



THEMATIC ASSESSMENT

Assessing Spotlight Initiative's contribution to the engagement of civil society, the implementation of 'Leave no one behind', and movement building

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Acronyms

AQ	Assessment question
CS-IPs	Civil society implementing partners
CS-GRG	Civil Society Global Reference Group
CSRG	Civil Society Reference Group
CS-NRG	Civil Society National Reference Group
CS-RRG	Civil Society Regional Reference Group
CSO	Civil society organisation
EU	European Union
EVAWG	Ending violence against women and girls
FGD	Focus group discussion
FGM	Female genital mutilation
GBV	Gender-based violence
GESI	Gender equality and social inclusion
GEWE	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
GRO	Grassroots organisation
IPV	Intimate partner violence
KII	Key informant interviews
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex
LNOB	Leave no one behind
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MTA	Mid-term assessment
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NPSV	Non-partner sexual violence
OPD	Organisation of people with disabilities
RUNO	Recipient UN organisation
SDDirect	Social Development Direct
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SOGIESC	Sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, and sex characteristics
TACAAG	Thematic Assessment Country Accountability and Advisory Group
TARG	Thematic Assessment Reference Group
ToR	Terms of reference
UN	United Nations
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDS	United Nations Development System
UWONET	Uganda Women's Network
VAWG	Violence against women and girls
WPHF	Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund
WRO	Women's rights organisations

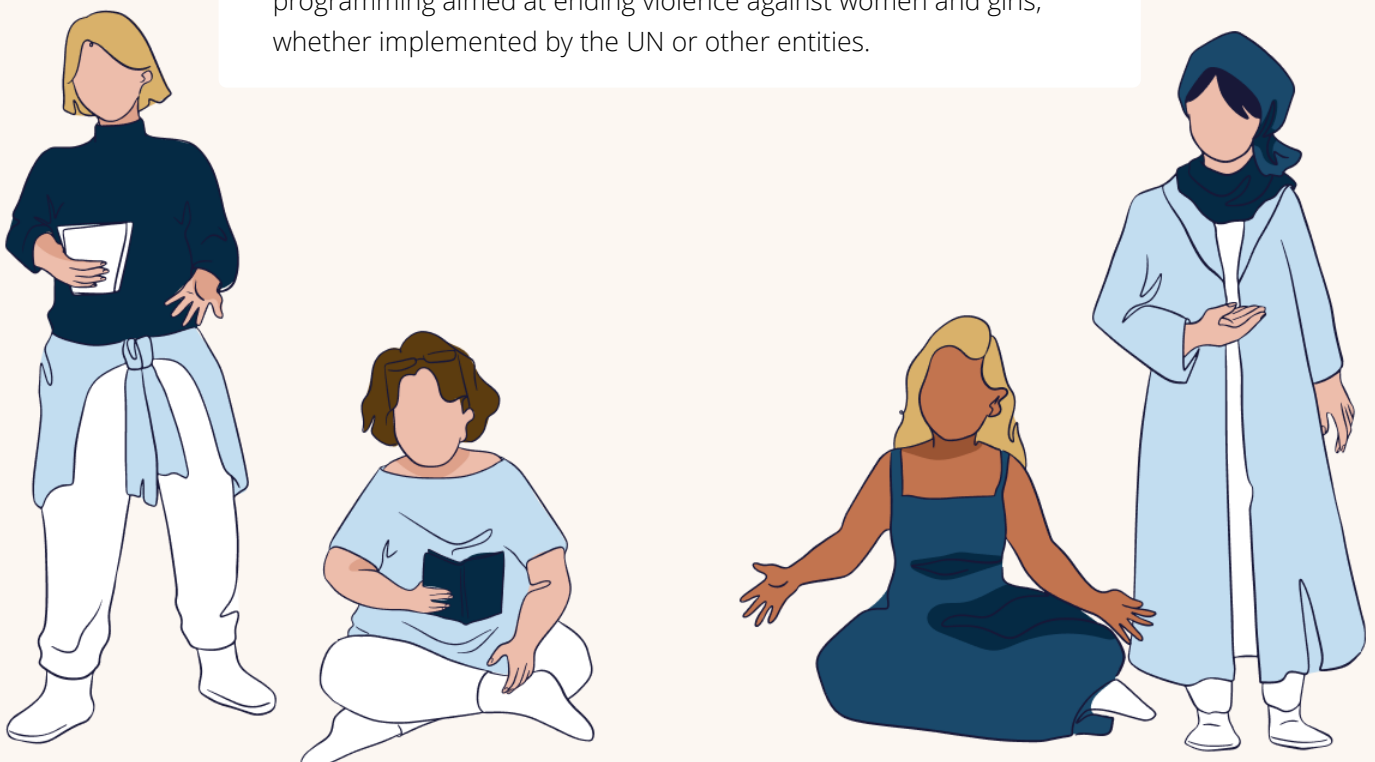
Acknowledgements

The SDDirect assessment team would like to thank all the Spotlight programme country teams across the 10 case studies for their support, guidance and engagement over the course of this assessment, including with facilitating introductions and logistics in country and participating in validation meetings.

We would also like to acknowledge the Spotlight Initiative Secretariat for their collaboration over the course of conducting this thematic assessment. Their insights and flexibility were invaluable, as was their support in connecting us to key stakeholders and sourcing relevant documentation.

We would also like to thank the 25 women who participated in the Thematic Assessment Country Accountability and Advisory Groups for sharing their insights and perspectives so openly with the assessment team. Our particular gratitude goes to all the women in their diversity who gave their time so generously during the course of this assessment sharing their wisdom with us through various forums over the course of data collection.

The thematic assessment was guided by a Reference Group, which was comprised of staff from United Nations (UN) agencies, civil society organisations, and Spotlight Initiative's Civil Society Global Reference Group members, who provided invaluable insights and support to the assessment, including ensuring the recommendations are relevant and practical for future programming aimed at ending violence against women and girls, whether implemented by the UN or other entities.



Evaluation core team

Jo Feather Team Leader	Celine Mazars Senior Evaluator	Hope Harriet Senior Evaluator	Stella Makhuva Evaluation Specialist
	Veronica Ahlenback Evaluation Specialist	Alix Clark Evaluation Specialist	Erika Fraser Quality Assurance

Case studies	Thematic Assessment Country	Advisory Group members
Malawi		Malawi
Stella Makhuva and Jo Feather		Maggie Kathewera Banda, Leah Katuya, and Beatrice Chisomo Mateyo
Uganda		Uganda
Maude Mugisha and Hope Harriet		Regina Bafaki, Rhonah Babweteera, and Constance Kekihembo
Liberia		Liberia
Caroline Bowah, Hope Harriet, and Stella Makhuva		Lakshmi S. Moore, Yah Parwon, and Massa Dugulu
Tajikistan		Tajikistan
Maria Boltaeva, Alix Clark, and Jo Feather		Guljahon Bobosadikova, Viloyat Mirzoeva, and Marifat Ablullaeva
Argentina		Argentina
Mariana Iacono and Fiona Hale		Irene Cari, Hannah Palacios, and Marta Carolina Rivas
Mexico		Mexico
Paola Perezniето and Fiona Hale		Nadia Maciel Paulino
Jamaica		Jamaica
Cordia Chambers-Johnson and Celine Mazars		Joy Crawford, Joyce Hewett, and Tamisha Lee
Belize		Belize
Sharmayne Saunders and Alix Clark		Mindy Pratt, Amira Teul, and Eva Burgos
Timor Leste		Timor Leste
Berta Antonieta and Veronica Ahlenback		Juvita Pereira Faria, Dillyana Ximenes, and Joviana Guterres
Pacific Regional Programme		
Veronica Ahlenback and Jo Feather		

Glossary

Civil society organisations (CSOs) or non-governmental organisations (NGOs) function outside the public and for-profit sectors, on the local, international, or international levels, and usually advance the interests of structurally marginalised communities. CSOs are an important intermediary between citizens and government, sometimes undertaking work that would otherwise be the responsibility of the state or government, including but not limited to social support and welfare services. CSOs also hold governments accountable while defending the rights of citizens.¹

Civil society reference group (CSRG): An institutional mechanism to facilitate systematic civil society engagement in designing and implementing Spotlight country programmes and drawing on its expertise, which exist at national, regional and global levels. The **Civil Society Reference Group (CSRG)** serves a dual function: to advise Spotlight Initiative, and advocate and partner for its objectives.²

Constituency-led organisations are led by and for structurally marginalised women, girls, and gender-diverse people, with a strong understanding of the needs and priorities of the groups ('constituents') in relation to addressing violence against women and girls. This includes (but is not limited to) organisations of people with disabilities (OPDs), LGBTQI+ organisations, and Indigenous women's organisations. This assessment uses 'constituency-led organisations' when discussing 'Leave No One Behind' findings to emphasise the importance of working with organisations by and for structurally marginalised women and groups.

Feminist movements have gendered political goals, gendered strategies, and an agenda built on a gendered analysis of the problem or situation they are seeking to change. Members

of the movement participate in shaping goals, strategy, and agenda. Women are a critical mass of the membership; they are the leaders at all levels, and they follow feminist values and ideology.

Intersectional³ feminism is an important aspect of this assessment and recognises the need to address overlapping discriminations and injustices and requires cross-movement building.

Grassroots organisations (GROs) are for and by those who are most vulnerable and directly affected by the issues they are addressing. They are self-organised and self-led groups and movements pursuing common interests through non-profit organisations that often have a low degree of formality and a purpose that can have a local, national, or global reach.⁴ If they have an operational budget it tends to be small (for example, under US\$200,000).

Leave No One Behind (LNOB): This principle refers to investing in reaching those who are most left behind and recognising the intersecting forms of discrimination and oppression faced by women and girls that differentiate their experiences and needs. Under each pillar, Spotlight Initiative programmes make specific and targeted efforts to ensure equal access and inclusion for all women and girls.⁵

Meaningful engagement of civil society: This concept refers to mechanisms to enable civil society to participate fully in all aspects of Spotlight Initiative programming, ensuring they have voice and agency and participate in leadership spaces and decision making, and that participation brings benefit to them. This may occur through their membership on reference groups or steering committees; ensuring they are given time, space and

¹ Spotlight Initiative Jamaica (2022) 'Supporting Civil Society To Offer Intersectional Gender Based Violence Services To Marginalized Communities In Jamaica '.

² Spotlight Initiative (no date) 'Civil Society Global Reference Group – Draft Terms of reference'.

³ A term coined by American law professor Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989.

⁴ Spotlight Initiative (2021) 'Spotlight Grassroots Action Plan: Ensuring Spotlight Initiative funding reaches local and grassroots civil society organisations'.

⁵ Spotlight Initiative (2019) 'Technical Guidance Note on the Four Pillars of Spotlight Initiative Theory of Change'.

resources to engage – including appropriate compensation for their time, transparency to access documents and data, and being able to hold Spotlight Initiative accountable. Co-creation with CSOs is a key aspect of meaningful engagement.⁶

Movements: An organised set of constituents (formal or informal groupings of citizens) pursuing a common political agenda of change through collective action, vested in the change it seeks, and which can be mobilised quickly to demonstrate collective power. Movements have a clear political agenda, leadership at different levels, pursue collective or joint actions, and employ diverse strategies.

Structurally marginalised (women and girls and communities): The report uses ‘structurally marginalised’ to refer to women and girls and communities who face intersecting forms of oppression and are therefore structurally marginalised in society. Experiences of multiple, intersecting forms of discrimination shape women and communities’ risk of being subject to different forms of violence. The assessment will examine to what extent Spotlight Initiative has recognised and addressed different forms of violence experienced by women and communities at the intersection of different oppressions, as well as its engagement with constituency-led CSOs and networks representing structurally marginalised women and communities.

(Gender) Transformative approaches: In the context of this assessment, we understand transformative approaches as putting emphasis on addressing power imbalances

through tackling structural root causes leading to unequal relationships, shifting decision-making power, and demonstrating new ways of working. This entails supporting and amplifying the voices and strategic priorities of diverse CSOs (including women’s rights organisations, grassroots organisations, and organisations representing structurally marginalised groups) and movements, ensuring accountability on all levels of programming, and prioritising sustainability of efforts. All of this is guided by feminist principles and underpinned by intersectional analysis. It places women, girls, and gender-diverse people at the heart of initiatives.

Women and girls in their diversity: This term refers to all women and girls – cisgender and trans women, women and girls of diverse ages, ethnicity, race, Indigenous identity, religion, sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC), HIV status, disability status, refugee and migrant status, relationship/marital status, and other characteristics that not only refer to the myriad of identities and social and health determinants that exist, but also includes varied geographies and socioeconomic status.

Women-led organisations: An organisation whose leadership is principally made up of women, demonstrated by 50% or more occupying senior leadership positions at both board and staff level.

Women’s rights organisations (WROs): Groupings defined as “civil society organisations with an overt women’s or girls’ rights, gender equality or feminist purpose.”⁷

⁶ Spotlight Initiative (2022) ‘Guidance Note: Sustainability of Spotlight Initiative’

⁷ OECD definition in: Spotlight Initiative (2022) ‘Inclusive funding to CSOs: Shifting the power through policies and practices’.

Executive summary

This report presents findings, conclusions, and recommendations of a global thematic assessment conducted on Spotlight Initiative.

Purpose and scope

The purpose of the thematic assessment was to take an in-depth look at how Spotlight Initiative has performed against three themes that are recognised as critical for more transformative, intersectional, and sustainable approaches in ending violence against women and girls (EVAWG) programming: 1) the extent to which Spotlight Initiative has meaningfully engaged civil society (particularly local and grassroots groups), particularly within the Initiative's governance structures and in programme implementation; 2) the extent to which Spotlight Initiative has implemented the principle of 'LNOB'; and 3) the extent to which Spotlight Initiative has meaningfully supported movement building. A fourth overarching question was added to explore the extent to which progress on these three areas was contributing to transformative change. Our four overarching assessment questions (AQs) are illustrated in the diagram below.

Hypothesis

Within a whole society approach, the best way to contribute to efforts to end violence against women and girls (by a large UN fund) is to support and foster feminist movement building, privilege partnerships with civil society organisations, including specifically women's rights organisations, and local grassroots organisations, and meaningfully implement the principle of leave no one behind; and that the one-UN system/approach is an appropriate and effective mechanism to do that.

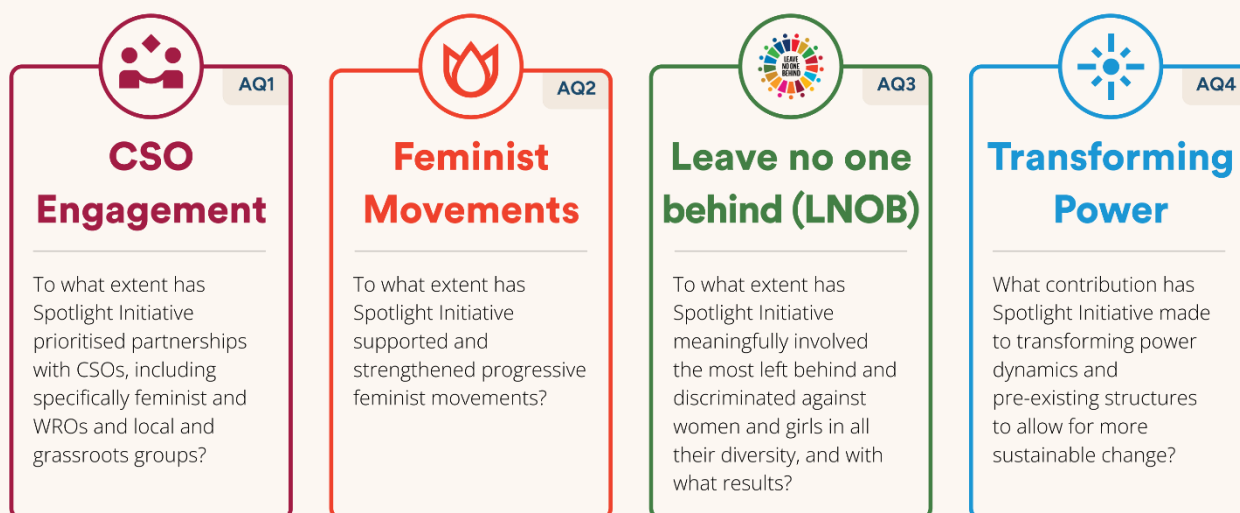


Figure 1: Thematic assessment questions

Assessment methodology

Central to the assessment's feminist and participatory approach was a desire to conduct an assessment that employed a range of qualitative methods to obtain a variety of perspectives, and which privileged the voices of civil society and women's rights activists to explore the assessment themes.

The assessment took a case study approach, involving participatory workshops, focus group discussions and in-depth interviews, complemented by a global, regional and country level document review, key informant interviews (KIIs), and story collection to gather data against the assessment questions. The figure below illustrates the approach.



Figure 2: Data collection snapshot

Limitations and mitigations

Operational limitations included the impact of the closure of country and regional programmes and the launch of the final evaluation on the assessment timeframe, alongside concerns about 'evaluation fatigue' and the availability of key staff for support. To help maximise participation, the Global Secretariat allowed for flexibility in the assessment timelines. Although the assessment methodology did not include direct consultations with survivors of violence or rights holders about their personal experiences, it involved interactions with constituency-led organisations and women's groups, who were integral to the programme. The assessment also sought to involve CSOs who were not formal partners with Spotlight Initiative, but they were not as widely represented as had been hoped.

Contextual limitations included local elections and political tensions in some of the case study countries, which meant that some people were unavailable during the data collection window. This was a particular challenge in regard to government stakeholders. In some case studies, the assessment team was not able to mitigate this challenge; however, given that civil society was the primary focus of this assessment, this challenge did not impact the validity of the results.

Key findings



AQ.1

CSO Engagement

To what extent has Spotlight Initiative prioritised partnerships with CSOs, including specifically feminist and WROs and local and grassroots groups?

To what extent have Spotlight Initiative's governance mechanisms meaningfully included / engaged a diversity of civil society in effective decision-making and monitoring processes at global, regional, and national level?

- The CSRGs established at global, regional, and country level were the primary mechanism used to facilitate the meaningful engagement of civil society in programme governance at these different levels. The CSRGs were found to be highly relevant and valued by civil society and Spotlight Initiative more widely.
- The extent to which CSRGs were involved in decision making and their level of influence varied across contexts. Numerous examples were found of how CSRGs were able to advocate and influence decisions within programmes and at global level.
- CSRGs played an important role in joint monitoring of programme activities and implementation, which was well received in some places. More could have been done to ensure civil society implementing partners understood the CSRG's role, particularly during joint, participatory monitoring visits.
- The extent to which CSRG members were able to engage meaningfully was constrained by the following issues: insufficient uptake of available compensation for their role, either due to cumbersome administrative requirements or lack of awareness of the guidance; limited understanding of the role, its responsibilities, and lines of accountability for CSRG members, in relation to the three aspects of the role identified, namely advising the Initiative, holding it accountable and linking it to the broader civil society landscape; and unclear or unrealistic expectations regarding the level of effort required to meaningfully engage.

To what extent has Spotlight Initiative meaningfully engaged different civil society groups (especially grassroots organisations and women's rights organisations) in the implementation of Spotlight Initiative-funded activities (as implementing partners)?

- Spotlight Initiative reports a high proportion of funding is allocated to CSOs, and there have been a range of deliberate, innovative and successful attempts to reach out to a diversity of civil society actors, including grassroots organisations. These include partnering with the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women (UN Trust Fund) and the Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund, the establishment of the WithHer Fund, small grants mechanisms, consortia arrangements, and, in some cases, amending contractual requirements to widen participation.
- Spotlight Initiative programmes employed a range of capacity-strengthening efforts that were found to be beneficial for some CSOs. However, these were often focused on supporting organisations to meet UN reporting requirements, rather than exploring organisations’ identified needs.
- A range of institutional barriers affected civil society’s ability to meaningfully engage, including bureaucratic funding processes in regard to disbursement of funds, and onerous procurement and reporting. Short funding cycles coupled with pressure to deliver results were also identified as key challenges.



AQ.2

Support to strengthening progressive feminist movements

To what extent has Spotlight Initiative supported and strengthened progressive feminist movements?

To what extent, and in what ways, is the UN considered a legitimate and relevant entity to support movement strengthening and cross-movement building?

- The UN is seen as a highly relevant and legitimate institution to provide targeted support to movement strengthening, through funding convenings and networking events for different WROs and civil society, and through advocacy activities, supporting women’s rights organisations and civil society groups to access different decision makers at different levels.
- Spotlight Initiative’s strategic position enables it to play an important role in bringing WROs, government stakeholders, and international NGOs together. The convening role was seen as one of the strategic functions the UN can play to support movements, which sometimes entails playing a ‘brokering’ role and supporting civil society to access strategic spaces, governments, and other decision-makers., to advocate on EVAWG programming and raise their profile. However, this positioning at times was perceived by some civil society representatives as compromising the Initiative’s ability to stand in solidarity with oppressed groups in contexts that are more restrictive.

- The collaboration of different UN agencies in Spotlight Initiative reflects diverse mandates and experience levels, coming together under one umbrella with the explicit aim of ending VAWG. While this undoubtedly signifies an important step toward working with WROs and movements in a meaningful and feminist way within EVAWG programming in the UN, it did present challenges as not all agencies had the same understanding of, and commitment to, engaging civil society and movements in this way.
- The approach used to support movements was not consistently applied across Spotlight Initiative, with some stakeholders reflecting that the absence of a well-defined strategy hampered efforts. At times, the UN was seen as trying 'to take over', 'lead', or 'build' movements, which stakeholders reflected should not be the role of the UN or Spotlight Initiative. Rather the assessment notes that the UN is best placed to support movement building 'behind the scenes', convening and funding but not taking the lead.
- The assessment found a common expectation among recipient UN organisations (RUNOs) for women's rights activists to act in the 'spirit of activism' and 'voluntarism', which is not aligned to feminist principles advocating for fair compensation for people's time and expertise. This discrepancy risks increasing stress and burnout among activists and limits the effectiveness of movement-building efforts.

To what extent have the strategies adopted to support and strengthen movements been effective and enabled greater agency of women's movements?

- The strategies used to support WROs and GROs, such as funding convening and networking opportunities, provided much-needed support for these organisations and were an important first step toward broader movement strengthening. However, they fell short in supporting the full range of skills needed for movement building, including, for example, supporting leadership development, and strategic planning or providing unrestricted support to meet their own identified needs.
- There were notable variations in how Spotlight Initiative engaged with movements depending on their stage of development. Where movements were already established, Spotlight Initiative's support was more aligned to their identified needs. In contexts with fragmented or nascent movements, support tended to be more directive, for example, bringing groups together and encouraging networking and collaboration, which is a less effective strategy for enabling greater agency.
- In contexts marked by strong anti-gender backlash, Spotlight Initiative faced significant hurdles in movement building. These challenges included navigating divergent and sometimes divisive perspectives among UN organisations, civil society, government and other stakeholders, on how best to address the backlash and the extent to which men should be included in efforts to end GBV in order to best support movement building.
- The assessment found a frequent confusion in the conceptualisation of support to individual organisations and support to movements that made it hard for participants in

the assessment to distinguish between efforts that were to strengthen movements and those that supported individual organisations with funding and capacity strengthening.



AQ.3

Leave No One Behind (LNOB)

To what extent has Spotlight Initiative meaningfully involved the most left-behind and discriminated-against women and girls in all their diversity?

To what extent has Spotlight Initiative's decision making, and implementation processes involved the most structurally marginalised women in all their diversity?

- LNOB was visible as a cross-cutting principle and broadly understood by stakeholders across Spotlight Initiative. It was considered in the formation of CSRGs, and the CSRGs acted as learning spaces and contributed to a stronger focus on LNOB in programmes.
- Structurally marginalised individuals and constituency-led groups were consulted and involved in decision making across Spotlight Initiative, to varied extents, and there is some evidence of their influence on the priorities of Spotlight Initiative's programming. Evidence of involvement in decision making appeared more frequently at the individual project level, through civil society organisations, while involvement in programme-level decision making appeared less frequently.
- Partnerships with constituency-led CSOs - including as implementing partners and grantees - emerged as an important approach for engaging structurally marginalised women and groups in implementation. Small grant schemes, in particular, enabled constituency-led CSOs to access UN funding and address violence against structurally marginalised women and groups, although the grants tended to be short-term.
- Contracting constituency-led CSOs to help strengthen the capacity of other CSOs is a promising approach taken by the Initiative as these organisations have expertise and are well placed to provide leadership on LNOB.
- Existing LNOB guidance was not sufficiently contextualised for EVAWG programming, which limited the LNOB analysis at the start of some programmes and subsequently the focus on LNOB across programmes.

To what extent have Spotlight Initiative's activities and results across the six pillars taken an intersectional approach to reach and/or serve the most structurally marginalised women and girls in all their diversity?

- Spotlight programmes supported the integration of marginalised groups' needs and priorities into mainstream GBV services, this included efforts to provide accessible information to reach marginalised groups of women and girls, and gender-diverse people
- Partnering with constituency-led CSOs helped Spotlight programmes better reach structurally marginalised women and girls, and is a more effective approach to mainstream LNOB and reach these populations than partnering with CSOs that are not constituency led (when not being sufficiently supported to do so).
- The provision of reasonable accommodations was key in creating inclusive spaces for structurally marginalised women and groups to participate in activities, such as supporting carers to attend meetings and sign language interpreters. Spotlight programmes did not always reflect inclusion and operationalise diversity across the entire programme cycle from design to implementation, for example by ensuring accessibility requirements and reasonable accommodations were adequately included in project budgets.
- The extent to which Spotlight Initiative was able to reach marginalised women and groups during implementation varied across programmes. While some Spotlight programmes found innovative ways to reach structurally marginalised groups and women and girls in remote areas, the lack of guidance on how to reach and engage structurally marginalised groups, especially in more politically restrictive contexts, was a significant gap.
- Spotlight Initiative had some guidance on data disaggregation, but this did not include guidance on whether and how to ethically and safely collect data related to women and girls in all their diversity and structurally marginalised groups reached by Spotlight programmes.



AQ.4

Transforming Power

What contribution has Spotlight Initiative made to transforming power dynamics and pre-existing structures to allow for more sustainable change?

- Spotlight Initiative has demonstrated the potential for the UN to work in more transformative ways, addressing and working to transform power structures including in relation to funding and supporting some of the 'non-usual suspects', but these approaches are still on a small scale.
- Spotlight Initiative responded positively to pressure and advocacy from civil society and made changes to governance and decision-making structures as part of its efforts to increase the meaningful involvement of civil society. For example, the inclusion of Pillar 6 was a result of civil society advocacy, as well as ensuring civil society representation on the Steering Committees at Global and National levels.
- Spotlight Initiative is a centrally designed global programme. While this helped ensure an evidence-based design at scale, and the ability to coherently aggregate results and capture global impact, many Spotlight Programmes felt the framework was 'imposed' and was not adequately contextualised or flexible enough to allow for localisation and recognise contextual experience, expertise, and knowledge.
- Spotlight Initiative has demonstrated aspects of UN Reform well, specifically related to inter-agency coordination, and the enhanced role of the Resident Coordinator. However, many existing patterns of engagement and agency and donor dynamics appear to be hampering consistent progress.
- A 'ripple effect' of pressure to deliver was observed, starting from the donor and passing to Spotlight Initiative, then to civil society, and finally to sub-grantees. This pressure undermined efforts to rebalance traditional power relationships, resulting in stress and tension.
- Spotlight Initiative is operating in many contexts where there is a strong and vocal anti-gender and anti-feminist backlash, which places the lives and rights of structurally marginalised women and girls in all their diversity at risk. The Initiative has found it difficult to navigate these dynamics in some settings, despite the commitment to address EVAWG through a human rights-based approach.
- Some seeds for transformative change have been planted and the Initiative was committed to achieving sustainable change in part through ensuring strong national ownership. The ambition of the Initiative and intensity of implementation over a relatively short time frame may have limited the likelihood of achieving the change in power structures that was hoped for.

Conclusions



AQ.1 CSO Engagement

1. Spotlight Initiative has made progress in pursuing an ambitious and bold agenda to do things differently to work with CSOs and WROs in new ways. The success of the CSRG mechanisms has demonstrated that new ways of working to create a space for sustained civil society advocacy and influence are possible.
2. The innovative processes that Spotlight Initiative used to address the structural barriers that CSOs, particularly WROs and GROs, face in accessing funding enabled a large number of 'non-usual suspects' to access UN funding.
3. The capacity-strengthening support that CSOs received from RUNOs under Spotlight Initiative programmes, while valued by many, could have been better designed to address CSOs' own identified capacity needs and priorities.



AQ.2 Support to strengthening progressive feminist movements

4. Spotlight Initiative has provided relevant and welcome support to feminist and women's movements in contexts where these movements are strong. It is recognised as a relevant entity that can make an important contribution to strengthening movements, providing it does not take a directive role as it did in some contexts where movements were more fragmented or nascent.
5. The UN's relationship with national governments is a positive contributory factor for strengthening movements and elevating the issue of EAWG politically, but can also be a hindering factor. This tension surfaced a number of challenges and learnings for the future.
6. The varied ways in which RUNOs engaged with WROs, groups, and movements was in part due to the different conceptual understandings of Pillar 6, which combines both strengthening and support to women's movements and CSOs, and how this pillar linked to activities under other pillars. This varied conceptual understanding also contributed to an inability on the part of many stakeholders to explain how Spotlight Initiative supported women's movements and what the Initiative's feminist approach was.



AQ.3

Leave No One Behind (LNOB)

7. Having LNOB as a cross-cutting principle across the Initiative's way of working supported an intentional focus on engaging and reaching structurally marginalised women in Spotlight Initiative.
8. CSRGs were the strongest example of Spotlight Initiative engaging structurally marginalised women and groups in governance mechanisms and decision making, but the lack of clarity around their roles and responsibilities (as noted in AQ1) contributed to these members feeling that their involvement was at times tokenistic or that they could have done more to reach out to their constituency groups to further the principles of LNOB had their roles been clearer.
9. Constituency-led CSOs were engaged in implementation, and projects run by these groups appeared strongest in reaching and addressing the priorities of structurally marginalised women and girls, and groups. Constituency-led CSOs are also well placed to support non-constituency-led CSOs to better integrate and implement LNOB approaches, supporting a twin-track approach of working with constituency-led CSOs and supporting 'mainstreaming' of LNOB (where safe and appropriate) in efforts to end violence against women and girls in all their diversity.
10. Existing guidance on data disaggregation does not sufficiently consider LNOB principles, and the existing data provides limited insight on who has been reached and how constituency-led CSOs have been engaged in Spotlight Initiative.





AQ.4

Transforming Power

11. As a global programme designed and managed from the centre, Spotlight Initiative sought to ensure a comprehensive approach aligned with the evidence base and the ability to aggregate reporting and impact globally. However, this contributed to a perception that Spotlight programmes had been ‘imposed’, were ‘top’-heavy’, and at times micromanaged. This is in part a result of the heavy procedural and reporting burdens, but also the short inception phase, and the perception that the Initiative had not taken sufficient account of the different local contexts and their characteristics at the design (inception) stage. This included not investing sufficient time in understanding the progress already made by local CSOs and their capacity to promote change.
12. Spotlight Initiative represents a clear commitment from the UN on the imperative for it to reform the way it works with, and funds civil society (within a whole-of-society approach to meaningful partnerships) to address the challenges and opportunities available, but this kind of reform requires time and progress and has been slower than some would like.
13. The donor climate that requires organisations (including UN agencies) to compete for (extremely limited) resources to end GBV and advance human rights, and therefore puts pressure on agencies to ‘sell themselves’, can pit UN agencies against one another, undermining collaboration and cooperation. Furthermore, this works as a disincentive to the open reflection (on what is working and isn’t and on power dynamics) that is critical to advancing relevant, responsive, rights-based programming to EVAWG.



Recommendations

A number of recommendations emerge from the findings and conclusions of this thematic assessment for Spotlight Initiative to consider for future programming. These recommendations are likely to have relevance beyond the country or regional programmes and could be of interest for learning across Spotlight Initiative as a whole, RUNOs, the UN system, donors, and others. (In fact, each recommendation can be and is often relevant to different stakeholder groups.)

A high-level summary of the assessment's recommendations is presented below. Full details are included in the main report.

RECOMMENDATION 1

Conceptual clarity and guidance

A future iteration of Spotlight Initiative should include a much clearer articulation of its feminist and human rights framing and include key definitions and a framework for how to support movement strengthening. Specific programmatic guidance on LNOB tailored to EVAWG programming, as well as an engagement strategy for how the UN (and Spotlight Initiative more specifically) can better support and work in solidarity with oppressed and marginalised groups generally, but also particularly in more restrictive contexts, should also be developed.

RECOMMENDATION 2

UN Reform and funding modalities

UN funding, procurement, and reporting systems should be simplified and harmonised across all UN agencies working on future iterations of Spotlight Initiative or other EVAWG programming in the spirit of UN Reform. Future EVAWG programmes should adopt feminist funding principles that recognise the importance of longer-term, flexible, core funding for women-led organisations. Multi-year funding cycles should be the norm, providing a significant proportion of funds as 'core' funding (to be allocated flexibly and used institutionally) for CSOs, including WROs, GROs, and constituency-led organisations.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Approach to capacity strengthening

Spotlight Initiative and the UN more broadly should revisit its approach to capacity strengthening with CSOs and what types of capacity strengthening it prioritises to ensure that support provided is consistently relevant and responsive to the identified needs of CSOs. To do this, participatory, collaborative approaches to capacity needs assessments should be used with partners to identify priorities, strengths, and gaps and explore different options for delivering capacity support, including through constituency-led CSOs, collective learning spaces, peer support, and accompaniment.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Civil society accountability and governance

UN global initiatives should continue to prioritise and facilitate civil society to meaningfully participate in governance and decision-making structures, through reference groups and steering committees. Civil society should be involved in designing their participation within programmes, what financial and other resources will be needed to support it, and how it will be monitored. Where civil society representatives in governance and decision-making bodies are expected to act as a bridge to broader civil society, specific mechanisms will be needed, and the UN agencies involved will need to support this 'bridging' role. Separate decision-making and governance structures should be considered to take into account potential conflicts of interest.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Understanding and challenging power

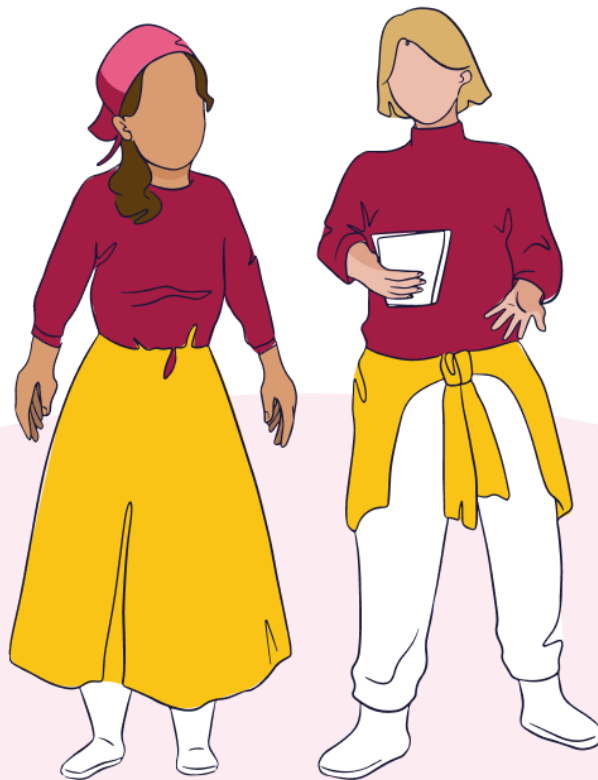
The UN, including Spotlight Initiative and RUNOs, and donors should continue to participate in critical, collective reflection on power dynamics within the UN and within the wider donor funding landscape and systems, and work collectively to develop a set of rights-based values and principles to embed in the United Nations' (and the Initiative's) contracts and agreements with civil society partners, in line with the UN Funding Compact. This will allow individuals and organisations who are implementing or receiving funds either directly from a UN agency or an intermediary to hold the UN or contracting partners to account for their commitments.

RECOMMENDATION 6

Data collection and monitoring

Spotlight Initiative should deepen its participatory approach to programme data collection and monitoring to ensure it better aligns with the Initiative's principles (as described in Spotlight Initiative's M&E Strategy), including on implementing LNOB, transparency, and learning. A Spotlight 2.0, or further EVAWG programmes, should explore how to further embed participatory approaches to M&E, deepen disaggregation (including by the type of CSO funded by the Initiative and the groups reached by that funding), and develop new indicators to track progress on and for greater learning on efforts to strengthen movements and integrate LNOB into programming.

Chapter 1: Introduction



Introduction

This report presents the findings and learning from the thematic assessment of Spotlight Initiative's work in relation to three distinct but intertwined themes:

- The extent to which Spotlight Initiative has **meaningfully engaged civil society**, particularly local and grassroots groups.
- Spotlight Initiative's implementation of **'Leaving No One Behind' ('LNOB')** as a cross-cutting principle.
- Spotlight Initiative's **support to movement building**.

This chapter explains the background to the thematic assessment and to Spotlight Initiative. Chapter 2 presents the methodology and approach to the assessment. In Chapter 3, key findings are discussed related to each of the assessment's questions or themes. Chapter 4 presents the forward-looking conclusions and, lastly, recommendations are detailed in Chapter 5.

1.1. Background to the thematic assessment

1.1.1 The global challenge of addressing violence against women and girls

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a pervasive and widespread human rights violation. Women and girls are disproportionately subjected to violence, including femicide, sexual violence, intimate partner violence (IPV), trafficking, and harmful practices.⁸ Estimates based on global evidence show that nearly one in three women has experienced physical and/or sexual IPV, non-partner sexual violence (NPSV), or both of these forms of violence, at least once in their life.⁹

Global estimates on violence against particular groups of women, girls, and gender-diverse people,¹⁰ who may be at disproportionate risk of violence due to the way systemic gender inequality overlaps with other forms of oppression, are scarce; however, where evidence is available, it suggests high rates of violence. For example, evidence from six low- and middle-income countries¹¹ showed that women with disabilities are two to four times more likely to experience IPV than women without disabilities.¹² Global estimates on violence against women with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, expression and sexual characteristics (SOGIESC) and non-binary and gender-diverse persons are not available. However, a recent global evidence review highlights that high rates of violence against LGBTIQ+ people have been recorded in studies from all over the world, and that women with diverse SOGIESC and

⁸ <https://www.un.org/en/spotlight-initiative/>

⁹ World Health Organization (2018) [Violence against women prevalence estimates, 2018 – Global fact sheet](#)

¹⁰ This report includes 'gender-diverse people' to recognise that not all who are at risk of violence based on systematic gender inequality, misogyny, and patriarchal norms (and intersecting forms of oppression) may identify as women, but may face violence based on real or (mis)perceived gender identity. This can, for example, include trans men and non-binary people who may be incorrectly perceived as women and/or who can be subject to violence based on perceived non-conformity to gender norms and roles ascribed to them by society. For example, trans men have been found to be at high risk of forced marriage (by parents) in some contexts, with subsequent high risk of IPV, but their experiences are commonly invisible in VAWG/GBV research and programming.

¹¹ Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Ghana, Nepal, South Africa, and Tajikistan.

¹² Dunkle, K. (2018) [Disability and Violence against Women and Girls: Emerging evidence from the What Works to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls global programme](#)

gender-diverse persons have been found to be at disproportionate risk of some types of violence, including intimate partner violence (IPV), forced marriages, and non-partner sexual violence (NPSV) (e.g. so-called 'corrective rapes').¹³ Evidence on VAWG from other structurally marginalised groups is similarly scarce on a global level, but studies in multiple countries have found that women and girls living with HIV/AIDS,¹⁴ female sex workers,¹⁵ and women from ethnic, racial, and Indigenous minorities,¹⁶ among other groups, face an increased risk of violence.

When examining VAWG through a lifecycle approach, evidence highlights that girls and women are exposed to risk factors throughout their lives. While evidence from five countries found that IPV prevalence was commonly higher among younger women (aged 18–25) than women over 25,¹⁷ adolescence and older age are likewise associated with unique risk factors and forms of violence. For girls, this includes the risk of child marriage, where recent global estimates suggest that one in five women aged 20–24 were married as children (19%).¹⁸ Evidence on violence against older women is very scarce, particularly from low- and middle-income countries; however, available (often smaller) studies have found high rates of violence and abuse against older women.¹⁹

While progress has been made in the last two decades in advancing women's rights and gender equality, the growing anti-gender movement, which is highly organised and well resourced, and recent shifts toward nationalist political leaders and authoritarianism have led to the marginalisation of women and girls, LGBTQI+ people, and refugees, and to the rolling back of their rights. The past two decades have also seen a steady decline in global freedom, with nearly 75% of the world's population living in a country showing democratic declines.²⁰ Interventions to tackle VAWG have rapidly grown in recent decades, with growing evidence of what works to prevent VAWG,²¹ but the socioeconomic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated its prevalence, and VAWG has now been labelled the 'shadow pandemic'²² and the 'ignored pandemic'²³ by actors that have explored the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on VAWG.

Several challenges persist in the global evidence base on what works to tackle VAWG, including: gaps in effective programming with structurally marginalised groups; evidence on

¹³ Ahlenback, V. (2022) [Ending Violence against LGBTQI+ People: Global evidence and emerging insights into what works](#)

¹⁴ See, for example, Durevall, D. and Lindskog, A. (2015) [Intimate partner violence and HIV in ten sub-Saharan Africa countries: What do the Demographic Health Surveys tell us?](#) *Lancet Global Health*, 2015, Jan;3(1)

¹⁵ See, for example, CREA (2012) [Count me IN! Research Report on Violence against Disabled, Lesbian, and Sex-working Women in Bangladesh, India, and Nepal](#)

¹⁶ See, for example, UNICEF, UN Women, UNFPA, ILO and OSRSG/VAC (2013) [Breaking the Silence on Violence against Indigenous Girls, Adolescents and Young Women](#)

¹⁷ Corboz, J., Jewkes, R. and Chirwa, E. (2020) [Violence against younger and older women in low- and middle-income settings](#)

¹⁸ UNICEF (2023) [Global Database: Child Marriage](#)

¹⁹ See, for example, Vizard, P. (2013) Developing an indicator-based framework for monitoring older people's human rights: panel, survey and key findings for Peru, Mozambique and Kyrgyzstan

²⁰ Freedom House (2022) [Freedom in the World 2022: The Global Expansion of Authoritarian Rule](#), Freedom House

²¹ See Kerr-Wilson, A. et al. (2020) [A rigorous global evidence review of interventions to prevent violence against women and girls](#)

²² See UN Women (no date) [The shadow pandemic: Violence against Women during COVID-19](#)

²³ See Oxfam (2019) [The Ignored Pandemic: The dual crisis of gender-based violence and COVID-19, which includes key evidence and data, e.g. on the surge in demand on GBV service providers during this time.](#)

how to address multiple and intersecting forms of VAWG (there is currently more evidence focused on how to address physical and/or sexual IPV compared to other forms of IPV, and non-partner VAWG); and evidence on how to sustain changes in the longer term (e.g. behaviour change), as most evaluations of interventions have measured short-term changes.²⁴

What the evidence base is strongly telling us is that preventing VAWG is possible,²⁵ and a comprehensive model that addresses all forms of VAWG and works on multiple, mutually reinforcing 'pillars' is likely to be the most effective way of ending violence against women and girls, as well as violence against other structurally marginalised groups.²⁶

1.1.2 Spotlight Initiative

Responding to this global challenge, Spotlight Initiative set out to promote a comprehensive, rights-based approach to drive transformative change across six interconnected outcome areas (or 'pillars'), with the ultimate objective to ensure that all women and girls – especially those who are structurally marginalised – live free from violence and harmful practices.

The six pillars of Spotlight Initiative are:

1. **Laws and policy:** Promoting laws and policies to prevent violence and discrimination, and to address impunity.
2. **Institutions:** Strengthening institutions.
3. **Prevention:** Promoting gender-equitable attitudes and norms.
4. **Services:** Providing quality services for survivors and their families.
5. **Data:** Strengthening systems for collecting data on VAWG.
6. **Women's movements:** Strengthening and supporting women's movements and relevant CSOs.

²⁴ Kerr-Wilson, A. et al. (2020) [A rigorous global evidence review of interventions to prevent violence against women and girls](#)

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Totapally, S., Jayaram, S., and Agarwal, A. (2022) [Imperative to Invest](#); Dalberg (2023) [Tracing the institutional history of Spotlight Initiative to eliminate violence against women and girls](#).

Spotlight Initiative Theory of Change

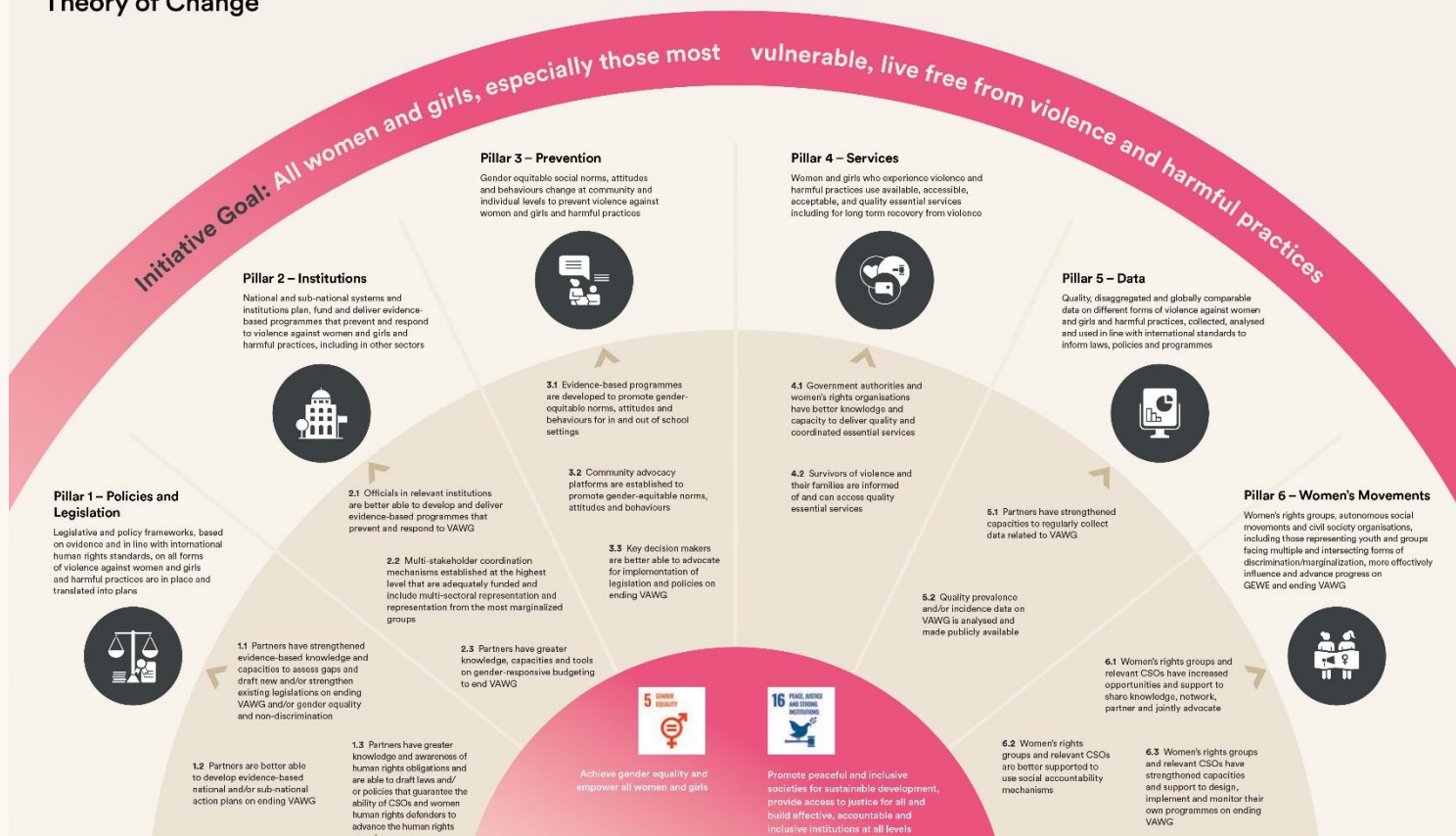


Figure 3: Spotlight Initiative Theory of Change

According to key informant interviews (KIIs) in the inception phase, the uniqueness and innovation of Spotlight Initiative lie not only in its focus on comprehensively addressing VAWG through multi-sectoral working – ensuring all its programmes are co-created with government and civil society, as well as aligned to local priorities – but also its scale. The programme is implemented through 26 country programmes across five regions, five regional programmes, one thematic regional programme in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (the Safe and Fair programme), and two civil society grant-giving programmes partnering with the UN Trust Fund and the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF).

Another key aspect of the Initiative's uniqueness within the UN system is that it was set up as a 'demonstration fund' to model UN development system reform,²⁷ aiming to leverage the collective strengths of the UN system to accelerate progress on the internationally agreed development goals, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and in particular SDG 5 that sets out to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Spotlight Initiative also had an intention to adopt a feminist approach by addressing power structures within the UN system to show that the UN could work differently, both together as 'One UN' and with civil society. The context of UN Reform (i.e. 'One UN') is hence critical to this

²⁷ To learn more about the UN development system reform ('UN Reform'), see: <https://reform.un.org/content/un-development-system-reform-101>.

assessment, which explores the extent to which these two transformative ambitions have materialised and to what effect for women and girls in their diversity, and those at most risk of being left behind in EAWG programming.

In 2017, the European Union (EU) announced nearly €500 million in ‘seed funding’ to end VAWG as a necessary precondition to achieving the SDGs – this represents the world’s single largest funding for EAWG programming. The 2030 SDGs Agenda is strongly backed by the EU, which has identified the elimination of all forms of VAWG, including sexual violence, trafficking, and harmful practices, as the first key thematic policy area in the EU Gender Action Plan III (2021–2025).²⁸

Spotlight Initiative was conceived of over the course of 2017 between the EU and the UN Secretary General and Deputy Secretary General and officially launched in September 2017. When this assessment commenced, in December 2022, Spotlight Initiative was about to enter its last year of implementation at country and regional levels (which continued until December 2023), while global-level activities continue until December 2024, when the current phase of the Initiative operationally closes. Spotlight Initiative is currently in a co-design process to develop a second phase, and is continuing to consolidate knowledge and learning to share with the sector.

1.2. Overview of the thematic assessment

Spotlight Initiative commissioned SDDirect to conduct an assessment looking at how transformative the Initiative had been across three thematic areas: CSO engagement, ‘leaving no one behind’ (LNOB), and strengthening movement building. The assessment focuses strongly on drawing out learning from what approaches have worked in relation to these themes, as well as what has not worked, to generate recommendations for future programmes. The core assessment team consisted of six women with diverse and extensive expertise in VAWG prevention, who were supported by eight national consultants and 25 women who made up the Thematic Assessment Country Accountability and Advisory Group (TACAAG).²⁹ The forward-looking recommendations in this report build on the evidence-based findings from data collection and document review, and also draw on the joint expertise of this assessment team, including practice-based knowledge and a shared commitment to feminist approaches in VAWG programming, research, and evaluation.

The assessment was guided by the Thematic Assessment Reference Group (TARG), which included representatives from civil society and women’s rights groups, members of Spotlight Initiative’s global civil society reference group (CSRG), Spotlight Initiative colleagues at global, regional, and national levels, (including from Spotlight Initiative’s Global Secretariat), UN agency focal points, members of UN evaluation offices, and academic institutions. The methodology section below provides further detail on the roles and responsibilities of the TACAAG and the TARG.

The assessment considers Spotlight Initiative’s work globally across all programmes. However, to gain detailed knowledge and learn from how these themes were applied in various contexts, the assessment used a case study approach. It includes case studies examining the three themes in 10 programmes across all regions where Spotlight Initiative was implemented. The

²⁸ Spotlight Initiative Terms of Reference 2017-2023. A Multi-Partner Trust Fund.; [and EU Gender Action Plan \(GAP\) III. Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council](#)

²⁹ With the exception of the regional case study which did not have a group. See the ‘Limitations’ section.

assessment was conducted between November 2022 and January 2024, with most of the data collection for country case studies taking place between March and August 2023.

This report presents the findings from the thematic assessment based on the synthesis of the 10 case studies, as well as from wider consultations through a SHINE discussion,³⁰ a story collection exercise, focus group discussions (FGDs) with CSRG members, and global document review. Findings from case studies were first triangulated at country level (obtaining evidence from multiple sources and perspectives) and further triangulation during the global synthesis, to ensure findings are well founded and that the assessment obtained a diversity of perspectives on the themes of inquiry. In line with the assessment's feminist methodology, the voices of civil society were prioritised, including through the selection of data collection methods and tools and the sampling strategies used. Findings from the case studies are used throughout the report as illustrative examples related to key global findings, and to highlight good practice and learning from Spotlight programmes. The case studies were not standalone evaluations of the programmes, but rather opportunities to take a deeper dive into particular contexts and provide important learning and evidence for the global assessment report. This thematic assessment is not a traditional evaluation of the impact of Spotlight Initiative, but rather provides a deep dive into specific themes that previous evaluations and studies have alluded to but were unable to explore in depth. The assessment has allowed for a more flexible, participatory, and consultative methodology than would have been possible with a more standard evaluation design.

1.2.1 Purpose and objectives of the thematic assessment

Spotlight Initiative commissioned the thematic assessment to take an in-depth look at how transformative it has been in relation to three themes that are recognised as critical for more transformative, intersectional, and sustainable approaches in EAWG programming: the extent to which Spotlight Initiative has **meaningfully engaged civil society** (particularly local and grassroots groups) in governance structures and implementation; the extent to which the Initiative has implemented **the LNOB principle**; and the extent to which Spotlight Initiative has meaningfully supported **movement building**.

The purpose of the thematic assessment is to capture lessons and insights on the three interconnected themes, and the extent to which Spotlight Initiative's focus on these themes has contributed to shifting power dynamics and structures to allow for more transformative and sustainable programming and change.

The assessment also aims to:

- Demonstrate Spotlight Initiative's accountability to stakeholders, with a focus on rights holders and communities, as well as civil society organisations (CSOs).
- Contribute to evidence-based decision making for programming and policy development by providing targeted recommendations to the UN and others working to end VAWG.
- Support learning by contributing to the existing knowledge base on ending VAWG in relation to the three themes.

³⁰ SHINE is an online hub for global knowledge exchange on ending violence against women and girls, convened by the UN Trust Fund and Spotlight Initiative.

In line with the assessment's feminist approach and participatory methodology (see Chapter 2), the report is also intended to support broader learning for a range of stakeholders working on EVAWG. As such, prior to the report being finalised, the findings and emerging recommendations were shared with a variety of stakeholders in the TACAAG and TARG for validation and to support the development of recommendations for Spotlight Initiative and programmes to end VAWG. This approach aligns with the World Health Organisation's ethical principles on research on violence against women, which state that *"researchers and donors have an ethical obligation to help ensure that their findings are properly interpreted and used to advance policy and intervention development."*³¹

1.2.2 Understanding the themes

The assessment focuses on three thematic areas that largely overlap under an overarching theme of transforming power dynamics and pre-existing structures for sustainable change. As noted above, the three themes are: civil society engagement, the implementation of the LNOB principle, and support to progressive feminist and women's movements. These are all central themes to achieving the transformative objective set out by Spotlight Initiative, including: demonstrating new ways the UN can work with civil society; recognising intersecting forms of discrimination (as it relates to VAWG) and including women who face structural marginalisation and groups that are at risk of being left behind; and centring women's and feminist movements in EVAWG efforts.



AQ.1 CSO Engagement

The first assessment theme considers the extent to which civil society has been meaningfully engaged in Spotlight Initiative, including in its governance mechanisms and in programme implementation. A key aspect explored is to what extent Spotlight Initiative has privileged partnerships with a diversity of CSOs, particularly with national organisations, local organisations, grass roots organisations (GROs), feminist organisations, and women's rights organisations (WROs). Spotlight Initiative's Theory of Change, and particularly Pillar 6, emphasises the critical role of civil society in EVAWG programming for supporting national ownership of development processes and sustainability of efforts.³² It states as a priority to reach beyond the 'usual suspects' in civil society and take deliberate steps to bring in new partners, especially CSOs at the local and grassroots level and those that represent historically marginalised groups. As such, this theme is closely linked with the leave no one behind (LNOB) principle, as Spotlight Initiative's Theory of Change is grounded in the evidence that working directly with diverse civil society actors (and feminist movements) who are experts in EVAWG in their contexts, are closer to their communities, and are more likely to be working with those who may face intersecting forms of discrimination and violence is the best way to serve women, girls, and gender-diverse people.³³

³¹ WHO (2001). [Putting women first: Ethical and safety recommendations for research on domestic violence against women](#)

³² Spotlight Initiative (no date) Technical Guidance on the Six Pillars of the Spotlight Theory of Change.

³³ Weldon, S. Laurel, Htun, Mala (2013). [Feminist mobilisation and progressive policy change: why governments take action to combat violence against women](#). Oxfam GB, Routledge



AQ.2

Support for progressive feminist and women's movements

The Thematic Assessment looked specifically at Pillar 6 which was added to Spotlight Initiative's Theory of Change after the inception phase as a result of lobbying by civil society and women's rights organisations. Pillar 6 is entitled 'Women's movements and CSOs'³⁴ and is explained as "promoting strong and empowered civil society and autonomous women's movements" using strategies such as advocating for laws and policies that protect the participation of women's movements, building the capacity of CSOs, deploying innovative funding mechanisms, and strengthening partnerships and networking opportunities for civil society.³⁵ Pillar 6 therefore, includes support to both CSOs and women's movements. The assessment explored how Spotlight Initiative's support to movements and CSOs overlapped and how it was differentiated at the outset. The Technical Guidance on the Six Pillars of Spotlight Initiative's Theory of Change identified this as an area for further exploration and consideration, stating that: "Civil society programming is not the same thing as movement-building, and strong organisations don't necessarily mean strong movements (and vice-versa)."³⁶ This was an important starting point for exploring this theme. Another aspect of this theme was the extent to which (and in what ways) a programme like Spotlight Initiative or the UN system more broadly are relevant and appropriate entities in the support to and funding of progressive women's movements.



AQ.3

Leave No One Behind (LNOB)

Spotlight Initiative is guided by the core principle of the 2030 SDGs Agenda – the LNOB principle, which was adopted as a cross-cutting principle in the Initiative (along with the human rights-based approach). The Technical Guidance on the Six Pillars of Spotlight Initiative's Theory of Change describes how the LNOB principle is intended to cut across each of the six pillars:

"Under each pillar, programmes will make specific and targeted efforts to ensure equal access and inclusion for all women and girls. This means conducting specific analysis of the barriers, risks and opportunities for specific groups of women and girls and working together with organisations and activists representing diverse groups (such as LGBTQIA, those living with different abilities, ethnic minorities, etc.). It also means engaging in radical listening and authentic solidarity."³⁷

³⁴ Pillar 6 outcome statement: "Pillar 6: Women's rights groups, autonomous social movements, and civil society organisations, including those representing youth and groups facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination/marginalization, more effectively influence and advance progress on GEWE and ending VAWG".

³⁵ Spotlight Initiative (2022) 'Technical Guidance Note on the Four Pillars of Spotlight Initiative Theory of Change'.

³⁶ Spotlight Initiative (no date) 'Technical Guidance on the Six Pillars of the Spotlight Theory of Change'.

³⁷ Ibid.

LNOB not only means reaching those who are at risk of being left behind in EVAWG programming and activities but also requires an intentional approach to addressing discrimination and oppression by transforming deeply rooted systems of inequality at all levels, which contribute to increased and unique risk of violence experienced by structurally marginalised women and gender-diverse people. This must be underpinned by an intersectional approach to ensure that interventions address relevant forms of violence and risk factors, and tailor approaches and activities to the priorities and needs of these groups. A key focus of the assessment has been to explore how far Spotlight Initiative has succeeded in reaching out and involving groups who traditionally have not partnered with the UN, through opening up funding opportunities to the 'non-usual suspects'. As well as how far the UN has been able to champion human rights principles and advocate for the most discriminated against and oppressed groups, across contexts, including in more restrictive contexts.

Each theme has a dedicated section in the report, which sets out the corresponding assessment questions and unpacks what parameters are considered and explored as part of the theme.

1.2.3 Audience for the assessment

The main audience for this assessment is Spotlight Initiative itself, including the different organisations and partners involved and its broader stakeholder base. The assessment's findings can be used to help shape the design of the next phase of Spotlight Initiative (Spotlight Initiative 2.0) and to support internal advocacy within the UN – including with the Deputy Secretary General's office and the UN Development Cooperation Office – for further reforms to UN systems and processes³⁸ to align even deeper with the principles of UN Reform and LNOB.

It is also intended that the assessment's findings and recommendations will support continued dialogue and influence future direction of UN programmes to end VAWG. They are also intended to inform decision making and improve programming to support the leadership and action of women's rights organisations (WROs), grassroots organisations (GRO), civil society organisations, (CSOs), and rights holders, including those most impacted by VAWG.

Additionally, for each of the 10 case studies, a case study note was produced and shared. It is hoped that the note can be useful to the Spotlight programme team in each country and region, along with civil society, including the Civil Society National Reference Group (CS-NRG) members, implementing partners, and other stakeholders who may be less closely involved with Spotlight Initiative. Findings from the case studies have been shared with contributors through validation meetings at programme level and through TACAAG members. The draft global assessment report was shared with the ten case study programmes for their review and comment before finalisation, as well.

This final report will be published publicly and shared widely, and a series of summary products will be produced for targeted distribution.

³⁸ There is clear evidence that a number of reforms have already been made to the backend functioning of UN organisations as a result of Spotlight Initiative's implementation experience and advocacy from the CSRGs, including a system for compensation/payment of CSRG members for their contributions. It is hoped that additional findings and recommendations from this thematic assessment may support further changes.

Chapter 2: Assessment approach and methodology



Assessment approach and methodology

The assessment is grounded in **feminist research principles** – meaning that the assessment team members recognise their position within the assessment, and the power inherent within that. The assessment team acknowledges that there are multiple experiences and different voices that need to be heard and valued throughout the process. Whilst many aspects of this assessment have been predetermined by Spotlight Initiative,³⁹ including the key assessment questions, which puts some limits on the space for co-creation across all aspects of the assessment, the Terms of Reference (Annex 4)⁴⁰ nonetheless called for a focus on positionality, power, and epistemological plurality. To address this, the assessment team worked with a range of stakeholders throughout the process to ensure collaborative knowledge creation and sensemaking. A methodology was adapted that ensured the assessment was able to rigorously answer the assessment questions, while at the same time privileging the voices and views of those who frequently get left behind or missed out of more traditional evaluation approaches. Predominantly qualitative and collaborative approaches to data collection and analysis were employed, which are explained further below.

The assessment team's positionality⁴¹ is central to the approach and team members' experience as evaluators. The assessment core team consists of a diverse range of practitioners, researchers, evaluators, feminists, and activists based variously in Europe and Africa. Some members have worked in this field for decades, while others are newer to this work and bring fresh perspectives. The assessment team therefore acknowledges that its members bring different experiences and perspectives into the assessment that need to be recognised and valued. Engaging with national consultants, who originated from all five regions where Spotlight Initiative was implemented, and the Thematic Assessment Country Accountability and Advisory Group (TACAAG) members in each of the case studies enabled different knowledge and expertise, and rich contextual perspectives to be brought to the team.

A key aspect of feminist evaluation lies in how the findings and recommendations can be used to advocate for social change, particularly with regards to addressing power inequalities. It is, as noted above, one of the World Health Organization's ethical principles on research on violence against women that "researchers and donors have an ethical obligation to help ensure that their findings are properly interpreted and used to advance policy and intervention development,"⁴² and this has been a key consideration throughout this assessment.

³⁹ The Spotlight Initiative Global Secretariat discussed the assessment's ToR – including the three themes and indicative assessment questions—with a range of stakeholders prior to launching the ToR. These included UN agencies, the Initiative's global CSRG, members of the national and regional CSRGs, and the TARG, among others.

⁴⁰ Spotlight Initiative (2021). [Terms of reference Spotlight Initiative Thematic Assessment](#)

⁴¹ Positionality refers to how one's identity influences, and potentially biases, one's understanding of and view of the world and how that may impact one's work. The assessment team acknowledges this as part of its self-reflection process and to mitigate against imposing members' biases and assumptions on the findings that emerge from this assessment.

⁴² WHO (2016) [Ethical and safety recommendations for intervention research on violence against women](#)

2.1. Analytical framework, approach, and assessment questions

The figure below details the four assessment questions across the three themes being explored, linked to the overall hypothesis that guided the assessment. While the assessment was not setting out to prove or disprove the hypothesis, this framing was important to explain why Spotlight Initiative's Global Secretariat – in consultation with a range of stakeholders – selected these themes for this assessment. This hypothesis is based on evidence from Htun and Weldon (2010) that posits that strong autonomous feminist movements are strong predictors of government action to redress VAWG. Countries with the strongest movements often have more comprehensive policies to address violence against women and girls, and other structurally marginalised groups, compared to those where these movements are non-existent.⁴³

Hypothesis

Within a whole-of-society approach, the best way to contribute to efforts to end violence against women and girls (by a large UN fund) is to support and foster feminist movement building, privilege partnerships with civil society organisations, including specifically women's rights organisations and local grassroots organisations, and meaningfully implement the principle of leave no one behind; and that the one-UN system/approach is an appropriate and effective mechanism to do that.



2.1.1 The Transformation Continuum

The assessment developed a framework called the 'Transformation Continuum' based on SDDirect's Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Continuum,⁴⁴ which presents a spectrum against which programming and interventions can be examined. The Continuum was adapted to each thematic focus area of the assessment, aiming to support analysis of whether and how Spotlight Initiative's engagement of CSOs, implementation of the LNOB principle, and support to women's movement building has contributed toward realising 'a genuinely transformative approach' to programming that aims to end VAWG. The findings related to the fourth assessment question on transforming

⁴³ Htun, M. and Weldon, S.L. (2010) [When Do Governments Promote Women's Rights? A framework for the Comparative Analysis of Sex Equality Policy.](#)

⁴⁴ This is an SDDirect tool, originally adapted from Caroline Moser.

power dynamics and pre-existing structures for sustainable change have also been analysed along the Continuum.

The Transformation Continuum was first conceptualised in the inception phase during which the assessment team identified a number of key elements and approaches along the five levels of the continuum – from exploitative and unaware on one side of the continuum, to sensitive, strategic and transformative on the other side. The conceptualisation built on the GESI continuum and previous applications of this in the context of VAWG programming,⁴⁵ as well as the teams' understanding of the thematic areas and Spotlight Initiative's transformative ambition.

During the inception phase the transformation continuum was developed for operational and programmatic elements of the programme, unpacking what an approach at each level of the continuum would look like for each of the three themes, and four assessment questions, being explored by the assessment – CSO engagement, movement Strengthening and LNOB.⁴⁶ The conceptualisation of the Transformation Continuum was further refined during the case studies and global analysis as the assessment teams' understanding of Spotlight Initiative's approaches evolved. During the analysis phase for the final report the assessment team developed four separate continuums for each of the four assessment questions. The key elements outlined at the 'transformative' level drew on the definitions and indicators outlined in the assessment matrix, while the key elements at the other levels have been developed to capture the process towards the transformative level.

The Transformation Continuum is included at the end of each assessment question section to capture how the various approaches used by Spotlight Initiative can be understood along the Continuum. The Continuum aims to be illustrative by summarising the approaches used and showing where these are located on the continuum. It does not comment on how often these approaches were used or where they have appeared but aims, instead, to support learning and discussion (through illustrative examples) on what transformative approaches can look like within the context of Spotlight Initiative and promote further understanding of what is required for more gender-transformative programming.

Another important aspect to note is that the Transformation Continuum aims to capture the range of approaches observed, including transformative ones, but also approaches on the strategic and sensitive levels, as well as the unaware and exploitative levels on the other end of the spectrum. It is important to recognise that not all aspects of a programme working to end VAWG can be transformational as this is not always feasible, safe, or ethical within a given context. Transformative approaches are centred around addressing power imbalances and structural inequalities. They inherently challenge the status quo, and this may be met with resistance and can come with a risk of backlash against those in a structurally marginalised position. Therefore, it is equally important to understand the approaches that fall on the sensitive and strategic levels, as there is good practice to draw out from these levels, as well as learning from the approaches that risk being unaware and exploitative.

⁴⁵ See for example Evaluation Offices of UNAIDS, UNHCR, UNFPA, ILO and UNESCO (2021) Joint Evaluation of the UN Joint Programme on AIDS on preventing and responding to violence against women and girls, [Joint evaluation of the UN Joint Programme on AIDS on preventing and responding to violence against women and girls \(unaids.org\)](https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/infographics/infographic-joint-evaluation-of-the-un-joint-programme-on-aids-on-preventing-and-responding-to-violence-against-women-and-girls)

⁴⁶ See Spotlight Thematic Assessment Inception Report (2023), Social Development Direct, London

The Transformative Continuum

Overview summary of essential elements on the five levels of the continuum, used for analysis



2.2 Methodology

To ensure a participatory methodology, the assessment employed a predominately qualitative approach, with a strong focus on valuing the plurality of views and experiences of different stakeholders in different contexts with different types of engagement with Spotlight Initiative, who are frequently not heard in more traditional evaluation methodologies.

The assessment team listened to and actively sought out the perspectives of people representing those who have the most at stake and are disproportionately impacted by VAWG, embarking on a process of ‘radical listening’, whereby the assessment team sought to listen without judgement or imposing our biases – this was particularly important during the CSO workshops. The assessment team did this while balancing the need to answer the specific assessment questions. An explanation of the different approaches the assessment took follows.

The diagram below outlines the methodological approach to the assessment.



Figure 4: Global and case study level data collection

2.2.1 Data collection methods




Desk review and documentation analysis

An extensive document review was conducted reviewing global reports, guidance notes, and country- and regional-level programme documents. The assessment team also consulted a wide range of external literature, evaluation guidance, and think pieces. More than 300 documents were reviewed to support triangulation and provide an important complement to the interviews and focus groups. Annex 1 provides a list of the documents reviewed.

Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions

The assessment conducted a series of KIIs and FGDs with stakeholders at global, regional, and country level. Stakeholders were made up of the following categories: civil society implementing partners, CSRG members, other civil society representatives who were not formally partnered with Spotlight Initiative but working to end VAWG and advance women's rights, as well, UN stakeholders, government, and other donors (see Table 1). A full list of stakeholder consulted is included in Annex 2.

A mix of open, discursive individual interviews and small FGDs were used.

	 Women*	 Men*	 Non-binary	Data unknown	In Total
Total Number of People Spoken To	372	98	8	28	506

THIS IS MADE UP OF THE FOLLOWING CATEGORIES OF STAKEHOLDERS

Civil society implementing partners	159	50	4	19	232
CSRG	36	6	2	1	45
Other civil society	68	7	2	5	82
UN stakeholders	77	17	0	3	97
Govt	26	17	0	0	43
Other donors	6	1	0	0	7

OF WHICH THE FOLLOWING WERE GLOBAL STAKEHOLDERS

	24	2	1	0	27
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AND THE FOLLOWING WERE FROM THE 10 PROGRAMME CASE STUDIES

	348	96	7	28	479
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* Includes trans and cisgender women

* Includes trans and cisgender men

Table 1: Breakdown of stakeholders consulted during the thematic assessment

Civil society implementing partners workshop

A participatory power analysis and movement mapping workshop with CSO implementing partners and sub-grantee partners was held in each of the 10 case study locations to discuss issues of power and movement building. The workshop agenda is included with other data collection tools in Annex 5. **Across the 10 case studies, the workshops involved a total of 87 women, 32 men, two people who identified as non-binary, and two participants whose gender identity was unknown.** Chart 1 below provides the breakdown.

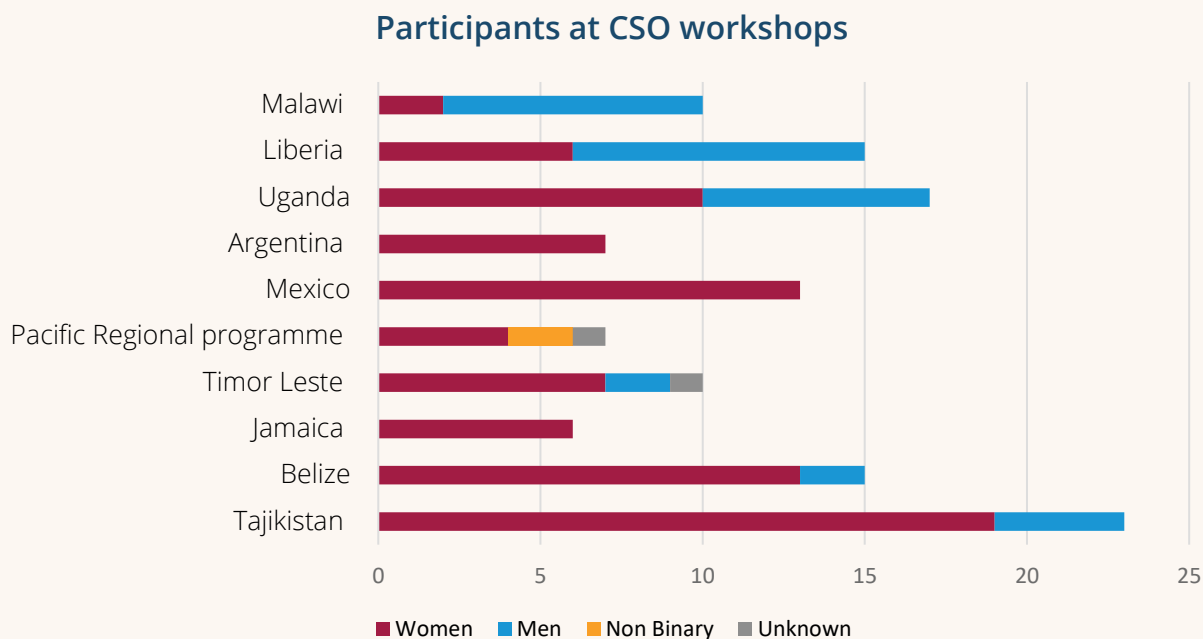


Chart 1: CSO workshop participants

A core part of the assessment's approach was to enable stakeholders, civil society actors, and rights holders who had interacted with Spotlight Initiative to share their experiences and stories with the assessment team. The assessment team wanted to use a story collection methodology to reach a wider audience and variety of stakeholders, as well as to further elucidate and triangulate the data from the case studies. Two methodologies were used for story collection: 1) a story collection form collected through KoboToolbox; and 2) a moderated discussion on the [SHINE](#) platform.⁴⁷ The assessment team used existing feminist networks to share the story collection form, including through the Sexual Violence Research Initiative newsletter, while the Spotlight Initiative Global Secretariat circulated the forms widely through their own networks, including with all Spotlight programme coordinators, members of CSRGs, the thematic assessment reference group, and more broadly through digital channels. The purpose was to gather insights on changes experienced (positive or negative) from a wide range of stakeholders (including those outside of the 10 case studies) with experiences of Spotlight Initiative. The case study protocol and story collection form are included with other data collection tools in Annex 5.

⁴⁷ The [SHINE Platform](#) is an online hub for global knowledge exchange on ending violence against women and girls, produced by the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women in collaboration with Spotlight Initiative.

Story collection form through KoboToolbox

The assessment team received 20 stories from 14 countries through the story collection form (see figure below). Half the respondents were from national CSOs (n = 10) with a few others from WROs and international NGOs. Fourteen stories shared related to LNOB, 11 to transforming power dynamics, nine to civil society engagement, and eight related to strengthening feminist movements.

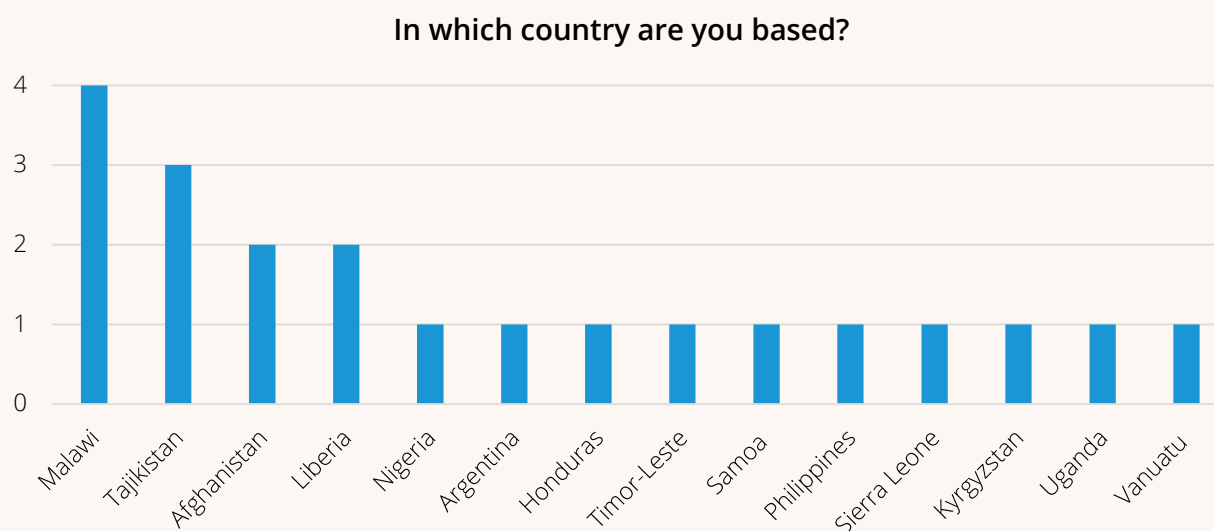


Figure 5: Countries where story respondents were from

Use of SHINE Hub

As noted, the assessment team also sought broader engagement on the three assessment themes from outside the 10 case study countries using the [SHINE Hub](#). The discussions were spread across three weeks, with each assessment theme having a dedicated week of discussion. The purpose was to ensure that the voices of a range of stakeholders (including WROs) were captured regardless of where they were located. Despite many efforts by the assessment team and Spotlight Initiative's Global Secretariat to promote the discussion, there was minimal uptake via this platform. **Three stories were shared in total:** a UN Trust Fund grantee in Rwanda shared their experience of LNOB and supporting women with disabilities during COVID-19; a member of Spotlight Initiative's global CSRG shared her experience of the CSRG coming together like a social movement; and a CSRG member from Zimbabwe outlined the importance of the LNOB principle within the CSRG and how the involvement of persons with disabilities in the group raised awareness and changed behaviour.

These stories have been incorporated in the key findings section where relevant and are included in their entirety in Annex 6.

As mentioned above, despite concerted efforts from the assessment team and Spotlight Initiative Global Secretariat, neither approach to story collection yielded a high response rate and in some case study countries the assessment team also struggled to get the desired levels of participation. A key takeaway from this process is that there was likely a degree of 'consultation fatigue', as the assessment was conducted while Spotlight country and regional programmes were in their final year, the final evaluation was being launched, and the CSRGs were embarking on a significant co-

design process involving many similar stakeholders. This is explored further in the limitations section below.

2.2.2 Sampling approach

Case study selection

An illustrative sample of 10 case studies was selected for deeper primary data collection to give a more granular and nuanced understanding of Spotlight Initiative's contribution across the assessment's thematic areas and help ground and inform the thematic assessment through analysis in different settings and contexts.

The case studies were selected in two phases: the first phase involved a mapping of all Spotlight programmes by regional representation and against a set of key programmatic and contextual factors. The second phase involved applying these criteria to ensure the assessment was able to achieve an effective balance of contextual and programmatic considerations, in consultation with Spotlight Initiative Global Secretariat. The assessment team applied a number of exclusion criteria, including excluding those that had recently participated in an evaluation process, to avoid overburdening country teams – despite this we did still have some challenges to participation, as explained further below. The map below shows the 10 case study locations selected. Annex 6 includes the detailed methodology for case study selection.

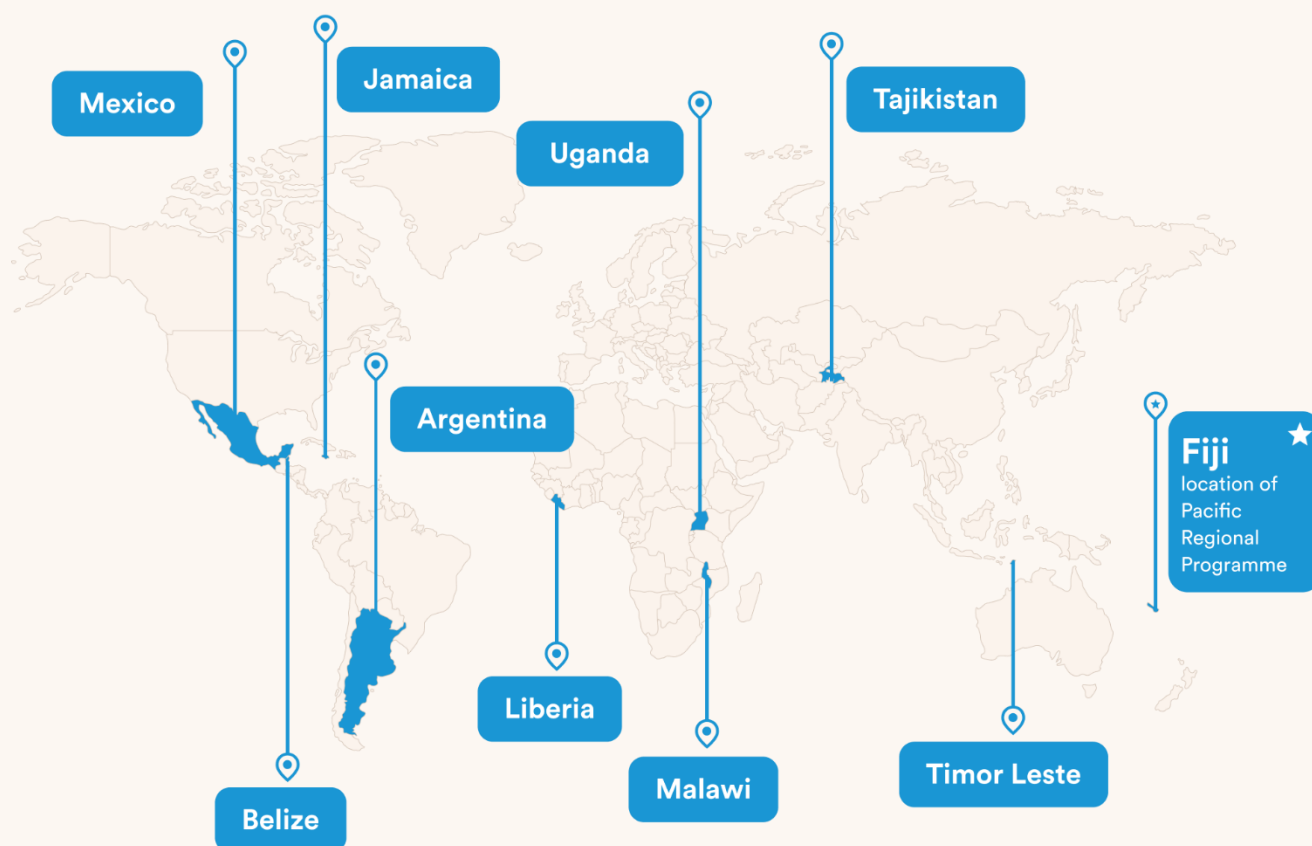


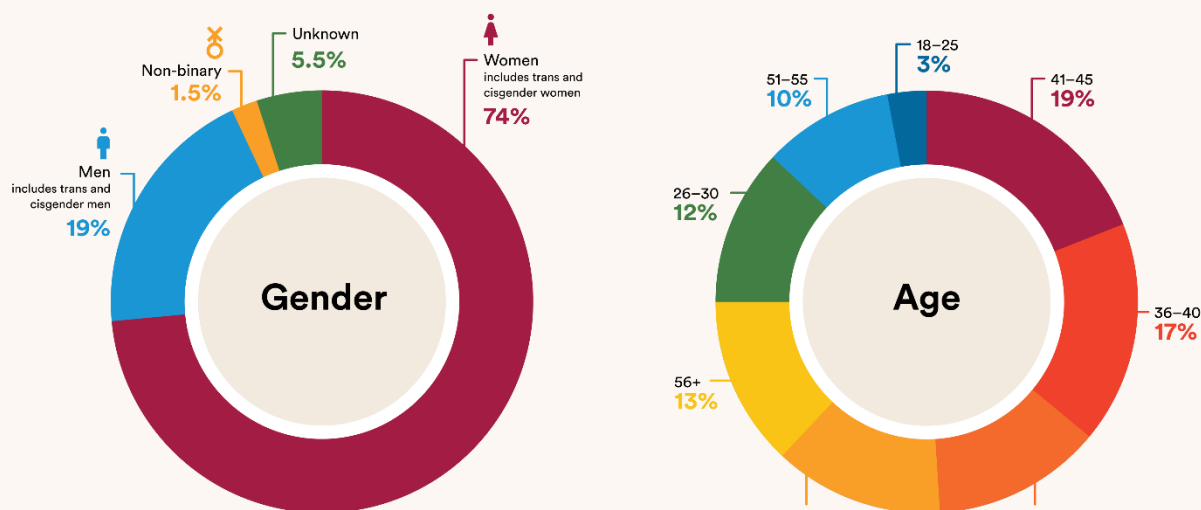
Figure 6: Map highlighting country / regional case studies

Primary and secondary data sampling

The assessment used a purposive sampling approach. At the global level, Spotlight Initiative Global Secretariat provided the assessment team with a stakeholder list of more than 1,000 stakeholders. During the inception phase the list was reviewed together with the Global Secretariat team to identify the most appropriate stakeholders with whom to engage. Purposive sampling was appropriate given the specific nature of the assessment questions and the unique consultative approach taken to maximise learning and the utility of the findings. Snowball sampling - where respondents were asked to recommend additional stakeholders who might add value to the assessment-was also used.

Stakeholders were selected for interviews and focus groups in the case studies through a mix of document review and purposive sampling in consultation with Spotlight programme teams. As the assessment methodology privileged conversations with civil society and GROs, civil society implementing projects under Pillar 6 were prioritised for inclusion. Most case studies included data collection outside of the capital city; those locations were selected in consultation with Spotlight programme teams to ensure maximum participation of CSOs, GROs, and WROs.

Figure 7 below illustrates the different stakeholder groups the assessment consulted, as self-identified by respondents using a descriptive data-monitoring form.⁴⁸ While almost half of the organisations consulted considered themselves to be national CSOs (43%), about a quarter were WROs (12%), women's movements (6%), or GROs (5%). This distribution reflects the types of groups or CSOs that Spotlight programmes typically partnered with at country and regional levels.



⁴⁸ Individuals were not required to complete this data monitoring form, so some data is incomplete. The data presented in the tables represents the data from the forms that were completed and submitted.

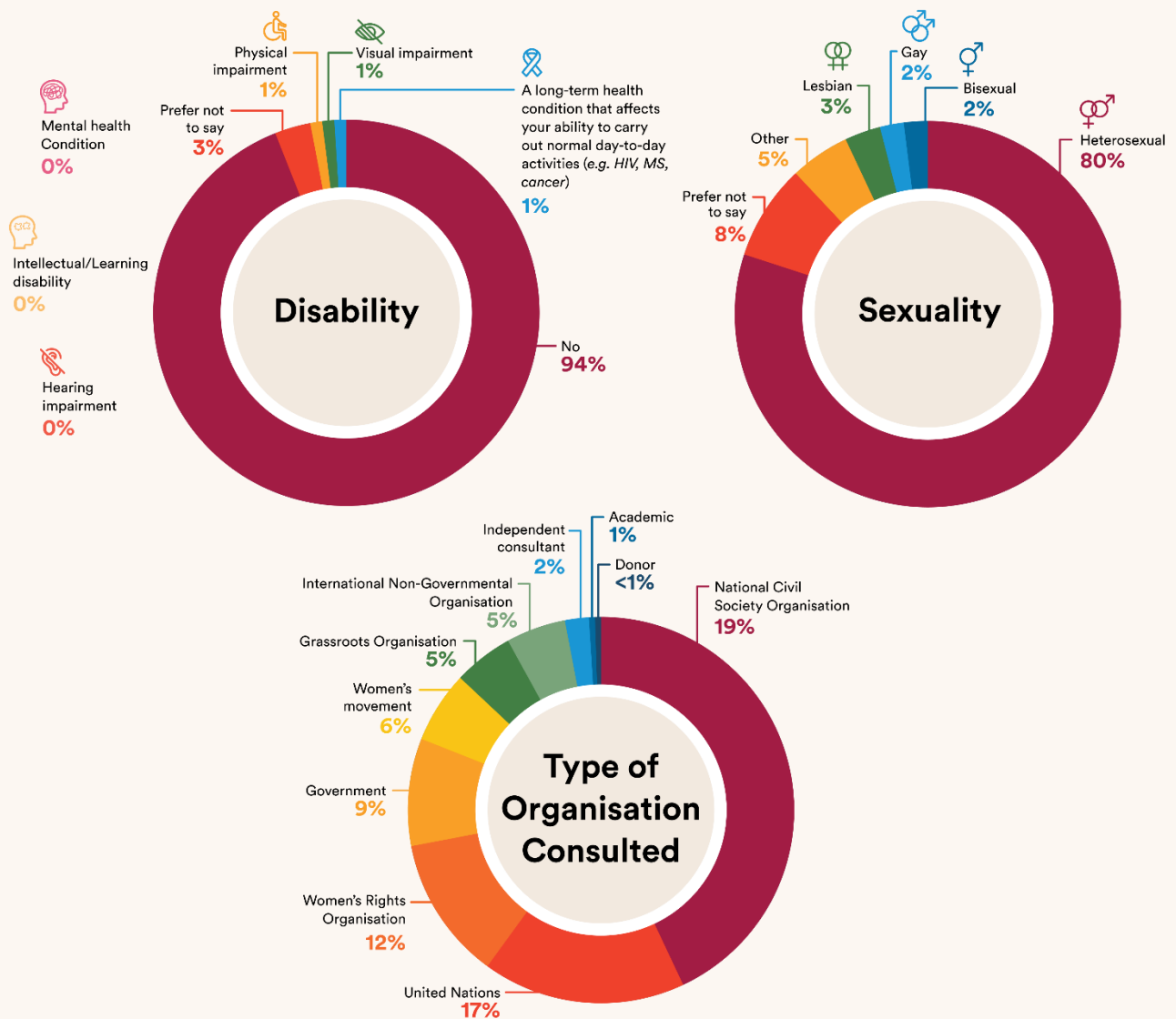


Figure 7: Descriptive monitoring data from the case studies

2.3 Data analysis and triangulation

This section includes a description of the methods of analysis and validation (including triangulation to help ensure the validity and credibility of the findings).

KIIs and FDGs. Detailed notes of all the interviews were taken, and where possible interviews were recorded to support analysis. All interview notes were coded using either *Dedoose* qualitative analysis software or an Excel coding matrix. Each case study assessment team was responsible for its own coding and analysis, so teams had the flexibility to use the platform they were most comfortable with. In addition, each case study team met frequently during the case study data collection window to discuss and interpret the emerging findings.

A series of detailed interviews was undertaken at inception phase and followed up with an additional set of global interviews for triangulation (see below). These interviews were similarly coded using *Dedoose* to support thematic analysis.

Story collection. The data coming through the two story collection exercises were coded by theme and analysed against the assessment questions.

Documentation analysis. The assessment team analysed more than 300 documents, which included publications, knowledge products, and guidance produced by Spotlight Initiative Global Secretariat; Spotlight programme documentation, including annual reports and guidance notes; and external literature and reports relevant to the assessment's themes. The document analysis was used to triangulate against the themes emerging from the interviews and case studies. This process was part of the adapted outcome harvest that was undertaken (see below).

Transformation Continuum and adapted outcome harvesting. The assessment team synthesised and mapped findings and outcomes from the case studies along the Transformation Continuum for each assessment theme, building on the conceptualisation developed in the assessment's inception phase. During the document review and analysis of interviews and focus group discussions, outcomes were coded against the assessment themes and stages of the Continuum. During this process, common approaches employed by Spotlight Initiative emerged, which corresponded to the different levels of the continuum.

Case studies. The core assessment team analysed each case study note against the assessment questions using thematic coding, in either *Dedoose* or excel. This was triangulated with additional global interviews and document review in the final stages of analysis and report writing.

Validation meetings. A key part of the assessment's feminist approach has been to ensure the meaningful involvement of various stakeholders in the assessment, including the thematic assessment's country accountability and advisory group (TACAAG), as highlighted above, and the Spotlight programme teams at country and regional level.

- **Case study assessment team level.** During the case study data collection window, the assessment team members responsible for the case study met frequently to explore and interrogate emerging findings.
- **Case study stakeholder level.** Toward the end of each case study, the assessment team conducted two country-level validation meetings: one with the TACAAG and the other with the Spotlight programme team to present (and validate) preliminary findings and ensure that their insights were reflected in the case study notes. Additional opportunities were given to both groups to review the draft case study notes for factual accuracy, to ensure the considerations were relevant, and provide feedback before finalising and sharing back with Spotlight programmes and respondents.
- **Core assessment team.** During the global synthesis phase, the core team members participated in three half-day workshops. Members explored the findings and identified outcomes and lessons learned against the assessment themes and the Transformation Continuum. This was key to ensure clarity and minimise duplication, as there is quite a lot of overlap and commonalities among the themes.

- **Full assessment team.** In addition to the three half-day meetings, the full assessment team had two half-day workshops. The first workshop was with the national consultants to discuss the emerging findings and reflect on the similarities between the case studies and the emerging themes. A second workshop was held with the TACAAG members and national consultants to discuss the assessment's recommendations and ensure they captured and reflected what the assessment was hearing from civil society.
- **Thematic assessment reference group and Spotlight Initiative Global Secretariat.** The final stage of the validation and triangulation process was a series of meetings with the thematic assessment reference group (TARG) and Spotlight Initiative Global Secretariat, which mirrored to some extent the meetings with the full assessment team; the first being to present the preliminary findings, and the second a longer workshop to explore, co-design, and prioritise the recommendations. The TARG and Global Secretariat and the 10 participating case study programmes have also been invited to review the full assessment report and provide comments as part of the validation process.

2.4 Role of Thematic Assessment Country Accountability and Advisory Group (TACAAG) in data collection and validation

A key part of the methodology was working with an advisory group of 25 diverse women across the country case studies⁴⁹ to guide and collaborate in the assessment.

This group was intended to include three women representing different stakeholder groups:

- One member from the CS-NRG, chosen through agreement within the CS-NRG.
- One implementing partner who had been actively involved in implementing a Spotlight programme throughout the entirety of the programme and in activities under Pillar 6, with suggestions provided by Spotlight programme teams and Recipient UN Organisations (RUNO).
- One member of a women's rights organisation or women's movement not formally involved with Spotlight Initiative but working to end gender-based violence, as suggested by the assessment's national consultants.

This group was not constituted through an open selection process but was formed purposively to provide diverse views and insights into Spotlight programmes and to act as a critical friend for the assessment team to challenge the team's assumptions and conclusions.

Initial meetings were held with TACAAG members in their respective countries to share more about the assessment and unpack the ToR, which also included compensation in recognition of their time and expertise. The TACAAG played a vital role in providing guidance and critical inputs throughout the assessment. Its members were critical in helping identify stakeholders, participating in meetings

⁴⁹ This was done in nine case studies. The tenth case study was of Spotlight Initiative's Pacific Regional programme, where we did not constitute a TACAAG due to the different nature of the programme. However, we did work closely with a member of the Civil Society Regional Reference Group (CS-RRG) who supported the assessment team during data collection, stakeholder identification, workshop facilitation, and validation.

to validate findings, supporting data analysis, and prioritising findings and recommendations for the global assessment report.

As noted above (in the validation meetings sub-section), the assessment team held a validation workshop at global level with national consultants and TACAAG members to discuss recommendations, during which the assessment team dedicated time for TACAAG members' honest feedback on how they experienced working with the team on the assessment. Feedback was also sought online from those members who could not join the workshop. The TACAAG members appreciated the spirit of collaboration and valued being kept updated and consulted at different stages. They felt that the time commitment and compensation was reasonable given their contributions. A key lesson for the assessment team was that working with experts familiar with the context and sharing power in assessments brings in a diverse, richer experience, and helped to further nuance the findings, highlighting the importance of creating more spaces for collaboration and mutual learning in feminist research. The assessment team continues to count on the TACAAG's support in sharing the findings of this assessment with WROs and women's rights and feminist movements within their networks and spaces.

"Despite the TACAAG members' otherwise busy schedules, the SDDirect team has been accommodating, always providing regular updates and feedback during the process. Keep up the good work!"

- TACAAG member

The assessment's gender-responsive and participatory methodology, with its intentional focus on diversity and inclusion and critical mindfulness of the assessment team's position of power and privilege, has produced more nuanced and balanced findings and enabled continued reflection on lessons learnt in the approaches used in this assessment that will continue to strengthen feminist research in the future.

2.5 Challenges and limitations

This assessment encountered both contextual and operational limitations, which are detailed below, along with mitigating measures.

CONTEXTUAL LIMITATIONS	MITIGATIONS
<p>Political tensions in some case study countries limited effective engagement with targeted groups. In four case studies, data collection was notably affected. For example, in one country, sociopolitical tensions in a specific area prevented civil society workshop invitees from traveling for safety reasons, and the assessment team was unable to secure interviews with local government</p>	<p>Where people were not able to join the data collection events in person, the case study assessment teams arranged remote interviews. Do no harm and safety of the respondents was always this assessment's first priority, so the assessment team recognises that, in some cases, it was not possible to be as representative as may have been hoped.</p>

representatives.	
Political changes in government and local elections affected the availability and interest of government stakeholders in the assessment.	Wherever possible, the assessment team shifted timeframes and made themselves available for remote discussions, which enabled greater participation in some cases. In some cases, key stakeholders were nevertheless unable to participate
The assessment did not include direct consultations with survivors of violence or rights holders, who were service users, about their personal experiences of the programme. This decision was taken at inception phase on the principle of beneficence, as the potential risks to participants outweighed the potential benefit to the assessment. The assessment did not ask direct questions about people's experience of violence as it was not relevant to our assessment questions.	The assessment ensured strong involvement of women's rights organisations and constituency led organisations, who themselves may be survivors, or directly supporting survivors so that we were able to involve those with lived experience.
Challenges in finding CSOs or grassroots organisation not affiliated with Spotlight Initiative who had sufficient insight into the Initiative, or incentive to engage with the assessment. In some countries, these groups were unavailable for interviews. Others had little knowledge of Spotlight Initiative or the country/regional programme, despite being active in GBV work, reducing their usefulness in reflecting on Spotlight Initiative specifically.	While the assessment did include this stakeholder group as key informants in most of the case studies, the numbers were limited, they were however included in the TACAAG, and so were able to share their insights in this way. Those members had useful insights and reflections on Spotlight Initiatives' programming. In future, the assessment team would rethink how best to identify and incentivise this group or whether there were other ways to engage them.
'Rejection', backlash against, or lack of understanding of some of the concepts used in this assessment, including feminism, feminist approaches, movements, and decolonisation in some contexts, made data collection difficult. Across the case studies, the assessment found that 'feminism' and 'feminist approaches and movements' were contentious concepts among stakeholder groups, including government, the UN, and civil society. In some cases, stakeholders did not want to answer questions about these topics, or felt they had nothing to contribute.	The assessment team ensured there was enough flexibility in the data collection tools to enable national consultants to adapt the questions and methodology to make them more relevant across contexts, including removing or replacing the term 'feminist' in some contexts. This experience is also a finding in itself and is factored into the analysis below.

OPERATIONAL LIMITATIONS	MITIGATIONS
<p>The assessment coincided with the final year of implementation in 2023, with most of the Spotlight programmes closing by December 2023. Approval for some case studies to continue until December was only granted in June 2023, creating uncertainty and pressure. The pressure for the Spotlight Coordination Unit, RUNOs, and CSOs to complete activities before programme closure led to some delays in identifying stakeholders, scheduling meetings, and securing documents. It also meant that some country teams were less engaged in the final review and sign-off of the case study notes.</p>	<p>The assessment team and Spotlight Initiative Global Secretariat allowed a degree of flexibility and extension of the original data collection timeframe focusing on document review first to accommodate teams' availability.</p>
<p>The assessment took a case study approach, exploring in depth the Initiative's work and approach in ten programmes, this represents nearly 30% of the total number of Spotlight programmes. While illustrative, this sample may be seen to have limitations in terms of the representativeness of the findings across the range of contexts in which the Initiative operates. There was only one regional programme included in the case studies, which limits the extent to which the assessment can make more generalisable comments with regards regional programmes.</p>	<p>The assessment developed objective criteria to select a balanced and diverse sample of programmes. Two programmes were selected from each region to support an increased contextual understanding. The case studies were well triangulated with the mid-term assessment reports. Strong themes emerged across the case studies indicating this was less of a limitation that might have been anticipated. In the case of regional programmes, which have all been developed quite differently the assessment has been careful to not generalise about these but to draw out findings and themes that were similar to those that emerged in the country case studies.</p>
<p>We received a very small number of stories despite adapting our methodology and trialling different approaches. This presents a limitation in terms of the validity of this as a standalone data source due to the small sample size.</p>	<p>The assessment asked similar questions of stakeholders during different data collection activities. Therefore, the stories collected were able to be analysed alongside the other data sources, including interviews, focus group discussions at case study level and wider data collection processes, and during the CSO workshops and interviews, to support triangulation.</p>
<p>A delay in the constitution of the TACAAG affected its role in guiding the assessment team or making substantive recommendations early in the assessment. In some cases, there was a slow response from the entities consulted to recommend TACAAG members.</p>	<p>In most cases where the TACAAG was formed later in the process, members were still able to engage in the country-level validation meetings. The assessment brought all TACAAG members together in the final phases of global synthesis to share the findings and recommendations with</p>

	<p>them to get their inputs and support the validation process in a more meaningful way to account for and help mitigate this limitation.</p>
<p>The assessment team and Secretariat had concerns about evaluation fatigue in countries frequently targeted by UN and Spotlight Initiative assessments. In one country, UN staff worried the assessment would cause evaluation fatigue. In another, CSOs mentioned they felt over-solicited for feedback. In one case study, some implementing partners and grantees were unresponsive despite repeated attempts to arrange interviews and gather their inputs.</p>	<p>The assessment team tried as much as possible to ensure a representative sample of individual interviewees and participants in FGDs and workshops. In some places, the assessment team reached out to potential stakeholders and offered multiple options, including remote interviews, sharing a voice note in WhatsApp, or responding to questions via email. The assessment team also made sure to note that a copy of the case study note would be shared with interviewees at the end of the process.</p>

Chapter 3: Key Findings



Key findings



3.1. CSO Engagement

ASSESSMENT QUESTION 1:

To what extent has Spotlight Initiative prioritised partnerships with CSOs, including specifically feminist organisations, women's rights organisations, and local and grassroots groups?

This section explores the extent to which civil society has been meaningfully engaged in Spotlight Initiative, including in its governance mechanisms (sub-question 1.A) and in programme implementation (sub-question 1.B). The analysis pays attention to whether and how a diversity of CSO partners have been meaningfully engaged, including as implementing partners and grantees, and to what extent Spotlight Initiative has privileged partnerships with national organisations, local organisations, and GROs, including feminist organisations and WROs, as set out in the Theory of Change. This section particularly looks for evidence of partnerships with WROs at various levels, including GROs, while the section on LNOB provides further analysis of the extent to which constituency-led organisations have been meaningfully engaged.

For the purposes of this assessment, the following definition of meaningful engagement with civil society is used, which sets out critical conditions and parameters that are explored in the analysis.

Meaningful engagement of civil society

Ensuring civil society is able to participate fully in all aspects of the programme by enabling them to:

- Have voice and agency within the programme;
- Participate in leadership spaces and decision making where participation also brings benefits to them;
- Have time, space, and resources to engage, including appropriately compensating for their time; and
- Hold Spotlight Initiative accountable.

Co-creation with civil society is a key aspect of meaningful engagement.

SUB-QUESTION 1.A: To what extent have Spotlight Initiative's governance mechanisms meaningfully included/engaged a diversity of civil society in effective decision-making and monitoring processes at the global, regional, and national levels?

The UN and the EU set a clear intention from the design phase to meaningfully involve CSOs in Spotlight Initiative.⁵⁰ This approach was considered one of the main innovations of the Initiative, setting it apart from other UN global programmes. It aligns well with other global agendas that advocate for strategic partnerships with civil society, such as those in the SDGs localisation agenda and the United Nations Development System (UNDS) reform.⁵¹ This willingness was first illustrated by the constitution of CSRGs at global, regional, and national levels. The groups were intended to serve a triple function: advising Spotlight Initiative, working as partners to help achieve its goals and hold the Initiative accountable to its commitments.⁵²

FINDING 1A.1: The CSRGs were perceived as a highly relevant mechanism to support the meaningful engagement of civil society in programme governance at various levels and were valued across programmes. In some programmes, meaningful engagement of members was hampered by issues around compensation, roles, functioning, and composition of the CSRGs.

CSRGs are a strong innovation for the meaningful engagement of civil society as EVAWG partners. Established at global, regional, and national levels, the CSRGs involved a diverse range of women's rights and feminist activists, as well as subject-matter experts and groups representing marginalised communities. With at least 20% of the membership represented as full members on national and regional steering committees (the highest decision-making body at the programme level) and the Global Operational Steering Committee and the Governing Body, they were also an important way for civil society to shape the accountability and governance processes of Spotlight Initiative.

Many respondents from different stakeholder groups (civil society, UN, and government) considered the CSRGs to be a relevant mechanism for civil society engagement and stated they wanted the CSRG as a mechanism to continue.⁵³ These groups fulfil an important triple mandate to: 1) advise on programme implementation; 2) advocate for the realisation of Spotlight Initiative's objectives; and 3) hold Spotlight Initiative accountable to its commitments.⁵⁴ Other programmes, such as WPHF and a programme within the Migration

⁵⁰Dalberg (2023) 'Tracing the institutional history of Spotlight Initiative to eliminate violence against women and girls' (internal document not available for circulation); KII with UN and [the European Court of Auditors, Special Report 21 / 2023: The Spotlight Initiative to end violence against women and girls – Ambitious but so far with limited impact](#).

⁵¹ See [Overview | Localizing the SDGs \(sdglocalization.org\)](#) and [UN development system reform 101 | United to Reform](#)

⁵² Spotlight Initiative (no date) Civil Society National Reference Group – Terms of Reference.

⁵³ As illustrated in Principles and Initial Actions to Guide Spotlight 2.0. Outcome of a co-design process led by members of the civil society reference groups to stakeholders, November 2023.

⁵⁴ Spotlight Initiative (2023) 'Spotlight Initiative – Global Annual Report 2022'.

Multi-Partner Trust Fund, adopted similar consultative groups and M&E indicators to assess progress in engaging with civil society,⁵⁵ which shows the mechanism was considered valuable.

Over the course of Spotlight Initiative, a number of changes were made to improve programmes' functioning and CSRGs were highly valued as a dedicated mechanism to meaningfully engage civil society. Nevertheless, some CSRG members pointed to areas that limited their engagement, including insufficient funds to compensate CSRG members, a lack of budget to carry out activities, ambiguity on the role of the CSRG, and some inconsistencies in how well functioning the groups were over time.

Compensation and budgeted workplans

An example of a well-budgeted and well-functioning CS-NRG is the Argentina programme, which had a specific budget (see box below).

Women's rights movement collaborating with Spotlight Initiative and the CS-NRG

"The specific budget for the Argentina Spotlight Initiative CS-NRG made the CS-NRG effort possible and enabled the CS-NRG to take decisions within the project and specifically within the campaign. The CS-NRG worked and led the campaign (two CS-NRG leaders, two CS-NRG assistants, and in consultation with the whole CS-NRG) working with UN Women and a Spotlight Initiative communications consultant.

A very successful campaign was carried out, which was co-designed and co-created with the CS-NRG. There was strong leadership in the decision-making within the CS-NRG, and the whole CS-NRG was consulted. We collaborated with UN teams and the advertising agency to move forward. The CS-NRG took decisions about the interviews, including who the interviewees would be, and some members actively participated in the production of the ads, which involved two intense months of non-stop work (including Saturdays and Sundays).

In summary, this experience demonstrated that another way of working is possible between society and the agencies, and between civil society and Spotlight programmes, and that civil society can make relevant contributions in the design of projects and break the donor-recipient paradigm. It demonstrated that it is possible to achieve a position of key partner within Spotlight Initiative, and to co-create and co-design in an effective manner. This was a clear example of a pilot that should continue and deepen, in particular to think about recommendations for Spotlight Initiative 2.0."

- Story collection form, Argentina

However, across many Spotlight programmes, the assessment team encountered issues about lack of compensation for contributions. For example, when CS-NRG members conducted

⁵⁵ Dalberg (2023) 'Tracing the institutional history of Spotlight Initiative to eliminate violence against women and girls', page 54.

monitoring visits, transport costs were not always covered. Clear guidance and advice – including a Guidance Note on the Compensation of CSRGs – was shared with Spotlight programmes to address this issue over the course of Spotlight Initiative, including ensuring that CSRGs had a budgeted workplan and guidance on compensation.

The Civil Society Global Reference Group (CS-GRG) was instrumental in advocating for an agreed process for compensation for members of the CS-NRGs and CS-RRGs. As noted, guidelines were developed, and this was seen as an important step forward by both civil society actors and the UN.

Despite the guidance being in place, the assessment team heard of challenges in CSRG members being reimbursed for their time and expenses due to lengthy procurement processes or reporting requirements. Inconsistencies in fund disbursement were observed, such as delays in receiving the remaining portion of allocated funds.⁵⁶ Some CS-NRG members encountered ‘unreasonable’ requirements, such as needing to provide detailed mobile data usage for reimbursement.

Concerns were also raised around the amount of money that was available for different activities, provided for both within the costed workplans and also in cases where workplans had not been approved or signed off. For example, in one Spotlight programme, CSRG members opted out of joint monitoring visits as the compensation they were offered did not adequately cover accommodation and travel, let alone compensating for their time.

In some cases, CS-NRG members were unaware of available funding, highlighting disparities in implementing global guidance. Inconsistencies in how guidance was understood by UN staff exacerbated challenges. While some staff viewed CSRG membership as a voluntary role, especially as they were assumed to be on a full-time salary, others felt that the compensation offered was insufficient for the expected workload. These challenges underline the need for clearer communication and expectations from the outset to foster trust between all parties involved.

Roles and responsibilities

Positive progress in understanding CSRG members’ role – an important element of meaningful engagement – was evident from Phase 1 to Phase 2, as attested by interviews and surveys conducted by Spotlight Initiative’s Global Secretariat with CSRG members at global, regional, and national levels. Survey feedback highlighted increased clarity in roles, with 74% of respondents in 2022 feeling their roles were clear, a 14-point increase from the previous year. Also, 69% reported actively contributing to the key objectives of the CSRG, up from 54% the year before. In addition, 84% reported being able to provide meaningful feedback, inputs, and suggestions.

However, concerns were raised around role clarity during the assessment. Case study interviews and FGDs with CS-NRG members revealed varying experiences, with some expressing uncertainty about their roles. ToR templates had been developed at a global level

⁵⁶ One Spotlight programme shared that CSRG members were given 80% of the proposed expenditure upfront and were then to receive the remaining 20% upon submission of their reports. However, receiving the remaining 20% took a long time.

for use and adaptation by country and regional programmes, but despite these generally being in place, stakeholders reported that they lacked specificity in terms of the expectations and level of effort. More clarity about representativeness and accountability would have been particularly welcomed. Some civil society members were not clear whether they were representing their organisations or attending in their own capacity. This ambiguity extended to questions of their accountability to constituencies (in the case of members from structurally marginalised communities) or to the Spotlight programme (see further discussion of this in the LNOB section).

Some civil society respondents stated that the relationship between CS-NRG and civil society implementing partners was not always clear. In several programmes, CS-NRG members wondered how they should play a 'bridging' role between implementing partners and the Spotlight programme, and in a few programmes implementing partners had no knowledge of the existence and role of the CS-NRG. In other programmes, the CS-NRG made a deliberate effort to stay connected to implementing partners, as in Liberia, where the group stayed connected through the establishment of a local secretariat and an online chatroom. Overall, these issues hampered the functionality of the CS-NRG in several countries.

Functioning and composition

The CS-NRG was active in some countries, though not all, but there was noticeable progress between Phase 1 and Phase 2 in terms of their engagement. Meeting frequency ranged from one per year in one case study to over 18 per year in another. The frequency of meetings may be an indication of how active and engaged the group was, and how strong the leadership might be.

The size and setup of the group may have influenced its effectiveness, and this varied considerably across different contexts. In one country case study, the CS-NRG had to be dissolved and restructured for Phase 2, and still faced challenges in fulfilling its role. Conversely, in another where the CS-NRG played a meaningful role, the number of members dropped from 19 to 12 between 2019 and 2022. The assessment team saw an example of the structure shifting from multiple local groups in Phase 1 to a unified national CSRG, with a smaller subgroup sitting in the national-level Steering Committee in Phase 2.

The functionality of the groups was also affected by the strength of the national partnerships. This includes the relationships between the national civil society sector, the UN system, and the EU Delegation, as well as the personal appetite of RUNO staff and, to some extent, the government to embrace new ways of working (see more on this below).

FINDING 1A.2: The extent to which CSRGs were involved in decision making and their level of influence varied. While the assessment found several examples of civil society influence within Spotlight Initiative, it also revealed a lack of common understanding around what role civil society was expected to play in decision making.

At global level, CSOs were able to play the dual role (described above) and influence the programme, although by the time the global CSRG was set up in 2019 it was too late to influence the initial design of Spotlight Initiative itself. However, they were able to advocate

during the inception phase for the addition of a sixth pillar entirely focused on support to civil society and movement building and strengthening. They also secured a place for civil society on the Global Governing Body and Operational Steering Committee. This was the result of early advocacy from CSOs, which called for their role to go beyond the advisory role that was initially planned and include a third function of the CSRGs, as reflected in programme guidance documents produced later, which specified a role “to hold the Initiative accountable for its commitments.”⁵⁷ The global CSRG also successfully advocated for the development of guidance on compensation to CSRG members, as already discussed above.⁵⁸

The country case studies found several positive examples demonstrating the influence of CS-NRGs. The CS-NRG played an active role in influencing the programme through the publication of various reports that influenced the decisions related to Phase 2.

“We went through the draft [of the shadow report], we came together to review, making revisions and finalising. RUNOs and Spotlight team were all there to listen to the CSRG.”

- CS-NRG member

In one country, the CS-NRG successfully advocated for funds to run a campaign on EAWG and was tasked with contributing to the assessment of small grants proposals. In a couple of case studies, the assessment team heard examples of the CS-NRGs playing crucial roles in the initial design of the programme, while in some places the assessment found less influence during implementation. Overall, in a number of contexts, the involvement of civil society was perceived as particularly meaningful, as these actors were listened to and the CS-NRG was valued as a learning space.

“CS-NRG organised regular meetings which kept everyone updated and shared learning from each other. [...] There is sharing of knowledge between CS-NRG members.”

- CS-NRG member

The role devoted to civil society in decision making was uneven but, in most places, an increased influence could be observed over time.

⁵⁷ Spotlight Initiative (2020) ‘Guidance on Compensation for Reference Group’.

⁵⁸ See also: [18 Feminist Recommendations: How the Spotlight Initiative can end gender-based violence](#)

“We sat in the national Steering Committee – this felt important. We had a voice at the table and amazing co-chairs who wanted to hear our voice – our monitoring role was very important.”

- CS-NRG member

The efforts to engage civil society more meaningfully are also illustrated by the fact that, in several countries, CSOs were involved in the development of the second phase of Spotlight Initiative. The involvement of civil society during the design of Spotlight Initiative 2.0, where they were “given their own space to reflect and consult widely”, was also noted. Notably, in Uganda, the CS-NRG reported that it was able to lobby for Spotlight 2.0 to increase the percentage of funds that will be allocated to CSOs from 30% to 46% of the total budget and tried to ensure that movement building was considered in Spotlight 2.0.⁵⁹

“The Chairperson of the CS-NRG was unapologetic. She insisted that they had to find a way of including movement building in the successor programme and they did find a way; they included movement building among young women.”

- RUNO representative

Despite numerous examples of CSRGs influencing and advising the programme on critical issues – demonstrating the capacities and commitment of the members of these groups – the assessment also found different interpretations of what meaningful engagement means, as well as a tension in terms of how far civil society can and should be advisors or co-designers. While civil society actors would have hoped to have been more actively engaged and consulted through a co-design process, the current guidelines for the CSRG set out their role as being largely advisory. There was a common view among the RUNOs that involving CSOs in a co-designing role would risk creating a conflict of interest and preclude them from applying for funding. To avoid this, CSRG members participated as individuals rather than as representatives of their CSOs. This meant that in some countries their organisations were allowed to apply for funding. But there was some inconsistency in relation to this. The assessment found that in at least one country, CSOs participating in the CS-NRG could not receive funding as implementing partners. The situation was more complex in countries where the VAWG CSO pool was small as the likelihood that CSOs would be both in the CS-NRG and act as implementing partners was high. It is important to consider in these circumstances how to ensure civil society can be meaningfully involved in decision making as well as receiving funding from a programme.

⁵⁹ At the time of publishing the report there is still uncertainty over the funding for movement strengthening in the follow-on programme but additional funding is being sought to support this.

In addition to the positive examples, some civil society respondents across many case studies felt that their leadership and expertise were not sufficiently valued, and they perceived their role as merely validating decisions already made, rather than being meaningfully engaged in decision making.

“It’s a good beginning, but there is a lot of room for improvement. This is not where decisions are made. [...] We have been engaging, but not sure of its meaningfulness.”

- CS-NRG member

Meaningful engagement was also said to be hampered by the fact that some CSOs were nervous about raising issues for fear of losing funding.

FINDING 1A.3: The role of CSRG members in monitoring Spotlight programmes’ implementation was well received in some places – and an example of a more participatory approach to monitoring – while in other places, this role was not readily understood by civil society implementing partners and this caused challenges.

Good practices of involvement of CS-NRG members in monitoring processes were found in a number of the case studies, including through joint monitoring visits and other forms of reporting. In one county the assessment team noted that the CS-NRG carried out its own report on the implementation of Spotlight Initiative through a shadow report. In another, the CS-NRG held reflection sessions after monitoring visits that provided a space for mutual support and learning, while in another country, civil society implementing partners described the value that CS-NRG members monitoring visits brought to their organisation:

“They [CS-NRG] do monitoring and provide some feedback. They give ideas in meetings, things that they observed. If anything needs some improvement from us, they can provide the feedback directly. The project is only one year, so verbal feedback was useful. We didn’t have to wait for reports to be written – we could change things directly.”

- civil society implementing partner

However, in some of the case study countries civil society implementing partners expressed some nervousness around joint monitoring visits in which CS-NRG members were involved. In some cases, civil society implementing partners were unsure of the purpose of the monitoring visits and who the reporting went back to, referring, at times, to those in the joint monitoring as ‘auditors’.

Additionally, **the assessment team heard from many civil society implementing partners, across case studies, that they were unaware of what the CS-NRG was, or who was sitting**

on it. This lack of knowledge may have contributed to a sense of mistrust and suspicion during the monitoring visits in some countries.

FINDING 1A.4: Spotlight Initiative put in place relevant mechanisms to monitor the involvement of (and the funding going to) civil society within the Initiative, but the use of some available tools was inconsistent.

Spotlight Initiative was intentional in monitoring the extent to which civil society was meaningfully involved and in seeking feedback from civil society actors, at all levels. Tools included Annex C in programme annual reports, CSRG scorecards, and annual surveys conducted with CSRG members.

Civil society scorecards were conceptualised as an independent monitoring (and accountability) tool assessing “the extent to which Spotlight processes and systems support the participation, protection, and involvement of civil society in general, and feminist activists and women’s movements in particular, in their work to end violence.”⁶⁰ The scorecards focused on participation, funding mechanisms, disbursement, and implementation, and as such supported CSRGs to hold Spotlight Initiative accountable to their promise of working differently with civil society. They enabled civil society groups to take stock of what was working well, as well as what Spotlight Initiative could do better in its work to eliminate VAWG. The scorecards, in some cases, were used to hold Spotlight Initiative accountable to its commitments and make recommendations for Spotlight programme adaptations. This process was hailed by CS-GRG members, who noted that the UN “heard sometimes difficult advice, and made the changes needed within their spheres of influence,”⁶¹ highlighting the willingness of Spotlight Initiative’s Global Secretariat to walk the talk and to meaningfully involve CSOs.

However, the assessment revealed inconsistent use of the monitoring toolkit. By 2022, almost half (47%) of CSRG members surveyed were using the civil society monitoring toolkit to produce scorecards. This percentage represents strong progress, and more than double from 2021, but the assessment team understands no scorecards were produced in 2023. It is not clear why this was the case, but the CSRG survey reported challenges around the use of the toolkit, including its complexity and the need for technical support to administer it. It might also have been due to Spotlight programmes closing in 2023, and the groups having other activities to complete during that period.

The assessment team also used Spotlight Initiative’s national programme data on civil society engagement and funding, compiled in Annex C of programme annual reports. Annex C is a useful tool in tracking the types of CSOs that Spotlight programmes work with, the structurally marginalised communities that they are reaching, and the amount of funding they receive. However, several challenges were noted in its use in terms of inconsistencies with categorisation of organisation type – grassroots groups or civil society organisations, or when an organisation was deemed a ‘new partner’ to one UN agency but an existing partner to

⁶⁰ Spotlight Initiative (2021) ‘Spotlight Monitoring Scorecard 2019–2020’.

⁶¹ CS-GRG (2023) ‘Co-design of Spotlight 2.0 with civil society reference groups and EAWG stakeholders, Evolving Discussion Paper’.

another. These challenges are likely due to misunderstanding the instructions and definitions provided. Strengthening the use of Annex C as a tool through targeted training and expanding categories could enhance its effectiveness in capturing the diversity of involved organisations.

Finally, annual surveys with CS-NRG members to “map the level of engagement of reference groups and to provide data for the Secretariat to monitor and track improvement”⁶² provided valuable insights, aiding the Secretariat in addressing challenges, improving systems, and providing additional guidance where needed. However, the response rate to these surveys is quite low, with between one and 12 CSRG members from each CSRG having participated.

SUB-QUESTION 1B: To what extent has Spotlight Initiative meaningfully engaged different civil society groups (especially grassroots organisations and women’s rights organisations) in the implementation of Spotlight Initiative-funded activities (as implementing partners)?

As well as ensuring Spotlight Initiative’s governance structure gives power to civil society in decision making this assessment question explored the extent to which the Initiative provided adequate time, capacity and financial resources to enable civil society organisations to play a meaningful role in implementation of projects and activities across the six pillars.

FINDING 1B.5: Spotlight Initiative reports that the percentage of overall funding allocated to CSOs is relatively high, and there have been deliberate attempts to involve a diversity of CSOs, including Grassroots Organisations, through a range of innovative processes.

Meaningfully engaging CSOs requires sufficient funding as well as implementation modalities that provide enough time, relevant support, and agency for CSOs to play an active role in implementation.

Programme data from Annex C shows that 48% of programme funds were allocated to CSOs (\$190 million) from Spotlight Initiative’s inception to December 2022, with US\$174 million delivered. Of this, 79% reached national organisations, local organisations, or GROs, and 73% was invested in WROs,⁶³ including over 1,000 local organisations and GROs. This is considered “unprecedented in EVAWG programming”.⁶⁴ Comparative in-depth analysis of financial data is beyond the scope of this assessment, but it is worth noting that the extent to which funds were channelled to women’s rights organisations is not always clear, as the total amount reported (on which the percentages are based) is not always clearly set out (see above on the issue of a misunderstanding of the definitions in Annex C).

⁶² Survey with CSRG members 2022.

⁶³ Spotlight Initiative (2023) ‘Global Annual Report 2022’, page 54.

⁶⁴ CS-GRG (2023) ‘Co-design of Spotlight 2.0 with civil society reference groups and EVAWG stakeholders, Evolving Discussion Paper’; Dalberg (2023) ‘Tracing the institutional history of Spotlight Initiative to eliminate violence against women and girls’.

Spotlight Initiative's 2022 Global Annual Report recognises that core institutional funding is "essential to local women's organisations' survival and their ability to respond to changing circumstances and contexts".⁶⁵ It reports that, as at December 2022, US\$11 million had been invested in core institutional funding globally. The assessment asked numerous civil society and UN stakeholders about the extent to which core, institutional support was received or provided by Spotlight Initiative and only a few examples of this were found⁶⁶ (including funds channelled through WPHF).

Overall, different kinds of CSOs, including well-established and newer CSOs, registered and unregistered, larger and smaller, national and grassroots, benefited from Spotlight Initiative in various ways. In several of the case studies, the assessment team noted that an individual Spotlight programme was successful in involving and supporting grassroots, women-led organisations, including organisations of Indigenous women and other structurally marginalised groups, many of which had never had international funding and support to advance their work to end GBV. For example, the assessment heard from participants in the Pacific Regional Programme case study that they appreciated the fact that the Spotlight Regional Programme in the Pacific brought more continuity of funding, compared to other donors. This provided them with catalytic funding to support their existing plans.

"Due to the thematic focus of the Spotlight programme, numerous women's NGOs received support from the Initiative. Specifically, in [locations] which I can speak to, the allocated funding had a significant impact. The funding enabled sustained advocacy efforts, resulting in increased reporting of cases related to female genital mutilation (FGM), rape, LGBTI rights, and more."

- civil society implementing partner

However, in several countries, civil society reported that funding requirements and mechanisms were very stringent and that this made such funding quite challenging for civil society to access.

A number of innovative processes were introduced to increase the involvement of GROs, such as harmonised or joint calls for Expressions of Interest, which were, at times, translated into local languages (Spanish, Russian, Tetum and others). Other efforts to innovate include encouraging consortia arrangements and establishing sub-granting and small grants mechanisms. These efforts were supported by the Grassroots Action Plan,⁶⁷ a guidance document developed by Spotlight Initiative on how to work with (and adapt) existing UN policies and procedures to better reach and engage local and GROs. In addition, the management of Spotlight programmes was frequently perceived as flexible and adaptive, and

⁶⁵ Spotlight Initiative (2023) 'Global Annual Report 2022'.

⁶⁶ One such example was in Timor Leste, where the programme provided core funding to CSOs, which covered salaries and IT equipment, but this was generally an exception.

⁶⁷ Spotlight Initiative (2022) 'Grassroots Action Plan: Ensuring Spotlight Initiative reaches local and grassroots civil society organisations'.

this was particularly the case in how programmes were able to respond to and support CSOs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Several small CSOs that had not previously worked on ending violence reported that the programme enabled them to work in new areas and build new networks in the VAWG sector. They particularly valued capacity-building sessions on proposal writing prior to Phase 2 applications and the support given to GROs to secure registration, both of which facilitated their access to new funding opportunities.

In multiple countries, CSOs noted that Spotlight Initiative amplified their voices and increased the visibility of their work on VAWG. The Initiative also improved dialogue with government, giving CSOs the opportunity to engage constructively and even provide training to government officials.

The trust funds that collaborated with Spotlight Initiative (UN Trust Fund and WPHF) reported positive shifts toward supporting smaller organisations.⁶⁸ In addition, Spotlight Initiative enabled WPHF to strengthen and expand the technical support provided to their grantees and distribute institutional funding in countries such as Afghanistan and Papua New Guinea.

FINDING 1B.6: Capacity-strengthening efforts were beneficial for some CSOs, and at times innovative, although often focused on meeting UN accountability requirements rather than capacity needs identified by organisations themselves.

Over a thousand local and grassroots women’s organisations benefited from Spotlight Initiative’s capacity-strengthening activities.⁶⁹ Feedback from CSOs in the case study programmes confirmed that they felt empowered by these efforts, as they enabled them to cascade the training to others, such as in the Pacific Regional Programme. Other CSOs stated that they benefited from learning exchanges, accompaniment by more established NGOs, and joint monitoring visits.

“When we would go and do monitoring of activities, they [RUNOs] would guide us on how best to do our work. [...] We [followed the advice given] and this improved the quality of our work. Sometimes you run out of ideas, but if someone comes and says, ‘If this is not working, why don’t we try something else?’ It opens your eyes.”

- civil society implementing partner

Some organisations were able to secure funding as a result of the training on proposal development provided by a Spotlight programme. Others strengthened their ability to apply for further grants, through training that gave them the skills to write proposals or support to help them get registered.

⁶⁸ Global Shadow Report Card, 2019–2020.

⁶⁹ Spotlight Initiative (2023) ‘Global Annual Report 2022’, Annex A.

While these capacity-strengthening initiatives had positive impacts for civil society implementing partners, some CSOs felt that they were not sufficiently targeted on their needs, and that due to the short timeframe for implementation there was not enough time to explore capacity-building opportunities as they had to prioritise implementation. For example, many of the CSOs the assessment team met felt that the capacity-building sessions largely focused on ensuring compliance with UN requirements (on proposal writing, reporting, and M&E), which was perceived by some as a reluctance by the UN to address *“the need for internal change within the UN’s partner selection process and its associated requirements, which many [CSOs] considered not fit-for-purpose”*.⁷⁰

Some CSOs the assessment team spoke to wanted more technical training on GBV and more networking opportunities. Others reported needing institutional strengthening (including computers or contributions to rent), which was not possible through Spotlight Initiative, with a few exceptions.

The technical capacity of CSO implementing partners on EVAWG or gender equality more broadly varied across case studies. In some countries, where the VAWG sector was small, some organisations were brought in with little experience of gender or VAWG work. In other locations, GROs had extensive experience in VAWG and women’s rights programming but little administrative and financial capacity. In some places, more focus could have been given to building the technical VAWG capacities of some smaller organisations, particularly those who were not experienced in this sector, and providing orientation on feminist values and ‘do no harm’ principles, as not addressing such issues sufficiently could lead to ethical and safeguarding risks.

Finally, many Spotlight programmes did not seem to have a clear capacity-strengthening strategy. Such a strategy could have defined capacity-building methods and topics that better align with feminist principles by, for example, tapping into the experience of established NGOs to train their peers (as noted above) rather than hiring individual consultants as trainers or mentors (and, at times, ‘business consultants’). This approach would have allowed for a more collaborative and tailored approach to addressing CSOs’ specific needs, including organisational as well as technical needs.

FINDING 1B.7: Institutional barriers, including bureaucratic funding, disbursement, and reporting processes as well as short funding cycles, and the pressure to deliver results, were among the main challenges identified in terms of ensuring meaningful engagement of CSOs in the implementation of the programme. Efforts were made to address these challenges in some programmes.

The introduction of an outcome (Pillar 6) focused on strengthening CSOs and supporting women’s rights movements was seen as an important addition to Spotlight Initiative and crucial to the overall goal of eliminating VAWG. Many CSOs appreciated this funding, especially those that had not received this type of funding before, of which there were many, as detailed above.

⁷⁰ Dalberg (2023) ‘Tracing the institutional history of Spotlight Initiative to eliminate violence against women and girls’.

However, funding under Pillar 6 was often small and short term, with implementation timelines as short as 4–6 months, limiting its impact. According to a report on Spotlight Initiative's engagement with CSOs from 2021,⁷¹ small grants usually range between US\$2,500 and US\$50,000 depending on the UN agency administering them. The 2022 Global Annual Report states that 79% of the funds allocated to CSOs had been delivered to national organisations, local organisations, and grassroots organisations, of which 19% went to local and grassroots organisations.

Short funding cycles (3–5 years) and phased disbursements of funding (funding that came in two tranches or phases) to programmes, disrupted (or stopped) the continuity of work with some CSOs and constrained/limited meaningful engagement, including at the community level. These challenges contributed to a sense of frustration that led to some CSOs who received funding in Phase 1 deciding not to submit a proposal for funding under Phase 2.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Spotlight Initiative – through both the UN Trust Fund and WPHF – was able to allocate a percentage of its funding to allow for institutional and core support and repurposed funds to support organisational resilience and survival during the pandemic.⁷² However, this level of flexibility was not consistent across all programmes, and there were restrictions placed on both WPHF and the UN Trust Fund's ability to provide core, institutional support for grantees in Africa using Spotlight Initiative funding. Instead, there was a requirement for this to be 'project funding' (for activities only).

Working with and funding GROs presents challenges for UN organisations due to institutional barriers and risk considerations. While some efforts were made to sub-grant to smaller CSOs, this approach was not widespread. Additionally, some CSOs faced difficulties in 'absorbing' the funding, particularly in countries with a small pool of organisations working on EVAWG, leading to a concentration of grants among a few CSOs that were experienced but not necessarily VAWG-focused nor women-led CSOs.

Efforts to streamline Joint Expressions of Interest were not matched with joint processes for contracts or fund management for implementing partners, which meant that CSOs were burdened by cumbersome reporting processes and a lack of coordination between RUNOs. This was reported in several programmes and evidenced in several Spotlight Initiative reports, including annual and global programme reports and the Mid-Term Assessment (MTA).⁷³ Some programmes sought to tackle this challenge, for example designing memoranda of understanding (MoUs) with civil society partners in order to avoid contracts with several RUNOs in parallel, and providing coordinated support and accompaniment to grantees and implementing partners.

⁷¹ CS-GRG (2021) 'The Spotlight Initiative: Investing in Civil Society Organisations and Movements: Driving Transformative, Sustainable Change'.

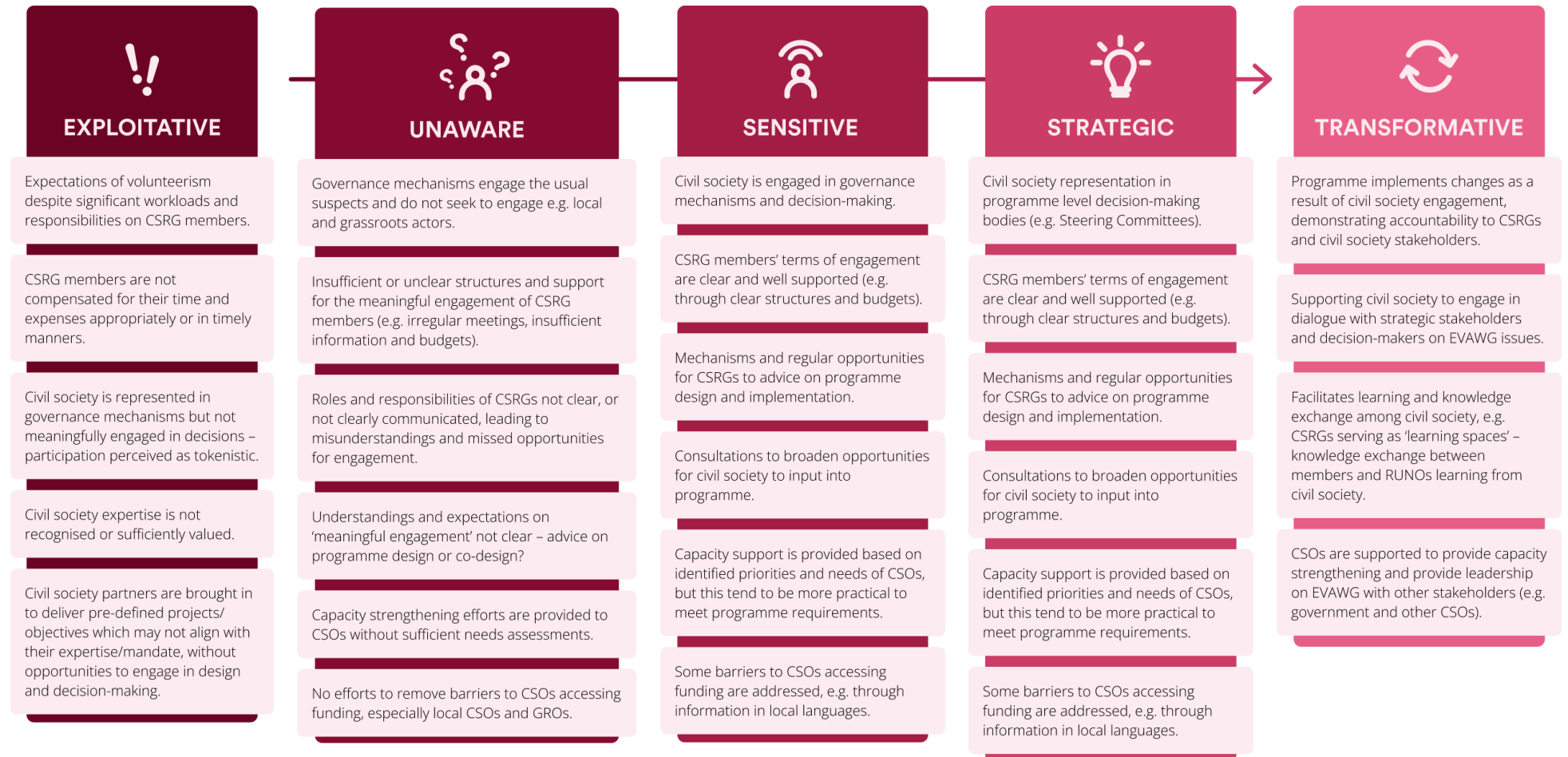
⁷² Global Scorecard 2019–2020.

⁷³ For example: Spotlight Initiative (2023) 'Global Annual Report 2022'; Spotlight thematic assessment case study notes (various); Dalberg (2023) 'Tracing the institutional history of Spotlight Initiative to eliminate violence against women and girls'.

CSO Engagements

APPROACHES ALONG THE TRANSFORMATIVE CONTINUUM

The assessment uses a Transformative Continuum to capture the type of interventions/approaches observed for each theme, and where they fall along the continuum. This aims to support learning and discussion of how programmes to end violence against women and girls can be more transformative, and what the process towards the transformative level could look like. The continuum highlights illustrative examples of approaches from across the programme case studies; it does not, however, indicate how common these approaches were across the Initiative. Instead, as noted, the continuum presents a range of approaches observed to support learning.





3.2. Support to progressive feminist and women's movements

ASSESSMENT QUESTION 2:

To what extent has Spotlight Initiative supported and strengthened progressive feminist movements?

In 2017, Spotlight Initiative expanded its Theory of Change to include an additional outcome (or pillar) to strengthen its work with women's movements, which became known as Pillar 6. This was primarily a result of the ongoing engagement and advocacy of feminist and women's rights movements.⁷⁴ According to the Global Results Framework,⁷⁵ Pillar 6 states: "*Women's rights groups, autonomous social movements and civil society organisations, including those representing youth and groups facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination/marginalization, more effectively influence and advance progress on GEWE [Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment] and ending VAWG*". The framework further breaks down three core outputs with their respective indicators.

The intention of Spotlight Initiative was to allocate 10–15% of all programme funding to Pillar 6⁷⁶ and 10% of each of the regional investment envelopes was dedicated to either direct grants or supporting WROs through the two civil society grant-giving programmes (with the UN Trust Fund and WPHF). The work with WPHF focused on funding local GROs and women's organisations in Africa and one country per region in the Caribbean, Asia, and Pacific.⁷⁷ The work with the UN Trust Fund⁷⁸ focused on funding WROs in Latin America and Africa. According to Spotlight Initiative's 2022 Global Annual Report,⁷⁹ a total of US\$85 million (23% of the overall activity funds) was allocated by December 2022 to Pillar 6 across the five regions⁸⁰ (this includes WPHF, the UN Trust Fund, and Safe and Fair Programmes).

The assessment sought to explore the understanding that existed of feminist movement building and strengthening, as well as what needs to be done to strengthen movements (see the box below). It also set out to understand the relevance and legitimacy of the UN, specifically Spotlight Initiative, to support movements and cross-movement building and consider the extent to which the strategies adopted have been effective in enabling greater agency of women's movements, by exploring successes, challenges, and enabling and hampering factors.

⁷⁴ Spotlight Initiative (2019) 'Global Annual Report 2018'.

⁷⁵ Spotlight Initiative (2018) 'Global Results Framework'.

⁷⁶ Spotlight Initiative (2019) 'Global Annual Report 2018'.

⁷⁷ WPHF funds range from US\$2,500 to US\$200,000. UN Trust Fund approved budget for Spotlight Initiative was US\$5,660,378 for five target countries in Latin America (Argentina, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico) and US\$20,636,792 for Sub-Saharan Africa.

⁷⁸ CS-GRG (2021) 'The Spotlight Initiative: Investing in Civil Society Organisations and Movements: Driving Transformative, Sustainable Change.'

⁷⁹ Spotlight Initiative (2022) 'Global Annual Narrative Progress Report 2022'. Note: Total allocation investment excluding WPHF, UN Trust Fund, and Safe and Fair Programme amounted to US\$48.5 million (15%).

⁸⁰ Ibid.

The concept of feminist movement building as defined by different individuals that we spoke to.

Across the case studies, the description of feminist movement building includes words such as awareness raising, collaboration of individuals or groups who share a common interest in driving change, addressing injustice, capacity building to CSOs, seed funding, networking and community or grassroots led. It is noteworthy that the conceptualisation of the phrase ‘feminist movement building’ was clearer among the Spotlight team at UN Women and some members of the CS-NRG than at the implementing partners (and other RUNOs), which suggests more conscientisation might be required on what the Initiative meant by supporting feminist and women’s movements. In the Technical Guidance Note on the Six Pillars of Spotlight Theory of Change (2019), the guidance highlights the importance of understanding the difference between strengthening civil society and building a movement, and provides useful guidance on what should be included under this pillar. However, the guidance was either not well understood or internalised, but it seems to have been interpreted and understood differently by different stakeholders within the Initiative, as seen in the quote below:

“The campaigns and awareness raising could be considered as a movement. If we are using a broader definition of movement.”

- RUNO representative

For most of the participants that responded to this question, the distinction between building and strengthening a movement was somewhat clear to them as they used literal terms of to “*build*” and to “*strengthen*”. Some mentioned that building the movement involved “starting from scratch” to collect people together and set a common goal toward the desired change. On the other hand, movement strengthening was described along the lines of amplifying already existing efforts, networks, or groups to make them better or more visible in terms of their agenda. In some of the case studies there seemed to be a lack of clarity on what *support* to the women’s movement means and looks like:

“Organisations come together because they have a common interest or issues, that is movement building, but not in terms of supporting organisations to go out on the street and be loud on issues. We do it in our own way, how we want to see change happen. In one way, we see movement building, a movement of conservation organisations for example – practitioners working on that [...] and mainstreaming human rights and gender into that. But not sure how Spotlight sees movements.”

- civil society implementing partner

SUB-QUESTION 2A: To what extent, and in what ways, is the UN considered a legitimate and relevant entity to support strengthening of movements and cross-movement building?

This sub question explores how far Spotlight Initiative understood what was needed to support movement building under Pillar 6, and the extent to which it was able to do provide that support.

“The UN is a mother of human rights; the UN respects the principle of LNOB. During the 16 days of activism 2022, there was a series of interactions where different organisations were brought together to discuss issues surrounding women. The UN feels it is always the right place to convene meetings. The UN adds credibility to the process.”

- RUNO representative

FINDING 2A.1: The UN is seen as a highly relevant and legitimate institution to support movement strengthening but the approach used is not consistent and at times the UN has been seen as trying ‘to take over’, ‘lead’, or ‘build’ movements themselves.

Across the case studies, it was clear that the UN was seen as a relevant entity to support strengthening of movements and cross-movements. In some countries, it was seen as the ‘only’ entity that can provide support to movements. There was a consensus among civil society and UN respondents that the UN should not take the lead in building movements. Instead, its position allows for unpacking of sensitive issues and engaging with different stakeholders, in line with the technical guidance note produced on the six pillars⁸¹ that underpins the need to recognise and sustain CSO leadership as important in strengthening movements.

Lessons from a Spotlight Initiative global learning session on women’s movements⁸² underscore the importance of recognising and empowering WROs to drive the agenda. While this lesson clearly shows that Spotlight Initiative understands its role is to support movements rather than lead them, the assessment team found that, at the country level, there were varied understandings of this role.

Some programmes faced challenges striking the right balance between leading and supporting movements, possibly due to pressure to demonstrate results or a lack of clarity on the types of support needed to best support movements. For example, in one country where the UN took

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² AWID 2019. Towards a Feminist Funding Ecosystem

the lead in developing a strategy for strengthening women's movements, civil society stakeholders and representatives of the women's movement felt that this should have been led by WROs.

"If there is any other organisation to lead, it should not be the UN. Some of these things – we need them to come from the community. It should grow from the community."

- civil society implementing partner

FINDING 2A.2: The assessment found numerous examples of the UN effectively supporting and strengthening movements through funding and organising activities such as convening different WROs and advocacy activities. However, this does not appear to have been done as part of a well-defined strategy at programme level.

Across the case studies, there are several examples of the UN playing an important convening role in bringing together different stakeholders. This convening role is also highlighted in Spotlight Initiative's 2022 Global Annual Report, which notes that multi-stakeholder dialogues led to the development of 330 jointly agreed recommendations to end VAWG since the start of the Initiative.

Examples include the 2022 Global Learning Symposium in Mexico,⁸³ a peer exchange session organised by WPHF and Spotlight Initiative,⁸⁴ and virtual sessions on psychosocial support and disability inclusion.⁸⁵ These spaces have many benefits, as reported by participants in one case study, who through their engagement with a Spotlight programme, became more intentional in addressing diversity and inclusion:

"Spotlight was very instrumental in giving us that kind of catalytic, out of the box thinking, at a time when everyone was quite isolated. [The Initiative] provided us with energy to think differently and action it."

- civil society implementing partner

⁸³ The 2022 Global Learning Symposium in Mexico brought together over 200 participants from the UN, government, civil society, and other stakeholders.

⁸⁴ WPHF and Spotlight Initiative (2021) 'Peer Exchange Brief: Key steps to coalition building: Advocating for women's rights, Advancing peace and Ending Violence Against Women and Girls'.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

The assessment team found a hunger for more convening spaces for WROs (and specifically for implementing partners working together with Spotlight programmes to come together), across the case studies.

The Technical Pillar Guidance provides useful direction in terms of how to implement Pillar 6, including exploring evidence and good practice in relation to movement-building support and feminist funding frameworks. However, no examples of contextualised movement-building strategies developed for the programme that sought to identify what movements, who the key actors were, and how a Spotlight programme could support them were shared with the assessment team. While some programmes conducted comprehensive mappings of organisations and networks as a basis for understanding the broader CSO landscape and creating greater synergies among organisations,⁸⁶ this was not consistently done across all countries, and it was not always clear to the assessment team how this mapping fed into funding and partnership decisions.

FINDING 2A.3: Spotlight Initiative’s strategic position enables it to play an important role in bringing women’s rights organisations, government stakeholders, and international NGOs together, which provides opportunities for advocacy on EAWG programming and has the potential to raise the profile of these organisations. However, this positioning at times was perceived by some civil society representatives as compromising the Initiative’s ability to stand in solidarity with oppressed groups in contexts that are more restrictive and repressive.

The UN holds a unique position as a powerful intermediary with national governments and multilateral and bilateral donors, which can be used as leverage to play a ‘brokering’ role with CSOs.⁸⁷ The 2022 Global Annual Report indicates that Spotlight Initiative continued to make substantial progress in raising the issue of EAWG and bringing it to the forefront of government agendas.⁸⁸ Indeed, the assessment team saw similar examples in the thematic assessment case studies:

“UN has power for influencing governments. What we need to do more is that UN side by side with CSOs has to claim the advocacy spaces, find the spaces to influence government. UN’s advantage is the convening power with the government, and now they try to work more with civil society.”

- CS-NRG member

Both individual Spotlight programme reports and global annual reports document examples of work with governments to raise the profile of EAWG and advocate for specific laws, policies, and national budgets on VAWG prevention and response. Many stakeholders interviewed

⁸⁶ Spotlight Initiative (2020) ‘Global Annual Report 2019’.

⁸⁷ Sandler, J., and Rao, A. (2012) ‘The elephant in the room and the dragons at the gate: strategizing for gender equality in the 21st century’, *Gender & Development*, 20:3, 547–562.

⁸⁸ Spotlight Initiative (2023) ‘Global Annual Report 2022’.

highlighted how Spotlight Initiative had used its unique positioning to work with governments, private sector actors, WROs, and marginalised groups to challenge existing power imbalances, particularly between the government and WROs.

EXAMPLES FROM THE THEMATIC ASSESSMENT CASE STUDIES

“The UN support increased their credibility, facilitated access to decision-makers, and made visible femicide and GBV against the women they work with and represent.”

– Mexico case study

The Mexico case study revealed that, through the programme’s efforts, the State Secretariat of Women in Estado De Mexico committed to continuing to provide small grants to CSOs even after the Spotlight programme there closed. The Initiative’s programmes also made the issue of femicide more visible in Argentina, and focused attention on FGM and early child marriage in Uganda. At the global level, UN Women is supporting Spotlight Initiative to participate in broader networks on gender equality through the Generation Equality Forum and, according to the meta-review of Spotlight Initiative in Latin America and Africa,⁸⁹ these broader networks (or action coalitions) provided opportunities for Spotlight Initiative to secure long-term commitments from governments such as Liberia and Ecuador to end GBV.

However, across several case studies, the assessment team found that Spotlight Initiative, being a UN programme, was not always able to visibly advocate for feminist and women’s rights in challenging political and legal environments in more restrictive contexts, or in the face of repressive governments. Several of the case study locations were experiencing significant anti-gender backlash and some civil society stakeholders consulted felt that Spotlight Initiative (and the UN more broadly) had not always taken a visibly strong stance in the face of this oppression. For example, in Uganda, during the tabling and passing of the Anti-Homosexuality Act of 2023, several groups expressed disappointment that Spotlight Initiative did not take a stronger stand on human rights violations.⁹⁰ Even while there was a public statement by the Secretary General of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres,⁹¹ the assessment team learnt from RUNOs that the UN works within the laws of the countries where they operate and the fact that the Government was largely involved in the implementation of the Spotlight Programme, Spotlight Initiative was careful on issuing statements that seemed contradictory to the laws in Uganda. Another example is Spotlight Initiative’s engagement with sex workers’ organisations and rights in several contexts. Spotlight Initiative struggled to partner with sex workers’ organisations due to the illegality of sex work in some programme countries, and in one case study interviewees noted that they had wished the UN had taken bolder positions on feminist issues as part of their support to feminist movements – including on the issue of sex work and sex workers’ rights, which is a polarised discussion in the context.

⁸⁹ Hera (2022). [Meta Review of the Spotlight Initiative: Latin America and Africa](#)

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ See: [Uganda: Guterres voices deep concern as Anti-Homosexuality Act signed into law | UN News](#)

The assessment team acknowledges that the UN often finds itself in a challenging situation in countries where its efforts to promote human rights and highlight state-level violations could lead to the non-renewal of its operational agreements. There are times when the UN is having to influence and negotiate in a less public way, and that might be perceived as inaction by civil society and movements, who feel they should be doing more or that by remaining silent the UN is condoning this behaviour. For initiatives like Spotlight Initiative, which aims to eliminate VAWG, including for the most structurally marginalised groups, such perceived (or real) inaction can harm relationships and trust with women's and social justice movements. This is also a fundamental challenge to the UN's ability to live up to its commitment to the human rights-based approach (HRBA) to development which requires human rights principles (equality and non-discrimination, participation, accountability) to guide UN development cooperation, as well as the LNOB principle – two of the guiding principles of the UN's Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework.⁹²

FINDING 2A.4: The assessment found a common expectation among RUNOs for women's rights activists to act in the 'spirit of activism' and 'voluntarism', which is not aligned to feminist principles advocating for fair compensation for their time and expertise. This discrepancy risks increasing stress and burnout among activists, hindering effective movement-building efforts.

Across many of the case study programmes, the assessment heard from the UN, Spotlight programme stakeholders, and civil society respondents that there was an expectation that the work of women's and grassroots groups and movements would be largely done on a voluntary basis. In one FGD with members of women's groups supported by a Spotlight programme, participants mentioned being "*seen as volunteers*" and not having their time appropriately compensated. RUNO staff in one country highlighted a declining spirit of activism "*among the people who do the work*", which they saw as increasing the cost of doing programming. Some key informants suggested that activists were being 'greedy' or 'grasping' when they asked for funds for petrol or other expenses to cover their costs.

These attitudes are worrying, as they are not conducive to being a funder that can legitimately support and fund movements. There is a need to have honest dialogues, unpack power dynamics, explore issues of trust, and recognise the privileges that come with job positions and hierarchies that likely hamper efforts toward working in solidarity with and supporting movements.⁹³ Women need to be recognised for their efforts and compensated for the time they put into achieving objectives, otherwise the work will lead to burnout and mental health stresses, which will ultimately limit the success of movement-strengthening efforts.

⁹² United Nation's Sustainable Development Group (2019) [United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework Guidance](#)

⁹³ Sandler, J., and Rao, A. (2012) 'The elephant in the room and the dragons at the gate: strategizing for gender equality in the 21st century', *Gender & Development*, 20:3, 547–562.

FINDING 2A.5: The collaboration of different UN agencies in Spotlight Initiative reflects diverse mandates and experience levels, coming together under one umbrella with the explicit aim of ending VAWG and integrating GBV across the work of the different agencies. While this undoubtedly signifies an important step toward working with WROs and movements in a meaningful and feminist way within EVAWG programming in the UN, it did present challenges as not all agencies had the same understanding of, and commitment to, engaging civil society and movements in this way.

Spotlight Initiative has provided an important learning opportunity for UN agencies to expand their understanding of supporting women's movements and operating from a feminist perspective. Various UN agencies came together, each bringing their unique mandates and expertise. This collaborative environment provided opportunities, in some situations, for learning and growth for these agencies to refine their approaches toward supporting WROs and women's rights movements in a more meaningful and feminist manner.

Across the case studies, both RUNOs and some civil society stakeholders often perceived Pillar 6 – and, by extension, work with women's rights organisations and movements – as a “*UN Women thing*”. For example, RUNO staff working across Pillars 1–5 often did not want to answer questions on movement building and instead referred the assessment team to UN Women. While Spotlight Initiative was set up to leverage the experience and expertise of different UN organisations to work together to end violence against women and girls, a number of UN organisations came together to work on different pillars, but Pillar 6 was led by UN Women solely. While UN Women is indeed the most appropriate agency to lead work on women's movements, the allocation of Pillar 6 to just one UN organisation, unlike the shared responsibility seen in other pillars, was highlighted as a possible flaw in the design and implementation of Spotlight Initiative. This approach may have caused work with women's movements to be siloed and perhaps deprioritised.

“Pillar 6 was not as comprehensive as other pillars – if you look at other pillars, like laws and policies – you would have two or more RUNOs working... Just one agency works on Pillar 6 – just UN Women – hugely to the detriment of that pillar – missing out on a comprehensive approach.”

- Spotlight Initiative Country Coordinator

Beyond events such as 16 Days of Activism and some capacity-building sessions, some UN and civil society respondents found it hard to articulate how they had been engaged in movement strengthening efforts in Spotlight Initiative and did not always understand or give value to its place in the programme.

A further challenge was noted with different agencies needing to respond to their broader agenda, and ensuring their work is credited.

“It’s all about the stamp of the entity and the cloud of the entity – I don’t see that.”

- CSO, not part of Spotlight Initiative

Similar reflections were found in other case studies, where this kind of approach and understanding of movement-building challenged the autonomy of women’s groups and movements to define their own agenda, as opposed to taking money to implement the UN’s agenda.

“Our wants are different from their [the UN’s] objectives; therefore, we decide not to bind ourselves to them. Feminist groups reject their money so that they are not dependent on them. Many movements don’t engage because we feel we are just a project for them.”

- CSO, not part of Spotlight Initiative

FINDING 2A.6: The assessment found a range of good examples where programmes engaged organisations working on other issues in implementation efforts to end VAWG to foster cross-movement building, but further efforts could have been made to better engage across networks, groups, and movements.

Due to positioning and collaboration with different partners and stakeholders, the UN as an entity can create spaces and platforms for cross-movement building. Examples of efforts to build links across movements included work to link the EVAWG movement to movements around poverty reduction, climate change, labour rights, and land rights.

Additionally, there was deliberate engagement of non-traditional GBV actors such as private sector organisations, law organisations, traditional leaders, and faith leaders.⁹⁴ In one case study country, women’s and LGBTQI+ movements came together in feminist spaces, contributing to cross-movement building, which was valued by participants:

“The Feminist Forum recently included good representation of LGBTQI+ people who call themselves feminists. We bring back learnings from feminist movements to the LGBTQI+ movements, and we contribute learning. Spotlight has supported those spaces really well.”

- Spotlight Initiative grantee

⁹⁴ Spotlight Initiative (2023) ‘Global Annual Report 2022’.

Across at least three case studies examined in the assessment, civil society stakeholders highlighted that the programme missed an opportunity to support linkages between national and grassroots' women's movements. Linkages between national and grassroots feminists are essential in creating the critical mass needed in movement-strengthening efforts. Efforts to support cross-generational movement strengthening were also not always realised. This was highlighted by civil society stakeholders in one programme, where not addressing intergenerational issues was seen as creating a less-inclusive movement. These stakeholders also highlighted divides between the church and WROs that they would have liked to have addressed. A missed opportunity for cross-movement building was highlighted in respect of support that could have been provided to a Young Feminist Network, with established chapters at district level, which could have been an effective mechanism for working with trans rights and LGBTQI+ movements. However, this linkage was not fully realised because the network did not have sufficient resources to do the work.

SUB-QUESTION 2B: To what extent have the strategies adopted to support and strengthen movements been effective and enabled greater agency of the women's movements (successes, challenges, enabling, and hampering factors)?

Spotlight Initiative used various strategies to strengthen movements in different contexts. This section covers some of the common strategies used that the assessment identified.

FINDING 2B.7: The strategies used to support women's rights and grassroots organisations, including funding convening and networking events and opportunities, provided much needed support for these organisations. They were an important first step towards broader movement strengthening. However, they fell short in supporting the full range of skills needed for movement building, including for example supporting leadership development, and strategic planning, or providing unrestricted core funding to meet their own identified needs.

Spotlight Initiative's Global Results Framework features an indicator that tracks the "number of women's rights groups, networks and relevant CSOs with strengthened capacities to network, partner and jointly advocate for progress on ending VAWG at local, national, regional and global levels, within the last year". **The Initiative cumulatively reports that 3,263 WROs, networks, and CSOs have strengthened capacities to network, partner, and advocate, which is significantly over the target set of 865.**⁹⁵

The assessment is not able to comment on whether this number reflects support that has been "effective, or enabled greater agency" of women's movements, but the assessment did interrogate what kind of support was provided to civil society implementing partners, including WROs, GROs, and grantees to strengthen their capacities to network, partner, and jointly advocate.

The assessment found examples of support to networking, convenings, and joint advocacy among organisations and groups that were effective in strengthening movements. Examples

⁹⁵ Spotlight Initiative (2023) 'Global Annual Report 2022', Annex A.

included global knowledge exchanges and convenings such as the Global Learning Symposium that took place in Mexico in 2022, which involved over 200 participants from a range of stakeholder groups. Other examples include strengthening advocacy skills to end GBV, supporting trade union workers through human rights and gender training, and building the capacity of women's groups and grassroots organisations in advocacy, M&E, participatory action research, financial skills, networking, and alliance building. Additionally, smaller CSOs in the Pacific region received targeted and specialised capacity support from a feminist organisation (contracted by Spotlight Initiative) which supported their skills development.

Many civil society respondents felt that there were other areas, such as leadership and influencing, where they wanted support but did not receive it. This type of support would have likely better supported movement strengthening. As highlighted in a UN Women report,⁹⁶ important skills that can be strengthened for solidarity include transformative leadership, trust building, intersectional analysis and inclusion, and coordination. These were the areas where stakeholders from WROs and GROs identified capacity gaps.

Overall, there was a feeling among civil society that, despite capacity needs assessments being conducted, the support received seemed to be geared more toward supporting them to meet UN requirements or implement work under a particular Spotlight programme rather than movement building. AQ1 provides further details of the types of capacity-building activities that were typically supported across the case studies.

“UN as a system struggles with movement building – they are not set up to do movement building and the way it gets translated as capacity building or programmatic exchange as opposed to giving organisations and groups the funding ... they need to prioritise what they want or to build coalitions.”

- CS-GRG member

FINDING 2B.8: The use of small grants and sub-granting, sub-contracting, and consortium arrangements were effective strategies to enable smaller grassroots organisations to access funding. However, much of this funding was given for short timeframes and often focused on delivering activities, limiting its impact on movement strengthening.

Spotlight programmes provided small grants and subgrants as part of the strategy to enable grassroots organisations that did not meet UN requirements to access funding. These grants were either established within a Spotlight programme under Pillar 6 and administered by a civil society partner, or they were administered through the two civil society grant-giving programmes (UN Trust Fund and WPHF).⁹⁷

⁹⁶ UN Women (2022) 'The Power of Partnerships: Programming Lessons For Strengthening Movements And Solidarity For An End To Violence Against Women And Girls In East And Southern Africa'.

⁹⁷ The assessment team was informed about the [WithHer Fund | unfoundation.org](https://unfoundation.org/); however, at the time of preparing the report, no stakeholder had mentioned this and no data was shared during the case studies from this.

In a number of the case studies, these small grant mechanisms were used to fund constituency-led organisations, in furtherance of the LNOB principle. This approach ensured that funds could go to organisations that did not necessarily meet the strict UN criteria for accessing funds.

In countries where there were strict laws on working with marginalised groups such as sex workers and LGBTQI+, the small grants programmes used different avenues to ensure funds reached marginalised groups, without necessarily drawing attention or harming either the organisations involved or the UN.⁹⁸ The small grants programmes also provided significant support to organisations during the COVID-19 pandemic so that WROs were in a better position to support their staff and ensure sustainability of their organisations. For example, US\$9.1 million was re-allocated as a COVID-19 response from the UN Trust Fund planned envelope for Africa to provide institutional funding for existing grantees in sub-Saharan Africa.⁹⁹ According to WPHF, funding to local organisations was made available through two streams, i.e. a programmatic stream which ranged from US\$30,000 to US\$200,000 and an institutional funding stream which ranged from US\$2,500 to US\$30,000.¹⁰⁰

RESULTS OF SMALL GRANTS PROGRAMMES FROM THE ASSESSMENT CASE STUDIES

In the Pacific regional programme, LGBTQI+ organisations (including those that were unregistered) received small grants through two grant-making windows that were focused on SOGIESC issues.

In Jamaica, the Association for the Deaf was able to have consultation meetings as a result of this granting mechanism.

In Uganda, the Young Women's Network was supported through Uganda Women's Network (UWONET).

"A lot of women's groups are not direct implementing partners but they are part of what we are developing as a network of movement builders – indirectly benefiting through capacity building and organisational capacity."

- RUNO representative

Much as this was seen as a good way of working with smaller organisations, it is important to highlight that some of the sub-grantees expressed frustration and a lack of power in these relationships during the CSO workshops held by the assessment team across case studies. Some CSO sub-grantees across case studies also mentioned implementing pre-designed activities on behalf of the implementing partners without the flexibility to amend or adapt according to their experience. Some participants felt that their expertise was not fully valued in the process. This is discussed further below under assessment question 4, which explores

⁹⁸ For example, funds were channelled through the WPHF National Steering Committee mechanism, so that they could reach more structurally marginalised and oppressed groups without government scrutiny and challenge.

⁹⁹ CS-GRG (2021) 'Investing in Civil Society Organisations and Movements: Driving Transformative, Sustainable Change'.

¹⁰⁰ WPHF and Spotlight Initiative (2021) 'A Missing Brick for Sustaining Women's Movements: Flexible institutional funding for local women's organizations'.

Spotlight Initiative's contribution to transforming power dynamics at the structural, operational, and implementation levels.

While these mechanisms and approaches are effective in supporting GROs to access funding, they do not necessarily translate into movement strengthening. This is because funding is usually provided over short timeframes, which is not conducive to securing the sustainability of these organisations or the interventions. Additionally, while some core or institutional funding was provided through these mechanisms, much of the funds allocated are to deliver activities rather than offering flexible funds that would better support the work of the organisation and contribute more effectively to movement strengthening, such as covering salaries, core operational costs, and expenses for convening and networking.

Several smaller CSOs, in sub-grantee relationships, expressed concern that there was very little money left for them once it got through all the other partners, including UN agencies and larger implementing partners. This sentiment was shared as below by one partner in a case study:

"[It's as if we're getting] the leftovers after it's been through the different UN agencies."

- civil society implementing partner

The focus on funding organisations to implement activities rather than providing more flexible support to movements may have limited Spotlight Initiative's efforts to support and strengthen movements and could have potentially contributed to competition among WROs, compromising the ability of organisations and movements to thrive and sustain themselves.

"I don't see the sustainability of movements – everyone depends on projects. I can't say that they will continue to exist without financial support; perhaps a memorandum has been signed but everything is based on the activities of individual activists – and what's next?"

- RUNO representative

FINDING 2B.9: There were notable variations in how Spotlight Initiative engaged with movements depending on their stage of development. Where movements were already established, the support was more aligned to their identified needs. In countries where movements were at an earlier stage, support appeared to be more instructive or prescriptive.

Spotlight Initiative tailored its engagement with movements based on their developmental stage, resulting in notable variations. In countries with fragmented or nascent movements, support tended to be more directive. This often involved RUNOs proactively bringing groups together and encouraging them to network and collaborate with

each other; in some cases, organisations were funded to work on GBV as a new activity for them, following some initial training or orientation. Conversely, in contexts where movements were already established, Spotlight Initiative's support was more closely aligned with movements' own established goals and clearly articulated requests.

Examples of promising practices included working closely with a WRO to organise national feminist forums and regional gatherings, funding a study on the state of the women's movement, and supporting a Women's Manifesto Movement.¹⁰¹ These promising practices could be replicated in other contexts, and underscore the importance of understanding the stage that movement(s) are at, and adapting efforts accordingly.

The importance of understanding and tailoring support to the local context could be seen in one programme that did not invest sufficient time and resources in understanding local civil society dynamics, which hindered its potential to have much impact on broader movement goals.

FINDING 2B.10: Despite efforts to engage diverse groups and strengthen connections within women's movements, Spotlight Initiative programmes encountered hurdles in supporting inclusive alliances, especially with smaller, unregistered organisations.

In supporting women's movement building, Spotlight Initiative has made efforts to recognise the importance of building inclusive movements across age, disability, and other potential dividing lines within movements. For example, there are several examples of Spotlight Initiative resourcing and strengthening the capacities of young feminist activists and youth-led networks.¹⁰²

Although the assessment found examples of programmes engaging with young people in movement-building efforts, challenges were faced around meaningful, long-term movement strengthening when much of the support was for one-off engagements. A particular issue faced was around including informal groups that were not registered. For example, in one country, registration hurdles in establishing district-level chapters for youth networks meant that an important opportunity for more effectively supporting movement building was missed.

"There are very few GBV organisations in the country that we haven't worked with. But there may be more informal groups, for example young women's organisations, who we haven't worked with. This goes back to the point that, if you're not registered, it is difficult to access funding."

- RUNO representative

¹⁰¹ Women's Manifesto, A united women's voice, Malawi, March 2019.

¹⁰² Spotlight Initiative (2023) 'Global Annual Report 2022'.

FINDING 2B.11: In contexts marked by strong anti-gender backlash, including male push-back towards EAWG programming and government resistance towards working with LGBTQI+ groups and sex workers, Spotlight Initiative faced challenges in supporting feminist and cross-movement strengthening. These challenges included navigating conflicting and divergent perspectives among UN organisations, civil society, government and other stakeholders on how best to address the backlash and the role of men in ending violence against women and girls. As a result, Spotlight Initiative was not always able to visibly stand in solidarity with feminist movements and structurally marginalised groups in these legally and politically challenging contexts.

Spotlight Initiative faced some of its most formidable challenges in supporting movement building in environments marked by a strong anti-gender backlash. This backlash often perpetuated harmful stereotypes about ‘women’ or ‘feminists’ and actively sought to undermine women’s rights and collective action.

One issue that was particularly divisive was men’s involvement. Spotlight Initiative developed technical guidance on working with men and boys that sets out why it is important to involve them and identifies guiding principles for programming with men and boys.¹⁰³ Nevertheless, the assessment came across several contradictions and challenges that Spotlight programmes were facing in their response to and engagement with men and boys.

While there is strong agreement among stakeholders about the need to engage men and boys in transformative approaches, opinions diverged on the extent to which they should be targeted or benefit from interventions. In one of the case study countries, this discussion was particularly divisive among civil society groups and some women’s rights activists. Some stakeholders emphasised centring men and boys as recipients of programme benefits, including economic empowerment to prevent violence among young men and support for male victims of violence (whether by other men or by women). Others worried that the vocal advocacy of male victims runs the risk of diluting the need for programming aimed at women and girls and shifts attention away from the underlying root causes of the issue. Some of the CSOs the assessment consulted felt that the programme’s focus on family violence (rather than VAWG) was done to “appease men”, in their view.

This lack of consensus in terms of the intention (and politics) behind working with men as allies but still centring women and girls is one that needs to be further addressed in Spotlight 2.0. Confusion in this domain creates fertile ground for anti-gender movements to take advantage, and undermine feminist and women’s movements and advance their own anti-gender agenda.¹⁰⁴

In certain contexts, the term ‘feminism’ can be another divisive issue within women’s movements. Despite engaging in actions and advocating for gender equality in a feminist

¹⁰³ Spotlight Initiative (2001) ‘Men and Boys’.

¹⁰⁴ Chenoweth, E and Marks, Z. (2022) ‘Revenge of the Patriarchs; Why Autocrats Fear Women’. *Foreign Affairs*, 8 February 2022.

way,¹⁰⁵ some progressive organisations distance themselves from the label of feminism due to the backlash it attracts. This strategic response was evident in some of the case studies, where caution was exercised in using the term ‘feminist’ in movement-building efforts. Stakeholders in several programmes observed that the word ‘feminist’ was viewed by some as aggressive and “against men”, while others noted that it could spark backlash. These examples underscore the importance of increasing understanding of feminism and feminist movements to build unity and inclusivity within women’s movements.

“When we label things, we get into trouble... it becomes ‘us against them’ ... so in the end, it is setting ourselves for failure. I think we really need to explain what it means so that people understand it is not bad. There is this fear that feminism means ‘women come to take over’.”

- CSO, not part of Spotlight Initiative

“Clarifying what really is feminist movement, [our country] is patriarchal when you mention ‘feminist’, it’s already stigmatised. First is getting people to understand the true meaning of feminism. Most of the time it’s misinterpreted thinking that you want to remove power from men and give it to women.”

- RUNO representative

FINDING 2B.12: The assessment found a frequent confusion in the conceptualisation of support to individual organisations and support to movements that made it hard for participants in the assessment to distinguish efforts that were seen to strengthen movements within the programmes compared to supporting individual organisations.

“Even though they [organisations] are part of the movement, they are not themselves movements. Movements operate at a scale no single organisation can operate at”.¹⁰⁶

While the Technical Guidance Note on the Four Pillars of the Spotlight Initiative’s Theory of Change¹⁰⁷ clearly outlines the difference between civil society programming and movement building, the assessment still found a lack of consistent understanding of the difference between the programme’s support to individual WROs, CSOs, and movements.

¹⁰⁵ Zulver, J. (2016) ‘High-risk feminism in El Salvador: women’s mobilisation in violent times’, *Gender & Development*, Vol. 24, No. 2, pp. 171–185.

¹⁰⁶ Srilatha Balitiwala, quoted during the 2009 AWID Forum.

¹⁰⁷ Spotlight (2019) Technical Guidance Note on the Four Pillars of the Spotlight Initiative Theory of Change

“Civil society programming is not the same thing as movement building, and strong organisations don’t necessarily mean strong movements (and vice-versa). It is important to understand the elements that contribute to strong social movements and strong programmes, how they connect, and what the progress and gaps have been within your context.”¹⁰⁸

While the guidance encourages programmes to “explore the differences between strengthening civil society and building a movement”,¹⁰⁹ the output indicators used to report on Pillar 6 do not appear to disaggregate these different elements. Most of the indicators that relate to Pillar 6 included in Spotlight Initiative’s Global Results Framework ask for data on *women’s rights organisations, autonomous social movements, and CSOs* together and data is not disaggregated in the reporting template. This makes it difficult to understand what type of support and achievements relate to social movements vs organisations.

The aggregation of these different groups in the monitoring and reporting system could be one reason why there appears to be a conflation of support given to individual organisations and efforts made to strengthen movements. There was no evidence to show (either in annual reports or shared documents) a breakdown of how many social movements reported greater influence and agency on the work on EAWG (as opposed to CSOs). Results frameworks were reviewed that included an indicator on how many civil society groups were supported but did not measure movement strengthening (or the extent to which movement building has been successful). One UN respondent suggested that the results framework could have “better defined the parameters of movement building” (RUNO), and this was a common reflection across the assessment.

“It was difficult to identify a movement that the Spotlight programme had worked with but rather smaller groups that they had worked on in their interventions.”

- civil society implementing partner



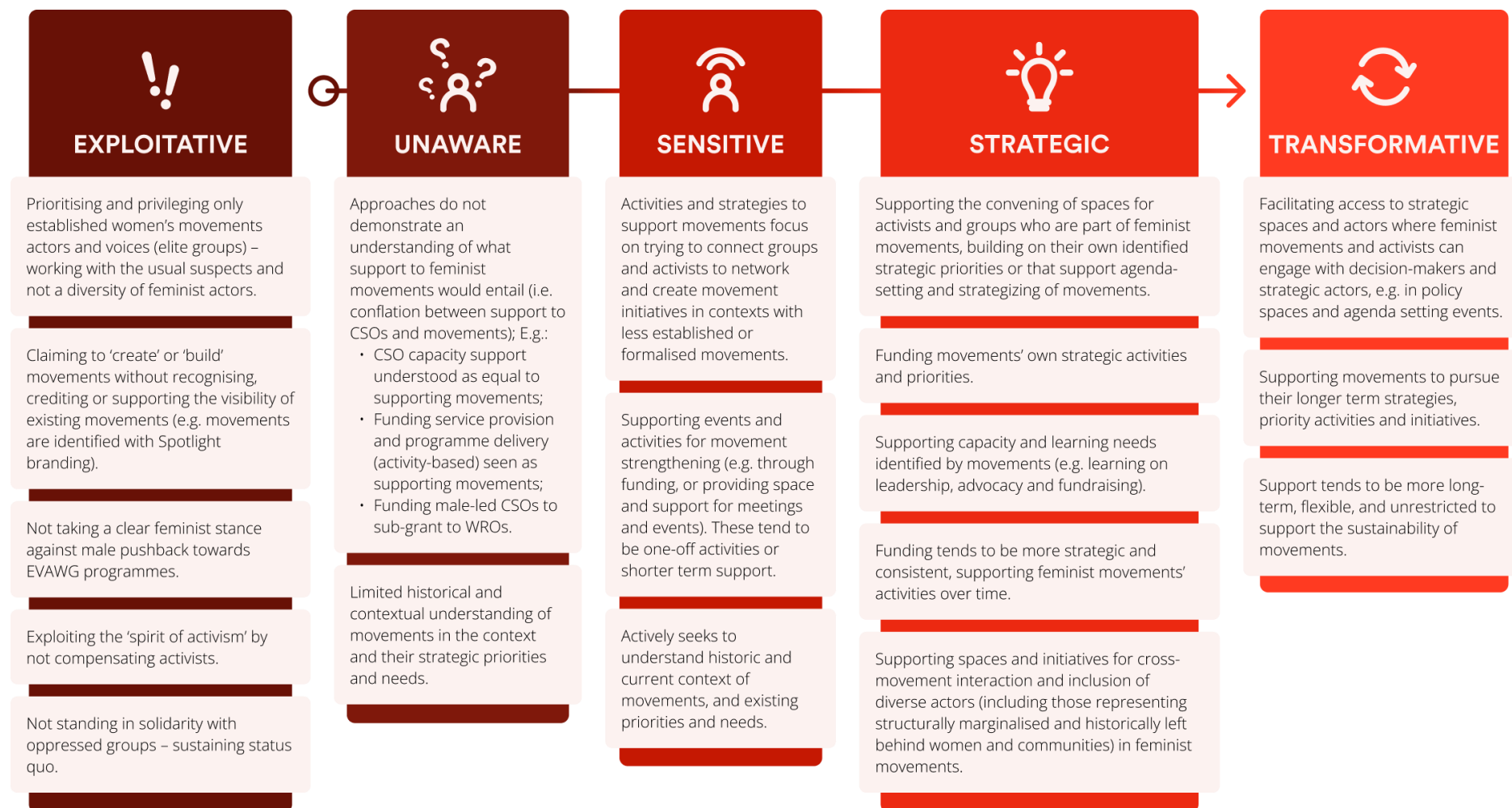
¹⁰⁸ Spotlight Initiative (no date) Technical Guidance on the Six Pillars of the Spotlight Theory of Change.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

Social Movements

APPROACHES ALONG THE TRANSFORMATIVE CONTINUUM

The assessment uses a Transformative Continuum to capture the type of interventions/approaches observed for each theme, and where they fall along the continuum. This aims to support learning and discussion of how programmes to end violence against women and girls can be more transformative, and what the process towards the transformative level could look like. The continuum highlights illustrative examples of approaches from across the programme case studies; it does not, however, indicate how common these approaches were across the Initiative. Instead, as noted, the continuum presents a range of approaches observed to support learning.





3.3. Leave No One Behind (LNOB)

ASSESSMENT QUESTION 3:

To what extent has Spotlight Initiative meaningfully involved the most left-behind and discriminated-against women and girls in all their diversity?

Spotlight Initiative's Pillar 6 outlines the importance of working with a diverse range of civil society actors, and the LNOB principle is emphasised throughout the pillar rationale and description.¹¹⁰ The following extract clearly centres the LNOB principle in Spotlight Initiative's work with civil society:

*Groups representing the most marginalised are often overlooked, excluded, or discriminated against. Ensuring inclusion and diversity requires examining existing partnerships, identifying who is left out and developing clear and deliberate strategies for reaching, listening to and collaborating with the full spectrum of actors, especially those historically excluded.*¹¹¹

This section presents findings on the extent to which Spotlight Initiative has meaningfully involved the most left-behind women and girls and structurally marginalised groups, and with what results. The first sub-question (3.1) explores how the Initiative has implemented the LNOB principle in its governance mechanisms, decision-making processes, and in programme implementation. When looking at involvement in implementation, this sub-question primarily focuses on how Spotlight Initiative has engaged constituency-led organisations in implementation through different modalities – including as implementing partners, grantees, and suppliers – to lead on and deliver key activities. This is different to the second sub-question (3.2), which looks at intersectional approaches implemented more broadly across activities and results across the six pillars, which also includes a focus on how non-constituency-led CSO partners have implemented LNOB as a cross-cutting theme.

SUB-QUESTION 3A: To what extent has Spotlight Initiative's decision making, and implementation processes involved the most structurally marginalised women in all their diversity?

This sub-question explores whether and how Spotlight Initiative governance mechanisms, designed to increase the meaningful involvement of civil society, were able to ensure that women and girls in all their diversity, in particularly the most structurally marginalised were able to engage in decision-making and implementation.

¹¹⁰ Spotlight Initiative (no date) Technical Guidance on the Six Pillars of the Spotlight Theory of Change.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

FINDING 3A.1: LNOB was visible as a cross-cutting principle and broadly understood by stakeholders across Spotlight Initiative. However, there was insufficient guidance on how to implement the principle in the context of an EAWG programme, and in some cases limited LNOB analysis at the start of programmes, leading to an inconsistent focus on LNOB across programmes.

UN respondents demonstrated a similar understanding of the principle of LNOB, with many describing it as being intentional about reaching those at risk of being left behind due to structural marginalisation and/or geographical remoteness. UN respondents typically conveyed a broad understanding of LNOB as a general UN commitment, rather than referring to Spotlight Initiative-specific guidance on LNOB or to how to operationalise the LNOB principle in the context of EAWG programming more specifically.

Spotlight Initiative has communicated its commitment to LNOB in various strategic documents.¹¹² LNOB is introduced as a guiding principle in both the Technical Guidance on the Six Pillars of the Spotlight Initiative's Theory of Change and the subsequent *Technical Guidance Note on the Four Pillars of the Spotlight Initiative's Theory of Change* (condensed from the original as the Initiative moves toward Spotlight Initiative 2.0). Both note that Spotlight Initiative will ensure resources to implement this principle (e.g. to ensure accessibility requirements are met). These documents do not include any technical guidance or minimum standards on how to implement LNOB meaningfully and safely as a cross-cutting theme, or on how Spotlight Initiative can meaningfully and safely engage with specific structurally marginalised groups.¹¹³ While there is no comprehensive LNOB guidance in place, the Spotlight Initiative Global Secretariat has developed brief guidance related to specific aspects of a LNOB approach, such as the guidance on the Promotion and Protection of Girls, the Interlinkages between HIV and Violence Prevention and Response, the Focus on Youth, and the Age Groups Considerations. While publicly available and shared with all Spotlight programmes, it was unclear to the assessment team to what extent these have been used by programmes on the ground.

Looking beyond Spotlight Initiative, there are a number of global UN documents that provide overarching guidance on LNOB.¹¹⁴ These provide UN-wide guidance on how to plan, implement, monitor, and ensure accountability in programmes in relation to LNOB. However, they do not explore what LNOB means in the context of EAWG programming. A small number of UN respondents referred to global guidance when asked about LNOB, but the assessment found limited evidence of this being systematically used to develop common strategies or

¹¹² Including in Spotlight Initiative Technical Guidance Note on the Four Pillars of Spotlight Theory of Change'; the 'Technical Guidance Note on the Six Pillars of Spotlight Theory of Change'; and the 'Civil Society National Reference Group: Guidance for set-up'.

¹¹³ The groups listed in Annex C for Spotlight programmes are: Adolescent girls; Elderly women; Indigenous women and girls; LGBTQI persons; Sex workers; Migrant women and girls; Women and girls from ethnic minorities and/or religious minorities; Women and girls living with HIV/AIDS; Women and girls with disabilities; and Rural women.

¹¹⁴ The following documents were reviewed for this assessment: [Leaving No One Behind – A UNSDG Operational Guide for UN Country Teams](#); [Intersectionality Resource Guide and Toolkit](#); [Leaving No One Behind: Equality and Non-discrimination at the Heart of Sustainable Development](#); [What Does it Mean to Leave No One Behind? A UNDP Discussion Paper and Framework for Implementation](#).

guide discussions among RUNOs on how to implement the LNOB principle in Spotlight programmes. One UN respondent highlighted how the lack of guidance on how to implement LNOB within Spotlight programmes also led to missed learning opportunities:

“There is no guidance or discussions in Spotlight on how to approach LNOB. Spotlight Initiative saw an opportunity but it also reveals how much we have not talked about. No learning through Spotlight on this.”

- RUNO representative

Across three case studies, UN respondents mentioned that LNOB guidance specific to Spotlight Initiative and their contexts would have been helpful.

One of the case studies found that some guidance had been developed by the programme to provide support on disability inclusion. A gender and disability analysis tool¹¹⁵ had been developed and provided guidance on conducting contextual analysis, programme planning, and M&E, among other areas. However, no further information was shared on how this toolkit was shared or implemented. Other good practice on documenting learning on LNOB was found in Latin America and the Caribbean, where several good practice notes on different aspects of LNOB had been developed, including addressing violence against women/girls with disabilities, violence against migrant women and girls, violence against Indigenous women, young people, and girls, and working with women and girls in contexts of social exclusion.¹¹⁶

Other case studies highlighted how the lack of LNOB guidance could lead to differing understandings of what it means to ‘LNOB’ in the context of EAWG programming.

In two Spotlight case study programmes, for example, there had been some debate around whether men and boys were being left behind – suggesting insufficient analysis of who is disproportionately affected by GBV, a structural rights violation, and limited understanding of the Initiative’s focus on the most marginalised women and girls in their diversity.¹¹⁷ Finding 2B.12 in the section on ‘Support for feminist/women’s movements’ elaborates further on this issue and its potential implications for women’s movements.

Another area where Spotlight Initiative lacked guidance was its approach to LGBTQI+ inclusion, particularly as it relates to the inclusion of women with diverse SOGIESC and gender-diverse people in EAWG programming.

It is unclear whether Spotlight Initiative’s engagement with LGBTQI+ groups consistently took an intersectional approach that centred the experiences of women with diverse SOGIESC and gender-diverse people who may be at disproportionate risk of intersecting gender-based and SOGIESC-based violence. Annex C only indicates whether CSO partners work with ‘LGBTQI+ persons’ without any information on

¹¹⁵ Spotlight Programme Malawi (not dated) Gender, SGBV and Disability Analysis Tool For Analysing Integration of Gender, SGBV and Disability in Program Planning and Implementation

¹¹⁶ See, for example, UNFPA (2021) [‘Responding to violence against girls and women with a disability’](#) and Spotlight Initiative (2022) ‘On working with women and girls in the context of structural exclusion’ ([‘La violencia contra las mujeres y niñas en contextos de exclusión estructural múltiple en Centroamérica’](#)).

¹¹⁷ While there is guidance on how to engage men and boys in Spotlight Initiative, the guidance does not address how to tackle backlash and situations such as those described here. See further discussion under AQ2.

whether these are constituency-led organisations (see Finding 3.4) and which LGBTQI+ groups they focus on. This conceals the extent to which Spotlight Initiative prioritised partnerships with women- and trans-led (LBT-led) CSOs and to what extent it focused on reaching lesbian, bisexual, and queer women, as well as gender-diverse people.¹¹⁸ One respondent had, for example, observed that while the programme brought a strong and much-welcomed focus on SOGIESC in EAWG programming, trans men had not benefited from any support in the programme: *"We did not have any trans men groups accessing the funding"* (Grantee). They explained that this may relate to queer organisations sometimes struggling to 'fit' into the framings of EAWG programmes. This further suggests limited intersectional and contextual understanding of how diverse LGBTQI+ persons may be at risk of violence in different contexts, where for examples trans men and non-binary people can face risk of violence based on being incorrectly perceived as (non-conforming) women, which can further intersect with homo-bi and transphobia.

The extent to which LNOB was understood as a cross-cutting theme in programmes varied. In some programmes, this was well understood and visible as a central aspect of the programme. In some others, LNOB was not consistently understood as a cross-cutting theme among all RUNOs and CSO partners. For example, in one case study programme, some CSO partners were fully aware of LNOB being a cross-cutting principle, while others were not and heard about LNOB as a cross-cutting principle for the first time during this assessment.

CSO partners in at least three Spotlight programme case studies included in this assessment also noted the limited guidance and insufficient unpacking of what LNOB means in their contexts. Respondents from CSO partners in different case studies expressed this in similar words:

"It's not enough to just have a statement that says we are going to work with marginalised groups – what was the particular strategy to do that?"

- civil society implementing partner

"More guidance and understanding were needed from Spotlight Initiative on what that means to unpack that big term you see in documents – what would it mean in the context of [case study context], so that we had some more guidance when we deliver on the ground."

- Spotlight programme grantee

The Metareview for Africa and Latin America¹¹⁹ states that Spotlight Initiative Global Secretariat would give LNOB further priority in Phase 2 by providing dedicated guidance and instructions, but that *"country programmes are encouraged to develop their own models of how to apply this*

¹¹⁸ In some case study countries, Spotlight programmes partnered with organisations that worked with lesbian, bisexual, and trans women. In other case studies, annual reports and respondents talked more broadly about LGBTQI+ organisations without specifying which groups they worked with.

¹¹⁹ Hera (2022). [Meta Review of the Spotlight Initiative: Latin America and Africa](#)

finding and recommendation based on their own context".¹²⁰ The assessment did not find evidence of any additional global LNOB guidance in Phase 2,¹²¹ but some country case studies did have an increased focus on LNOB in Phase 2, although others showed a decreased focus.

Mapping exercises were conducted across some Spotlight programmes to identify structurally marginalised women and girls to inform the programme's engagement with these groups. For example, in one case study a mapping exercise was conducted and presented to CSOs to support a programme's engagement with structurally marginalised groups, including LGBTQI+ people. It was unclear whether any similar exercises had been conducted, or this was highlighted as a gap, across other case study programmes. However, several Spotlight programmes included consultations with structurally marginalised groups at the design stage that informed LNOB approaches (see Finding 3.3). Some country programme documents include analysis of how some women and girls are at disproportionate risk of violence in their 'Situation analysis' sections, while some outline how and to what extent they will be reached by the programme. However, the depth of this analysis varies between country programme documents.

FINDING 3A.2: LNOB was considered in the formation of CSRGs, and the CSRGs acted as learning spaces and contributed to a stronger focus on LNOB in programmes. However, the LNOB principle was not fully realised in the operationalisation of the groups.

The guidance for establishing CS-NRGs states that organisations representing young women and groups facing intersecting forms of discrimination¹²² should be engaged in the groups.¹²³ It highlights the importance of operating in inclusive ways, including selecting venues that are accessible, covering transport expenses, and ensuring language accessibility.¹²⁴

The LNOB principle was considered to varied degrees in the CS-NRGs in the case study programmes. The assessment team found that across the majority of case study programmes, CS-NRGs were established to include members from structurally marginalised populations, with the groups being highlighted as inclusive spaces that reflected the LNOB principle. For example, in one case study the CS-NRG included members representing women and girls, youth, Indigenous groups, and LGBTI+ groups, while in another the group included Indigenous, Afro-Latino, rural, urban, LGBTQI+, sex workers, women with HIV, women who have experienced violence, and women of different professions. In other case study countries, the CS-NRG was said to be less inclusive:

¹²⁰ 'Follow up to the Midterm Assessment Findings and Recommendations: Africa and Latin America'.

¹²¹ However, the Spotlight Initiative Global Secretariat highlighted that the guidance on participatory M&E was rolled out in Phase 2, which aimed to contribute to "ensuring the principle of leaving no one behind is streamlined across the programme cycle" (Fostering Civil Society Engagement through Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation).

¹²² The guidance mentions "e.g. women and girls living in rural communities, women and girls who are survivors of violence, women and girls living with HIV/AIDS, women and girls from ethnic minorities and Indigenous communities, women and girls living with disabilities, etc."

¹²³ Spotlight Initiative (not dated) Civil Society National Reference Group: Guidance for set-up.

¹²⁴ Knowledge of English not being a requirement.

LEARNING ABOUT DISABILITY INCLUSION IN THE CSNRG, ZIMBABWE

"In fact, for us in Zimbabwe, having [member living with a disability] on the CSRG not only brought awareness of key disability issues, but also ensured we are conscious of the needs of our brothers and sisters. She will not have it during the CSRG meeting we decide to speak without acknowledging her needs. Over the last CSRG life-span, she has ensured all members of the CSRG attend basic training in sign language, as a means of bringing awareness to us on the importance of inclusion in all our interventions."

- RUNO representative

The LNOB principle was considered to varied degrees in the CS-NRGs in the case study programmes. The assessment team found that across the majority of case study programmes, CS-NRGs were established to include members from structurally marginalised populations, with the groups being highlighted as inclusive spaces that reflected the LNOB principle. For example, in one case study the CS-NRG included members representing women and girls, youth, Indigenous groups, and LGBTI+ groups, while in another the group included Indigenous, Afro-Latino, rural, urban, LGBTQI+, sex workers, women with HIV, women who have experienced violence, and women of different professions. In other case study countries, the CS-NRG was said to be less inclusive.

"[T]he civil society reference group didn't have a person with a disability. They didn't have a sex worker. They didn't have an LGBTQI representative. Didn't have an albino, didn't have etc. We were just us, as usual. So, if that is a place to show inclusion, we could have done better."

- CS-NRG member

In one case study where the CS-NRG was diverse in terms of composition, it was noted that power and participation in decision making were not equal among group members. Younger feminists as well as women from Indigenous or afro ethnic backgrounds did not feel included in important decision-making spaces by older, non-minority women in the group, either by not being invited or by others coming together to limit their voices. In addition to different levels of power, levels of participation and length of involvement in the CS-NRG were also contributing factors to the unequal participation and influence in decision making.

Attention was paid to ensuring accessibility in the CS-NRGs in some case study programmes (e.g. in selecting meeting venues, supporting transportation, and considering accessibility requirements for persons with disabilities), although this did not appear to be consistent across all programmes. One of the stronger examples identified by the assessment came from the Zimbabwe CS-NRG, during a FGD. A member of the CS-NRG explained that the group was very diverse and included one member living with a disability. The process of ensuring that the CS-NRG was an accessible space meant that *"the Spotlight programme in*

Zimbabwe had to rethink the whole discourse around inclusion", including the need to budget for accessibility requirements such as interpretation. They went on to explain that a lot of learning took place among CS-NRG members and the Spotlight programme team in this regard – something that was also seen in at least three other case study programmes, where the CS-NRGs were described as spaces for learning from members from structurally marginalised groups.

In other case study programmes, ensuring accessibility was more of a challenge. Some CS-NRGs struggled to include or retain members with disabilities. It is not clear whether this was due to insufficient support to meet accessibility requirements or ensure inclusive spaces, limited outreach to organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) and persons with disabilities, or due to other reasons unknown to the assessment team.

Another programme noted some challenges in ensuring the engagement of CS-NRG members in remote and less connected areas of the country. The challenges related to expectations to travel to meetings in the capital with short notice and to poor connectivity when the meetings shifted to being online. These were cited among the reasons for people dropping out of the group.

The assessment found that the voluntary nature of the CSRGs, where some CSRG members were compensated for expenses but not paid for their time and expertise, is not conducive from a LNOB perspective as it privileges members from more established or funded organisations (i.e. those that may be receiving compensation from elsewhere). One case study note observed that the *"unpaid nature of CS-NRG members poses challenges to full inclusivity"* as some may not be able to take on the role or sustain their involvement in the group, which included a significant unpaid workload. People from CSOs that can support their engagement are therefore more likely to be able to participate. In one case study programme, the CS-NRG requested the Spotlight programme support economically disadvantaged members to receive computers or phones as work tools in order to overcome some of these challenges, but this request was not provided for. A member of the CS-NRG raised issues around burnout in the group due to the demands on people's time without proper compensation, which they observed particularly affected members from structurally marginalised groups (e.g. sex workers and Indigenous women).

At the global level, from 2019 to 2020, more than 50% of the members of the CS-NRG represented structurally marginalised groups (e.g. women with disabilities, Indigenous women, sex workers, and LGBTIQ+ communities), giving this a score of 'significant' in terms of representation of constituencies.¹²⁵ Results from a survey with global, regional, and national CSRG members in December 2022 showed that 57% of respondents believed that the adherence to the principles of LNOB, transparency, and inclusivity in the engagement had been high.¹²⁶

As noted above, the intentional focus on LNOB in the establishment of the CSRGs led to diverse groups, inclusive of members from different structurally marginalised groups. However, despite the guidance for establishing CSRGs – which state that these should include

¹²⁵ Spotlight Initiative (2021) Spotlight Monitoring Scorecard 2019–2020.

¹²⁶ Spotlight Initiative (December 2022). Civil Society Reference Group Survey Analysis.

“organisations representing young women and groups facing intersecting forms of discrimination” – in many case study programmes, members were engaged as individuals rather than representatives of organisations. Being engaged as individuals, it was not clear whether and how members from structurally marginalised groups were ‘representing’ their constituencies, and if there were any expectations in terms of consulting with and feeding back to their constituencies. In one case study country, two members from so-called ‘key populations’ felt they were individual representatives rather than constituency representatives. The issue of members being engaged as individuals rather than ‘representatives’ is further discussed under AQ1.

FINDING 3A.3: Structurally marginalised individuals and constituency-led groups have been consulted and involved in decision making across Spotlight Initiative (albeit to varying extents), and there is some evidence of their influence on priorities and understandings of GBV in programmes. Evidence of involvement in decision making appeared more frequently at individual project level, while involvement in programme-level decision making appeared less frequently.

In several case studies, diverse and inclusive CSRGs were seen to lead to a stronger focus on structurally marginalised groups and intersectional understandings of violence, indicating that the CSRGs were able to influence programme design and implementation in some locations. In one case study, respondents attributed the programme’s strong focus on persons with disabilities in part to the CS-NRG. In another case study, respondents stated that members from structurally marginalised groups in the CS-NRG were instrumental in ensuring a strong focus on inclusion from the start. Members with disabilities and from the LGBTQI+ community contributed to shaping the programme’s understanding of GBV, increasing understanding of the violence that women with disabilities face and violence experienced on the basis of SOGIESC. Another good example is where a CS-NRG developed a report with recommendations on LNOB for the Spotlight programme, which included recommendations on how engagement with the LGBTQI+ community could be improved in light of the discriminatory laws that put up barriers to their open participation.

Another mechanism to engage structurally marginalised women and groups in programme design, which was seen in a few case studies but not consistently, was consultations. In one case study programme, for example, although the CS-RRG had limited representation from structurally marginalised groups, LGBTQI+ organisations felt that they were able to influence the programme during early consultations resulting in more attention to SOGIESC than they would usually see in an EAWG programme. Inclusive consultations were also noted to be part of the programme design process in two other case studies:

"I represented a WRO at one meeting which spoke about Spotlight and where we asked what we believed the funds should go towards – we made recommendations. What existed and how the spaces can be improved rather than inventing new services and spending monies unnecessarily."

- WRO representing the LGBTQI+ community

"We were pushing for LGBTQI+ organisations to also be able to be supported by Spotlight because of the high levels of violence that people with diverse SOGIESC face in the region. We wanted that to be a strong element of Spotlight Initiative in the Pacific [...] I think we influenced the process a lot. It was there, but we were pushing for it".

- Spotlight programme grantee

The assessment found limited evidence of structurally marginalised women and groups taking part in, or influencing, programme-level decision making, with notable exceptions where CSRG members from structurally marginalised groups were included in Spotlight programme governance bodies and committees. In one case study programme, for example, the CS-NRG included representation of different groups of structurally marginalised women, who were also nominated to be part of other Spotlight programme governance bodies and committees. In another case study, the programme Steering Committee included members of LGBTQI+ groups and disability groups who ensured that the priorities of these groups were clearly identified and addressed in the programme. Participation of LGBTQI+ civil society organisations and representatives of other groups, who have different aspects of their identities and lives criminalised (e.g. sex workers), in National or Regional Steering Committees was however not widely observed (except in this one case study), perhaps due to the composition of these committees where government actors hold seats and co-chair the committees.

There was more evidence of involvement of structurally marginalised women and groups in decision making at project level when constituency-led CSOs were engaged as implementing partners and grantees and were able to design their projects. For example, in one case study, where implementing partners included CSOs led by structurally marginalised women as sub-grantees (particularly LGBTQI+ women and girls, rural women and girls, and Indigenous women and girls), it was noted that they were involved in project design, implementation, and in some cases, decision making at this level. In other cases, constituency-led CSOs that were sub-grantees did not appear to enjoy the same level of engagement in decision making; some stated that they were engaged when projects were already planned and felt as if they were only brought in to implement activities.

FINDING 3A.4: Partnerships with constituency-led CSOs emerged as an important approach for engaging structurally marginalised women and groups in implementation, including as implementing partners and grantees. Small grant schemes in particular enabled constituency-led CSOs to access UN funding and address violence against structurally marginalised women and groups, although the grants tended to be short term.

In addition to ensuring structurally marginalised groups were represented on CSRGs, the assessment found that a common strategy to achieve its commitment to the principle of LNOB was through partnering with organisations led by and for structurally marginalised women and gender-diverse people (in this assessment termed ‘constituency-led organisations’). This was found to be an important approach for meaningfully engaging structurally marginalised women and groups in implementation, and in turn for reaching these populations (discussed further under Finding 3B.7). Constituency-led organisations were either engaged as implementing partners or as grantees under the small grant schemes, which the Grassroots Action Plan outlines as one of the recommended approaches for engaging local organisations and GROs.

Partnerships with constituency-led CSOs (as implementing partners and grantees) emerged as an important approach to implement the LNOB principle in Spotlight Initiative, which ranged from partnering with national and regional constituency-led organisations to local organisations and GROs, including unregistered groups. In some case study programmes, this was a clear, strong focus from the onset, although in others the assessment noted that the engagement of these organisations as partners varied between Phase 1 and Phase 2. Two reasons for this emerged. Firstly, some UN respondents were open about not having the internal capacity to partner with constituency-led organisations from the outset, as they may not have had the experience and networks to engage these organisations and, in some cases, it took them until the later stages of the programme to be able to implement this approach:

“We could have worked even harder to get them onboard. We managed to get one disability group in the third round. They are part of a bigger disability group. They are often left behind. They [women with disabilities] also experience violence, but who goes out to assist them? [...] At first, we neglected the disability groups. In the second round, we included them.”

- RUNO representative

Secondly, in one case study, the programme formed partnerships with constituency-led CSOs in Phase 1 but did not continue these partnerships in Phase 2 based on concerns around non-delivery of results and potential (mis)use of funds. The CSOs were not offered any capacity support to address the concerns before the decision was made that they would not continue in the programme.

As noted above, constituency-led CSOs were also engaged as grantees in small grant schemes – and in sub-granting mechanisms – which were seen as an effective approach for engaging these organisations in implementation. The small grants mechanism promoted a more flexible approach to funding, which helped address some of the challenges associated with accessing UN funding by some smaller GROs, as well as unregistered organisations – an important step for reaching groups that are otherwise at risk of being left behind in UN programmes (see also Finding 1A.5).

For example, in one case study programme, Spotlight Initiative worked hard to mitigate obstacles related to bureaucracy and to promote collaborations between formalised and informal organisations as a way to ensure that unregistered organisations could also receive support. This ensured that UN funding was accessible for smaller, local GROs run by and for the most structurally marginalised women, often for the first time.

In another case study programme, the small grantee scheme was designed so that it focused on different structurally marginalised constituencies in different grant windows, making deliberate efforts to reach these organisations and award projects that address violence against these groups. One round targeted OPDs and two subsequent rounds focused on addressing violence against the LGBTQI+ community. Furthermore, a sub-granting mechanism allowed unregistered LGBTQI+ organisations to enter consortiums with more established organisations (also put forth as one of the recommended approaches in the Grassroots Action Plan) and access funding. Sub-granting was also used in other case study programmes to reach unregistered groups.

However, respondents also shared some challenges related to this modality. The funding was relatively short term, which can put immense pressures on CSO partners to deliver a lot within short timeframes, while also not being conducive to transformative change. An LGBTQI+ CSO that was a recipient of a small grant felt that the UN funds *'activities'* not *'bodies'*, meaning that the organisation did not feel Spotlight Initiative was supporting them holistically to develop and become sustainable, but rather to implement activities on a short-term basis. This approach leads to a constant need to think about the next few months of funding, increasing the risk of stress and burnout.

While constituency-led groups were engaged, better reaching structurally marginalised groups, Spotlight Initiative did not aggregate or systematically track the partnerships with constituency-led groups. For example, as mentioned previously, while Annex C of programme annual reports captures information on which vulnerable/ marginalised populations are 'supported' by the CSOs that have received a Spotlight Initiative award, the document does not indicate whether CSOs are led by and for these constituencies, or whether they take an inclusive/intersectional approach or had specific projects or activities focused on structurally marginalised groups. That said, the assessment found that all case study programmes had some type of engagement with constituency-led CSOs, although this is not systematically tracked.

Reporting on the grants channelled through the Spotlight Initiative's partnerships with the UN Trust Fund and WPHF also captured information on CSO partners engaged in these programmes, and the structurally marginalised groups that were reached by this funding. In 2019 and 2020, more than half of the UN Trust Fund grantees were organisations working to end violence against structurally marginalised or excluded women and girls (16 working for

women living with disabilities, four with Indigenous women/women from minority ethnic groups, and 11 with refugee and internally displaced women).¹²⁷ As at December 2023, out of the 101 grants awarded by WPHF: 18% focused on improving the situation for women who are forcibly displaced; 31% on improving the lives of women and men living with disabilities; 20% targeted child and single mothers, and widows; 27% targeted youth and young women's active participation; 8% of projects supported Indigenous and ethnic minorities; and 3% supported LGBTQI+ communities and female sex workers.¹²⁸ However, as with Annex C, the reporting does not capture to what extent the awarded organisations were constituency-led.

FINDING 3A.5: Contracting constituency-led CSOs to provide capacity strengthening to other CSOs in Spotlight programmes is a promising approach as these organisations have expertise and are well placed to provide leadership on LNOB.

A promising approach that was seen in a few case studies was that constituency-led CSOs were contracted to lead on capacity-strengthening efforts with other CSO partners in Spotlight programmes. A Civil Society implementing partner (non-constituency-led) in one of the case study programmes described the rationale and value of engaging constituency-led organisations to lead on capacity-strengthening efforts to LNOB:

“They know the situation better, and for sustainability also, they work directly with the community-led organisations. They also did the capacity building to CSOs, [they] were invited to participate in capacity building to other partners – [these explained to us] what is disability inclusion and LGBTQI+?”

- civil society implementing partner

In one case study programme, an LGBTQI+ CSO helped deliver training on VAWG, domestic violence, and IPV to organisations working in the world of work to train participants in how to better support women who are disproportionately affected by violence and harassment in the workplace. The same programme also had a Learning Consortium¹²⁹ that engaged LGBTQI+ CSOs and OPDs to provide capacity building to other consortium members. In another case study programme, an OPD similarly provided capacity building to other CSOs and service providers in the Spotlight programme.

This approach supported the ‘mainstreaming’ of the LNOB principle, as non-constituency-led CSOs and service providers were trained on how to meaningfully engage with different marginalised groups. In most cases, the constituency-led CSOs that provided the capacity

¹²⁷ Spotlight Initiative (2021) ‘Spotlight Monitoring Scorecard 2019–2020’.

¹²⁸ WPHF (2023) Spotlight Dashboard (as at 5 December 2023).

¹²⁹ The Learning Consortium was led by two CS-IPs and engaged 23 CSOs, including CS-IPs but also smaller and less established CSOs and GROs who were not implementing partners of the Spotlight programme in Timor Leste.

building were already engaged as implementing partners or grantees. However, a slightly different approach was observed in one of the case study programmes.

SUB-QUESTION 3B: To what extent have Spotlight Initiative's activities and results across the six pillars taken an intersectional approach to reach and/or serve the most structurally marginalised women and girls in their diversity?

CSO-LED CAPACITY SUPPORT ON INTERSECTIONAL APPROACHES, PACIFIC REGIONAL PROGRAMME

In the Pacific Regional Spotlight Programme, a CSO with a strong focus on intersectionality (including working with lesbian and bisexual women and trans communities) was contracted as a vendor to support the regional programme's CSO partners with capacity support and training through establishing and running the Pacific Feminist Community of Practice (PacFemCOP). The PacFemCOP was intersectional both in its content as well as in terms of who it engaged, and was described as 'transformative' and highly relevant by partners. The modality of contracting a CSO (DIVA for Equality) to lead on capacity building and networking among civil society organisations in the Spotlight Programme was much appreciated and highlighted as an innovative practice in the region.

This sub-question explores whether and how Spotlight programme activities have adopted an intersectional approach and to what extent Spotlight Initiative's interventions have reached women and girls in their diversity, particularly those at most risk of being left behind. In addition to the role of constituency-led organisations in implementation (discussed in sub-question 3.1), this considers the work of non-representative CSO partners and to what extent their activities have been inclusive and intersectional. Spotlight Initiative's Theory of Change, Fund ToR, and annual reports all highlight the need to ensure an explicit LNOB focus throughout the programme's planning and implementation.¹³⁰ These and other documents detail the roles of diverse CSO partners in implementation and in reaching marginalised women and girls. Spotlight Initiative demonstrated its intention to reach structurally marginalised women in a number of ways across the different programmes.

FINDING 3B.6: Integrating LNOB in GBV services promoted more accessible and inclusive services and information for structurally marginalised groups.

The assessment learned that Spotlight programmes supported integration of marginalised groups' needs and priorities into mainstream GBV services to reach and serve marginalised women, girls, and gender-diverse people. This finding confirms the Metareview¹³¹ findings on

¹³⁰ Spotlight Initiative (2019) 'Global Annual Report 2018'.

¹³¹ Spotlight Initiative (not dated). Follow up to the Mid-Term Assessment Findings and Recommendations Africa and Latin America (internal document, not published)

Spotlight Initiative's efforts to adopt an intersectional approach in the design and implementation of programme activities. This included capacity building of service providers such as police, health personnel, and judiciary mobile courts to enhance their capacity in responding to the needs of structurally marginalised women, girls, and gender-diverse people. Evidence from programme activities shows that structurally marginalised groups such as women with disabilities, women and girls in remote and rural areas, women living with HIV, Indigenous women, LGBTQI+ communities, and sex workers have been reached through this approach, albeit to differing degrees across contexts.

The assessment team also noted that a number of programmes made efforts to provide accessible information to reach marginalised groups of women and girls, also part of making mainstream services more accessible. This was illustrated through several case study programmes that translated information about GBV services and laws into different Indigenous languages and formats accessible to those with disabilities. For example, the Spotlight programme in Argentina provides a good example of inclusive access to information and services.

SUPPORTING ACCESSIBLE GBV SERVICES, SPOTLIGHT PROGRAMME ARGENTINA

In Argentina, Spotlight has supported work to make the national GBV hotline 144 more accessible to women who speak languages other than Spanish, through an instant messaging system in five Indigenous languages (Wichí, Guaraní, Qom, Quechua and Mapuche) and five foreign languages (Russian, English, French, Chinese and Portuguese) through a Hotline 144 WhatsApp platform. Additionally, the Spotlight programme in Argentina supported the launch of a Hotline 144 platform for deaf and hard-of-hearing women.

FINDING 3B.7: Partnering with constituency-led CSOs helped Spotlight programmes better reach structurally marginalised women and girls and is a more effective approach to mainstreaming LNOB and reaching hard to reach populations than working with CSOs that are not constituency-led.

The assessment learnt that engagement of constituency-led CSOs was effective in reaching and serving diverse constituencies of structurally marginalised women and girls. Lessons learned across evaluations on civil society engagement in LNOB programming¹³² indicate that provision of essential services by CSOs can be a viable option for providing support to structurally marginalised groups, especially where accessing public services through official means may create risks for certain populations. In light of this lesson, the Metareview¹³³ shows that the engagement with constituency-led CSOs supported the LNOB principle as

¹³² UNDP Independent Evaluation Office (2022). [Lesson Learned on Civil Society engagement in Leave No One Behind Programming](#).

¹³³ Hera (2022). [Meta Review of the Spotlight Initiative: Latin America and Africa](#)

evidenced by a wide spectrum of marginalised groups that were reached by these CSOs, including adolescent girls, elderly women, Indigenous women and girls, LGBTQI+ persons, sex workers, migrant women and girls, women and girls from ethnic minorities and/or religious minorities, women and girls living with HIV/AIDS, women and girls living with disabilities, and other marginalised groups relevant in national contexts. This contributed to reaching 24% of rural women, 23% women and girls living with disabilities, and 60% of other marginalised groups.¹³⁴ Several of the assessment's case studies similarly found that Spotlight Initiative reached a diversity of structurally marginalised groups by partnering with constituency-led CSOs, including those led by and for older women facing GBV, women living with HIV, women who use drugs, Indigenous women, young people, and transgender and lesbian women.

The assessment noted that, where constituency-led CSOs were engaged, reaching marginalised groups had positive outcomes. Constituency-led groups could easily access relevant networks and had built trust with their constituencies. The activities of the constituency-led CSOs were tailored to the needs and priorities of the marginalised groups. For example, in one case study programme, an LGBTQI+ organisation and an OPD mobilised their communities to participate in activities on municipality level, advocating for their right to live free from violence. Another example from Rwanda (see box) illustrates the critical importance of engaging CSOs that are led by and for the communities they serve, as they are aware of their situation, needs, and priorities and can respond accordingly.

REACHING WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES DURING COVID-19, RWANDA

"My organisation was part of the Spotlight Initiative when it was the critical time of COVID-19. A meaningful engagement is that engagement that deeply digs into critical situation and prioritises solutions and strategies crafted by the rights holders and or frontline advocates! I remember Spotlight Initiative came at the time my organisation was totally disconnected from the community of girls and women with disabilities we served during the COVID-19 lock down. While many other organisations were shifting to online platforms to continue some of their service delivery my organisation had no appropriate technology tools and skills to quickly adapt to the situation yet risks of violence have increase specifically for women with disabilities living in isolated houses in the community. Spotlight funding supported the organisation to bridge this gap by distributing appropriate smartphones to frontline community volunteers, who were girls and women with disabilities, that help to connect to community and spread out the information and updates on COVID-19 as well as establishing toll free line to continue provide psychosocial and legal aid support to victims. This intervention through UNTF was mindful of the situation and so quick to respond to threats and challenges at the frontline."

- Story submitted through the story collection exercise

¹³⁴ Spotlight Initiative (not dated). Follow up to the Mid-Term Assessment Findings and Recommendations Africa and Latin America (internal document, not published)

Evidence from this assessment suggests working with constituency-led organisations was more effective than expecting non-constituency-led organisations to be able to effectively and meaningfully mainstream the principle of LNOB and reach the most marginalised

(when not being sufficiently supported to do so). The assessment learnt that non-constituency-led CSOs faced challenges with identifying and mobilising groups such as LGBTQI+ persons and sex workers in contexts with high levels of stigma and repressive legal environments. Some also noted challenges with reaching women with disabilities. Spotlight Initiative had an expectation that all CSOs would be able to mainstream and reach marginalised groups and, while some guidance was provided on this (see Finding 3.1), the assessment's case studies largely indicate that guidance, support, and budgets were insufficient to match these expectations.¹³⁵

Where non-constituency-led CSOs were able to reach and meaningfully engage structurally marginalised groups, this was based on longstanding support to these groups and the ability to tailor activities appropriately to targeted groups. One such example was noted in one of the case studies, where a feminist organisation that had been active for 20 years had long supported women in the LGBTQI+ community and has adapted its activities to meet the needs of these women, including through providing psychosocial support and counselling (including group counselling) for lesbian women. The CSO, which was a Spotlight implementing partner, stated that Spotlight "*funding helped [organisation's name] to deliver the healthy relationships counselling, which offered a safe space for couples of same-sex to receive support and counselling as well*" (Civil Society Implementing Partner representative).

While, in general, programme-level guidance and support to non-constituency-led CSOs on how to take a LNOB approach were insufficient, the assessment found some good examples where CSO partners described how being part of Spotlight Initiative had helped them to be more inclusive in their activities.

For example, in one of the case study programmes a grantee partner described how they had started providing trainings to women and girls with disabilities and collaborated with the National Centre for People Living With Disabilities to ensure disability inclusion expertise in this training, and are now considering using this inclusive approach across all their activities:

¹³⁵ For example, in one case study programme, some CSO implementers felt that the programme made assumptions about their ability to reach different categories of marginalised groups based on their area of work. More specifically, there was an assumption that organisations whose focus was HIV could easily understand and work on issues faced by those in the LGBTQI+ community and sex workers and could easily reach out to them: "*[XX] was never a player in Pillar 6; it was only a player in prevention. They were understood as an organisation who have a big component of HIV and, to that extent, they easily understand issues of LGBTI, of sex work, of HIV and that movement includes many actors, which is true, but which was an assumption that when you fund [xx] they will actually find sex workers, they will reach out to LGBTQI!*". (CS-NRG member and an implementing partner).

"We are thinking about bringing women with disabilities into our regular training, taking an inclusive approach. We are looking at including 2–3 women with disabilities in all trainings, which broadly addresses issues. Women with disabilities are more vulnerable than the ones we call 'vulnerable'. All the training we have said we have 'done to vulnerable' women, but never included women with disabilities before. Thanks to Spotlight, we got into working with women with disabilities."

- Spotlight programme grantee

FINDING 3B.8: The provision of reasonable accommodations was key in creating inclusive spaces for structurally marginalised women and groups to participate in activities. However, programmes did not always reflect inclusion and embrace diversity across the entire programme cycle from design to implementation, through for example supporting not only physical accessibility but also intentionally designing activities to be relevant to members of structurally marginalised groups.

Reasonable accommodations are one of the enablers of the implementation of the LNOB principle. To meaningfully implement LNOB, the 'Mid-Term Assessment Findings and Recommendations Africa and Latin America' document¹³⁶ highlights the requirement of further investments, and the design of new and more adapted tools and approaches to create a conducive environment for the engagement and participation of marginalised groups. In response to this finding, some programmes provided reasonable accommodations that helped marginalised groups of women and girls to engage and participate in activities. Accommodations included provision of assistive devices and services to women with disabilities, transport and lodging for those from remote areas, and creating spaces for specific marginalised groups to engage.

One good example of a reasonable accommodation came from a CS-NRG where a member of the CS-NRG was a woman living with a hearing impairment. The CS-NRG made budgetary accommodation to provide a sign language translator to enable her to participate in the CS-NRG activities. According to a respondent from the CS-NRG, *"we had to cascade the budgetary issues – if we wanted her to participate, we knew we needed a translator so she could actively participate in the entire process"*. Similarly, in one of the assessment's case study programmes, reasonable accommodations included providing hearing and mobility assistive devices, as well as covering transport and accommodation costs for those living in remote locations. However, these inclusive practices were not consistently implemented across programmes or among

¹³⁶ Spotlight Initiative (not dated). Follow up to the Mid-Term Assessment Findings and Recommendations Africa and Latin America (internal document, not published)

RUNOs. The assessment learnt from one case study programme, for example,¹³⁷ that Spotlight Initiative had no budget guidance on how to include costs for reasonable accommodation, as such disability inclusion was not always fully integrated and resourced.

While programmes tried to ensure that activities included representatives of marginalised groups (as participants), programmes (including RUNOs and CSO partners) did not always reflect inclusion and embrace diversity from design to implementation.

For example, one respondent shared that *“as part of our projects we always looked at how disabled people would be present at our meetings, how to provide them with maximum comfort”* (RUNO representative). Similar sentiments were shared by other respondents (from both RUNOs and CSO partners) about activities being inclusive and non-discriminatory in the sense that they were open to participants from structurally marginalised groups, as they were invited and sometimes supported (through provision of reasonable accommodations) to attend activities. However, the assessment noted that, while accessibility and support was given for structurally marginalised people to be able to physically attend activities (e.g. through transport and reasonable accommodations), the same attention was not paid to creating inclusive and enabling environments for the meaningful engagement of other structurally marginalised groups such as LGBTQI+ persons and sex workers. There were, for example, some reports of marginalised groups declining participation due to security concerns, while implementers labelled marginalised groups as ‘shy’ or ‘hard to identify’. Furthermore, there is a difference between intentionally designing and adapting activities to be relevant and appropriate for structurally marginalised groups and their needs and priorities in relation to GBV and being inclusive by ensuring diverse representation and participation (but with limited attention to diverse needs and priorities). The assessment found fewer examples of the former approach, although with some noticeable exceptions of intersectional approaches and activities that were tailored to the needs and priorities of women and girls in their diversity, including from structurally marginalised groups (see Finding 3.B7 for examples).

FINDING 3B.9: Reaching of marginalised women and groups in implementation varied across the assessment’s case studies. While some programmes found innovative ways to reach structurally marginalised groups, the lack of guidance on how to engage structurally marginalised groups, especially in hostile contexts, was a significant gap.

The Spotlight Technical Guidance Note¹³⁸ suggests programmes target marginalised groups according to the operational context. Spotlight Initiative in some of the case study programmes did well in identifying a number of marginalised groups through mappings¹³⁹ and in consultations (see Finding 3A.1) that the programmes engaged with, reaching a range of

¹³⁷ Stakeholders in Liberia highlighted that lack of funding restricted the extent to which marginalised groups were involved in their diversity, especially people with disabilities. Future programming could consider whether adequate funding is available to enable implementing partners to ensure reasonable accommodations for people with disabilities to ensure their participation.

¹³⁸ Spotlight Initiative (no date) Technical Guidance on the Six Pillars of the Spotlight Theory of Change.

¹³⁹ See the Liberia and Malawi case studies.

structurally marginalised populations in different contexts (see Finding 3B.7). The extent to which different structurally marginalised groups were reached varied by context, however.

Spotlight Initiative also did well in reaching marginalised groups in remote/rural areas.

The assessment noted efforts, including in Malawi and Liberia, to address the intersectional needs of women and girls experiencing different types of violence in different locations. Services – such as mobile courts and healthcare – were taken to hard-to-reach areas or transportation was provided to help women and girls access services.

In some programmes, however, challenging socio, cultural and legal environments and repressive governments were a major cause of programmes ‘treading carefully’ in their choice of which groups of marginalised women and girls to engage with.

The United Nations Country Team’s (UNCT) ‘Operational Guidelines on LNOB’¹⁴⁰ urge the UN to use its convening power to create an enabling environment for the participation of threatened or discriminated groups such as persons with disabilities, young people, Indigenous peoples, migrant workers, LGBTQI+ persons, people living with HIV, and human rights defenders. A number of the case studies conducted for this assessment took place in repressive contexts for LGBTQI+ people and sex workers in particular, where these groups are criminalised, highly stigmatised, and/or targets for ongoing backlash. Spotlight programmes in some repressive contexts were still able to reach these groups by adapting their approaches. For example, in one case study, Spotlight Initiative found ways to engage LGBTQI+ organisations in implementation through the use of different funding modalities which were not subjected to the same scrutiny by government officials as direct contracting arrangements which required government clearance.

Despite some innovative ways of addressing such challenges, there was no specific guideline on how to safely and meaningfully engage structurally marginalised groups in hostile contexts where the government does not recognise the rights of these groups (e.g. LGBTQI+ people and sex workers), and some programmes did not find ways to meaningfully engage the most marginalised groups in their contexts due to legal or other barriers. Furthermore, while Spotlight Initiative developed guidance on how to protect and mitigate risks for women human rights defenders in their engagement with the Initiative,¹⁴¹ this does not address risks facing LGBTQI+ human rights defenders in particular, which would have been highly relevant to include given Spotlight Initiative’s focus on including LGBTQI+ people.

FINDING 3B.10: Spotlight Initiative had some guidance on data disaggregation, but this did not include guidance on whether and how to ethically and safely collect data related to women in their diversity and structurally marginalised groups.

Spotlight Initiative’s M&E strategy recognises the principle of LNOB, and states that the principle will be integrated in relevant tools and mechanisms. In regard to data disaggregation, it states that “*indicators should be disaggregated, where relevant, by income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability and geographic location, or other characteristics*”,

¹⁴⁰ UNSDG, 2022 Operationalising Leaving no one behind. Good Practice Note for UN Country Teams

¹⁴¹ Spotlight Initiative (2022) ‘Spotlight-Specific Integrated Protection Approach: Protecting and Mitigating Risks for Women Human Rights Defenders in their Engagement with Spotlight Initiative’.

and commits to setting up “specific mechanisms to track the participation of women and girls, including those facing intersecting forms of discrimination, and the groups that represent them (CSOs) in decision making and in the design of the Spotlight Initiative.”¹⁴² The Spotlight Initiative Global Results Framework (i.e. the menu of indicators) further elaborates on what ‘other characteristics’ or ‘other status’ may entail, detailing that they include: “discrimination on the basis of age (with attention to youth and older persons), nationality, marital and family status, sexual orientation and gender identity, health status (including HIV), place of residence, economic and social situation, and civil, political or other status.”¹⁴³

Spotlight Initiative’s ability to collect and disaggregate data to achieve the ambitions set out in the M&E Strategy, including on the extent to which programmes’ activities engaged or reached marginalised women and left-behind groups across the pillars, varied. While some data disaggregation guidance existed, it primarily¹⁴⁴ focused on gender, ethnicity, location, socioeconomic status, and disability. While programming data may have been disaggregated by some categories, it was not done so systematically across all categories or across all programmes. Spotlight programmes’ reporting did not, for example, always gender-disaggregate for persons with disabilities reached by programming, or for the type of disabilities, or the total number of persons with disabilities reached.

Similarly, reporting on the reach of LGBTQI+ persons was not disaggregated (or not reported on in annual reports). Reporting on ‘LGBTQI+ people’ as one group risks homogenising LGBTQI+ persons’ experiences and does not pay attention to how intersecting risk factors rooted in patriarchy, misogyny, homo-, bi-, and transphobia can put women and gender-diverse people at particular risk of GBV.¹⁴⁵ This further contributes to an artificial divide between ‘women and girls’ and ‘LGBTQI+’ people, with limited recognition of the fact that many LGBTQI+ persons identify as women, and that trans men and non-binary people can also face violence based on their real or perceived gender identity (e.g. due to transphobia, or where they may face violence on the basis of being perceived as non-conforming women in patriarchal societies).

The assessment found that Spotlight Initiative faced challenges collecting the type of disaggregated data it intended to, and hence in reporting on the reach and inclusion of structurally marginalised groups. This was not only the case in hostile sociopolitical and repressive legal contexts where collecting data on sensitive characteristics would potentially not be safe, but appeared to be a challenge across many programmes. The assessment found that no case study programme had clarity on how to collect disaggregated data in consistent and safe ways, as existing guidance did not provide practical guidance on whether and how to collect this data and did not address the safety and ethical considerations that come with collecting sensitive data (e.g. on SOGIESC).

¹⁴² Spotlight Initiative (2020) M&E Strategy

¹⁴³ Spotlight Initiative (2018) Global Results Framework. Menu of indicators

¹⁴⁴ Global results framework; Spotlight Indicator Tipsheet

¹⁴⁵ For a discussion of the broader trend of homogenising diverse SOGIESC experiences in data collection and research, and associated risks and limitations, see Myrntinen, H. and Schulz, P. (2022) [Broadening the scope but reasserting male privilege? Potential patriarchal pitfalls of inclusive approaches to gender-based violence](#), *International Feminist Journal of Politics*.

Some programmes expressed a need for guidance and strategies on how to collect disaggregated data – in other words, how to make sure they were being intentional about relevant LNOB-focused disaggregation beyond the age, gender, and disability data collection. A respondent from a RUNO in one case study explained how the programme made efforts to support implementing partners to collect data on the engagement with structurally marginalised groups, after recognising this knowledge gap:

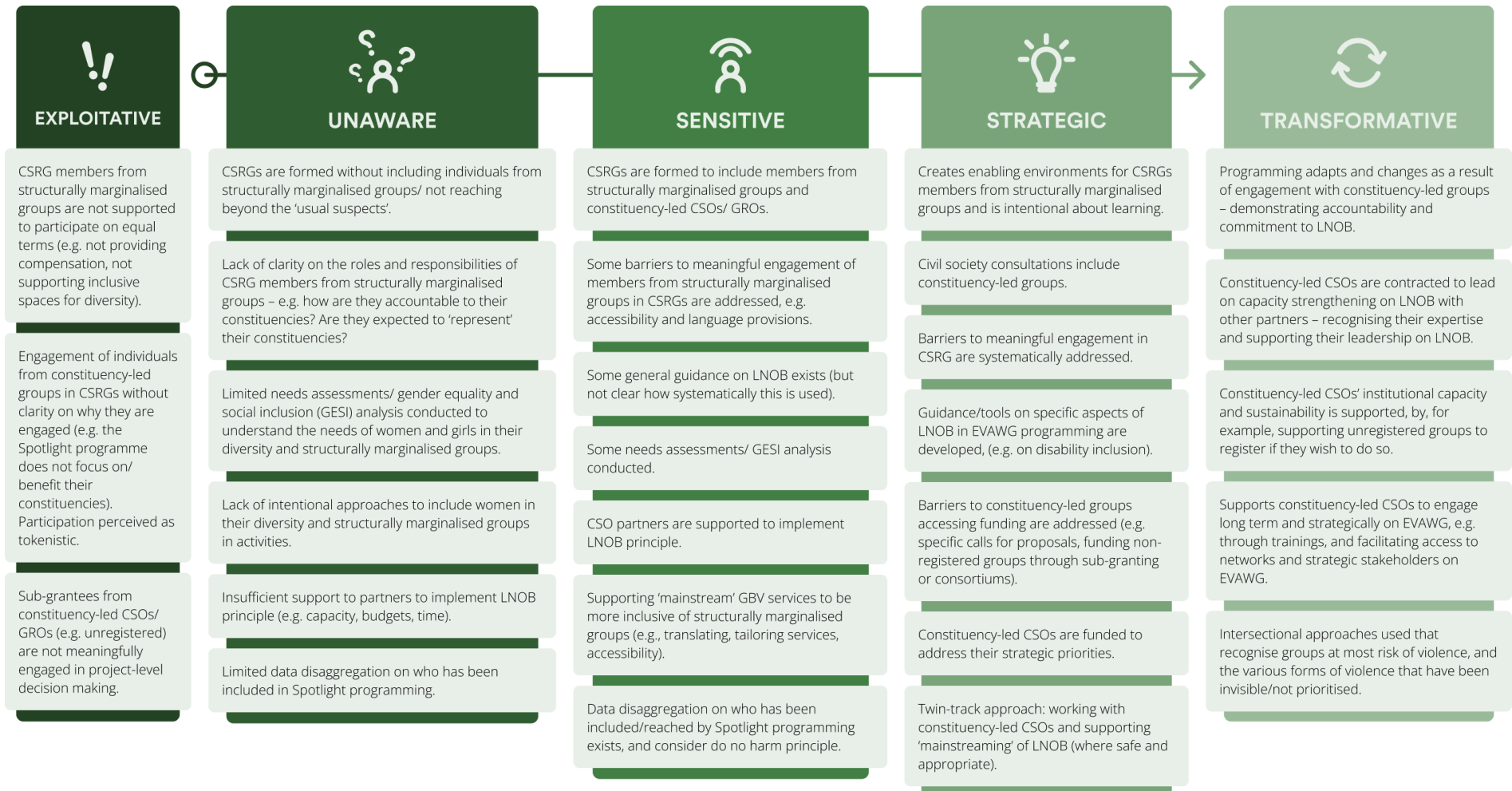
“Not all implementing partners understood correctly this LNOB principle at the beginning of the Spotlight programme. Then it became clear from the reports [of implementing partners] that it was necessary to approach the needs of people in more detail, provide a breakdown of beneficiaries, etc. Then, during the trainings, marginalised groups were indicated – there were separate sessions to eliminate these gaps in knowledge, provided with specific methodological guidelines.”

- RUNO representative

Leave no one behind

APPROACHES ALONG THE TRANSFORMATIVE CONTINUUM

The assessment uses a Transformative Continuum to capture the type of interventions/approaches observed for each theme, and where they fall along the continuum. This aims to support learning and discussion of how programmes to end violence against women and girls can be more transformative, and what the process towards the transformative level could look like. The continuum highlights illustrative examples of approaches from across the programme case studies; it does not, however, indicate how common these approaches were across the Initiative. Instead, as noted, the continuum presents a range of approaches observed to support learning.





3.4. Transforming power dynamics

ASSESSMENT QUESTION 4:

What contribution has Spotlight Initiative made to transforming power dynamics and pre-existing structures to allow for sustainable change?

Spotlight Initiative set out to be transformative, in both *what it did* and *how it worked* to prevent and respond to VAWG.

“Civil society is a key stakeholder of the Spotlight Initiative. The Initiative’s engagement with civil society recognises the leading role that women’s movements have played in advancing progress on ending violence against women and girls (VAWG) and is guided by a human rights-based approach, including the central principle of leaving no one behind.”¹⁴⁶

The previous sections have highlighted aspects of the transformative approach related to CSO engagement (in governance and implementation), movement building, and the principle of LNOB. This final AQ now explores the extent to which Spotlight Initiative was able to work differently across these three areas to transform power dynamics and pre-existing structures to support transformative, sustainable change (in a short timeframe). The section explores power dynamics at different levels, including within Spotlight Initiative programmes themselves, and among RUNOs, implementing partners, grantees, government, and the broader civil society sector. It also explores the extent to which the Initiative was able to work in a transformative way to address the root causes that drive VAWG, including gender and other forms of inequality and harmful norms.

FINDING 4.1: Spotlight Initiative has demonstrated the potential for the UN to work in more transformative ways, including in funding and supporting ‘non-usual suspects’, although these approaches are still on a small scale.

In line with the Grassroots Action Plan (and often under Pillar 6 of programmes), the assessment found that efforts were made across Spotlight programmes (and RUNOs) to reach out to smaller GROs and WROs by, for example, establishing small grants programmes, either through the partnership with the UN Trust Fund and WPHF (as noted above), or through separate contracting arrangements.

The small grants mechanism demonstrates that Spotlight programmes innovated and adapted processes and were successful to an extent in providing flexible funding to organisations,

¹⁴⁶ Spotlight Initiative (2017) Fund ToR – Description of the Action Spotlight Initiative Rider II.

albeit on a small scale and over short timeframes (many CSOs received short-term funding of six months or less).

Furthermore, the small grants mechanism in the Pacific Regional Programme provides an example of other elements of more transformative approaches in EAWG programming – including working directly with WROs, GROs, and constituency-led organisations to end violence – and by doing so addressing some of the systematic barriers to accessing funding. This way of working challenges some of the traditional power structures in the sector, where systems have often privileged more established partners of the UN (typically international or national organisations).

However, the assessment found very few examples of where this funding was for core, institutional support; it seemed to be predominately for activities and/or attendance at events or in networking spaces, with only a small percentage allocated to core costs. The two civil society grant-giving programmes (the partnerships with the UN Trust Fund and WPHF) have the mechanisms and systems in place to provide more feminist funding, but still faced challenges providing the type of long-term, flexible, trust-based funding that small organisations really need.

In addition to small grants mechanisms, Spotlight programmes developed other ways to support organisations that might otherwise not meet the stringent funding criteria. This included encouraging partnership, consortia arrangements and sub-granting, for smaller organisations to access funding through a larger implementing partner or amending the requirements for registration in some cases. These innovations were particularly prevalent during COVID-19, which illustrates that flexibility is possible within the system where there is senior-level commitment. This was also highlighted in the Meta Review of Spotlight Initiative¹⁴⁷.

However, much of the UN's financial processes continue to be at odds with a more transformative, feminist, rights-based approach to funding, even as they try to innovate and adapt. More is needed to facilitate this type of funding, which is defined for this thematic assessment as core, multi-year, flexible funding that is not tied or contingent.

FINDING 4.2: Spotlight Initiative responded positively to pressure and advocacy from civil society and made changes to governance and decision-making structures as part of efforts to increase the meaningful involvement of civil society. However, despite important changes to governance and decision-making structures, not all civil society partners felt they were engaged as equal participants.

Spotlight Initiative recognised that power is often held by those who lead and make decisions, and part of its approach to increasing the voice and meaningful participation of civil society was to engage civil society actors in decision making. Mechanisms were developed to ensure civil society were represented at the highest level of the Initiative's governance structures, and these efforts are to be commended.

¹⁴⁷ Hera (2022). [Meta Review of the Spotlight Initiative: Latin America and Africa](#)

Several examples are provided earlier in this report of where Spotlight Initiative adapted and developed processes in response to civil society advocacy and lobbying (for example, the addition of Pillar 6, the development of compensation guidelines, the inclusion of CSRG members on steering committees, and the specific forms of violence addressed at country level). However, there were challenges in regard to ensuring these structures allowed for equal opportunities to participate in decision making and drive strategic direction. This is explored in detail under AQ1 above.

Members of CSRGs did not always feel their role was clear or that they were equal partners in decision making. While one or two civil society representatives nominated from the CSRGs sat in on national, regional, or global steering committees, these structures often remained ‘top-down’ and the experience of members sitting at this level varied considerably. One person shared their positive experience during an FGD:

“We had a voice at the table, amazing co-chairs who wanted to hear our voice – in terms of saying that our monitoring role was very important”

- CS-NRG and national steering committee member

Others reported that they did not always feel they had a ‘equal seat at the table’ but were merely there to ensure that the Committee met its membership requirements as per the Fund’s structure:

“The contribution that civil society can make is very limited – they want us there (on the Governing Body), but our power is limited. They do give us space to ask questions, and let us give opinions, but not sure how much we contribute to decision making – that could be the structure in which we operate. I would have liked to see more in terms of them taking our comments more seriously.”

- CS-NRG member

This is also picked up in the recent Dalberg Institutional History Report, which refers to a “*top-down governance structure*” in which many decisions were imposed rather than created, which resonates with the assessment’s findings.¹⁴⁸

FINDING 4.3: Spotlight Initiative is a centrally designed global programme. While this helped ensure consistency with the evidence-based design at scale, and improved the ability to coherently aggregate results, many countries felt the framework was ‘imposed’ and was not adequately contextualised or flexible enough to allow for localisation and recognise contextual experience, expertise, and knowledge.

¹⁴⁸ Dalberg (2023) ‘Tracing the institutional history of Spotlight Initiative to eliminate violence against women and girls’.

There are many important and positive reasons why an ambitious programme of this nature should take a global approach to design, building on the evidence base and good practice in the sector, to ensure fidelity to design, scale, and capture global impact – which is what Spotlight Initiative did with its comprehensive six-pillar Theory of Change. However, **there were several challenges with this centralised approach, which impacted how Spotlight programmes were perceived at country and regional level, and the extent to which programmes could adequately contextualise the framework.**

“Spotlight, in my view, assumed that the theory of change underlying Spotlight was the theory of change that would be relevant to the Caribbean. It was imposed. But I believe it is important to adapt. You think globally and act locally. So, it is necessary to adapt to the local context.”

- RUNO representative

Taking a global, rights-based, and inclusive approach that cannot be swayed by local anti-gender politics is crucial in the current global context. However, it is also important to adapt the global design to suit national and local contexts, as well as to ensure a transformative, contextualised programme driven by diverse local realities. While efforts were made to contextualise the programme – in particular, in relation to what types of violence were prioritised – these efforts were relatively limited, and in some cases, the rationale for the contextualisation was not well understood or supported by civil society actors.

A significant factor hindering Spotlight Initiative’s ability to be more locally led and contextually relevant was the very short inception phase, which did not allow for adequate consultation and adaptation, which was also highlighted by the Midterm assessment.¹⁴⁹

In the case of one programme, stakeholders cited the challenges and tensions experienced in the region at the beginning, as there was already an existing EVAWG programme running in the region under a separate governing structure. The Spotlight programme was seen by some as creating a parallel system and programme and that it would have been better to have joined forces with the already-existing initiative. While stakeholders were consulted to some extent in the design of the programme, some have cast doubt on how much power they actually had to effect real change in the programme.

FINDING 4.4: Spotlight Initiative has provided good examples of UN Reform, specifically related to inter-agency coordination and the enhanced role of the Resident Coordinator. However, existing patterns of engagement and agency, as well as certain donor dynamics, appear to be hampering consistent progress.

¹⁴⁹ Hera (2022) ‘Metareview of the Spotlight Initiative: Africa and Latin America’.

While this assessment did not set out to evaluate UN Reform, certain aspects of this have emerged as critical for the achievement of the ambition of Spotlight Initiative to work in a transformative way. The earlier sections of the report have discussed aspects of UN Reform and the extent to which systems and processes were harmonised to facilitate civil society's engagement with the programmes at country and regional level. This finding relates to the ambition for the Initiative to work in a radically different way, through modelling UN Reform, looking specifically at aspects of inter-agency coordination and collaboration.

Spotlight Initiative was intended to demonstrate and align with UN Reform principles, which set out how the UN Development System can be more integrated and focused on delivery at country level to deliver on the SDG agenda. This included ensuring a reinvigorated Resident Coordinator System, clearer lines of accountability from UNCT to host governments, and streamlining operating practices, including back office and service centres.¹⁵⁰ The opportunity provided by the EU with this funding has been variously described by UN respondents as an *"alignment of the planets"* or a situation where *"the ship was being built as it sailed."* The findings from the assessment tend to concur with the latter view.

There were promising examples across Spotlight programmes of UN Reform, with one respondent (see below) noting that, through the Spotlight programme in their country, "One UN was put into practice for the first time." Examples of robust inter-agency collaboration and technical collaboration were found across programmes. Agencies also came together programmatically – to develop internal agreements, Joint Expressions of Interest, or joint ToR, and in one case issuing a joint contract to a CSO that was providing support across pillars working with different RUNOs.

The role of the Resident Coordinator was heralded as improving coordination across several programmes as well. For example, in many countries the Resident Coordinator established pillar technical coordination groups and galvanised stakeholders at district or provincial level to come together for joint planning and information sharing. Some RUNOs shared the following positive experiences with the assessment team:

¹⁵⁰ See [UN development system reform 101 | United to Reform](#) for further details of UN Reform.

“I just want to acknowledge that power dynamics will always be there wherever you have different parties, even in our homes. I think one of the things we struggle with is the dynamics. But I think there was an effort to make sure that the different agencies are working together. There could have been pitfalls here and there, but the effort was there. The joint meetings, the joint reporting, having a coordinator for the whole Spotlight programme. I think there were efforts to make sure that agencies move sort of in harmony.”

- RUNO representative

“It was this principle of One UN that was put into practice for the first time [here]. Everyone was on an equal footing, there was no struggle for power and dominance, there was no ‘first they, then we’ – the work went in parallel.”

- RUNO representative

However, the extent to which Spotlight Initiative was able to make radical and transformative changes to the ways of working with civil society, as it has set out to do in its ambitious vision, varied across programmes and was limited on the whole. When the programme was launched, UN Reform was underway but processes and systems had yet to be rolled out across agencies and geographies. The situation was further complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which diverted attention and resources. Operationalising UNDS reform will clearly take time and the timeline of Spotlight Initiative was too short to achieve these changes across the board.¹⁵¹

There also seems to be deeper, more structural barriers, related to UN agencies’ specific systems and wider organisational culture (where there may be issues of competition and trust). These barriers make harmonising and simplifying UN processes for civil society a nearly impossible task without a much more radical overhaul of the UN system.

“Each UN agency has its policy, rule... It is impossible for us to override these differences... there should be ONE system... There was no structural change within the UN to facilitate this. However, the technical collaboration went well between RUNOs”

- RUNO representative

The assessment found some examples of duplication among RUNOs in terms of activities being implemented (e.g. two agencies supporting mobile legal clinics in the same location were effectively competing against each other or seeing the same cases), partners being funded, or

¹⁵¹ This is highlighted in Hera (2022) [Metareview of the Spotlight Initiative: Latin America and Africa](#), as well as Dalberg (2023) ‘Tracing the institutional history of Spotlight Initiative to eliminate violence against women and girls’.

multiple community events competing with each other. All of these issues created challenges for both communities and CSOs, which were raised with the assessment team.

The Metareview of Spotlight Initiative identified the challenge of RUNOs competing for visibility and funding: *“whereas there is generally positive feedback from implementing partners on the value of ‘working as one’, there are also frustrations that came up when RUNOs competed for visibility and acknowledgement before IPs and government agencies... one MDA commented that RUNOs each implement internal workplans and seek to be acknowledged as individual agencies as opposed to one UN.”*¹⁵²

This situation is not unique to any one Spotlight programme, nor is it unique to Spotlight Initiative: when UN agencies have to compete for extremely limited resources (for efforts to end GBV and advance women’s rights), among the same donor pool, the ways donors fund can reinforce competition by pitting UN agencies against one another:

“Sharing of resources creates apprehension. We need to recognise each other’s contributions but inherently it is difficult. Delivering as one has challenges.”

RUNO representative

Spotlight Initiative set out to demonstrate radical change, including in relation to UN Reform and in how it worked with civil society over a relatively short timeframe. It has contributed to both efforts, but with the best will in the world this is a challenging ambition to fully realise.

FINDING 4.5: Mechanisms in place to cascade funding down to smaller GROs were successful in reaching the ‘non-usual suspects’ in some cases. However, a ‘ripple effect’ of pressure was often passed down to sub-grantees, which undermined efforts to rebalance traditional power relationships and led to stress and tensions.

In order to get funding to smaller, community-based and grassroots organisations that might not have met UN funding requirements, Spotlight programmes brought organisations together to create consortiums or establish sub-granting partnerships. Sub-grantee partners were valued for their knowledge and proximity to communities, as well as for their ability to deliver specific activities across different outcome areas in line with their expertise.

At the same time, sub-grantee CSOs (usually grassroots groups) shared examples of considerable pressure being passed down to them, in terms of delivering results, spending funds, and reporting deadlines. It was not always clear to them where this pressure was coming from, as sometimes they were not even aware they were in receipt of Spotlight Initiative or UN funding. In discussions across different FGDs, it was noted that, in many consortia and sub-grantee relationships, pressure to deliver and report on results can be

¹⁵² Hera (2022). [Metareview of the Spotlight Initiative: Latin America and Africa](#)

passed down from Civil Society implementing partners / grantees to sub-grantees. Sub-grantees, who are typically smaller GROs, may operate in different ways compared to more established CSOs.

“The funding we received was passed down from [grantee partner], which makes it difficult for us to navigate, often with strict regulations come from on top, especially on the finance report”

- CSO representative

Moreover, the funding allocated to sub-grantees was often tied to the implementation of specific activities that had already been designed by the implementing partner, leaving them little room to meaningfully engage, influence, or adapt.

“When our lead sometimes goes for meetings, we would suggest: let one of the implementing partners go with you. He said no... they are not allowing that because they are the head. They go and explain what they want to explain. Even if we have challenges, you will not be able to explain our challenges like the way we will explain it. He said no UN doesn't want to see you; UN is seeing me because the project was passed through me.”

- Spotlight programme sub-grantee

The assessment team heard numerous accounts of stress, burnout, expectations of working long hours, and confusion at the community level when multiple requests for community involvement in Spotlight activities were received due to delayed timelines and pressured deadlines. This issue is in part related to the short timeframes that Spotlight programmes (and Spotlight Initiative more broadly) were operating under, potentially reinforcing power imbalances between UN agencies and implementing partners and grantees. Some countries experienced long delays in disbursement of funds between Phase 1 and Phase 2, which had a knock-on effect on civil society implementing partners and sub-grantees. The programme was designed to have two phases to allow for a performance assessment between phases and before disbursing the final tranche of funding. Systems were in place to try to mitigate against Spotlight programmes running into cash flow challenges, but in reality, many programmes experienced these challenges which cascaded pressure down from UN to Civil Society implementing partners, to sub-grantees.¹⁵³

Short funding cycles, and these working practices, are not unique to Spotlight Initiative and are often found across this type of work. However, it is critical to understand that they constrain the ability of EVAWG initiatives (like Spotlight Initiative) to work differently with civil society or to

¹⁵³ Spotlight programmes were allocated 70% of the total programme funding in Phase 1 on the understanding that following a performance assessment (mid-term review) and having spent 70% of that allocation they would be able to apply for further funding. As this was done on a regional basis, some countries inevitably spent faster or slower which resulted in some cash flow challenges in certain contexts.

promote gender-transformative approaches that aim to challenge and change the power dynamics and social norms that drive and sustain VAWG. They are also strongly detrimental to the wellbeing of organisations and individuals, as they often reinforce (rather than reduce) power imbalances between the UN and implementing partners and between implementing partners and sub-grantees, fostering unsustainable ways of working.

FINDING 4.6: Spotlight Initiative is operating in many contexts where there is a strong and vocal anti-gender and anti-feminist backlash that means the rights, and lives, of women and girls in their diversity and structurally marginalised groups have been undermined and put at risk. The Initiative has faced challenges in navigating these dynamics in some settings, despite the commitment to address EAWG in the context of the human rights-based approach and LNOB.

In light of the rise of anti-gender actors, including governments and non-government actors, in increasingly restrictive or repressive contexts globally, it is more important than ever for UN agencies to continue to work to ensure human rights and be bold in promoting gender equality and the rights of women, girls, and those most 'left behind', continuing the legacy of Spotlight Initiative and upholding its values. As noted earlier (see finding 2A.3 and 3B.9) Spotlight Initiative faced challenges in reaching and visibly standing in solidarity with feminist movements and structurally marginalised groups in more legally and politically challenging contexts, particularly where national governments may not recognise the human rights of structurally marginalised groups such as LGBTQI+ people and sex workers.

The assessment found several examples of where Spotlight programmes came up against anti-feminist and anti-gender backlash, including, in some contexts, a vocal call for more work to be done to support men and boys. In one programme, for example, men and boys were referred to as a 'left-behind group' and civil society stakeholders explained that *"[This county] is not comfortable standing up with women without apologising to men"*.

Some Spotlight programmes were more able to explain why the programme was designed to address VAWG and structurally marginalised groups (of which 'men and boys' more generally are not included) and to work strategically with men and boys as perpetrators and allies (including in addressing femicide and other forms of VAWG). However, on the whole, the assessment found few examples where a programme had been able to boldly address this type of backlash and transform gendered power dynamics (despite global guidance being produced, i.e. 'Planning guidance – Working with Men and Boys'). This is explored earlier under AQ2, but remains a key aspect of the gender-transformative approach Spotlight Initiative set out to deliver. This highlights the importance of taking a human rights-based approach to any work that is trying to prevent and respond to GBV.

As part of broader anti-gender backlash, some Spotlight programmes faced anti-LGBTQI+ backlash and resistance towards including LGBTQI+ organisations and individuals in programmes. This played out both in relation to including LGBTQI+ members in CSRG and on steering committees in some programmes, and in relation to engaging LGBTQI+ CSOs and groups in implementation of some Spotlight programmes. As noted earlier, Spotlight Initiative did not have specific guidance on how to safely and meaningfully take an LGBTQI+ inclusive

approach in EVAWG programming and governance, as part of the more general LNOB guidance.

FINDING 4.7: Some seeds for transformative change have been planted, and the Initiative was committed to sustainable change, through developing and securing national ownership from the outset. The ambition of the Initiative and the intensity of implementation over a relatively short time frame may have limited the achievement of lasting change in power structures that was anticipated.

"I am not sure if the programme has been transformative. The Spotlight programme has put new thinking on the table, and this can be transformative over time."

- CSO, not part of Spotlight Initiative

A core part of being a transformative programme is ensuring that any achievements or structures supported or created by the programme are sustainable. Spotlight Initiative's comprehensive approach prioritises national ownership through working on laws and policies, prevention, supporting civil space, and strengthening movements and was developed to foster sustainability. While the assessment did not set out to conduct any analysis of the impact or sustainable benefits resulting from the programme implementation, examples emerged from the case studies relating to aspects of Spotlight Initiative that could be seen as transformative in relation to sustainable change.

Stakeholders highlighted sustainable achievements such as enhanced reporting and financial capabilities of CSOs, the creation of accessible online repositories, national GBV surveys, national budget lines dedicated to EVAWG and legal frameworks that support gender equality and combat violence. Many countries developed training materials, tools, and good practice documents, which have either been shared with government and civil society or disseminated online. A number of case study countries mentioned that their Spotlight programme had increased the visibility of GBV/VAWG as an issue across the country among government and/or the general public, and that relationships and collaborations with government and civil society had improved over the course of the programme.

All country and regional programmes were requested to develop sustainability strategies during their final year and the assessment team reviewed those that were shared from three of the case studies. While the Initiative's design was conceived to promote sustainability and national ownership, the way this played out at country and regional level varied considerably. The programmes could have done more to support the sustainability of civil society organisations through prioritising core funding and supporting strategic organisational capacity strengthening, which are both key to organisational sustainability and resilience. Another aspect of sustainability where more could have been done was in strengthening movements, as discussed under assessment question 2. The quotations below are from grantees in a focus group which highlight one area that could be strengthened in future programmes.

“When we received the small grant, we started thinking about what would happen afterwards. Now that the grant has been spent, we are still working on GBV but without funding or pay. But we still have our referral links to services, and the issue of violence has not gone away, so we can still tell people where they can go to access services for GBV.”

- Spotlight programme grantee

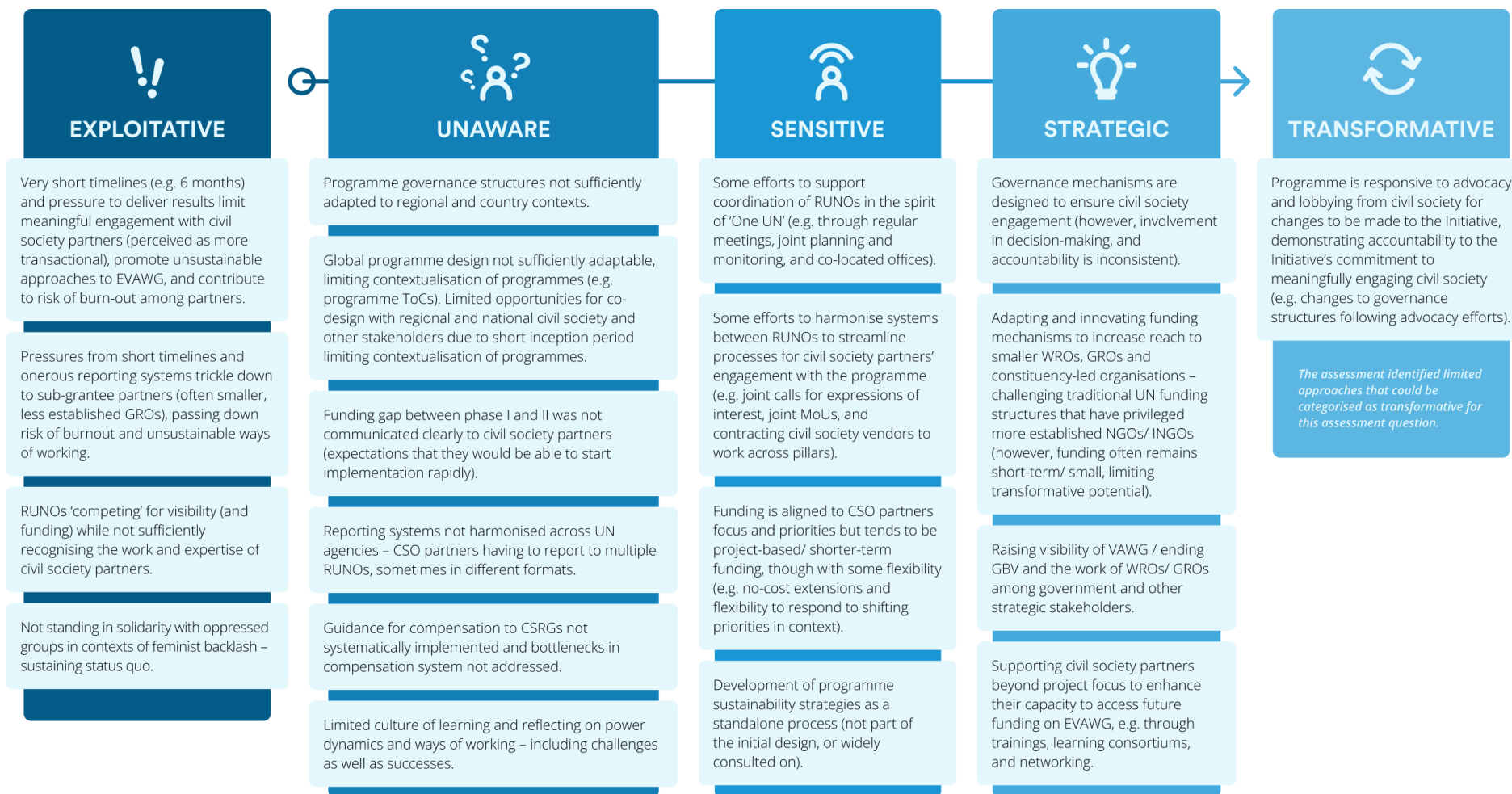
“Everything the Spotlight programme did was great, but it wasn’t done thinking about sustainability. The programme objectives and monitoring did not focus on sustainability. They just gave the grants without any follow-up.”

- Spotlight programme grantee

Power Dynamics and Sustainable Change

APPROACHES ALONG THE TRANSFORMATIVE CONTINUUM

The assessment uses a Transformative Continuum to capture the type of interventions/approaches observed for each theme, and where they fall along the continuum. This aims to support learning and discussion of how programmes to end violence against women and girls can be more transformative, and what the process towards the transformative level could look like. The continuum highlights illustrative examples of approaches from across the programme case studies; it does not, however, indicate how common these approaches were across the Initiative. Instead, as noted, the continuum presents a range of approaches observed to support learning.



Chapter 4: Conclusions



Conclusions

The following conclusions are derived from the assessment's findings.



AQ.1 | CSO Engagement

Conclusion 1.

Spotlight Initiative has made progress in pursuing an ambitious and bold agenda to do things differently to work with CSOs and WROs in new ways. The success of the CSRG mechanisms has demonstrated that new ways of working to create a space for sustained civil society advocacy and influence are possible.

[Link to findings: 1A.1, 1A.2, 1A.3, 4.2](#)

The CSRGs at different levels have played a significant role in this regard and there is evidence of their potential to be effective platforms for advocacy and influencing. This influence has been more visible at global level. At regional and country level there was confusion around the role of the group in terms of providing advisory support versus decision making. The extent to which CSRGs were accountable to broader civil society, to their constituencies, or to Spotlight programmes' civil society implementing partners, or the extent to which CSRGs could hold Spotlight programmes to account, was not well understood by those involved and this led to tensions in numerous places. The involvement of CSRG members in monitoring the programme is an important approach to enhance transparency and accountability, however it needed to be more clearly communicated and explained to all parties as there were examples of mistrust and nervousness surrounding this.

The intention for this group was found to have been a good one, but at country and regional level a lack of clarity and inconsistent communication caused tensions that were in some cases difficult to repair. The challenges related to the role and accountability of CSRGs especially at regional and country levels highlight the importance of ensuring clear communication and defined roles and functions of CSRG members to enhance their effectiveness.

Conclusion 2.

The innovative processes that Spotlight Initiative used to address the structural barriers faced by CSOs, particularly WROs and GROs, in accessing funding enabled a large number of 'non-usual suspects' to access UN funding.

[Link to findings: 1A.4, 1B.5, 1B.7, 2B.8, 3A.4](#)

The innovative processes identified in the assessment included the small grants programmes that were seen to have been largely successful in reaching out to a diversity of organisations who had not received funding from the UN previously. Mechanisms were put in place to encourage consortia working, including with unregistered organisations. The engagement with the UN Trust Fund and WPHF (through two civil society grant-giving programmes), as well as with the WithHer Fund, ensured that funds reached these smaller organisations.

These different funding modalities and partnerships were an important way for Spotlight Initiative to support GROs and WROs, but they were not consistently used or available and

some of the existing UN reporting, procurement, and contracting systems and processes remained (and proved to be barriers) even within these mechanisms. These funding modalities needed to go further to allow for even more meaningful engagement of civil society through quality, longer-term funding that meets the needs of the recipient organisations, including for core, institutional costs (rather than tied to specific activities) to achieve results developed collaboratively.

Conclusion 3.

The capacity-strengthening support that CSOs received from the RUNOs as part of Spotlight programmes, while valued by many, was largely designed to enable organisations to meet UN reporting requirements and did not always address CSOs' expressed capacity-strengthening needs and priorities. It could have been better designed to address CSO's own identified needs and priorities.

[Link to findings: 1B.6, 2B.7, 3B.7](#)

Where Spotlight Initiative used a participatory and collaborative approach to capacity strengthening that focused more on mutual learning, peer support, and accompaniment, this was found to be more highly valued. The role of constituency organisations in delivering capacity strengthening, particularly around aspects of an LNOB approach, is also an important approach to maintain and replicate (see also Conclusion 10).



AQ.2 | Support to progressive feminist and women's movements

Conclusion 4.

Spotlight Initiative was able to play an important and welcome role supporting feminist and women's movements in contexts where these movements are strong, providing this support is based on collaboration and partnership rather than imposition, and respects the autonomy and leadership of these movements. The more directive role some Spotlight programmes played where movements were more fragmented or nascent is not always the most appropriate role for the UN to assume.

[Link to findings: 2A.1, 2A.2, 2A.3, 2B.9, 2B.10, 2B.12](#)

The assessment found good evidence that the support to women's movements provided by Spotlight programmes at country and regional level was recognised and valued where these movements had been in existence for a while, had strong and empowered leadership, and were in strong positions to advocate for what they needed. The UN plays an important role in convening groups and supporting networking events. It can lend its name and legitimacy to these movements and facilitate access for civil society to spaces not normally open to them (including between movements and CSOs and governments). The Initiative's role in contexts where movements were more fragmented or nascent was less well understood by programmes, which led to a range of different approaches being considered under 'support to movement building' including supporting individual organisations, strengthening the 'capacity' of CSOs, or playing a more directive role in 'creating' movements among existing community groups.

Conclusion 5.

The UN's relationship with national governments is a positive contributory factor for strengthening movements and elevating the issue of ending VAWG politically, but it can also be a hindering factor. This tension surfaced in numerous ways.

[Link to findings: 2A.3, 2B.11, 4.6](#)

National governments are important strategic stakeholders for Spotlight Initiative at country and regional level, to ensure the issue of VAWG remains high on the political agenda. They are key partners for the programme in terms of developing laws and policies, ensuring gender-responsive budgeting, and providing quality, accessible services, among others. These strong partnerships provided many important opportunities for women's movements and WROs to raise their profile with government counterparts. In numerous cases, CSOs were called upon to provide training and advice to government stakeholders. They reported that their visibility had improved and that they felt more respected by government officials. Government stakeholders also reported having improved relationships with civil society and by extension community members.

The tensions arise in more legally and politically challenging environments where repressive governments seek to restrict the human rights and basic freedoms of specific groups (often oppressed and structurally marginalised groups). Civil society actors in these contexts highlighted that Spotlight Initiative was not able to stand fully in solidarity with them and against repressive governments and regressive environments and laws, and this led to a loss of trust in Spotlight Initiative (and the UN more widely in some cases).

The extent to which a programme of this nature, led by the UN, can take a strong and public human rights stance has been much debated. The assessment team acknowledges that the UN often finds itself in a challenging situation in countries where its efforts to promote human rights and highlight state-level violations could lead to the non-renewal of its operational agreements (and therefore close down the space for its involvement). There may be instances where the UN is making efforts to advance human rights but not doing it in a way that is visible or communicated to wider civil society, which may give the perception that it is not standing in solidarity with oppressed and structurally marginalised groups.

However, for initiatives like Spotlight Initiative, which aim to eliminate all forms of VAWG, including against the most structurally marginalised groups, such inaction (perceived or otherwise) can harm relationships with social justice, human rights, and feminist and women's rights movements/organisations and therefore limit the ability to make a lasting impact.

Conclusion 6.

The varied ways in which RUNOs engaged with WROs, groups, and movements was in part due to the different conceptual understandings of Pillar 6, which combines both strengthening and support to women's movements and CSOs, and how it linked with activities under other pillars. This varied conceptual understanding also contributed to an inability on the part of many stakeholders to explain how Spotlight Initiative supported women's movements and what the Initiative's feminist approach was.

[Link to findings: 2A.5, 2B.7, 2B.9, 2B.12, 3B.9](#)

Pillar 6 combines the work supporting local civil society and women's movements. The outcome statement reads: *"Women's rights groups, autonomous social movements and civil society organisations, including those representing youth and groups facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination/marginalisation, more effectively influence and advance progress on GEWE and ending VAWG"*. The assessment found that many stakeholders from the RUNOs and civil society conflated the work with CSOs and women's movements or saw Pillar 6 as just about women's movements. This may have contributed to interventions under Pillar 6 being siloed by the programme. The fact that the other programme pillars involved more than one RUNO collaborating and Pillar 6 was solely under UN Women may also have contributed to an absence of widespread understanding and buy-in of this aspect of the programme. Different groups of stakeholders, including UN agencies, civil society, and government, expressed the need to have a stronger conceptual understanding of what Spotlight Initiative's support to women's movements should look like. The assessment did not find a common understanding of the strategic long-term vision for the activities under Pillar 6 and how it linked to the other pillars. This meant that many of the interventions that fell under that pillar were ad hoc and small scale and did not seem to contribute to a coherent movement-building strategy across the country or region of operation.



AQ.3 | Leave No One Behind (LNOB)

Conclusion 7.

Having LNOB as a cross-cutting principle supported an intentional focus on engaging and reaching structurally marginalised women and groups in Spotlight Initiative.

Link to findings: 3A.1, 3A.2, 3B.6, 3B.8, 3B.9

However, the lack of comprehensive guidance on implementing the principle in EVAWG programming specifically, and opportunities for learning, limited the extent to which the principle was consistently implemented, especially in countries where this was a new concept or that are more hostile for structurally marginalised groups. The LNOB principle did lead to a stronger focus on inclusive approaches in some Spotlight programmes, including disability and LGBTQI+ inclusion, but inconsistencies in approaches and practices, and to some extent understandings, of LNOB suggest that LNOB had not been fully anchored as a cross-cutting principle among all programmes and stakeholders.

Conclusion 8.

CSRGs were the strongest example of Spotlight Initiative engaging structurally marginalised women and groups in governance mechanisms and decision making, but the lack of clarity around their roles and responsibilities (as noted in AQ1) contributed to these members feeling that their involvement was at times tokenistic or that they could have done more to reach out to their constituency groups to further the principles of LNOB had their roles been clearer.

Link to findings: 3A.2, 3B.3, 3B.7, 3B.9

The assessment found that the LNOB principle was front and centre in the formation of many CSRG groups, which contributed to a stronger focus on structurally marginalised women and groups in Spotlight programming. It also contributed to learning among members of CSRGs on

the issues faced by structurally marginalised groups. However, CSRGs were not fully supported to operationalise the principle in how the group worked. For example, while accessibility for persons with disabilities was ensured – and there is good practice to draw on and roll out as a minimum standard across all CSRGs on this – not all members from marginalised groups could participate on equal terms (e.g. because of a lack of compensation and/or support to do so).

The power dynamics at play in feminist spaces were not always considered part of the LNOB approach in governance mechanisms and decision-making processes to the extent of ensuring an understanding that diversity does not equal inclusion.

The assessment also found that more efforts could have been made to engage constituency-led CSOs and structurally marginalised groups in decision-making processes beyond the project level (e.g. by more consistently engaging members from structurally marginalised groups in programme governance bodies and committees). Furthermore, power dynamics need to be considered in grantee/sub-grantee partnerships, as the latter often did not feel meaningfully engaged in design and decision-making processes.

Conclusion 9.

Constituency-led CSOs were engaged in implementation, and the projects run by these groups appeared strongest in reaching and addressing the priorities of structurally marginalised women and groups. Constituency-led CSOs are also well placed to support non-constituency-led CSOs to better integrate and implement LNOB approaches, supporting a twin-track approach of working with constituency-led CSOs and supporting 'mainstreaming' of LNOB (where safe and appropriate) in efforts to end violence against women and girls in all their diversity.

[Link to findings: 3A.4, 3A.5, 3B.7, 3B.9](#)

Partnering with constituency-led CSOs was an important strategy for engaging these organisations in implementation (as implementing partners, grantees, and sometimes vendors), as well as for engaging structurally marginalised women and groups in programme activities. This is because constituency-led CSOs had the capacity – including through their expertise, the trust they have built, and their networks – to reach their constituencies. This approach therefore supported Spotlight Initiative in reaching a range of structurally marginalised groups in different contexts.

The assessment noted some challenges in terms of pursuing a 'mainstreaming' approach to LNOB, where non-constituency-led partners were not sufficiently supported to implement this in meaningful ways. There is, however, promising practice to draw on across programmes, and Spotlight Initiative should learn from existing examples of integrating LNOB in mainstream GBV services and where non-constituency-led partners were supported to work more inclusively in meaningful ways (e.g. through collaborating with constituency-led CSOs to ensure meaningful engagement with members of structurally marginalised groups and tailoring activities or support to the needs of structurally marginalised women and groups).

The small grant schemes in particular enabled constituency-led organisations, GROs, and unregistered organisations to access UN funding, some for the first time. This was at times achieved by forming consortiums between more established CSOs and smaller, sometimes unregistered, organisations. This approach demonstrates that there are ways to address administrative and financial challenges to accessing UN funding (e.g. the requirement to be registered or to have been so for a certain number of years). While this approach improved

flexibility and accessibility, opening up UN funding to new organisations, the often project-based, short-term funding cycles are not conducive to ensuring organisations' sustainability or for implementing transformative approaches to EVAWG (which take time, institutional support, and sustained resourcing).

Conclusion 10.

Existing guidance on data disaggregation does not sufficiently consider LNOB principles, and existing data provides limited insight on who has been reached and how constituency-led CSOs have been engaged in Spotlight Initiative.

Link to findings: [3B.6](#), [3B.10](#)

Ethics and safety need to be put front and centre in such guidance to ensure adherence to 'Do no harm' in data collection with structurally marginalised women and gender-diverse people. This should consider whether data should be collected on the engagements with structurally marginalised people to begin with (i.e. are there any safety or ethical concerns with collecting and managing this data). If this is to go ahead, what type of data should be prioritised and how will it be collected, managed, and stored? While having more and better quality data on the experiences of women and girls in their diversity and structurally marginalised groups in relation to EVAWG programming is vital, it is similarly paramount that the generation of this data is non-extractive and ensures a 'Do no harm' approach.



AQ.4 | Transforming Power

Conclusion 11.

Spotlight Initiative as a global programme designed and managed from the centre - while important for ensuring a comprehensive approach aligned with evidence-based good practice and global reporting - created a perception that the programme had been 'imposed', was 'top'-heavy', and at times had been micromanaged. This is in part a result of heavy procedural and reporting burdens, but also the short inception phase, and the perception that the Initiative had not taken sufficient account of the different local contexts and their characteristics at the design (inception) stage. This included not investing sufficient time in understanding the progress already made by local CSOs and of their capacity to promote change.

Link to findings: [1B.7](#), [2B.8](#), [4.3](#), [4.7](#)

The assessment explored the tensions that arise around the need to have a consistent global approach to a programme of this nature, the pressure to ensure aggregated reporting, and the ability to implement a transformative agenda that inherently seeks to confront power dynamics. Spotlight Initiative tried to ensure its programmes were decentralised to allow for contextual adaptations, including each programme having its own CSRG and Steering Committee, and allowing them to report on specific indicators that were not aggregated at a global level. However, this does not appear to have gone far enough in ensuring that participants, in particular civil society actors, felt ownership of the programme and their contributions to it.

The heavy requirements for financial and narrative reporting, the rigidity of procurement and contracting processes, and the challenges with changing workplans and reallocating budgets all contributed to this sense of the programme being imposed from the top. Drawing on its transformative ambition, Spotlight Initiative has to confront the power dynamics in such structures and consider ways for stakeholders at regional and country levels to have much greater ownership of programmes, from inception through to implementation and evaluation. The insufficient inception phase for regional and country programme design contributed to this challenge. Numerous times throughout the assessment, stakeholders at different levels shared examples of pressure they felt from some structure perceived as 'above' them.

Conclusion 12.

Spotlight Initiative represents a clear commitment from the UN on the imperative for it to reform the way it works with and funds civil society (within a whole of society approach to meaningful partnerships) to address the challenges and opportunities available, but this kind of reform requires time and progress has been slower than some would like.

[Link to findings: 4.1, 4.2, 4.4, 4.5, 4.7](#)

Progress has been created by Spotlight Initiative in regard to UN Reform, including the stronger role played by the Resident Coordinator in coordination and oversight and examples of RUNOs finding solutions to reduce the reporting burdens of some partners, etc. (examined more fully under AQ1 and AQ4). Nevertheless, changes need to be more far-reaching and at a wider UN scale to create the systemic change required to realise the vision and ambition that Spotlight Initiative had put in place. UN agencies and donors need to recognise that the funding and grant-making systems that favour activity-based, results-focused short-term delivery are not conducive to shifting power and working differently with CSOs. They do not currently support the trust-based funding models that should become the norm.

Conclusion 13.

The donor climate that requires organisations (including UN agencies) to compete for (extremely limited) resources to end GBV and advance human rights, and therefore puts pressure on agencies to 'sell themselves', can pit UN agencies against one another, undermining collaboration and cooperation. Furthermore, this works as a disincentive to the open reflection (on what is working and isn't and on power dynamics) that is critical to advancing relevant, responsive, rights-based programming to EVAWG.

[Link to findings: 1B.7, 2A.4, 2A.5, 2B.10, 2B.11, 2B.12, 3A.1, 4.1, 4.3, 4.6, 4.7](#)

Throughout the course of this assessment a number of challenging questions have been explored, and issues have been raised that are uncomfortable and difficult to explore and confront, some of this related to the dynamics among donors, and among UN agencies. These dynamics were at times difficult to surface and reflect on openly. A programme of this nature that seeks to be transformative at its core requires the individuals associated with it to be open to these conversations, to reflect on both successes and failures in an honest and proactive manner.

Chapter 5: Recommendations



Recommendations

A number of recommendations follow from the findings and conclusions for Spotlight Initiative to consider for future programming, which could be of interest for learning across Spotlight Initiative as a whole, RUNOs, the UN system, donors, and others (indeed, each recommendation can be and is often relevant to different stakeholder groups). The assessment team hopes that, as stakeholders read and reflect on the recommendations presented below, they keep this in mind, reflecting on their own role in strengthening civil society engagement, movement building, and the integration of the LNOB principle.

RECOMMENDATION 1

Conceptual clarity and guidance

A future iteration of Spotlight Initiative should include a much clearer articulation of its feminist and human rights framing and include key definitions and a framework for how to support strengthening movements. This should include specific programmatic guidance on LNOB tailored to EAWG programming and an engagement strategy for how the UN / Spotlight Initiative can support and work in solidarity with oppressed and marginalised groups.

LINKED TO CONCLUSIONS



PRIORITY

HIGH

TIMELINE

SHORT TERM

Directed to: Spotlight Initiative Global Secretariat, in collaboration with civil society stakeholders

Suggested steps that could be taken include:

- Develop clear definitions and a common understanding of what *supporting movements* means in different contexts, including separating out and creating an important distinction between support to CSOs (an important focus) and movement strengthening.
- Develop a conceptual framework for movement building that considers different types of support in countries where movements are strong and united and contexts where they are more fragmented, nascent, and /or dispersed. This guidance can draw on examples shared throughout this assessment, as well as documents produced by women's rights groups.¹⁵⁴
- Ensure existing guidance on LNOB is contextualised for EAWG programming and widely shared and communicated with programmes. Supplementary guidance needs to be developed on entry points that includes good practice examples of how to integrate an LNOB lens to EAWG programming, including a focus on 'Do no harm' and ethical practice.
- Work with civil society actors, particular structurally marginalised and oppressed groups, to develop an engagement strategy for how the UN/Spotlight Initiative can support and work in solidarity with oppressed and marginalised groups, and ensure accountability to, and

¹⁵⁴ Including COFEM, AWID, Equality Fund, etc.

protection of, activists and women human rights defenders in the context of GBV programming. This should also include how the programme can work in repressive contexts to support oppressed groups and address the backlash against human rights and gender equality.

- Ensure equitable, safe, and productive spaces are provided where communications and connections are made, especially in the face of injustices, so as to continue strengthening solidarity among women and the feminist and women's movements.

RECOMMENDATION 2

UN reform and funding modalities

UN funding, procurement, and reporting systems should be simplified and harmonised across all UN agencies working on future iterations of Spotlight Initiative or other EVAWG programming in line with UN Reform, to address power imbalances inherent in traditional funding models. Ensure accountability to the women's movement in terms of funds disbursement, recruitment processes, and reporting/complaints processes. Such initiatives should adopt feminist funding principles that recognise the importance of longer-term, flexible, core funding for women-led organisations. Multi-year funding cycles should be the norm, providing a significant proportion of funds to be allocated flexibly for institutional funding to CSOs, including WROs, GROs, and constituency-led organisations.

PRIORITY

HIGH

TIMELINE

MEDIUM /
LONG TERM

LINKED TO CONCLUSIONS



Directed to: UN system-wide, including Executive Office of the Secretary General (EOSG), Development Coordination Office (DCO), UN Country Teams, and UN agencies, including headquarters

The assessment explored some elements of UN Reform and confirmed that progress has been made but that the pace of change is slow due to a number of bottlenecks and disincentives. It is beyond the scope of this assessment to make recommendations on how to accelerate progress across the UN system, and there are already many studies that have tried to do just that.¹⁵⁵

Simplifying and cohering financial and narrative reporting requirements (so that implementing partners can report in one form, not individually to each UN agency), procurement processes, and timeframes would greatly enhance the experiences for civil society and government partners. The assessment identified a number of promising practices that could be rolled out and scaled up

¹⁵⁵ Numerous evaluations and reviews conducted for different UN agencies have by necessity had to look at the process of UN Reform, this includes the recent European Court of Auditors Report (2023) The Spotlight Initiative to end violence against women and girls. Ambitious but so far limited impact; an independent evaluation of lessons learnt from delivering as one (2012); and the recent Dalberg (2023) Institutional History.

across countries and regions to increase access and improve the experiences of local CSOs when partnering with UN agencies.

Suggested steps that could be taken include:

- Spotlight Initiative should continue to ensure the recommendations in the Grassroots Action Plan are implemented including RUNOs issuing Joint Expressions of Interest. It should go one step further and include joint calls for full proposals, removing the requirements for organisations to complete a second full proposal directly to the pillar-lead RUNO.
- Calls for proposals should continue to be made available in local languages, with submissions accepted by hand, post, and email, at district level as well as main offices.
- UN reporting templates should be simplified and harmonised, to ensure that implementing partners and organisations receiving funding from more than one RUNO do not need to complete multiple reporting templates.
- Where organisations are funded across multiple UN agencies, joint MoUs should be developed that allow for a single report to be submitted against the MoU to all supporting agencies.
- Grants or contracts should be awarded for the full duration of the programme/initiative, reflecting the multi-year funding and long-term commitment required to achieve transformative change and ensure organisational stability and sustainability.

RECOMMENDATION 3

Approach to capacity strengthening

Spotlight Initiative (and the UN more broadly) should revisit its approach to capacity strengthening with CSOs, ensuring it is more aligned with the priorities of CSOs and implemented in more empowering and sustainable ways through meaningfully engaging CSO partners in the delivery of trainings, accompaniment and other capacity strengthening efforts. It should develop a participatory, collaborative approach with partners to capacity needs assessments to collectively identify priorities, strengths, and capacity gaps and explore different options for strengthening capacity, including through collective learning spaces, peer support, and accompaniment.

PRIORITY

HIGH

TIMELINE

SHORT TERM

LINKED TO CONCLUSIONS

3

9

Directed to: Spotlight Initiative Global Secretariat, UN country teams, and RUNOs

Suggested steps that could be taken include:

- Spotlight Initiative should develop a framework and guidance for conducting participatory, collaborative capacity assessments together with civil society partners, to identify areas of strengths and gaps and plan together how to address those.

- One-off trainings should be replaced with more sustainable and empowering practices of mentoring and accompaniment, where for example different CSOs partner with each other to provide mutual support in recognition of the different experiences and expertise that exist.
- Support the leadership of constituency-led CSOs in capacity strengthening efforts (e.g. as trainers, facilitators and advisors) with other programme partners on how to integrate LNOB issues in safe and inclusive ways, in recognition of their expertise in these areas and the complexities of mainstreaming the LNOB principle.
- Collective learning spaces should be prioritised, resourced, and incentivised (including by donors) to support strengthening the capacity of UN teams as well as CSOs. This may include building these into workplans, performance plans, and objectives, to foster a culture of learning and reflection as a core part of the programme delivery and approach.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Civil society accountability and governance

UN global initiatives should ensure governance and decision making prioritises accountability to civil society and rights holders and continue to facilitate civil society's meaningful participation in governance and decision-making structures, through CSRGs and steering committees. Civil society should be involved in designing their participation within programmes, what financial and other resources will be needed to support it, and how it will be monitored. Where civil society representatives in governance and decision-making bodies are expected to act as a bridge to broader civil society, specific mechanisms will be needed to enable this, and UN agencies involved will need to support these. Separate decision making and governance structures should be considered to take into account potential conflicts of interest.

LINKED TO CONCLUSIONS



Directed to: Spotlight Initiative Global Secretariat, country teams, and RUNOs

Suggested steps that could be taken include:

- Create and prioritise spaces for civil society and feminist leaders from the country, regional, and global levels to hold UN power-holders to account. Ensure a diversity of civil society representatives are involved in the governance and decision making of programmes such as these. Roles should be more than just advisory and be created to hold programmes to account for their commitments and articulated ways of working.
- The CSRG should be made a permanent structure for accountability and advice to Spotlight Initiative at global, regional, and national levels, with the following adjustments:

PRIORITY

HIGH

TIMELINE

SHORT TERM

- ToR need to set out a clearer and more detailed set of expectations and roles and responsibilities, including parameters of involvement regarding decision making and advisory support. Length of service needs to be established to enable wider participation and rotation of membership.
- Communication between the group and Spotlight Initiative teams at different levels needs to be more consistent and expectations should not be assumed.
- Compensation guidance needs to be much more consistently implemented across all countries and regions, while the system for payments needs to be simplified for all involved. Expectations of volunteerism need to be challenged and members of groups need to be fairly compensated for the work they do, including paying for their time as well as their expenses.
- The LNOB principle needs to be systematically operationalised in CSRGs to ensure participation is facilitated, including provision of laptops, phones, and data packages, as well as ensuring accessibility and supporting a focus on inclusive learning spaces. In addition to ensuring representation of women in their diversity and members of structurally marginalised groups, there is a need to support inclusive and safe spaces for everyone to participate.
- Lines of accountability need to be clearly identified and followed to ensure that CSRG members are able to represent both their constituency groups and wider civil society who have a stake in Spotlight Initiative. CSRGs must be able to hold Spotlight Initiative to account, at the same time as civil society holding CSRGs to account.
- The practice of including civil society members on governing bodies or steering committees within programmes is a relevant one and should continue, but there needs to be equal representation of civil society on these bodies and all members need to ensure they demonstrate and model principles of equitable partnership and decision making so civil society members do not feel their involvement is tokenistic.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Understanding and challenging power

The UN, including Spotlight Initiative and RUNOs, and donors should continue to participate in critical, collective reflection on power dynamics within the UN and within the wider donor funding landscape and systems, and work collectively to develop a set of rights-based values and principles to embed in the United Nations' (and the Initiative's) contracts and agreements with civil society partners, in line with the UN Funding Compact. This will allow individuals and organisations who are implementing or receiving funds either directly from a UN agency or an intermediary to hold the UN or contracting partners to account for their commitments.

PRIORITY

HIGH

TIMELINE

MEDIUM TERM

LINKED TO CONCLUSIONS



Directed to: Spotlight Initiative Global Secretariat, country teams, and RUNOs

Power dynamics and hierarchies exist in every walk of life, and nowhere more acutely than where money is involved. Recognising the power imbalances between donors and recipients is a critical first step to addressing them and not abusing them. It is important to put mechanisms in place to mitigate the 'ripple effect of pressure' being passed down to sub-grantees, who are frequently smaller, grassroots, or women- and constituency-led organisations.

Suggested steps that could be taken include:

- Recognise and seek to challenge the 'top-down' nature of global programmes to include space for more contextual knowledge and localisation processes.
- Spotlight Initiative should co-develop a set of guiding principles of equitable partnership, ways of working, and power sharing among stakeholders, that all RUNOs and participating agencies must sign up to and model to strengthen trust and mutual respect, valuing expertise and contextual knowledge, among civil society and UN agencies. All collaborating agencies and CSOs should base their partnerships on this set of principles, aligned to UN normative human rights and gender equality frameworks.
- Consider joint fundraising efforts to incentivise harmonised and collaborative processes and reduce competition among UN agencies.
- Ensure sub-grantees have the same information and access to the UN as the principal contract holders to ensure transparency and equity in communication. Delivery and reporting timeframes need to be shared and adequately phased to avoid the 'ripple effect' of pressure being passed down.
- Visibility and branding guidelines need to acknowledge the importance for smaller GROs of being recognised for their contribution and having their logos and branding visibly displayed as

equal partners in the wider programme. External reports and publications should acknowledge all contributions.

RECOMMENDATION 6

Data collection and monitoring

Spotlight Initiative should deepen its participatory approach to programme data collection and monitoring to ensure it better aligns with the initiative's principles (as described in Spotlight Initiative's M&E Strategy), including on implementing LNOB, transparency, and learning. A Spotlight 2.0, or further EVAWG programmes, should explore how to further embed participatory approaches to M&E, deepen disaggregation, and develop new indicators for greater learning on movements and LNOB.

PRIORITY

MEDIUM

TIMELINE

MEDIUM TERM

LINKED TO CONCLUSIONS

10

11

Directed to: Spotlight Initiative Global Secretariat

Data collection, monitoring, and reporting processes are a critical way to generate learning and encourage reflection, and Spotlight Initiative has produced a number of guidance documents and contributed to training on participatory monitoring and reporting processes.

Current reporting methods do not fully capture how much money is going to support feminist movements, or what level of funding is being provided to support WROs or to support core institutional costs that can be used flexibly. Current reporting is also not allowing the Initiative to understand which of the CSOs being supported are constituency-led groups or those supporting structurally marginalised groups more broadly. This lack of disaggregated information is not currently conducive to a true understanding of how the LNOB principle is being implemented and to what extent it is reaching those most left behind. Current reporting templates, like Annex C in programme annual reports, have the potential to provide more valuable information with some amendments.

Suggested steps that could be taken include:

- Develop guidance on data disaggregation to better understand which women and girls in their diversity and structurally marginalised groups have been reached, and support teams to implement this in a variety of contexts, including contexts hostile to these groups. This should be part of the LNOB guidance (see Recommendation 1) to ensure a 'Do no harm' approach.
- Promote and prioritise roll out of existing PMER training and guidance to ensure these principles are consistently embedded across programmes, and that indicators and reporting requirements provide the right incentives to ensure participatory processes.
- Expand the scope of what is being captured in Annex C, to include information about constituency-led organisations, and which constituencies they are led by, addressing

intersectional feminist identities as part of the leadership, rather than just listing which groups are reached by organisations.

- Support country and regional teams to improve the use of disaggregated data to better understand who is being reached and not reached by the programme.
- Review the indicators in the global monitoring framework to include some more qualitative measures, particularly around capturing Spotlight Initiative's efforts to strengthen and support movements, as distinct for civil society capacity and networking. There are different tools that the Initiative could consider to understand the capacity of the movements it was trying to strengthen such as the Movement Capacity Assessment Tool and the Girl Generation Scorecard.¹⁵⁶
- Ensure any future programme includes an evaluation and research strategy, with appropriate budget, that assesses programme impact at implementation level across the whole Initiative.



¹⁵⁶ Global Fund For Women (2020) 'Movement Capacity Assessment Tool'; and Girl Generation (2018) 'Tracking Trends in Social Movements Scorecard and Guide'.

Annexes



Annex 1: Documents reviewed (including in this volume)

The following annexes are included in the separate volume of annexes

Annex 2: Stakeholders consulted

Annex 3: Assessment Matrix

Annex 4: Case study Methodology

Annex 5: Data collection tools

1. Introduction and informed Consent script
2. Descriptive Data Monitoring Form
3. UN Staff Interview Question Guide
4. Civil Society Reference Group Interview Guide
5. Civil Society Organisations (not formally involved with Spotlight Initiative) Interview Question Guide
6. Government Interview Question Guide
7. Implementing Partners Interview Question Guide
8. Civil Society Organisations Focus-Group Discussion Guide
9. Workshop agenda
10. Protocol Global Story Collection and Facilitated Discussion
11. Global Story Collection Form
12. Facilitated discussion on SHINE platform

Annex 6: Stories collected

Annex 7: Terms of reference for thematic assessment

Annex 1: Documents reviewed

We have included hyperlinks below where documents are publicly available. Where there is no link, these have not been published, but can be accessed by contacting the Spotlight Initiative Global Secretariat.

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