

SESSION ONE - LATIN AMERICA AND CARIBBEAN

Embracing Healthy Masculinities for the Prevention of Violence Against Women and Girls

Key Lessons Learned and Promising Practices

The Spotlight Initiative Cross-Regional Learning Session on **Embracing Healthy Masculinities for the Prevention of Violence Against Women and Girls** explored various approaches for engaging men and boys to address gender stereotypes and negative social norms to effectively transform harmful masculinities. This knowledge product highlights critical lessons learned as well as promising practices from Spotlight Initiative programmes in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as in other contexts that surfaced during the session. This product can be used to support quality programming and implementation efforts to eliminate violence against women and girls in the Spotlight Initiative and beyond.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED

- To effectively transform toxic masculinities and challenge harmful stereotypes, it is critical to address the root causes of violent behaviour while working with men and boys. All interventions with men and boys should be **rooted in addressing the power imbalances** that exist between men and women, and boys and girls. This also includes **increasing perpetrator accountability by challenging men's beliefs around the right to control others, the household, and women and girls**. It is critical that interventions are **inclusive of men of various orientations and backgrounds and address broader structural issues**, such as economic factors and employment. Using the SASA! programme and tools have been found helpful for working with men and boys to transform power dynamics.
- There is often backlash with counter-arguments that women are perpetrators of violence too. It is essential to understand and openly reaffirm that by far the largest percentage of perpetrators are men, statistics demonstrate that most survivors are women and girls, and that **men have a key role to play for the elimination of violence against women and girls**.
- It is critical that **women are engaged in the design and implementation** of initiatives that challenge gender stereotypes and support healthy forms of masculinities for the prevention of violence against women and girls.
- **It is critically important for men to understand and accept that safe spaces only for women are essential, in particular for survivors**, and in turn also benefit men. In certain circumstances, there have been benefits to having **safe spaces only for men and boys** to speak in an environment where they do not feel judged, can **openly explore the roots of harmful belief systems**, and can work together to **change assumptions and transform harmful masculinities**.
- **Engaging boys from a young age is critical for prevention**. Working with schools provides an opportunity to have boys **question gender stereotypes and challenge the acceptability of employing violence** from an early age. Boys can learn to deal with frustrations in constructive ways. When these perspectives are brought back home, they **have the potential to influence the behaviour of adults in the family**.
- **Faith-based organizations and religious leaders** can play a useful role in engaging men and boys, as they can be **willing to partner and engage extended communities and societies in the effort to eliminate violence against women and girls**. Traditional leaders have the power to transform notions on whether violence against women and girls continues to be viewed as a 'private' matter and instead bring it to the public eye. Furthermore, traditional leaders can be **key partners in addressing unequal power dynamics through public education and dialogue**.

- It is important to assess **how to best reach men and boys in rural communities with high prevalence rates**, particularly where there is low connectivity. Using existing campaigns, edutainment, radio and TV with messaging and information on programmes can be useful options.
- To meaningfully engage men in prevention programmes, it is important to **combine interventions with psychosocial support** to work through the issues that contribute to the use of violence and how men perceive themselves.
- The necessity to elevate the **transformation of harmful masculinities to scale is a critical lesson and next step**. Moving beyond working only with small groups of men and boys, further research on how **families across the board can assist with changing socialization patterns to counter gender stereotypes** for men, women, boys and girls can be one potential step towards this aim.
- It is important that initiatives for the prevention of violence against women and girls are **long-term**. It takes time to change mindsets, attitudes and behaviours, and thus be able to see the results of effective programming.



“UNDERSTANDING THAT BEING MASCULINE DOES NOT MEAN THAT YOU HAVE TO BE A BULLY, OR THAT YOU HAVE TO BE IN CONTROL ALL THE TIME, IS SOMETHING THAT A LOT OF MEN HAVE NOT COME TO TERMS WITH. THE PROGRAMME TAKES A VERY DELIBERATE APPROACH TO WORK WITH MEN AROUND UNDERSTANDING THESE THINGS.”

Tyrone W. Buckmire
 Director, Legal Aid & Counselling Clinic
 Spotlight Initiative Grenada

PROMISING PRACTICES

- **The Spotlight Initiative in El Salvador** developed promising **training programs on masculinities** - one for public operators and another tailored towards young leaders. The trainings covered issues including gender-based violence and control, power and dominance, social constructions of gender across generations, principles of equality and equity, alternative masculinities, as well as assertive communication and creative conflict transformation, among others. **Training leaders across areas of work on the core constructs of masculinities can bring meaningful results and have cascading effects** beyond conducting broad 'gender' trainings as is traditionally done. For example, **knowledge of alternative masculinities rose from 10% before the training to 71% afterwards**, and youth expressed their desire to **continue learning about masculinities through similar initiatives**. Furthermore, the Initiative leveraged another promising practice to support the transformation of masculinities - through the creation of an interactive online chat bot on Facebook engaging men between the ages of 15 to 29 to **speak about their emotions and experiences with masculinity, relationships** and other related issues to address the **root causes of violence against women and girls and support prevention efforts**. Within 5 months, the bot had **489,954 interactions**.
- **The Spotlight Initiative in Jamaica** held interventions with men - of various ages, orientations, and located in both rural and urban areas - to understand **how conceptions of different kinds of masculinities impact them as a community of men**. Framing discussions in this way is a promising practice to support prevention efforts. Working with **men at the grassroots level and from various communities**, such as the LGBTQI+ community, has been key to engaging all men to challenge assumptions and behaviours in a safe space. This has also provided an opportunity for **men to become advocates**. As men gain a stronger sense of their role in supporting safer and more equal communities, a community of men **changemakers** is being created to mobilize an end to violence against women and girls.



“DECONSTRUCTION [OF TOXIC MASCULINITIES] IS A PERSONAL COMMITMENT.”

Participant from Spotlight Initiative El Salvador training on masculinities

CASE STUDY

Transforming Toxic Masculinities through Reflection and Accountability in Grenada

The Spotlight Initiative in Grenada is supporting efforts to **address the root causes of men’s violence against women and increase perpetrator accountability** through the Partnership for Peace (PfP) Violence Intervention Programme. Based on **perpetrator accountability and victim safety**, the programme receives men who have been mandated to attend by a magistrate or judge and who often join with a belief that they have a right to exercise power and control over others, particularly women. The programme engages in a variety of sessions to uproot these beliefs, one of which is on family histories. In this session, men are prompted to examine what behaviour was modeled in their homes during childhood and how they learned to treat members of the family.

Often, **men had learned that they must exert their masculinity by controlling women’s rights and hold the belief that they have the right to use violence in their relationships**. Understanding how toxic masculinities are linked to socialization processes, this becomes a starting point to **deconstruct harmful attitudes and behaviours** - the programme emphasizes that **healthy relationships are equal partnerships through a shared experience**. Programmes that intend to challenge men’s notions on gender-based violence have to **deliberately confront the beliefs, attitudes and behaviours that underpin and manifest as toxic masculinities**.

The programme covers subjects such as equality, communication, and conflict resolution, which most of the men had no exposure to before the programme. What is essential to acknowledge and advocate for, is that **change is possible**. Throughout the programme, participants begin internalizing that they cannot expect or attempt to be in control all the time, recognize their partners must have space to raise issues, and that they in turn should be prepared to listen, negotiate, and manage their own behaviour in ways that are not harmful. By the end of the programme, **participants make the deliberate choice to live violence-free, and many expressed that their relationships had become much better as a result of changing their behaviour**.

Since its initial roll out in Grenada in 2005, Legal Aid and Counselling Clinic has successfully run 31 sixteen week cycles of the PfP programme. As of May 2021, **over 556 men have been referred to the programme, with more than 440 having met the criteria for successful completion**.

What about the backlash?

When men join the PfP programme, there is often backlash where they question why women are not part of the programme too. The programme's first response is by demonstrating the empirical evidence that, though there are instances where women perpetrate violence, **men's violence against women is the most widespread and the vast majority of survivors are women** - thus the programme must work to address the largest need. There is also another level of pushback that comes from EVAWG practitioners and others in the field. The concern is that the **focus should be on directly supporting women and girls**. The PfP programme recognizes this and also critically acknowledges that **men as perpetrators have an important role to play in eradicating violence against women and girls**. If perpetrators are not directly confronted, there would be a large gap in this area of work that is essential to accelerate progress to end violence against women and girls.

“I'M MAKING A DELIBERATE CHOICE TO LIVE VIOLENCE-FREE IN MY RELATIONSHIP BECAUSE I UNDERSTAND THAT IF MY BEHAVIOR CONTINUES TO BE VIOLENT, DISRUPTIVE, BULLYING, AND CONTROLLING, THERE ARE IMPLICATIONS, NOT JUST TO MY POTENTIAL INTERACTION WITH THE LAW, BUT [WOMEN] AND MY CHILDREN CAN BE AFFECTED THEIR WHOLE LIVES.”

Representative from participants of the Partnership for Peace Violence Intervention Programme in Grenada

It is of paramount importance to ensure the safety of survivors when challenging toxic masculinities and engaging men and boys for the prevention of violence against women and girls. This includes **respecting survivors' agency, privacy, and the right to safe spaces as defined by the survivors themselves**.

Access the Spotlight Initiative Guidance on Engaging Men and Boys and the Embracing Healthy Masculinities presentation materials, recording, and resources [here](#).

SESSION ONE - LATIN AMERICA AND CARIBBEAN

Innovative Coordination in the Spirit of the UN Reform

Key Lessons Learned and Promising Practices

The Spotlight Initiative Cross-Regional Learning Session on **Innovative Coordination in the Spirit of UN Reform** highlighted how Spotlight Initiative teams can leverage coordination mechanisms and implement interagency work to strengthen collaboration and accountability in the pursuit of eliminating violence against women and girls. This knowledge product highlights critical lessons learned and promising practices from Spotlight Initiative programmes in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as in other contexts that surfaced during the session. This product can be used to support quality programming and implementation efforts in service of the UN Reform and to eliminate violence against women and girls in the Spotlight Initiative and beyond.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED

- Embracing **compromise and creativity in the spirit of collaboration** is essential to achieving interagency coordination under the Spotlight Initiative, even as the wider UN system is still transitioning to UN Reform.
- **Leveraging each UN agency's area of expertise through effective coordination and collaboration** allows for more comprehensive programming and ensures that the Initiative overall benefits from mobilizing the UN system as a whole.
- Coordinating across UN agencies on government partnerships by leveraging existing links to various ministries and other government entities is helpful to maintain regular communication about the Spotlight Initiative and **ensure a whole-of-government approach**.
- Communicating and advocating on the **added value of Spotlight Initiative as one UN, under the leadership of the Resident Coordinator**, is critical for national ownership and ensuring high level commitment by national partners.
- Creating **shared spaces** to discuss and exchange on programme interventions enhances internal and interagency collaboration, leading to more efficient implementation.
- Ensuring that **resources are strategically used and activities are not duplicative** is an important element in achieving more efficient and effective programming under the principles of UN Reform.
- Utilizing **technology and virtual platforms**, such as Google Drive, for coordination makes **information-sharing and joint filing** easier and contributes to **improved communication across agencies**, especially in the context of COVID-19.

“LET’S THINK ABOUT THE BIGGER PICTURE, ITS RELEVANCE TO THE UN, AND HOW TO JOIN THE SUM OF OUR CONTRIBUTIONS. THINK OF WHAT EACH OF YOU CAN CONTRIBUTE TO THE UN SYSTEM MORE BROADLY. THE BEST WAY THIS CAN BE ACHIEVED IS BY BEING UNDER THE RESIDENT COORDINATOR’S SHIP. THIS IS TO BE A COMMON PLATFORM WHERE EVERY VOICE IS HEARD. LEARN TO LIVE WITH THE IMPERFECT. WHILE UN AGENCIES MIGHT HAVE DIFFERENT DATA AND GUIDELINES, AT TIMES, THERE NEEDS TO BE COMPROMISES. EMBRACE OPERATIONAL HARMONIZATION WHILE INCREASING EFFICIENCY. “

Alessandra Roccasalvo, Spotlight Initiative Secretariat



PROMISING PRACTICES

- **The Spotlight Initiative in Jamaica** has streamlined the engagement of partners through **interagency committees, a promising practice** in the country. For example, the Initiative established an interagency Communications Task Force and invited members of the EU Delegation to participate in monthly meetings and regular communication, which **fostered deeper collaboration** on communications and visibility. Pillar-level meetings were also created to ensure technical coherence across UN agencies, provide a space to learn from each other's lessons in implementation, and **achieve greater harmonization and coordination** across all pillars. Government and civil society partners were invited to join pillar sub-committees to support **meaningful multi-stakeholder participation**. These committees have **supported coordination efforts and fostered stronger partnerships overall**.
- **The Spotlight Initiative in Honduras** identified an opportunity to better **coordinate on communications and knowledge management by creating an interagency "toolbox."**¹ This toolbox will pool existing communication products, resources, and tools from all UN agencies which will be shared widely across Spotlight Initiative programmes and the Latin America region at large. In the spirit of leaving no one behind, the team is also exploring how to incorporate sign language so that people with hearing disabilities can have equal access to these materials. Though the toolbox is still under development, the Initiative identified this joint undertaking as innovative because it is a break from previous practice in communications work and has the potential to **amplify communications and visibility efforts for greater impact by reducing duplication of work, enabling UN agencies to leverage each other's expertise, and streamlining the dissemination of information**.
- **The Spotlight Initiative in Belize** spent a year consistently communicating and advocating the added value of the Initiative. This strengthened the partnership and coordination with the government. Pursuant, the government has been taking the lead and approached the Initiative to engage in a planning session, in order to align the Initiative with the government's priority and strategic frameworks to allow for **sustainability and long-term continuity of the programme**.
- **The Spotlight Initiative in Trinidad and Tobago** works to bring together Implementing Partners to discuss ongoing projects, provide updates and share information and opportunities on how to **interconnect with each other**. By supporting this systematic exchange across Implementing Partners, the Initiative is working towards a more cohesive and coordinated programme. The **development of a catalogue** by the Arthur Lok Jack School of Business in the University of the West Indies further facilitates knowledge sharing, as it serves as a database of GBV service providers across the three target communities of the Spotlight Initiative in the country, and therefore a resource for all partners and ultimately victims/survivors. An innovative practice by the Family Planning Association is making these resources more accessible by **incorporating the entire catalogue onto a bilingual mobile application, a virtual hub to include all GBV-related information in one space**, and which will therefore allow for the integration of materials from various service providers to further streamline information.

¹ The first version of the mapping of communications activities by the Initiative in Honduras - such as campaigns, publications, videos - organized by categories may be found [here](#). Kindly note that this document is still in development.

Access the Innovative Coordination presentation materials, recording, and resources [here](#) and the Programmatic and Operational Guidance folder in the Virtual Library [here](#).

SESSION TWO - AFRICA AND ASIA

Addressing Harmful Practices and Promoting Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights through Effective Stakeholder Engagement

Key Lessons Learned and Promising Practices

The Spotlight Initiative Cross-Regional Learning Session on **Addressing Harmful Practices and Promoting Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights through Effective Stakeholder Engagement** included a focus on exploring promising practices for addressing harmful practices, including female genital mutilation (FGM), child marriage, and gender stereotypes. The session also examined how to promote sexual and reproductive health and rights when addressing harmful practices and changing social norms. This session also included a focus on enhancing stakeholder engagement such as with traditional leaders, governments, civil society organizations, and youth to address harmful practices. This product highlights key lessons and promising practices from Spotlight Initiative programmes in Africa and Asia, which can be used to support quality programming in an effort to eliminate violence against women and girls in the Spotlight Initiative and beyond.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED

- Encouraging **ownership of the Spotlight Initiative by the government supports effective coordination, greater impact and sustainability** of efforts to end harmful practices. At times national and local organizations work towards ending harmful practices in their communities without government oversight; however, government engagement is key to coordinating resources and channelling funding through dedicated budget allocations.
- Partnering with **schools is a critical entrypoint** to integrate EAWG efforts, including knowledge on sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR), into community-based education programming as well as establish trust with parents, teachers, and local community leaders to engage them in efforts to end harmful practices. However, school closures in the wake of COVID-19 are presenting a serious challenge. Engaging in **remote (i.e. online) and hybrid learning opportunities and disseminating information on harmful practices**, such as through the use of technology as well as megaphones and socially distanced home visits in rural areas, have ensured harmful practices are continuously addressed and SRHR is promoted through the pandemic.
- As child marriage and FGM are deeply ingrained in cultural norms and are practiced at the community level, even when there are efforts to end harmful practices, cases are often left to families to address and are not officially prosecuted at an institutional level. The judiciary has a critical role in **addressing the impunity of perpetrators through enforcing the implementation of legal frameworks established to end violence against women and girls**. Thus, **strengthening the capacity of the judicial system** to conclude cases of harmful practices as quickly as possible is crucial. Furthermore, strengthening broader frameworks, legal systems and institutions is essential to **ensuring the implementation of laws and policies** by the justice system and all stakeholders involved so that perpetrators of violence against women and girls are held accountable.
- It is important to create the **link for governments to work directly with traditional leaders** to ensure efforts to eliminate harmful practices continue in a sustainable way. In this regard, it can be helpful to work with traditional leaders that are well known or already work with the government.

- To address the challenge of pushback and resistance that can come from traditions and religious practices when working to eliminate harmful practices, it is critical to engage in **continuous dialogues** with traditional/religious leaders as well as with authorities to ensure sustained ownership of efforts, including social norms change, as well as accountability to eliminate harmful practices.
- Employing a **multi-faceted approach to address harmful practices is essential**. This includes understanding the cultural importance behind the practices, and finding **healthy, safe and equitable alternatives to continue respecting cultural traditions**, as well as acknowledging the economic incentives behind the practices and providing options to foster **economic independence and support alternate livelihoods**.

“COORDINATION BETWEEN POLICE, TRADITIONAL LEADERS AND SCHOOL MANAGEMENT HAS HELPED TO FREE OVER 1200 GIRLS FROM CHILD MARRIAGES. POLICE INTERVENTION HAS AIDED IN ACCELERATING THE ARREST AND PROSECUTION OF OFFENDERS IN DEFILEMENT AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE.”

Julio Mwenyemkulu
Spotlight Initiative Malawi



PROMISING PRACTICES

The Spotlight Initiative in Liberia engages in promising practices to support a comprehensive, multi-tiered approach to eliminating harmful practices through community consultations, economic empowerment, monitoring, and policy change:

- Through engaging with the National Traditional Council of Chiefs and Elders, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Civil Society Working Group on FGM and traditional leaders in the community, it surfaced that **traditional leaders recognize FGM as not only a cultural practice, but also an income generating activity** for FGM practitioners. As such, key economic interventions, such as **climate-smart agriculture, business development** (including the Village and Loans Associations) and **literacy skills**, were identified to provide alternate sources of income for FGM practitioners in order for them to debunk the practice of FGM. **300 FGM practitioners have benefited as a result of these efforts** and are now **championing change against the practice of FGM in their communities**. Alternative rites of passage for initiating girls into womanhood rather than through FGM is being developed with key stakeholders.
- In respecting the cultural significance of Sande Societies, the Initiative has supported the development of vocational and heritage centres. These multipurpose centres will undertake positive cultural practices and skills to support cultural sustainability without FGM. The Initiative also provided **motorbikes for traditional leaders to monitor FGM interventions**, ensuring the closure of bush schools. This was especially important during the COVID-19 pandemic and in order to reach the most remote communities.
- An inventory of existing bush schools and FGM practitioners was conducted, and a database developed, documenting about **1000 bush schools**. This informed the alternative economic support to traditional FGM practitioners, community outreach and monitoring by traditional leaders to ensure their closure and support the rollout of alternative rites of passage.
- Through **continuous advocacy at multiple levels**, the Seven Count Policy was developed and signed by Traditional Chiefs in the 11 FGM practicing counties in Liberia. However, it is still a challenge to have authentic buy-in and FGM cases are still not reported officially as there is no existing law at this time. The Seven Count Policy called for a **one-year suspension of FGM**, and a draft Bill on FGM is in place to support long-term efforts to end the harmful practice.
- Through the Initiative's efforts, it has been observed that there is more of a will to listen and support efforts to end harmful practices. No more a 'silent issue', FGM is now talked about more openly. To this end, **many traditional leaders have become agents of change and are supporting continued advocacy**.

The Spotlight Initiative in Malawi is engaging in a promising practice through **weekly mentorship sessions and girls' protective networks on sexual gender-based violence, SRHR, harmful practices, perspectives on gender equality and life skills in safe spaces** at the community level, targeting out-of-school adolescent girls and young women. The objective is to create a **cadre of adolescent girls and young women** with the knowledge and assertive skills to ably negotiate and challenge the harmful practices that fuel gender-based violence in communities, and also offer a supportive system within the communities to challenge, report and help seek services. The programme has trained mentors who have reached **over 11,440 mentees**. Collaboration between the mentees, mentors, and traditional leaders has led these safe spaces to become key for ending child marriages, other harmful practices, for prevention, and to increase uptake of SRHR services among adolescent girls and young women. As part of the Safe Schools programme, **15,000 girls** were trained to actively participate in their own protection and defend others through reporting, which supports sustainability efforts. **13,000 boys were also trained on child marriage and the need to report cases of violence against adolescent girls**. This has led to the **identification of 1,893 child marriages** that were later dissolved by chiefs in collaboration with police, mother groups and child protection workers. As a result, **112 cases were taken to court and 71 convictions have been recorded**.

The Spotlight Initiative in Kyrgyzstan engaged in an innovative practice through supporting the design and dissemination of a mobile phone game, "Spring in Bishkek". The game is designed to **empower users** to learn more about the practice of forced marriage/abduction for forced marriage (Ala Kachuu), how to prevent it, and how to help others who may be targeted, providing real-life referral services. Developed by local activists with input from psychologists and lawyers, this game uses Communication for Development strategies to demonstrate alternative behaviour models for girls, boys, and adults.



With over 117,000 downloads across the region, the Initiative in Kyrgyzstan is in the process of assessing how to meaningfully track social norms change.

The Spotlight Initiative in Uganda:

- Has supported **government ownership in addressing harmful practices** through the **allocation of a national budget to end FGM**, a good practice. This partnership with the government has resulted in systems strengthening, where ownership of efforts to end violence against women and girls is being cascaded down to national districts and lower levels of government as part of the Initiative's **sustainability strategy**.
- Has also innovatively supported **community-based women's groups to become part of the surveillance system of cross-border movement of girls for FGM and child marriage** between the border of Uganda and Kenya. These community-based women's groups now have an **integral role in bringing girls back home** and reporting these cases to authorities.

The Spotlight Initiative in Mozambique is following the good practice of engaging closely with traditional leaders to end harmful practices and has significantly invested in developing the capacities of traditional and community leaders. Through providing the tools necessary to support with the identification of cases of violence against women and girls, traditional leaders are now equipped to report these cases to local authorities. This engagement led to a national forum where traditional leaders agreed on an **action plan to address child marriage specifically, and gender-based violence overall, in their communities**. This level of capacity development has been incredibly successful - when traditional leaders used to celebrate and were custodians of early childhood marriage, **many are now the first to denounce child marriage** by highlighting that it is illegal in Mozambique and have become **true agents of change in their communities**. With more investment, there is more potential to increase commitment and impact.

The Spotlight Initiative in Niger is addressing the generational gap that is usually present when working across stakeholders by **elevating the voice and agency of youth groups**. The Initiative is mentoring young girls in various communities to speak out on issues pertinent to violence against women and girls. The Initiative is engaging in mentorship by creating a circle of women and girls where they can feel comfortable to first share these issues. Then, collectively, cases can be reported to social workers or NGOs. **This style of mentorship and subsequent reporting has become a promising practice that has allowed women to feel like they are heard and listened to, fostering a greater sense of agency within their communities**. The Initiative has also supported **dialogue between youth and traditional leaders** to create consensus on addressing harmful practices and ensure this work is carried forward sustainably beyond the Initiative.

The Spotlight Initiative in Tajikistan is innovatively **harnessing the influence and reach of social media and online communities** to increase public understanding of violence against women and girls. This builds off previous practice where civil society organizations have used Facebook to proactively report and follow up on cases of gender-based violence. In tandem, the Initiative is **mobilizing male celebrities to become gender champions and advocate for men and boys to meaningfully join in the effort** to end violence against women and girls.

The Spotlight Initiative in Zimbabwe has supported an innovative transformation of how the value of cattle is being used. Where cattle were previously given as part of the bride price in early marriages, the request for cattle is **now instead used to impose a penalty for breaking the law when child marriage takes place**. This demonstrates an **understanding and respect for cultural traditions while engaging the community in a practical step** to eradicate violence against women and girls.

“SOCIAL NORMS AROUND MARRIAGE PUT A HIGH PRESSURE ON PROSECUTION OFFICIALS TO USE THE LOWEST POSSIBLE PENALTY, BY NEGOTIATING. OFFICIALS ARE REPORTING HIGH PRESSURE FROM FAMILIES, HOWEVER THE BEST STRATEGY TO PREVENT EARLY MARRIAGES AND TEENAGE PREGNANCY IS COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION.”

Jipara Turmamatova, Spotlight Initiative Kyrgyzstan

Access the Addressing Harmful Practices and Promoting Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights through Effective Stakeholder Engagement presentation, recording, and resources [here](#).

SESSION THREE - PACIFIC

Innovative Adaptations: Spotlight Initiative Programming in COVID-19 and other emergency contexts

Key Lessons Learned and Promising Practices

The Spotlight Initiative Pacific Regional Learning Session on **Innovative Adaptations of Spotlight Initiative Programming in COVID-19 and other Emergency Contexts** focused on how Spotlight Initiative programmes pivoted programming to respond to the spike in violence against women and girls through COVID-19 and other emergency contexts. In particular, the effective engagement and leadership of civil society, governments and other stakeholders were critical. This knowledge product highlights critical lessons and promising practices from Spotlight Initiative programmes and partners in the Pacific and other contexts that surfaced during the session, and can be used to support how violence against women and girls programming can be adapted in emergency contexts in the Spotlight Initiative and beyond.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED

- The flexibility of Spotlight Initiative to **reprogramme funds** during COVID-19 and other emergency contexts has been **critical to addressing the immediate needs** of governments and local, grassroots women's organizations on the frontlines of responding to violence against women and girls. This has allowed partners to **scale up prevention and response efforts** to ensure essential services remain open, remote and adapted essential services are provided, and are made accessible to the most marginalized women and girls.
- **Multi-stakeholder partnerships are key** to swiftly engage in prevention and response efforts across sectors at multiple levels. This allows for ongoing activities to be **rapidly reprogrammed** to support the most at-risk women and girls. **Laying the foundations** in advance of sudden emergencies (where relevant) to **establish and strengthen partnerships with key institutions, organizations and other relevant actors** supports efficient collaboration and coordination in unstable contexts. Furthermore, **relationship building and maintenance** is important for adaptation to sudden onset disasters and other emergencies.
- Fostering **national ownership** of interventions that are **locally driven and contextualized** strengthens meaningful and sustainable engagement with stakeholders at multiple levels. This includes **ensuring the accessibility** of relevant initiatives and materials in alignment with the leave no one behind principle, such as translating materials into **local languages** and **providing guidance** in different contexts.
- **Accelerating implementation** particularly in emergency contexts is a challenge. When the pandemic hit, it was difficult to continue programming as most partners became focused on COVID-19 response. Many programmes **used this as an opportunity to channel funds to civil society partners** to rapidly respond to the spike in violence against women and girls and support prevention efforts during this critical time.
- **Regional bodies** can play a critical role in **coordinating emergency response across national institutions and actors** to mitigate the risk of violence and support the safety of women and girls across the region.
- In **multi-island contexts**, it has been difficult to facilitate programming without travel. **Remote platforms have been a key resource**, such as through using mobile technology like WhatsApp to enhance communications and employ needed support. However, internet connectivity remains a challenge - the provision of data sticks is one solution.

- In the Pacific, there are **challenges with data collection and producing statistics through emergencies**. Conducting needs assessments are critical to continuously address shifting needs and priorities, and in the long-term, a focus on **strengthening quality, disaggregated data** has been expressed as necessary to **prepare for future emergency contexts**.
- When adapting programming, there have been challenges with navigating different **UN agency procedures and funding mechanisms**. Lessons learned from programmes include **piggybacking on specific UN agency procedures** as makes most sense for the context, engaging in **cross-country and cross-UN agency knowledge exchange** to learn how others overcame particular barriers, and **working proactively with the Spotlight Initiative Secretariat** for support.
- Overall, programmes highlighted the importance of having **long-term EAWG programmes** as it takes more than two years to achieve real impact and requires **sustained, comprehensive programming**. This is particularly necessary for engaging in prevention work, such as social norms change, and to **see the results of systemic transformation that can aid with mitigating the risk of violence against women and girls in emergency contexts**.



“ANY INTERVENTION UNDERTAKEN NEEDS TO BE NATIONALLY DRIVEN, CONTEXTUALIZED AND OWNED BECAUSE IF ANYTHING SITS APART FROM THE COMMUNITIES’ CULTURAL IDENTITY AND CULTURAL PRIDE, IT WILL BE VERY DIFFICULT TO ENGAGE WITH STAKEHOLDERS.”

Elisapeta Kerslake
Spotlight Initiative Samoa

PROMISING PRACTICES

The Spotlight Initiative in Samoa:

- **Innovatively reprogrammed funds** across UN agencies to address the immediate needs of frontline service providers, such as local, grassroots civil society organizations and the government to swiftly engage in the prevention and response to violence against women and girls in the COVID-19 context. This allowed the Initiative to **meet the most critical needs of women and girls** experiencing or at risk of violence. For example, the Initiative worked in

partnership with the government to distribute **400 COVID-19 packs with information and materials on EVAWG to women and girls in hard-to-reach areas**, many of which do not have access to radio or television. The packs included information on the heightened risks of VAWG during COVID-19, where and how to access crisis services, as well as sexual and reproductive health (SRHR) products.

- Ensured the leave no one behind principle was upheld through the emergency, when women and girls are often left on the sidelines. Innovative in this context, the Initiative reached out to **marginalized women and children in the outer islands** to distribute GBV and COVID-related fact sheets that were **translated in their local language**. This ensured that they had SRHR products and information on where to get help and support.
- Any intervention implemented must be **nationally driven, contextualized and owned** to ensure Samoan cultures are respected, which supports effective stakeholder engagement. Thus, in good practice, the Initiative has closely engaged those at the **highest levels - considered to be the community level** - including chiefs, women's committees, and youth representatives, as well as the Civil Society National Reference Group that led a 16 Days of Healing campaign. The Initiative also engaged the highest levels of government, such as through actively supporting the country's Prime Minister in launching the international technical and programmatic guidance on out of school comprehensive sexuality education. **The Resident Coordinator has also been an active champion** for the UN and partners, advocating at the highest levels with the Deputy Secretary-General and government.

The Spotlight Initiative in Timor-Leste:

- Strengthened its engagement with civil society partners and the **Civil Society National Reference Group** as a good practice for critical emergency response. The Initiative supported accessible meetings in local languages, ensuring their engagement throughout crises as the Reference Group serves as an **important link to access information on how essential services are operating during crises**.
- Supported **real-time documentation and dissemination** as another good practice. This was originally a challenge, though has been implemented to **foster trust with partners and thus support swifter emergency response**.
- Another challenge encountered during COVID-19 was the inability for personnel to travel from the capital to other municipalities in order to move programming forward. Building off good practice in emergency contexts, the Initiative had already started on a plan to engage **personnel who could be based in each municipality** as a promising practice which can **enable local connections during the COVID-19 context when travel may be restricted**.

The Spotlight Initiative Pacific Regional Programme:

- Is innovatively **adapting administrative data collection** to get a better understanding of the situation of VAWG during lockdown, including the **socio-economic triggers that may instigate or exacerbate violence**. This provides a deeper understanding of the community and household factors that may contribute to violence, information which can ultimately **support relevant actors to mitigate the risks of violence**. **Multi-sectoral partnerships are crucial** for safe and ethical data collection and to respond adequately. This data is obtained in part through existing services, and the administrative data system is linked to the national service delivery protocols, including frontline service providers, police and the justice system who come together under one protocol to agree on the guidelines for referrals.
- Is engaging **regional bodies** to support adaptation to COVID-19 and other emergencies, as they can play a critical role in **coordinating emergency response across the region**. For example, under the Pacific Community (SPC) there is a domestic violence working group comprised of women's machineries and ministries of justice that **led the implementation of the Family Protection Act across much of the region**. Its three priorities include national multi-sector service delivery protocols, administrative data and data collection, as well as coordination structures that bring together government with other critical actors.

Though much of the work is implemented at the national level, they are considered **regional priorities** in order for these bodies to support and enable actors at the national level to better respond.

- Provided **small grants** to local, grassroots women’s rights organizations to strengthen COVID-19 response efforts for the elimination of violence against women and girls. The Initiative’s small grants supported the Kolomotu’a Women’s Council in Tonga, which trained women on how to engage in revenue generation activities such as sewing masks, to **foster financial independence for survivors** during lockdown. In the Cook Islands, the Te Ipukarea Society who received support from the small grants is breaking the stigma around women’s health by **engaging with boys to better understand menstrual health** and providing women and girls with access to SRHR products, which are essential to increase girls’ attendance in school.

The Spotlight Initiative in Papua New Guinea:

- Significant challenges during COVID-19, including strict movement restrictions, hindered women’s access to shelters and other essential services. Following good practice in emergency contexts, the **Initiative supported organisations that provide emergency medical services** (St. John Ambulance) to have additional transport facilities **move survivors from safe houses** to the police station or clinics and increased staff at the phone line counseling services to assist with the increased number of calls. Guidelines and standard operating procedures were developed for shelters and safe houses on **how to operate safely and bring in survivors in the context of COVID-19**.

View the innovative adaptations to COVID-19 from other Spotlight Initiative programmes [here](#).



“TO ADAPT SUCCESSFULLY TO DIFFERENT CRISES, RELATIONSHIP BUILDING IS VERY IMPORTANT. THIS INCLUDES GOVERNMENT AND DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS.”

Alexandre Tilman
Spotlight Initiative Timor-Leste



Access the Innovative Adaptations: Spotlight Initiative Programming in COVID-19 and other emergency contexts presentation, recording, and resources [here](#).

SESSION FOUR - GLOBAL

Fostering Civil Society Engagement through Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation

Key Lessons Learned and Promising Practices

The Spotlight Initiative Global Learning Session - **Fostering Civil Society Engagement through Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation** - brought together Spotlight Initiative teams and civil society partners to build a common understanding of Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (PME). Participants gained greater insight into how a participatory approach to monitoring and evaluation better surfaces the underlying structural factors that perpetuate discrimination, bias, and inequality and, as such, contributes to improved programming to end violence against women and girls. The session also fostered discussions on the challenges to meaningfully implement PME, and ways to further integrate PME in Spotlight Initiative programmes. Furthermore, the session sought to analyze, further refine/revise and validate the [PME guidance note](#) while identifying and sharing concrete mechanisms and ways forward to further integrate PME into Spotlight Initiative programming. To support the (practical and meaningful) implementation of PME, this product highlights critical lessons learned and promising practices surfaced during the session from Spotlight Initiative programmes and partners in Belize, Malawi, and Niger, as well as in other contexts.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED

To effectively implement participatory approaches to monitoring and evaluation, all key stakeholders engaged have the opportunity to critically “re-think” the **Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) function**. This entails shifting from a “policing” mindset to a **participatory mindset**. As the findings from country-level pilots have shown, **PME is a ground-breaking and collective exercise** that contributes to:

- a) Empowering rights holders and building trust and mutual collaboration
- b) Adapting programme strategies to local realities
- c) Fostering collaboration and partnerships between local communities and other programme partners
- d) Ensuring the principle of leaving no one behind is streamlined across the programme cycle.

To achieve these results, **we can generate a substantive shift in mindsets and perceptions around M&E.**

- To successfully promote participatory approaches, it is important to **engage rights holders and local communities from throughout the programme cycle - from design and implementation to monitoring and evaluation**. This will contribute to enhancing **co-ownership and collaboration**, ensuring that programme goals and overall objectives are aligned with the (varied) needs expressed by those benefiting from programme interventions.
- In PME, the **process is as important as the outcome**. In other words, transforming the traditional methods of M&E and data collection by centering rights holders, survivors, community members, and the demands of movements (among others, including those meant to benefit from Spotlight interventions) - is, in itself, a transformative result: it challenges the top-down conception of monitoring and fosters trust-building and more equitable relationships.
- As the country-level pilots have shown, PME can **contribute to multiple and intersecting results** that will ensure programme strategies and interventions **adequately respond to local priorities and to the needs of all women and girls:**

1/ Involving civil society partners, rights holders and key stakeholders (such as local authorities) in monitoring and evaluation processes ensures that their feedback and lessons learnt are captured in a timely manner, contributing to the Initiative's decision-making.

2/Participatory methods allow critical recommendations to surface from rights holders. This enables rights holders to **actively shape programme strategies, facilitate (corrective) action, if needed, so that programming is more effective/better advances efforts to EVAWG).**

3/ Participatory approaches are crucial to foster engagement and **empower local communities by amplifying their voices and views.**

- Participatory methods of M&E require **agility and flexibility. It is critical to rethink the more traditional distribution of roles within programming.** Spotlight Initiative programmes must ensure that power is shared with community members, rights holders and those impacted by programming. This is essential if PME is to be effective and truly respect and promote the insights of local community members, and the women and girls meant to be supported by Spotlight programming.
- Participatory approaches take **time and resources**, often requiring a reimagining or reallocation of budgets (and at times an increase in budgets). The process of change is often not linear, with iterative learning - as PME surfaces critical insights - throughout. **Allocating adequate time and resources is therefore central to the success of PME.**



“PME CONTRIBUTES TO THE TRANSFORMATIVE AGENDA OF ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS, AND DECOLONISING DEVELOPMENT.”

Lara Fergus
GRG Coordinator

PROMISING PRACTICES

- **The Spotlight Initiative in Malawi** engaged in an innovative practice by **including the perspectives and experiences of communities and rights holders into the design and implementation of the programme’s Midterm Review**. Through focus groups discussions, key informant interviews and one anonymous survey, this inclusive process had two main objectives: to check whether women and girls and other stakeholders felt the programme was relevant and sustainable, and to assess what was and was not working (and why) so that the Malawi Spotlight team could recalibrate programming. As a result of rights-holders’ feedback and insights, the country team was able to identify bottlenecks and find mitigating solutions, shaping the interventions that have been prioritised in Phase II. Moreover, this innovative practice will contribute to increasing the quality and sustainability of programming in the Initiative, and enhance ownership and participation.
- **The Spotlight Initiative in Belize** adopted a promising practice by embracing a collaborative approach with civil society partners throughout the programming cycle, **including in monitoring and reporting processes**. Through community-based dialogues with implementing partners and beneficiaries, stakeholder consultations, and programmatic visits, the voices of civil society partners are meaningfully reflected in programming. This has promoted **shared learning and improved co-ownership of the programme**. Moreover, to ingrain this promising practice in the Initiative’s strategy, the team created an M&E framework that embeds PME (ensuring this approach is not simply adopted ad hoc, but rather institutionally grounded, carried out systematically and sustainably over time).
- **The Civil Society Reference Group (CSRG) in Niger** is fully engaged in a promising practice by **piloting the [Global Strategy on Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation](#)**. Through a participatory and inclusive approach, the CSRG undertook monitoring field visits, during both the Mid-term Assessment process and Spotlight annual reporting period. This approach aimed at collecting data and capturing impact stories on the results of the Initiative from the perspectives of rights holders and community members (better understanding what is beneficial to their lives). This has fostered **CSRG engagement in decision-making processes and has enabled voices from civil society to be streamlined and amplified through formal and informal structures**. Overall, PME in Niger has resulted in empowering rights holders and local communities, providing an opportunity for them to be heard. PME has also allowed country-level Spotlight Initiative teams to receive ongoing feedback from right holders about the impact on the ground and adapt programme interventions to local needs in a timely manner.
- **In Sudan, within the framework of the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation**, PME was widely implemented to **measure change over time in gender and social norms**. Through *The Most Significant Change Technique (MSC)*, the Initiative adopted the promising practice of engaging rights holders to **jointly identify the most significant impacts of the Initiative on their families and communities**. The Initiative jointly identified the added value of programme interventions **through the lens of its agents of change**. Through the MSC technique, impact stories have been transformed into the subject of collective discussion, analysis, verification and documentation, **ultimately enabling the production of recommendations ground in local priorities, and adapting programme strategies accordingly**.

“PME HAS CONTRIBUTED TO FOSTERING TRUST WITH LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND RIGHTS HOLDERS. AS THE CIVIL SOCIETY REFERENCE GROUP, WE HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO AMPLIFYING THE VOICE OF RIGHTS HOLDERS AND USING THEM TO INFORM RELEVANT RECOMMENDATIONS.”

Soumaila Amadou Moumouni
Member of Civil Society Reference Group Niger

“WOMEN AND GIRLS IN MALAWI FELT THAT THE PROGRAM WAS RELEVANT TO THEIR NEEDS AND THEY ACKNOWLEDGE THE NEED OF CONTINUING WORKING TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN WHICH REMAINS WIDESPREAD.”

Teemar Kidane
Spotlight Initiative Coordinator in Malawi

“IN BELIZE WE ARE WORKING TOGETHER WITH OUR CIVIL SOCIETY NATIONAL REFERENCE GROUP TO EFFECTIVELY REACH RIGHTS HOLDERS IN COMMUNITIES. THROUGH STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS WE HAVE ALSO ADDRESSED LIMITATIONS AND ENSURE FLEXIBILITY AND RAPID ADAPTATION TO EMERGING CHALLENGES.”

Pamela Bradley
Spotlight Initiative Coordinator in Belize



Access the Global Learning Session on Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation presentation, recording, and resources [here](#) and further information on PME [here](#).