



## Lessons Learned from Spotlight Initiative Programming: A Comprehensive and Transformative Approach to EVAWG

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### Introduction

The Spotlight Initiative commissioned this knowledge brief to share lessons learned and promising practices related to its work on a comprehensive approach to ending violence against women and girls (EVAWG). This brief draws on insights and analysis from a synthesis of 126 reports from 2019 to 2021 across all Spotlight Initiative country and regional programmes, trust funds, and global conversations in 2021.

The Spotlight Initiative's comprehensive approach to EVAWG is intersectional and engages women and girls across all diversities. Using a six-pillar approach, it addresses the issues of prevention, justice, and policy work to ensure that women and girls have the support and protection they need to live a life free from violence. The Spotlight Initiative operates in a localised manner where action planning and intervention design are determined by country level assessments and analysis on the ground. To achieve long-term success the Spotlight Initiative engages in work across multiple pillars, and with a range of partners, resulting in synergistic effects of pillars whereby progress in one area affects outcomes in another pillar. There is also a focus on transformation, which means that fundamental shifts to underlying social norms and power structures that maintain gender inequalities occur through programming.

This brief highlights the high-level lessons learned using a comprehensive and transformative approach across the areas of policy development, institutional strengthening, social norms and attitude change, service provision and referral systems, stronger data and strengthened civil society and feminist movements.

### Lesson Learned #1

**Engaging in multi-stakeholder awareness raising can help shift underlying discriminatory gender norms that maintain inequalities and violence and support shifts in other spheres, such as access to justice and policy reform, as well.**

Spotlight Initiative's programs across countries demonstrate that a multi-stakeholder and holistic response, engaging diverse stakeholders and institutions is the foundation of success in EVAWG.

The Spotlight Initiative places substantive focus on the role of social norm change as a catalyst for change in multiple pillar areas. It is important to be mindful that changing attitudes, behaviours, and social norms, takes time. Efforts that are holistic and engage local communities, leaders, youth and duty bearers with messaging to increase awareness, programming that mobilises champions of change and strengthens institutions and finally advocates for and creates policies are essential for eliminating VAWG. Spotlight Initiative programmes in **Latin America, Cameroon, Liberia, Haiti, Mali, Niger and Uganda** have demonstrated this value by adopting a multi-stakeholder and holistic approach.

For example, in **Liberia**, work in community awareness raising of VAWG and prevention activities contributed to increased justice for survivors and strengthened institutions through gender-aware policies and stronger referral networks. In 2020, Spotlight Initiative and partners supported community and national radio to share messaging that challenged negative social and gender norms that lead to VAWG and shared health guidelines related to Covid-19, and information about service referral pathways. These messages reached 23,425 community members, including traditional, religious and community leaders, and were aimed to mitigate rising cases of violence many saw due to COVID-19. Work was also done increasing awareness in communities, reaching 21,398 people in five counties, on the Domestic Violence Law and the Seven-Count Policy suspending all female genital mutilation (FGM) interventions for one year, and the Comprehensive Prevention Strategy CPS was also conducted – supporting greater awareness of new legal norms of equality and ending VAWG and harmful practices (HP).

Significant success was also seen through transformative programming engaging 8,959 males (5,249 men, 3,710 boys) in 22 communities to challenge violent masculinities and promote positive norms of equality and protection of women facing violence or harm. From this programme, 52 rape cases (96% of the survivors were girls under 18) were reported to the authorities, and the perpetrators were arrested, and interventions were made in 295 GBV/HP cases, resulting in increased access to justice for women.

The Spotlight Initiative recognizes that changes in behaviour is a complex and ambitious target that takes time. Therefore, programs and initiatives that are backed by actionable and localised research can significantly enhance the chances of success. The **Spotlight Initiative Latin American Regional programme** began the exploration of how knowledge of the behavioural sciences can be used to inform and highlight messages that have been shown to reach men and young people, and in this way develop a model communication campaign that can be used by different actors. The study explores a series of decisions and behaviours that men take in different spheres of daily life-- such as intervening when a colleague is being harassed, to disciplining boys and girls, even raising their voices in support of policies that combat VAWG-- all these moments of decision that men have throughout their lives can significantly contribute to reducing or increasing the prevalence of VAWG.

## Lesson Learned #2

**Engaging stakeholders and communities in analysing the problem and problem solving helps create more effective and comprehensive solutions to EVAWG and shifting norms and behaviors.**

Ultimately in order to transform existing gender norms and the acceptability of violence, new understanding, awareness and analysis of public and social messages, interactions, communities, institutions and policies must take place. This requires a deeper understanding of gender, gender roles and stereotypes, power and the ways in which gender inequities and power imbalances are tied to VAWG. When people are involved in conducting the analysis themselves, results can be deeper and more meaningful. Spotlight Initiative programmes in many countries, including **Latin America, Belize, Liberia, Haiti, Mali, Cameroon and Uganda** have all tested a series of relevant innovations in community engagement and achieved short-term and long-term results.

In Uganda, an in-depth evidence-backed community engagement methodology shown to reduce VAWG<sup>1</sup> called SASA! was implemented for community mobilisation against VAWG. This four-stage engagement approach has proven to reduce VAWG by exploring the balance of power in intimate partner relationships and in broader community dynamics. In the past, many prevention efforts focused strictly on awareness raising without engaging and supporting community members through the stages of behavioural change, have fallen short. SASA! supports stakeholders from all levels of the community to participate in its four phases and seeks to prevent violence by changing the attitudes and behaviours that perpetuate power imbalances in the relationship between men and women.

The Spotlight Initiative and partners, UGANet and Community Development Foundation for Uganda (CDFU) launched the SASA! Start Phase across various districts in Uganda, aiming to foster personal reflection on power and nurture equitable power relations.

As a result, VAWG is now a public agenda item, it is a topic that is more openly discussed in communities especially during marital conflicts. The community activist leaders and service providers actively report cases and perpetrators are held accountable. CDFU conducted an assessment to measure the impact from trainings provided to community leaders and activists that showed promising results on activists' awareness of the prevalence of violence against women and girls (96%), understanding of the consequences of violence (83%) and the importance of actively stopping violence (81%). Further, 24% of the respondents reported a reduction in the acceptance of domestic violence and improvement in family support to survivors. The least recalled topic from trainings at 1.4% was individual anger management, demonstrating that a shift in knowledge can happen faster than changes in behaviours.

Encouraged by the largely favourable results from engagement on the community level and compelling evidence base on the program in Uganda, Spotlight Initiative has supported the replication, adoption and scale up of SASA! in other countries including in **Haiti, and Uganda**.

Other community engagement models that have shown success include in **Belize**, where virtual platforms and 30 community-based master trainers engaged 240 out of school youth to increase sexuality education. The expansion of community level trainers increased the national capacity to reach young people within their own local spaces through interpersonal channels as well as through popular (and youth friendly) social media and video conference platforms resulting in a localised, low cost, high impact model to scale up programming and reach the most vulnerable and marginalized adolescent girls; and in **Mali**, where intergenerational dialogue around sexuality and gender based violence (GBV) are still taboo subjects, forum theatres using participatory theatrical techniques helped facilitate community dialogue, proving to be an effective instrument of communication to raise collective awareness about the consequences of harmful practices and GBV. This process of social and educational dialogue helped break taboos and silence and spark conversations related to the importance of educating girls and ending FGM, violence and other harmful practices.

## Lesson Learned #3

**Mobilising funding to feminist organisations, movements and civil society organisations leads to transformative shifts in the status quo of who is typically resourced and who has access to international aid and development spaces.**

The Spotlight Initiative has at the heart of its strategy a transformative approach to partnerships and to how funding is allocated, and has prioritised funding feminist and women's rights organisations as key actors in the fight to end VAWG. Research has shown their critical role in keeping issues on the political agenda despite lack of funding, backlash or limited political opportunities. These groups possess an understanding of the landscape and issues at play, the analytical lens, and the practical implementation expertise to make changes happen.

<sup>1</sup> Raising Voices in Uganda [conducted randomised control trials \(RCT\)](#) and showed a 52% reduction in Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) against women in SASA! communities.

All Spotlight Initiatives programmes have made transformative funding allocations to feminist and women's rights groups as part of their country strategies and through the twin track approach of direct support to CSOs and women's movements through Pillar 6 and by mainstreaming support across all Pillars. Women and feminist organisations having adequate and flexible resources is essential for making progress on ending VAWG. As such, the Initiative delivered 72 per cent (USD 104 million) of the awarded funds to civil society organisations in 2021 were led by women, feminist and women's rights organisations.<sup>2</sup>

In **Afghanistan**, Spotlight Initiative's work establishing support of five CSOs to implement activities to combat VAWG and early and child marriage, had yields after the Taliban takeover. Specifically in a challenging political context, these CSOs were able to continue to be a safe space to hear women and girls concerns and needs, which was critical after August 15th and the political backlash against women's rights.

In **Uganda**, Spotlight Initiative found the women's movement to be a key partner around safety and security efforts in the country. The women's movement led a campaign to protest violence against women by security officers, raising attention to the issue so it could be addressed and developed mechanisms to ensure women and diverse populations, such a disabled women, women living with HIV, sex workers, etc., could get access to essential services.

In **Honduras**, Spotlight Initiative put feminist voices and organisations at the centre of their work in reducing femicides. They selected feminist organisations as partners due to their critical analysis of the issue, locally developed solutions and to ensure the sustainability of the work. Through a partnership with Oxfam who was an intermediary donor and partner, they supported intersectional projects reaching women with disabilities, living with HIV, sex workers, trans, young women, and indigenous Afro-descent women.

## Lesson Learned #4

**Amplifying the synergies between outcomes and working from a transformative perspective by working across multiple pillars helps address VAWG more effectively.**

The Spotlight Initiative model is built upon the compounding effects of creating change across multiple pillars of work. Spotlight Programmes in **Liberia, Niger, Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Nigeria** have worked comprehensively across multiple or all pillars creating building blocks toward holistic change. Policies without the engagement of local and informal governance structures or without the buy-in from key actors including men and young boys on the grassroots level seldom achieve sustainable change and transformation in behaviour for the elimination of VAWG. Likewise, to create effective policy and regulatory frameworks community-led efforts result in the most suitable and impactful frameworks for coordinated change.

In **Kyrgyzstan**, the issue of gender-based violence (GBV) first gained traction during public hearings regarding the law on domestic violence led by the Parliament Committee on Law Enforcement, Crime Prevention and Counteraction to Corruption which was supported under Pillar 1 of SI. The legal review carried out for this effort inspired media discussions by survivors of violence, women's rights advocates, women judges and CSOs which were mobilised under Pillar 3. Strategic discussions were also simultaneously held in 12 target municipalities which led to the strengthening of local institutions to prioritise monitoring, and accountability frameworks under Pillar 2. The discussions were led by locally trained champions of the Gender Action Learning System which in turn created local activists leading to a shift in attitudes in communities. Such synergistic collaboration using a combination of activities across policy mobilization, strategic messaging, civil society strengthening and establishing grassroots level champions has resulted in a holistic and comprehensive response and multi-fold progress toward the abolition of child marriage in **Niger**, of FGM in **Nigeria**, and the establishment of a legal framework to help prevent and address GBV in **Tajikistan**.

Engaging in gender transformative capacity building efforts at the institutional levels have yielded some important results across many Spotlight Initiative countries, including in **Argentina, Belize, Grenada, Timor Leste, Papua New Guinea and Liberia and Mali**. Results in using a gender lens are diverse and include the increased availability of gender budgets, better policies supporting gender equality and preventing VAWG, stronger gender responsive and rights-based services, and higher quality gender data.

In **Argentina**, a combination of using data strategically (Pillar 5) and applying a gender lens (Pillar 2) supported stronger health services (Pillar 4). Specifically, the Spotlight Initiative piloted an initiative with the Ministry of Women Gender, and Diversity to develop comprehensive care centres for survivors of violence. They worked at the regional and municipal levels and brought in data on causes and prevalence of violence, trained service providers on stronger care and policies that needed to be put in place to protect women and trans people, and ultimately services are being systematised and "Open House" model for cis and trans people is being implemented, strengthening access and quality of care.

Gender analysis capacity development led to many countries implementing gender budgets or programmes for VAWG and gender equality, including Spotlight Initiative in **Argentina, Honduras, Liberia, Malawi, Mexico, Mozambique, Nigeria, Pacific Regional Programme, Uganda, and Zimbabwe**. In Nigeria, results from the gender training with gender officers in the women ministries has led to integration of VAWG, sexual violence and harmful practices into action plans and gave participants a clearer understanding of the importance of sexual health and reproductive rights and how to mainstream them and make sure budgets were allocated for services and work on these issues. Ultimately budgets and line items for resources for specialised services for SGBV issues (Pillar 2) can lead to strengthening the availability and access to services (Pillar 4).

<sup>2</sup> See definition in the Methodology note included in Annex C.