

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 EVAWG 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](#).