reductions in budget allocated to gender equality initiatives have adverse consequences that impede the protection of women's rights and safety, the advancement of policies and programmes that address gender-based violence, as well as equitable access to education, healthcare, employment and other opportunities.

In order to address this, through Spotlight Initiative, UNDP, UN Women and Forum Komunikasaun Ba Feto Timor Loro Sa'e (FOKUPERS) actively engaged with different levels of government and 23 civil society organisations with the objective to increase budget allocations for preventing and ending violence against women and girls.⁶⁶ This engagement also ensured that stakeholders had a greater understanding of the budget and budgeting process, so that they could actively engage, contribute to and monitor its implementation.

Results

Spotlight Initiative's efforts to strengthen gender-responsive budgeting in Timor-Leste have resulted in notable outcomes, including increased budget allocation for gender equality and increased confidence of civil society organisations in overseeing budget implementation.

⁶³ Over 54,000 Lives Transformed in the Efforts to End Gender-based Violence in Timor-Leste (International Organization for Migration, October 2023).

⁶⁴ Op-Ed: The Countdown to an End to the 16 Days of Activism and an End to Gender-based Violence (UN Women, December 2020).

⁶⁵ The 2021 Global Annual Narrative Progress Report, page 86.

⁶⁶ The 2021 Timor-Leste Annual Narrative Programme Report, page 32.

Spotlight Initiative developed a multi-pronged approach to address the decline in funding, involving training on gender-responsive budgeting with ministries, municipalities and civil society, among others. For example, the programme engaged a gender expert to advocate in parliament to increase funding for women’s human rights and ending violence against women and girls. In addition, Spotlight Initiative carried out gender-based violence prevention training with the Municipal Gender Working Group, Sectoral Directors at the municipal and post-administrative level, and the Gender Working Group from different line ministries. This training included components of gender-responsive budgeting and reached over 300 participants.⁶⁷

Another key activity supported by Spotlight Initiative was capacity development on gender-responsive budgeting for community members, civil society organisations and local governments. The programme employed an innovative method that translated state budget execution and expenditures into simplified information using infographics. This training assisted stakeholders in acquiring the necessary skills to assess the coherence between the state budget, public policies, programmes and projects, and the impact on citizens and monitoring of the budget programmes. These efforts highlighted the important role civil society organisations can play in monitoring government activities, such as comprehensive budget analysis.⁶⁸

“This initiative recognizes the role that CSOs play in overseeing government activities and provides tools that empower CSOs [to] strengthen checks and balances systems and enhance the democratic system.”

Bruno de Lencastre, Chief Technical Advisor of UNDP Parliament Project

These strategies were effective and resulted in a 247 percent increase in the budget between 2021 and 2022, specifically 203.78 million USD. In addition, 233 million USD (over 12 percent of the budget) was allocated to gender equality and social inclusion. In 2023, 259 million USD was allocated for gender equality and social inclusion programmes. This amount represented the third largest allocation from the total budget (or 8.2 percent), indicating the importance of gender equality and inclusion in the 2023 budget. The increased budget allocation will contribute to better governance, and it is expected that future budgets will be more gender-responsive, transparent and accountable to the prevention of and response to violence against women and girls.

These strategies were effective and resulted in a 247 percent increase in the budget between 2021 and 2022, specifically 203.78 million USD. In addition, 233 million USD (over 12 percent of the budget) was allocated to gender equality and social inclusion. In 2023, 259 million USD was allocated for gender equality and social inclusion programmes. This amount represented the third largest allocation from the total budget (or 8.2 percent), indicating the importance of gender equality and inclusion in the 2023 budget. The increased budget allocation will contribute to better governance, and it is expected that future budgets will be more gender-responsive, transparent and accountable to the prevention of and response to violence against women and girls.

Spotlight Initiative’s interventions also contributed to the approval of the new National Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence 2022-2032 (hereafter referred to as the “National GBV Action Plan”) by the Council of Ministers in June 2022. This action plan engaged a number of government offices, including the Municipality Authority Planning Unit under the Ministry of State Administration, the Gender Working Group, and the Secretariat of State for Equality and Inclusion. This work has resulted in the incorporation of the National GBV Action Plan into the Municipality Annual Plans for 2022, as well as an assessment of the municipality’s work on the National GBV Action Plan. Aligning programme objectives with actual budgets is critical for implementation.⁶⁹ These efforts facilitated holistic planning and development and helped to avoid duplication of efforts and resources.

“It is hard to understand the state budget and especially to analyse it from a gender perspective. The training has increased my understanding to analyse the programme and budget, and I look forward to familiarising and understanding all the budget books.”

A Gender Responsive Budget Working Group member training participant

These results clearly illustrate a renewed government commitment to gender equality, particularly in the case of the Secretariat of State for Equality and Inclusion. It is hoped that these efforts will contribute to sustainable, long-term allocations for gender equality in future budgets, coordination across different levels of government, as well as increased engagement and oversight of civil society organisations and other stakeholders.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Gender Responsive State Budgeting Analysis Workshop – EU-UN Spotlight Initiative (Delegation of the European Union to Timor-Leste, June 2022).

⁶⁹ The 2022 Timor-Leste Annual Narrative Programme Report.

Key Elements of Success and Practices for Replication

- **Strengthen government accountability and transparency to end violence against women and girls through training civil society and citizens to monitor gender budgets.** Citizen and civil society budget tracking is essential to ensure that funds are allocated to issues, such as ending violence against women and girls. These measures can contribute to the advancement of gender equality and women's rights in a city, region, municipality or country.
- **Engage a gender expert in the parliament or government body responsible for gender budgeting.** The gender expert was able to work within government structures to promote and advance issues related to gender equality. Through advocating for policies, programmes and initiatives that address gender-based violence, a significant budget increase was achieved. Positioning gender experts strategically in government or parliament could be replicated in other countries to achieve increased budget allocations, policies and programs aimed at ending violence against women and girls and increasing gender equality.
- **Train and build the capacity of civil society organisations to monitor budgets and expenditures that are allocated to end violence against women and girls and support gender equality.** Through innovative methods that simplified complex budgets, civil society representatives increased their confidence and skills to engage not only in the budgeting process, but also in overseeing the implementation of the budget and programmes.
- **Align local and national gender action plans and budgets to preserve resources and minimise duplication.** This promotes efficiency, accountability and targeted development and can contribute to maximising limited resources to promote gender equality.

2.2 *The institutionalisation of the Parliamentary Committee on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, and the first-ever budget allocation for gender-based violence programming in Papua New Guinea*

Overview

Papua New Guinea has one of the highest rates of gender-based violence in the world. Around 56 percent of women and girls aged 15-49 have experienced physical violence and 28 percent have experienced sexual violence. Furthermore, 63 percent of ever-married women have been subjected to physical, sexual or emotional abuse.⁷⁰ In 2020, lockdowns necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic significantly increased domestic violence: 68 percent of women experienced physical violence, and 50 percent of women were sexually assaulted in their own homes. By the end of 2020, Papua New Guinea recorded 761 cases and 9 deaths related to gender-based violence.⁷¹ Amid the elevated rate of violence against women, two widely publicised cases of domestic violence led to public outcry, urging the government to take action.

Gold-medalist boxer and international rugby player, Debbie Kaore, was burnt by an iron and beaten by her former partner, as witnessed by her children.⁷² The brutal attack was captured on video and publicly released in June 2020. A few weeks later, a 19-year-old mother of two, Jenelyn Kennedy, was tortured and killed by her husband.⁷³ These cases were the turning point that sparked a civic and political movement against gender-based violence. Vigils and peaceful marches were held to commemorate Jenelyn's death and address violence against women.⁷⁴ The "PNG Man Up" involvement at one vigil, for example, called for justice for the victims and was attended by senior government officials, including the Prime Minister, who signed the pledge to end gender-based violence.⁷⁵

Results

Shortly after these events, the National Capital District Governor championed ending gender-based violence with all of the governors across Papua New Guinea. The Spotlight Initiative programme in Papua New Guinea organised a Governor's Conference on Gender-Based Violence in August 2020, which convened governors and ministers from different provinces. The state officials discussed strategies for addressing gender-based violence in the country and formed an alliance to end gender-based violence. One of the strategies formulated by this Coalition of Parliamentarians was to hold the first ever National Summit on Ending Gender-Based Violence. Through Spotlight Initiative, UNDP provided technical, operational and financial support around the proposed event. The first-ever summit to end gender-based violence was successfully held in November 2020⁷⁶ and attended by approximately 750 people from different sectors all over the country. Representatives from the private sector spoke about the impact of gender-based violence on their businesses, while representatives from civil society shared their difficulties in securing funding for gender-based violence-related initiatives. The summit was live-streamed and covered by both social and traditional media.

⁷⁰ Papua New Guinea Demographic and Health Survey 2016-18 [FR364] (National Statistical Office Papua New Guinea and ICF, 2019).

⁷¹ The 2020 Papua New Guinea Annual Report, page 10.

⁷² [Champion boxer beaten by ex-partner with hot iron raises profile of domestic violence plaguing PNG](#) (ABC News, 2020).

⁷³ [Papua New Guinea women demand end to domestic violence after death of 19-year-old mother Jenelyn Kennedy](#) (ABC News, 2020).

⁷⁴ The 2020 Papua New Guinea Annual Report, page 12.

⁷⁵ Ibid, page 13.

⁷⁶ Ibid, page 20 and 26.

A key resolution achieved during the national summit was the establishment of the Special Parliamentary Committee on Gender-Based Violence (hereafter referred to as the “Special Parliamentary Committee”). The committee, composed of seven members of the parliament,⁷⁷ was developed to serve as a national mechanism to address violence against women and children in the country.⁷⁸ The Committee’s role was to monitor government operations, identify policies for review and recommend different courses of action to the government.⁷⁹ This marked a significant milestone for the country, introducing a dedicated governmental body aimed at addressing gender-based violence which, in turn, ensured governmental accountability.

Through the support of Spotlight Initiative, the Special Parliamentary Committee held its first inquiry in May 2021.⁸⁰ This consisted of two days of public hearings, during which written submissions from stakeholders detailing the gaps and challenges in properly responding to gender-based violence were considered. The result of the first inquiry was a parliamentary report containing 71 recommendations for action. A second gender-based violence hearing was held in March 2022.⁸¹

“Being part of the public hearing allow[ed] a space for frontliners [to] get up to the mic, report actual cases, [and] talk about the challenges that they were going through. [Establishing a parliamentary committee on GBV] was a big win [that] holds the government accountable in addressing gender-based violence.”

Jacqui Joseph, Civil Society Reference Group Chair

A key win of the Special Parliamentary Committee was the allocation of the first-ever national budget in 2021 (approximately 7.93 million Papua New Guinean Kina or 1.4 million USD) for violence against women and children. Among the initiatives funded by the budget were the implementation of the sorcery accusation-related violence national action plan, the provision of grants to civil society organisations for gender-based violence/sorcery accusation-related violence programmes, and funding for staffing for the National Gender-Based Violence Secretariat under the Department of Community Development and Religion.⁸² Making even greater strides, the government increased the budget for 2023 by 24 percent, amounting to 9.8 million Papua New Guinean Kina (2.63 million USD).⁸³ Spotlight Initiative supported this budget allocation and implementation work through technical assistance to key state agencies⁸⁴ and continued dialogue with civil society to align the budget to sectoral needs.⁸⁵

Finally, after the July 2022 election and during the 11th Parliament, another political landmark was achieved as the parliamentary committee was institutionalised and became the permanent Parliamentary Committee on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment. This was seen as a breakthrough not only in Papua New Guinea but also in the Pacific region. This unexpected and positive result was the product of continuous advocacy and awareness raising activities of the Spotlight Initiative programme and public pressure on political leaders.⁸⁶

Key Elements of Success and Practices for Replication

- **Recognise the power of media coverage to spark collective action and sustain momentum.** In this case, the high-profile cases covered by the media during the pandemic created a movement to end violence against women and children and fueled political leaders to advocate for the protection of women and children. Spotlight Initiative seized this opportunity and kept the momentum going by facilitating key opportunities for state actors to gather, plan and champion their advocacy. Spotlight Initiative facilitated the meetings of the state officials, resulting in the formation of the Coalition of Parliamentarians and the convening of a national summit that paved the way for the institutionalisation of the Permanent Parliamentary Committee on Gender-Based Violence.
- **Develop strategies around the existing political infrastructure and harness opportunities in a supportive political climate.** Instead of reinventing the wheel, Spotlight Initiative supported and stimulated the advocacy initiatives of parliamentarians to combat gender-based violence. Strategically establishing a Parliamentary Committee dedicated to gender-based violence utilised the existing governmental structure, eliminating the necessity to introduce a new system or process.
- **Continually work with and engage the civil society sector.** Civil society organisations’ proactiveness and commitment to gender-based violence were instrumental to the successful establishment of the Permanent Parliamentary Committee on Gender-Based Violence. The civil society organisations were deeply engaged, available to provide input during the hearing and consistent in their support of the programme.

⁷⁷ A new era for gender-based violence response in PNG (East Asia Forum, September 2021).

⁷⁸ The 2020 Papua New Guinea Annual Report, page 24.

⁷⁹ Ibid, page 7-8.

⁸⁰ Special Parliamentary GBV Committee tables final report (UNDP Papua New Guinea, April 2022).

⁸¹ Key Activities of the Special Parliamentary Committee on GBV (PNG Parliamentarians to End GBV, April 2022).

⁸² The National GBV secretariat will be the key government division to operationalize the National GBV strategy of Papua New Guinea.

⁸³ The 2022 Papua New Guinea Interim Annual Report, page 7.

⁸⁴ Ibid, page 10.

⁸⁵ The 2021 Papua New Guinea Annual Report, page 37.

⁸⁶ The 2022 Papua New Guinea Annual Report, page 26.

Gender-lens training of duty-bearers

2.3 Chiefs Forums in Malawi engage traditional leaders as key allies in ending violence against women and girls

Overview

Malawi has one of the highest rates of child marriage in the world, with approximately 46 percent of girls being married before the age of 18, and 9 percent married before they turn 15.⁸⁷ Child marriage is a form of gender-based violence and a human rights violation, compromising girls' health, security and autonomy and preventing them from achieving their full potential.

As custodians of tradition, culture and customs, traditional chiefs in Malawi play a critical role in ending child marriage and harmful practices. However, historically, there has been a significant discrepancy between chiefs' positions on such matters, which highlighted the need for a platform to reach consensus and harmonisation on their role in ending violence against women and girls. To address this, through Spotlight Initiative, UNDP and the Ministry of Local Government, Unity and Culture formed a strategic alliance in 2020 with Paramount Chiefs, the most senior traditional leaders in Malawi, to implement the "Chiefs Forum" to end violence against women and girls and child marriage. Through consultation meetings, Spotlight Initiative was able to engage the Paramount Chiefs to co-develop the Forum strategy, which was key to obtaining their buy-in to the initiative. Following this, broader consultations involving 3,421 community leaders and other stakeholders were held to support the development of a national framework that subsequently guided the establishment of Chiefs Forums at national, district and community levels.

The framework was the first of its kind and defined the roadmap for the implementation and work of the Chiefs Forums to promote gender equality and challenge harmful social norms by contributing to and monitoring the implementation of gender-based violence, child marriage and other harmful practices and sexual and reproductive health and rights by-laws and policies. It also functioned as an accountability mechanism for traditional leaders to their constituents.

Results

In 2020, a National Chiefs Forum was established, along with six District Chiefs Forums across the country. Community level Chiefs Forums then followed, reaching approximately 2,232 chiefs. To strengthen these platforms and enable the chiefs to fulfil their roles effectively, 1,561 members of the Chiefs Forums were trained on gender-based violence, harmful practices and sexual and reproductive health and rights laws, leading to a better understanding of the referral pathways and how to promote safety for women and girls. The training approach also included coordination mechanisms for traditional leaders to work collaboratively and in an harmonised way through the Chiefs Forums at national, district and local levels. These trainings were recognised as an important step for traditional leaders to collectively handle and prevent gender-based violence and child marriage cases and had a transformative impact on some chiefs' awareness and perspectives of gender-based violence and harmful practices, as shared by some of them.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ [The Child Marriage Factsheet](#) (UNICEF Malawi, July 2018).

⁸⁸ [UNDP Spotlight Initiative video](#) (UNDP Malawi, August 2022).

“What makes Spotlight Initiative unique is the approach they taught us. We were trained to work in groups to ensure effectiveness of our efforts to deal with GBV and accountability.”

Paramount Chief Kawinga of Machinga district

“

“Spotlight Initiative came in with a lot of training for the Chiefs to know how to work, especially when it comes to issues of GBV. It also helped Chiefs to start coordinating with other structures like the Community Victim Support Unit, the police, the court and various other community groups like mothers groups.”

A traditional chief from Machinga district

“The Spotlight Initiative has empowered us Chiefs. We are able to impart knowledge about the effects of violence against women and girls in our communities. We can see change.”

A traditional chief from Ntchisi district

“Individually, I changed my perspective on issues of GBV and became passionate about helping women and girls. Last year, I took three girls back from child marriages, and I did not need support from anybody else to do it because now I know the power that I have as a Chief.”

A traditional chief from Machinga district

Another effective strategy implemented by the Chiefs Forums was the inclusion of traditional chiefs in gender-based violence patrols, in collaboration with Safe Space mentors, mother groups and child protection workers. (See more in [case study 3.1](#) under Pillar 3.) Together they identified and referred child marriage and harmful practices cases, and defined and applied penalties in accordance with their by-laws. Additionally, to support girls' education, chiefs visited schools to identify absentees and contacted parents to ensure their daughters attended school. Some chiefs went as far as conducting resource mobilisation in their communities to support girls' re-enrollment in schools and supplied educational materials and uniforms. These practices were reinforced through localised by-laws and have achieved significant results. Gender-based violence patrols were able to identify and refer 1,075 gender-based violence cases, of which 44 percent were addressed through mobile and district courts.⁸⁹ They also cancelled 1,222 child marriages (98 percent of registered child marriages within six districts) and then re-enrolled girls in schools, which likely contributed to preventing early pregnancies.⁹⁰ Chiefs also conducted awareness campaigns on gender-based violence in their localities, according to action plans.⁹¹

According to different traditional chiefs, the Forums and associated activities, such as the gender-based violence patrols, have been instrumental in fostering normative and behavioural changes, including significant shifts in attitudes towards gender-based violence, child marriage and girls' education. These changes are occurring in community members and amongst traditional leaders themselves, who are now catalysts of social change and championing their commitment to ending violence against women and girls. The Chiefs Forums are also contributing to strengthening local by-laws, ensuring harmonisation and alignment with the national priority of ending violence against women and girls. The growing support of many traditional leaders through the Chiefs Forums represents successful results that can be replicated and adapted in other contexts.

Key Elements of Success and Practices for Replication

- **Identify and engage the most influential traditional and religious leaders and community leaders to co-create strategies for greater reach, resonance and impact.** The strategy of involving and ensuring the buy-in of Paramount Chiefs was crucial to reach and engage more local Chiefs in Forums. District and local Chiefs are energised by the Chiefs Forums' approach of working collaboratively and in alignment and are calling on other leaders to join them. Ultimately, this increased the number of people that were reached in communities.
- **Train leaders on gender-based violence issues and offer concrete collaborative and coordination mechanisms to ensure increased effectiveness and coherence across different levels (e.g., national, regional and local levels).** The Spotlight Initiative programme contributed to a strengthened integrated service delivery landscape by ensuring gender-based violence prevention measures were integrated into traditional chiefs' action plans with coordination mechanisms in place. For example, training the local chiefs gave them the necessary skills to address cases, reducing the number of cases that went to Paramount Chiefs and increasing women's and girls' access to justice, resulting in more efficient case resolution.
- **Connect different interventions and existing government, public and community structures to adopt a comprehensive approach and increase impact at individual, community and societal levels.** Strengthening chiefs' collaboration with service providers, community groups and stakeholders from other Spotlight Initiative activities being implemented in the country, such as the Safe Space mentors and mobile courts, led to more effective responses and results across other pillars. (See more in [case study 7.1](#), which details this work across multiple pillars.)



⁸⁹ Ibid, page 10.

⁹⁰ The 2021 Papua New Guinea Annual Report, page 37.

⁹¹ The 2022 Papua New Guinea Annual Report, page 26.

Gender equitable secondary and higher education

2.4 Revised protocol addressing gender-based violence cases in higher education in Ecuador

Overview

The prevalence of gender-based violence in higher education institutions in Ecuador is significant, with data showing that 19 percent of female teachers and administrative staff, and 31 percent of female students have been assaulted by someone at university.⁹² A national protocol for the prevention of harassment, discrimination and violence based on gender and sexual orientation in higher education⁹³ (hereafter referred to as the “National Protocol”) was issued in 2018 to support universities to implement internal protocols. However, it only offered general information and guidance and lacked strong implementation and accountability mechanisms. As such, acts of violence remained underreported at universities because survivors believed that nothing would happen. Close to half (48 percent) also stated that they were concerned about retaliation from aggressors.⁹⁴

In 2022, through Spotlight Initiative, UN Women and the University of Cuenca collaborated to review the university’s existing protocol to be more actionable, include more prevention mechanisms and reflect the voices and experiences of students and university staff. The goal was also for this revised protocol to inform a recommendation document to update the National Protocol.

Spotlight Initiative, together with its implementation partner Center for Planning and Social Studies and the University of Cuenca, started the review process with an in-depth analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the existing protocol. Several consultation meetings were held with student organisations, the university administration and academic staff who offered valuable recommendations to strengthen the protocol. The next step was the development and conclusion of the final version of the Protocol For Prevention and Action in Cases of Harassment, Discrimination and Violence Based on Gender, Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation (hereafter referred to as the “Final Protocol”).

Results

The Final Protocol was approved by the University of Cuenca Council in January 2023. One of the main changes implemented was the inclusion of an entire prevention section with action plans and concrete measures to be implemented, such as the inclusion of gender equality and human rights approaches in all career curricula. Another key change was the creation of a specific commission to investigate reported cases of violence and sexual harassment with a concrete timeline for the investigation process.⁹⁵ An important accountability mechanism was also introduced in the investigation process: representatives from the University Women's Association and the employee association gained voice and a vote in the committee based on whether the victim was a student or a staff member.

Student organisations began to raise awareness about the Final Protocol through social media and other channels, such as banners across the university. A student organisation⁹⁶ also trained other students on the Final Protocol, and they, in turn, shared it with others, further increasing awareness. Students were proactive in building their own initiatives. One such innovation was the development of a mobile application where anyone could easily access the protocol and gain information about support services, as well as share their experiences with the student community. The socialisation and sharing process has been important, leading to a wider reach and necessary discussions on gender-based violence and harassment in the university setting and beyond.

The results of the Final Protocol have not yet been evaluated because the implementation is recent. However, some students and teachers have already been held accountable, according to the revised rules. In one instance, a teacher was disciplined under more concrete and explicit definitions of different types of violence defined in the protocol, in this case, under symbolic violence.⁹⁷ Furthermore, according to one student, the fact that the Final Protocol included students' voices and needs was a result in itself.

Building on the successes of the work with the University of Cuenca, Spotlight Initiative supported two more universities in the review and approval of protocols to prevent harassment, discrimination and gender-based violence cases.⁹⁸ Based on

⁹² From Evidence to Prevention: How to Prevent Violence against Women in Ecuadorian Universities (GIZ, June 2023).

⁹³ Protocolo de actuación en casos de acoso, discriminación y violencia basada en género y orientación sexual en las instituciones de educación superior (Secretaría de Educación Superior, Ciencia, Tecnología e Innovación del Ecuador, 2018). (in Spanish)

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ The Special Commission for Attention and Review of Cases of Harassment, Discrimination and Gender-Based Violence. The Special Commission has three days from the day following the complaint to verify compliance with the requirements set out in the protocol, and if met, a process will be installed immediately.

⁹⁶ Named *Red de Cuidado* (translated as “Care Network”).

⁹⁷ Symbolic violence is a term coined by Pierre Bourdieu to refer to a type of non-physical violence manifested in the power differential between social groups or individuals. It is often manifested in an imposition of the norms of the group/individual possessing greater social power on those of the subordinate group.

⁹⁸ Amazonian State University of Pastaza and San Gregorio University of Portoviejo.

this work and lessons learned, Spotlight Initiative led the development of a recommendation document to strengthen the national protocol, which was submitted to the Secretariat of Higher Education in Ecuador. Follow-up activities will be conducted in connection with the second phase of the Spotlight Initiative Ecuador programme.⁹⁹

Key Elements of Success and Practices for Replication

- **Protocols to prevent gender-based violence and harassment at universities need to be actionable and include means of prevention and accountability mechanisms to be effective.** The case in Ecuador detailed how these specific additions, coupled with student involvement and ownership, led to a stronger policy framework being implemented.
- **Engage in participatory processes that build with and from a diverse set of stakeholders' perspectives and experiences to support more relevant and effective policy design processes.** Involving students in the protocol review process was critical to amplifying their voices and needs, fostering students' ownership of the document, encouraging them to share it widely and to act as advocates, in addition to monitoring its implementation.



⁹⁹ Funded by the European Union, the Italian Ecuadorian Fund for Sustainable Development and USAID, Spotlight Initiative in Ecuador has been granted a second cycle starting in January 2024 and lasting 2 years.



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.

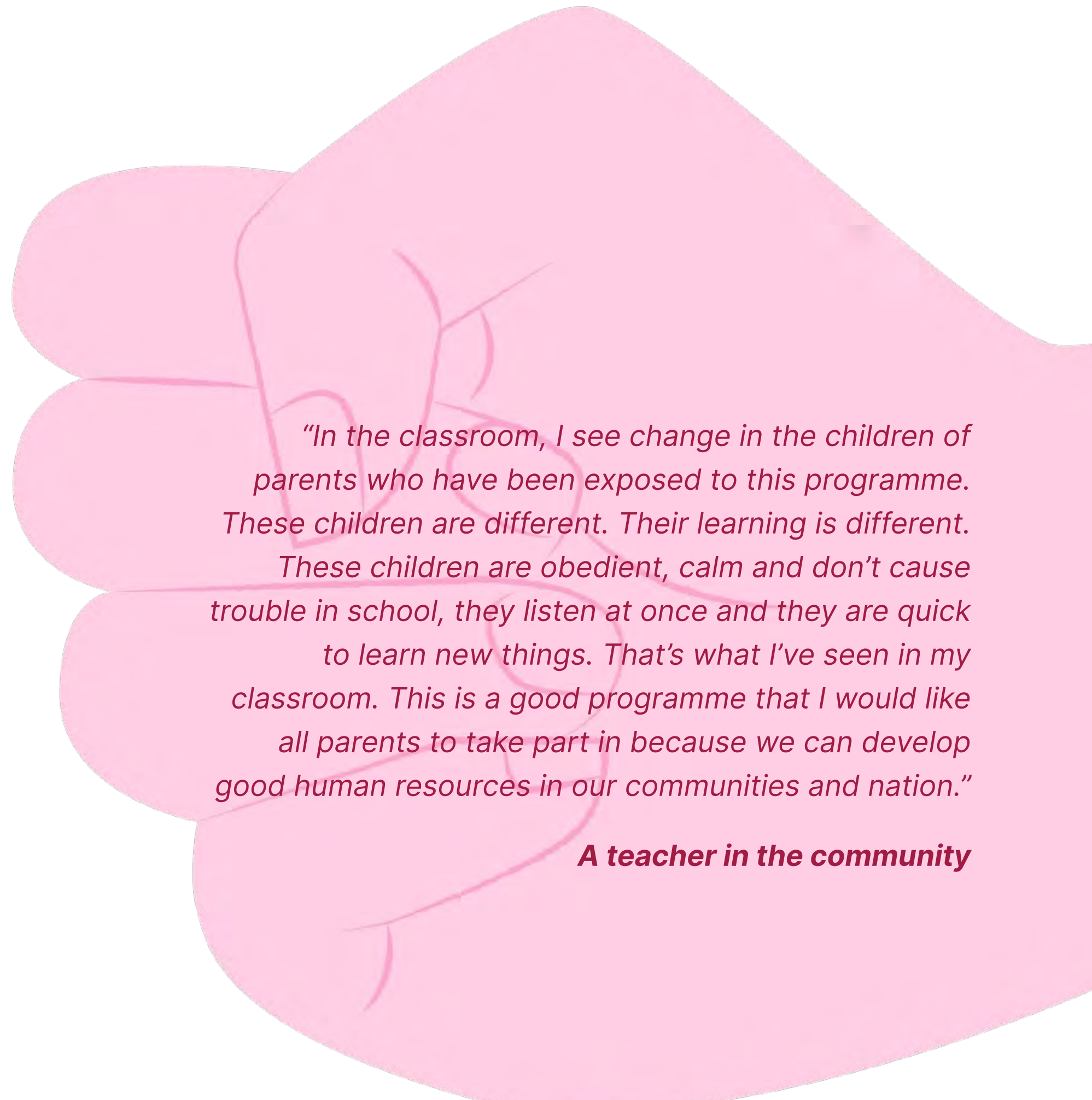
¹³⁰ The 2023 Papua New Guinea Annual Report Draft, page 28.

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. Relaunched 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.

