



UNSDG SYSTEM-WIDE EVALUATION OFFICE

# Final Evaluation of the Spotlight Initiative (2017 - 2023)



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## **UNSDG System-Wide Evaluation Office**

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Andrea Cook	Executive Director
Valeria Carou Jones	Evaluation Manager
Nicholas Chua	Evaluation Analyst

## **Evaluation Team**

---

Andrea Lee Esser	Evaluation Team Leader
Katy Pullen	Evaluator (Gender and Gender-Based Violence Expert)
Veronika Tywuschik-Sohlstrom	Evaluator (Data and Systems Expert)
Paola Vela	Evaluator (Research Assistant and Interpreter)

## **Quality Assurance Panel**

---

Ole Winckler Andersen	Senior Analyst, Danish Institute for International Studies
Lisa Sutton	Director, Independent Evaluation and Audit Services, UN Women

## **Research Support**

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Karen Garza  
Amira Matawa

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## **Evaluation of the Spotlight Initiative – Report**

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**For further information please contact:** [un-systemwideevaluationoffice@un.org](mailto:un-systemwideevaluationoffice@un.org)

United Nations Sustainable Development Group System-Wide Evaluation Office

United Nations

New York

USA

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## Acronyms

AIAMP	Red Especializada en Género de la Asociación Iberoamericana de Ministerios Públicos
ACT	Advocacy, Coalition Building and Transformative Feminist Action to EVAWG
AOI	Areas of Investigation
AR	Annual Report
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CO	Country Office
COSI	Community of the Spotlight Initiative
CP	Country Programme
CPD	Country Programme Document
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DESA	Department of Economic and Social Affairs
DV	Domestic Violence
EAG	Evaluation Advisory Group
EC	European Commission
ECA	European Court of Auditors
ECM	Early Child Marriage
EOSG	Executive Office of Secretary-General
EQ	Evaluation Question
ERG	Evaluation Reference Group
EU	European Union
EU CLIPS	European Union Country Level Implementation Plans
EUD	EU Delegation
EVAWG	Eliminating or Ending Violence Against Women and Girls
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GALS	Gender Action Learning System
GAP	Gender Action Plan
GB	Governing Body
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GDI	Gender Development Index
GEWE	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
GII	Gender Inequality Index
GTG	United Nations Country Team Gender Theme Group
HDI	Human Development Index
HOA	Head of Agency
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IP	Implementing Partner
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
JWP	Joint Work Plan
KII	Key Informant Interview
KM	Knowledge Management
LNOB	Leave No One Behind
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPTFO	Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office
MSC	Most Significant Change
MTA	Mid-Term Assessment
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NRA	Non-Resident Agency

NRG	National Reference Group
OSC	Operational Steering Committee
ODA	Official development assistance
OECD DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
PAHO	Pan American Health Organization
PME	Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation
PMU	Programme Management Unit
QAP	Quality Assurance Panel
RC	Resident Coordinator
RCO	Resident Coordinator Office
RO	Regional Office
ROM	Results Oriented Monitoring
RPD	Regional Programme Document
RRG	Regional Reference Group
RUNOs	Recipient United Nations Organization
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
SI	Spotlight Initiative
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
SWAP	System-Wide Action Plan
SWE	System-Wide Evaluation
ToC	Theory of Change
TOR	Terms of Reference
UN	United Nations
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDCO	United Nations Development Coordination Office
UNDG	United Nations Development Group
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDSG	United Nations Deputy Secretary-General
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Fund
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
UN Trust Fund	United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
VAWG/HP	Violence Against Women and Girls and Harmful Practices
VFM	Value for Money
WHO	World Health Organization
WPHF	Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund



## Executive Summary

### Background and context

In 2017, the United Nations (UN), in partnership with the European Union (EU), launched the Spotlight Initiative to End Violence Against Women and Girls in line with the 2030 Agenda and guided by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The intended impact of the Initiative was for all women and girls to live free from violence and harmful practices. The Spotlight Initiative was the first large-scale initiative to systematically address both the drivers and the consequences of gender-based violence. It was envisioned as a model fund for UN Development System Reform to accelerate progress towards achievement of SDGs.

VAWG is one of the world's most prevalent human rights violations and a global public health problem affecting women and girls of all ages, races and socioeconomic backgrounds. The magnitude of the impact of VAWG and harmful practices on individuals' lives and society is immeasurable, with long-term physical, economic and psychological consequences. Despite the significant personal and societal costs of VAWG, progress to end VAWG has been slow and challenging.

The Spotlight Initiative was implemented through 26 country programmes, five regional programmes; one thematic regional programme; and two civil society grant-giving programmes in partnership with the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women and the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund. The Spotlight Initiative concluded its first stage at the end of 2023 and is positioning to commence a second stage. The Spotlight Initiative Secretariat commissioned the System-Wide Evaluation Office (SWEO) to conduct an independent evaluation of the first phase of the Initiative (2017-2023).

### Evaluation purpose, objectives and scope

The evaluation's purpose is to assess the Spotlight Initiative's overall performance, including its contribution to UN Reform. The evaluation focuses on the first phase of the Spotlight Initiative from December 2017 to December 2023. The specific objectives of the evaluation are:

- Assess how the Spotlight Initiative design and theory of change, including the whole systems approach and its six pillars, were structured to guide and influence programming including coherence, stakeholder participation and geographic scope, as well as flexibility and suitability to global, regional and national contexts
- Assess the extent to which management and operational systems were fit for purpose to efficiently support collective results at country, regional and global levels
- Assess the functionality of governance structures and the extent to which key stakeholders engaged in collaborative partnerships and decision-making
- Assess progress and results achieved including the extent to which the Initiative contributed to transformative change
- Assess the extent to which the United Nations has demonstrated the ability to function as a collective to achieve the Initiative's goals, including consideration of how UN reform supported the Initiative and how the Initiative impacted on the reform process
- Assess of the extent to which progress and results achieved are sustainable
- Identify lessons learned on how stakeholders can work within complex realms to design programmes to accelerate progress toward eliminating VAWG and other development challenges.



The evaluation covers implementation at the global, regional and country levels inclusive of two civil society grant-giving programmes from 2017 to 2023. It focuses on seven areas of investigation which were translated into seven evaluation questions aligned to the evaluation criteria of relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability. See below.

<b>AOI 1 – Programme design (relevance)</b>
Q1: What are the key strengths and weaknesses of the design of the Spotlight Initiative, including the whole systems approach and the six pillars with cross-cutting principles? To what extent has the Spotlight Initiative design process and programme scope influenced results, coherence, stakeholder participation and flexibility and suitability to global, regional and national contexts?
<b>AOI 2 – Management and operationalization (efficiency)</b>
Q2: To what extent has the Spotlight Initiative put in place adequate resources and systems at all levels to achieve the results as articulated in the theory of change and the results framework? What have been the strengths and challenges as a result of the processes established and resources put in place at the headquarters, country and regional levels including management and administrative systems (for example. architecture, personnel, capacities, finances)?
<b>AOI 3 – Governance, leadership and coherence (external coherence)</b>
Q3: To what extent has Spotlight programming been coherent at country, regional and global levels? To what extent were the right stakeholders (including marginalized groups) engaged and to what extent have key actors at all levels demonstrated the required engagement, ownership and shared responsibilities and decision-making? What evidence is there of collaborative partnerships across the United Nations, government, European Union and civil society organizations?
<b>AOI 4 - Results and progress (effectiveness)</b>
Q4: To what extent have the results achieved by the Spotlight Initiative provided a robust proof of concept for the theory of change and the six pillars whole systems approach with cross-cutting principles, including evidence of progress against the results framework plus other results such as SDG localization and acceleration; innovation; qualitative significant changes; and the impact or reach of advocacy, communications and knowledge management to influence change?
<b>AOI 5 - UN reform and new ways of working (internal coherence)</b>
Q5: To what extent has the Spotlight Initiative been able to operate as a shared system to achieve a common purpose? In particular, how has UN reform supported the Spotlight Initiative and how has the Spotlight Initiative supported reform? Is there credible evidence of a collaborative systems approach to working internally and with external stakeholders on the Initiative (and beyond)?
<b>AOI 6 – Sustainability</b>
Q6: To what extent has the Initiative demonstrated sustainable changes in line with plans including evidence of institutionalization and ownership? What are the risks of a return to less joined approaches?
<b>AOI 7 - Lessons learned</b>
Q7: What are the key strengths and weaknesses in design, systems, targets, operations, management structure, architecture and donor base of the Spotlight Initiative that have implications for design of other complex programmes (including VAWG) and UN reform? How can these lessons be applied at all levels?

## Evaluation approach and methodology

The evaluation utilized a theory-based approach which involved the analysis of Spotlight Initiative’s planning documents and theory of change and use of contribution analysis. The evaluation used a mixed-methods approach, drawing on qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection and analysis to strengthen the reliability of data, to capture a broader range of perspectives and obtain a deeper understanding of the effects of the Spotlight Initiative. See below. The evaluation was participatory in its approach, involving stakeholders at all stages of the evaluation and it adapted a “most significant change” approach to explore high-level results and contributions to “transformative change”.



The evaluation integrated a gender equality and human rights-based approach throughout, aligned with the United Nations Evaluation Group’s guidance. Ethical considerations and safeguards were designed to ensure informed consent, confidentiality and data protection; cultural sensitivity and fair identification of participants; and adherence to “do no harm” and “survivor-centred” principles in relation to participants and their communities.

## Findings

### 1. Programme design

The Spotlight Initiative’s theory of change, with its six pillars and three cross-cutting principles, was comprehensive, serving as a critical framework to support coherent design of country and regional programmes. While supporting a holistic approach, the theory of change was ambitious and lacked elaboration on interactions across pillars and across programme levels. The global design structure of the Initiative was complex, leading to challenges in ensuring coherence across components. The design was flexible enough to allow for country and regional contextualization, though challenges were faced with localizing the results framework especially for regional programmes.

The countries selected for the programme offered diverse testing grounds for the Spotlight Initiative model. A thematic focus by region provided a strategic entry point and an opportunity to raise the profile of key regional challenges, however irregular classifications of regions led to programme design challenges.

The design process at global, regional and country levels brought together a broad base of stakeholders though some stakeholders with specialized expertise were not initially involved in the global design. Country and regional levels had to develop complex programmes within short timeframes in contexts where critical data were often unavailable. The lack of an inception phase left little room to develop relations and structures needed to support implementation. RUNO selections at country and regional levels were in line with mandates and comparative advantages, but the designation of “core” and “non-core” entities was ultimately not unifying.

## **2. Management and operationalization**

While expenditure and financial delivery rates increased over time, the lack of an inception phase, short implementation timelines, and a multi-layered process for releasing funds caused operational challenges and delays in the implementation of country and regional programmes.

Adequate human resources were apportioned to enable the Global Secretariat and UN Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office to operate effectively and support programme implementation. However, significant challenges were faced in ensuring adequate human resources to operationalize country and regional programmes. Insufficient staffing levels, turnover in personnel, setbacks in UN recruitment processes and a limited pool of experts from which to draw in some contexts (such as Small Island Developing States) were identified as challenges to operational effectiveness.

The Spotlight Initiative demonstrated an ability to be responsive to changing national and regional contexts through timely and adaptive actions, including the response to COVID-19 and other crises during programme implementation. However, the integration of more flexible and responsive strategies into the operational framework would have better anticipated and mitigated the impacts of significant external changes in context.

UN systems and procedures presented operational challenges for RUNOs in reaching grassroots organizations and for implementing partners of the Initiative. Different financial and administrative systems hindered UN system-wide operational efficiencies in the context of the Initiative, despite a concerted effort by personnel to mitigate these impacts.

While centralized performance management, monitoring and reporting systems promoted standardization, these required extensive human resource investment with limited evidence of positive impact on programme operational efficiency or performance. Implementation of the global results framework was challenging and there was significant variability in the quality of results reporting. Participatory M&E approaches and mid-term assessments were valuable for learning and accountability purposes, however the tie-in of the mid-term assessment to a performance-based continuation of programmes created unintended operational disruptions.

## **3. Governance, leadership and coherence**

The Spotlight Initiative's governance structures at global, regional and country levels engaged a broad base of high-level stakeholders, though functional challenges were faced at all levels of governance. The inclusion of formal governance structures for civil society engagement was an important and innovative aspect of the programme that nevertheless required adjustments and adaptations along the way to improve functioning.

The Spotlight Initiative demonstrated mixed results in fostering coherence within and between governance structures. The Initiative faced coherence challenges between its governance structures, marked by a top-down approach from global bodies that was not well connected to regional and country levels. WPHF and UN Trust Fund governance structures at country levels had limited engagement with Spotlight Initiative structures though protocols were in place to avoid duplication and foster coherence.

There are exemplary cases of effective national and subnational government engagement and ownership, however, the programme has faced continuity challenges due to changes in government administrations and political instability that have hindered potential for government ownership in some instances. Ownership of the agenda by regional bodies varies by region due to a range of factors. Interactions between the United Nations

and the European Union at all levels has been multifaceted, reflecting a complex interplay of issues including governance, personal dynamics and visibility.

#### **4. Results and progress**

The Spotlight Initiative achieved notable results across its six pillars. In Pillar 1, Spotlight Initiative strengthened and supported new and existing VAWG legislation, advancing national and global efforts to combat VAWG and gender-based violence. In Pillar 2, it trained parliament members, government officials and traditional leaders to foster effective programmes for preventing and addressing VAWG. In Pillar 3, it promoted gender-equitable norms and prevented violence through school initiatives, creative awareness activities and mentorship programmes. In Pillar 4, it improved access to services for women and girls by boosting the capacity of service providers. In Pillar 5, it successfully contributed to collecting and increasing the usage of qualitative and disaggregated gender-based violence data. With the incorporation of Pillar 6, Spotlight Initiative empowered women's movements and local feminist organizations, significantly impacting national civil society organizations and grassroots groups. The comprehensive approach, combined with substantive funding allocations and high-level, multi-stakeholder engagement, made important contributions to significant changes toward eliminating violence against women and girls at country and regional levels.

The Spotlight Initiative generated a wealth of learning and knowledge to support efforts to end violence against women and girls. The impact and reach of communications, advocacy and knowledge management to influence change was demonstrated in several contexts, but results were not well evidenced at scale or at all levels.

#### **5. UN reform and new ways of working**

Aspects of UN Development System reform such as the Resident Coordinator system positively supported the implementation of the Spotlight Initiative. In some cases, the Initiative supported common approaches to specific areas of operations. However, there were challenges to delivering reform objectives, several of which were exogenous to the Spotlight Initiative, including factors related to the culture, business operations and performance management processes of UN entities.

The Spotlight Initiative deepened understanding of UN entity comparative advantages and synergies in EVAWG within country and regional programmes. The impact on RUNO ways of working at the global level was found to be limited. Evidence that the Initiative delivered a more collaborative and coherent UN system response to EVAWG is mixed.

In most countries where the Spotlight Initiative was implemented, the programme positively influenced UN Country Team guiding frameworks to more consistently address violence against women and girls. Furthermore, there was evidence of positive spillover effects from country and regional programmes to non-Spotlight Initiative countries.

#### **6. Sustainability**

Efforts were made to consider sustainability during design and implementation, but operational and contextual factors affected the focus on sustainability. Sustainability strategies, developed in the final year of programme implementation, left uncertainties about ownership and the practicalities of turning strategy into action.

Progress in institutionalizing programme interventions within government and regional bodies was mixed across countries and regions. The Spotlight Initiative significantly enhanced the capabilities of civil society

organizations to address violence against women and girls. However, funding shortfalls jeopardize continuation of gains made. Mechanisms exist at country and regional levels to promote and sustain UN entity collaboration to end VAWG, but individuals and personal interactions also have influence over continuation of Spotlight Initiative approaches. Capitalizing on opportunities to institutionalize Spotlight Initiative efforts is predicated on funding, as well as a willingness among key stakeholders to collaborate at all levels.

There is evidence of the Initiative's positive influence on development partner programming and investments on EVAWG in the countries and regions where it operated. However, the Spotlight Initiative struggled to secure broad-based financial support beyond the initial European Union funding committed. Efforts to mobilize resources under the Spotlight Initiative between 2018 and 2023 met with limited success at global, regional and country levels for a variety of reasons, including fund set-up, perceptions around visibility and influence and donor and UN entity preference for individual over joint UN programming.

## Conclusions

Overall, the evaluation found proof of concept for the Spotlight Initiative model while also highlighting areas for improvement. The comprehensive design demonstrated the ability of an integrated, inter-agency approach to EVAWG to contribute to higher-order changes at regional, national and local levels. The Initiative was able to respond to contextual changes to deliver important results across pillars, while deepening understanding across stakeholders of the need for a broad range of actors to work collaboratively to address violence against women and girls, providing proof of concept for the approach. The governance model brought together expanded stakeholders with an elevated role for civil society engagement. While noting these achievements, the evaluation found that programme delivery was significantly challenged by a complicated operational model and by limitations in the compatibility of UN administrative and financial systems, which restricted their capacity to function collaboratively. While some elements and activities of the Initiative show signs of continuation, the sustainability of the overarching approach is still to be determined. The evaluation produced seven conclusions as detailed below.

**Conclusion 1 - The conceptual six-pillar model was comprehensive, and the programme played an important role in raising visibility and focusing attention on a comprehensive approach to EVAWG in the countries and regions where it operated. The evaluation confirmed proof of concept for the six-pillar approach with cross-cutting principles of the theory of change while also highlighting a need for clearer elaboration on interactions across pillars and across programme components.**

The theory of change was an essential strength of the programme that facilitated a comprehensive approach to EVAWG.<sup>394</sup> The “whole of UN - whole of government” approach, combined with significant funds dedicated to a traditionally underfunded issue, played a positive role in raising the visibility of the issue and enhancing government ownership in many contexts. The inclusion of civil society organizations as a pillar-specific and cross-cutting approach supported greater engagement with civil society, adding valuable perspectives to efforts to end violence against women and girls. While the theory of change was predicated on stable operational environments, the model was able to be adapted to navigate complex and dynamic environments to deliver results (see Conclusion 4).

While supporting a comprehensive approach, the theory of change did not clearly identify interactions across pillars so that intentional strategies could be developed to foster synergies. The evaluation highlighted a need for greater attention during the design phase on guiding a strategic approach to implementation that considered how activities could be staged (or staggered) to allow progress in one pillar to leverage results in another pillar. The Spotlight Initiative does not contain a theory of value creation, identifying and defining the value that will be created by the Initiative, to complement the theory of change and allow for a more comprehensive capture of the Initiative's value and tangible and intangible effects.

Furthermore, coherence was not well articulated across the 26 country programmes, five regional programmes, one thematic programme and two lines of grants with missed opportunities to foster greater synergies, particularly between regional and country programmes.

**Conclusion 2 - The governance model was able to bring together diverse stakeholders in line with the multisectoral approach, with an elevated role for civil society organizations within all levels of governance. However, expanded stakeholder engagement (including civil society reference groups (CSRGs)) required time and space to develop new relations and define systems.**

The Initiative's governance structures at all levels brought together an expanded group of stakeholders, many of whom had never shared common space around EVAWG. In many contexts, this supported the development of new alliances and coalitions to work more collaboratively to EVAWG including bringing non-traditional actors (for example, religious, traditional and sports leaders) to the table.

At country and regional levels, steering committees played a role in overseeing programmes and facilitating multi-stakeholder engagement. Variations were notable, with some demonstrating a commitment to high-level participation and shared responsibility, while others grappled with cumbersome coordination and infrequent meetings. Civil society reference groups faced challenges in defining roles and responsibilities and establishing influence on decision-making though overall their involvement substantially enriched discussions by bringing diverse perspectives and ensuring the representation of marginalized voices.

Global-level governance structures included senior personnel from the UN and EU, which raised the profile of the Initiative while at the same time offering limited space for technical discussions that would have been more appropriately handled at lower levels of governance. Coherence and knowledge exchange across governance levels, exacerbated by inadequate bi-directional communication, led to a perceived disconnect between global decisions and local realities.

**Conclusion 3 - The operational model was overly complex to efficiently operationalize the Spotlight Initiative at the speed and scale envisioned. Root causes of operational inefficiencies stemmed from the lack of an inception phase, insufficiently flexible funding release and replenishment modalities and human resources that were not commensurate with programme goals and the timeframe for implementation.**

Though ambitious in its scope and intent, the Spotlight Initiative operational model was convoluted and insufficiently flexible, posing challenges to efficient implementation. The evaluation identified an inherent tension within the operational model between demonstrating proof of concept at a fast pace and at scale and allowing time and space for the development of cohesive operational processes needed for efficient programme implementation. This was exacerbated by the lack of an inception phase, which did not allow time for country and regional programmes to establish the relationships and systems needed for efficient implementation.

The replenishment model and disbursement and flow of funds between Phase I and Phase II were key causes of operational issues for country and regional programmes, contributing to setbacks and delays in implementation. In particular, the Spotlight Initiative's "70 per cent rule" led to stop and start implementation by RUNOs, resulted in complex programme coordination efforts, and contributed to personnel turnover, further compounded by other system operational bottlenecks. The need to deliver at a fast pace was frequently at odds with UN entity procedures and processes. While there were examples of operational collaboration, the overall lack of harmonization across RUNO administrative and financial systems caused confusion and challenges for implementers and contributed to delayed recruitment and procurement processes.

Within the operational model, the Initiative faced significant challenges in ensuring adequate human resources. The staff and capacities needed to deliver at the speed and scale required, working within agreed

governance structures and timeframes, was largely underestimated and under-resourced. Gaps among RUNOs in technical or operational capacities or an insufficient number of staff presented operational challenges for most country and regional programmes (particularly in SIDS contexts) while turnover and staffing gaps within programme management units led to shortfalls in capacities relating to monitoring and results reporting, communications and coordination.

**Conclusion 4 – Aspects of global monitoring, reporting, knowledge management and communication systems contributed to learning and accountability, however, these were not fully effective, efficient or responsive enough to guide programme implementation and communicate results achieved to stakeholders. Overall, the complexity of the results framework and indicator guidance proved challenging to operationalize and the use of standardized indicators across diverse country and regional contexts has not provided a consistently reliable picture of programme performance. The impact and reach of communications, advocacy and knowledge management to influence change were particularly challenging to measure and to demonstrate results at scale.**

Monitoring and reporting systems incorporating the global results framework, annual reporting and mid-term assessments, encountered significant obstacles in their operationalization. These included burdensome reporting requirements and changes to online platforms for data tracking and aggregation, exacerbated by staffing and capacity gaps in monitoring and evaluation personnel, which rendered the monitoring function of the programme complicated and time consuming. Participatory monitoring and evaluation approaches and the mid-term assessments helped to inform decision-making and refine interventions and strategies to EVAWG. However, learning and insights did not sufficiently channel back to stakeholders, including governments and civil society, to guide programme implementation and revise and refine implementation plans through adaptive management.

The results framework's use of standardized indicators across diverse country and regional contexts has not provided a consistently reliable picture of programme performance, highlighting the challenges inherent in monitoring complex social change processes. Overall, the complexity of the results framework and indicator guidance proved challenging to operationalize, despite some limited scope to add custom indicators to ensure contextual relevance. While the framework was designed to track progress toward results, impact-level tracking has not been possible due to lack of available data for selected SDG indicators within the programme timeframe. Tracking of outcome- and output-level indicators was more effective, but with inconsistencies. A disproportionate focus was also placed on quantitative indicators at the expense of capturing qualitative changes to better address some of the widely acknowledged challenges inherent in monitoring complex social change processes, which may have offered a richer and more accurate portrayal of the important results achieved by country and regional programmes (see Conclusion 5).

The Spotlight Initiative does not contain a value-for-money framework integrated into its design, which hindered the articulation and capture of the comprehensive costs and effects of the Initiative to meet the expectations of key stakeholders.

The large volume of learning and knowledge generated demonstrated evidence of wide reach within specific contexts, particularly for communications campaigns and activities. However, evidence of influence and impact of knowledge and communications at scale is limited. Challenges were faced in fully capitalizing on opportunities for cross-learning and cross-fertilization of knowledge.

**Conclusion 5 - Country and regional programmes demonstrated an ability to be responsive in the face of dynamic environments to demonstrate important results across all six pillars, with evidence of contributing to higher-order changes supported by work across multiple pillars.**



The Spotlight Initiative showcased results across all six pillars, evidencing contributions to higher-order changes and helping to lay crucial foundations for transformative change. In delivering results, the Initiative demonstrated an ability to be responsive to dynamic external factors that included a global pandemic, environmental disasters, political upheaval and conflicts, while at the same time navigating internal challenges (see Conclusions 3 and 4).

The contribution to higher-order changes at regional, national and lower levels would not have been possible without the comprehensive design, scale of funding and high-level visibility that the UN-EU partnership afforded. At the national level, these included raising the visibility of VAWG and developing stronger partnerships and broader multi-stakeholder engagement, as well as enhanced government ownership of a comprehensive approach to EVAWG. Regional-level changes included: enhanced visibility of the issue and greater understanding of the importance of a multisectoral approach; improved availability of data and practice-oriented tools; and greater engagement across stakeholder groups. The Spotlight Initiative strengthened civil society organization capacities at both national and regional levels. It contributed to higher-order changes at community levels including raising awareness and changes in mindsets, empowering women and girls and strengthening response systems, services and referral networks.

The Spotlight Initiative's support to, and engagement with, civil society organizations were strengths of the programme that resulted in better networked, trained, and capacitated civil society organizations to advance work related to gender-based violence. In the context of rapidly changing contexts, strengthening civil society organizations was a strategic result that can offer some level of stability in dynamic environments.

**Conclusion 6 – The Spotlight Initiative has demonstrated a broader influence on UN Development System processes and with non-Spotlight Initiative countries that have adapted elements of the model. However, the sustainability of results and the Initiative's overarching approach is influenced by multiple factors including variable degrees of ownership of sustainability strategies, a changing official development assistance landscape, development partner preference for individual over joint entity engagement, and competition for funding among UN entities underpinned by incentive structures.**

The Spotlight Initiative model influenced approaches to EVAWG in some countries as evidenced by the ongoing development of Spotlight Initiative-inspired programmes globally as well as the identification of spillover effects in some non-Spotlight Initiative countries that adopted aspects of the model and theory of change. Despite examples of successful institutionalization of Spotlight Initiative approaches and activities at the country and regional levels, there were missed opportunities at all levels to embed the Spotlight Initiative programming approach more systematically within governmental, intergovernmental and UN system processes, and to more effectively share knowledge and learning to influence public and policy discourse.

Between 2018 and 2023, the Spotlight Initiative struggled to secure broad-based financial support beyond the initial EU funding, although there is evidence of positive influence on development partner programming and investments in EVAWG in some countries and regions. While some RUNOs have secured funds to continue specific elements or activities of the Initiative, there are uncertainties regarding ownership and implementation of sustainability strategies, highlighting challenges in future funding for civil society. Institutional and programme funding for civil society organizations, especially grassroots and women's rights organizations, remains a critical challenge given the crucial role of civil society in reaching the most vulnerable and maintaining momentum to EVAWG.

Whether the United Nations or other stakeholders can mobilize adequate funding for the envisaged shift to the Spotlight Initiative 2.0 Fund, continuation of the comprehensive approach to EVAWG is still to be determined. Contextual factors, such as a changing official development assistance landscape, government priorities and donor preferences, have impacted resource mobilization. In several contexts, competition for funding between

RUNOs was found to adversely affect collective resource mobilization efforts led by the UN Resident Coordinator for joint successor programmes. Development partner (including EU delegations) preferences for funding single entities has encouraged UN entities to pursue unilateral funding, compounded by the existing incentive structures under which UN entities and their staff operate.

**Conclusion 7 - The Spotlight Initiative was supported by, and is supportive of, the principles of UN Development System reform, positively contributing to clearer understanding of entities' comparative advantages in EAWG and supporting more comprehensive approaches to EAWG in UNSDCFs. However, significant challenges were encountered to working coherently across UN entity systems, several of which were exogenous to the Initiative. Individuals and interactions were found to have had equal, if not greater, primacy over processes in the delivery of a coherent UN system response to EAWG at country, regional and global levels.**

The timing of the launch of the Spotlight Initiative relative to the UN Development System reform meant that the learning process took hold as country and regional programmes were implemented. Against this backdrop, there are clear instances where UN Development System reform efforts supported implementation and vice-versa, although evidence that this was able to deliver a more coherent UN system response to EAWG at country, regional and global levels is mixed.

In line with UN Development System reform principles, placing the programme under the overall leadership of the UN Resident Coordinator at the country level positively impacted the visibility of EAWG as a critical development issue within the country, facilitated high-level government, civil society and EU delegation involvement, and supported RUNOs in navigating operational challenges during implementation. This led to a clearer understanding among RUNOs at country and regional levels of areas of comparative advantage and synergies in EAWG and supported new ways of working together in structures and processes aligned to reform principles. For example, there was positive influence on UNCT guiding frameworks, including the cooperation framework, to prioritize a more coherent and multisectoral approach to EAWG.

Significant challenges were experienced in streamlining operational practices in the face of different UN entity systems, which has been a steep learning curve for UN personnel, who would have benefited from more detailed operational guidance beyond that provided by the Secretariat and in current UNSDG Guidance on Joint Programming.

Challenges in delivering reform objectives within the programme architecture were, to a significant degree, identified as institutional in nature and exogenous to the Spotlight Initiative. These included cultural factors (strong identity and culture of individual UN entities and the need for corporate visibility and recognition including through use of entity logos), factors related to business operations, and performance management mechanisms that create barriers and disincentives to collaboration. These challenges created friction points during programme implementation that affected cooperation and cohesion among UN entities at all levels.

The implementation of the Spotlight Initiative demonstrated that individuals and interactions have played a prominent role over processes and tools in the delivery of a coherent UN system response to EAWG at the country, regional and global levels. Inter-agency collaboration with external partners varied depending on the context and particular dynamics among the RUNOs, and between RUNOs and the Programme Management Unit at country and regional levels. Even though committed individuals working together demonstrated an ability to overcome systems challenges to coherence, UN systems were not sufficiently robust to mitigate challenges in personal, interpersonal and team dynamics.

## Recommendations

**Recommendation 1 – For the Spotlight Initiative 2.0, work with key stakeholders to review the theory of change to simplify the focus to encompass fewer pillars, while still maintaining the comprehensive approach and cross-cutting elements and promoting interaction across pillars and programme levels. Allow for greater flexibility within programmes for prioritizing and adapting to different contexts (including full UN entity engagement without core and non-core designations) while maintaining key non-negotiable requirements. Develop a simplified results framework while maintaining the comprehensive framing.**

**Timing: Immediate (within one year as part of 2.0 design)**

**Directed to: Spotlight Initiative Secretariat**

### **Action Points:**

- a. Ensure that all key stakeholders are engaged in the redesign process including civil society and all entities with specialized expertise including the World Health Organization (WHO) given its proven expertise and deep experience of the health services sector on issues of VAWG and gender-based violence.
- b. Simplify the six-pillar model to fewer pillars to allow for greater tailoring and prioritization across contexts, including consideration of an approach tailored to SIDS contexts, while retaining all elements of the proven model.
- c. Complement the theory of change with the development of a theory of value creation at the inception phase of the Spotlight Initiative 2.0 to facilitate the comprehensive capture of the value created by the Initiative and tangible and intangible results.
- d. Work with key stakeholders to identify specific aspects of women's economic empowerment programming with strong linkages to EVAWG to provide guidelines in order to clarify the focus of this area within the Spotlight Initiative model as a critical component of a comprehensive response in certain contexts
- e. Provide flexibility on pillar focus at regional and country levels to allow for prioritization and staging, while maintaining the comprehensive approach. The design should include key core elements to preserve the integrity of the model including a focus on civil society organization engagement as a pillar-specific and cross-cutting element.
- f. Clarify and formalize relationships and interactions between and across regional and country programmes to capitalize on opportunities for synergistic programming.
- g. Allow for engagement with the full spectrum of UN entities without designation of core and non-core.
- h. Develop a simpler results framework with fewer indicators, drawing on good practice from the United Nations joint programmes to end female genital mutilation and early child marriages, maintaining the comprehensive framing, while ensuring the more systematic capture of disaggregated data on programme reach to vulnerable groups.

**Recommendation 2 - For the Spotlight Initiative 2.0, ensure that programme design and operations maintain relevance and dynamic responsiveness to changing contexts in design and operationalization of Spotlight Initiative 2.0 including establishing systems to enable swift and coordinated adjustments to changing contexts so that programming can pivot with agility. Consider how the Spotlight Initiative 2.0 may allow for intervention in existing crises or emergency contexts by establishing simplified operational processes and selective focus interventions to support a comprehensive approach to EVAWG, complementing existing humanitarian-focused gender-based violence systems and structures.**

**Timing: Immediate (within one year as part of 2.0 design)**

**Directed to – Spotlight Initiative Secretariat**

**Action Points:**

- a. Assume dynamic environments in the design stage to create more agile systems to adjust and respond to changing contexts, drawing on learning from MPTFs in complex contexts (for example, the UN Peacebuilding Fund and the Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund).
- b. Develop crisis preparedness guidance and systems for adaptation to substantial changes to context, based on lessons learned from the Spotlight Initiative and other programmes.
- c. Consult with key stakeholders in the GBV space for humanitarian and conflict settings to develop a Spotlight Initiative design model tailored to complex contexts, allowing for nimbler implementation and pillar-specific focus areas to support a broader comprehensive approach to EAWG that targets gaps and reinforces work across wider gender-based violence programming in complex contexts.
- d. Systematize minimum standards for do no harm considerations throughout programme design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation.

**Recommendation 3 – For the Spotlight Initiative 2.0, explore alternative phasing and sequencing approaches to implementation and revise aspects of the Spotlight Initiative operational model including the fund disbursement modality. Ensure human resource planning by RUNOs, including staffing of programme management units, is aligned with programme delivery and operational requirements.**

**Timing: Immediate (within one year as part of 2.0 design)**

**Directed to – Spotlight Initiative Secretariat, RUNOs**

**Action Points:**

- a. As part of programme development, allow time and space (specifically, an inception phase) for the development of cohesive operational processes needed for efficient programme implementation, drawing on documented good practice examples (for example, Kyrgyzstan).
- b. Review fund disbursement modalities to mitigate challenges in maintaining implementation timelines and the recruitment and retention of key programme personnel. This includes revisiting pre-financing mechanisms and amending the current fund disbursement modality requiring all RUNOs to achieve 70 per cent rate of fund utilization before replenishments are released to participating agencies.
- c. Build on efforts to operationalize the principles of budget flexibility and adaptive programming within the Spotlight Initiative operational model, prioritizing contexts where RUNOs and their implementing partners are likely to face greater operational and human resource challenges, including multi-country office and SIDS contexts and countries shifting into crisis situations (see also Recommendation 2).
- d. Ensure programme management units are adequately staffed to perform monitoring and evaluation, communications and coordination functions while also ensuring that the coordination capacities required to operationalize joint and integrated UN EAWG programmes are reflected in programme design and allocations.
- e. Ensure RUNO staffing needs and capacities are adequately assessed and aligned to support implementation of Spotlight Initiative programmes, from the design stage onwards (*action point directed at RUNOs*).
- f. Accelerate recruitment and procurement processes to mitigate operational bottlenecks for implementation of Spotlight Initiative programmes, leveraging UN efficiency gains in business operations where possible (see also Recommendation 7 below) (*action point directed at RUNOs*).

**Recommendation 4 - For the Spotlight Initiative 2.0, strengthen and simplify monitoring, reporting and learning systems in line with a streamlined results framework. Expand efforts to ensure that monitoring systems report on disaggregated data to highlight the programme reach to vulnerable groups. Expand on and systematize utilization of qualitative approaches to capture a richer and more holistic picture of programme results on the ground. Integrate a value-for-money framework to guide data collection and monitoring during implementation and to serve as a key input for value-for-money assessments. Develop stronger systems to enable real-time learning and knowledge sharing to drive the scaling-up of good practices and innovative approaches.**

**Timing: Immediate (within one year as part of 2.0 design)**

**Directed to: Spotlight Initiative Secretariat**

**Action Points:**

- a. Develop streamlined and simplified annual reporting formats with inputs from users at country and regional levels to ensure relevance and reduce time and effort spent. Where possible generate reports that serve various purposes for reporting requirements set forth (for example, entities, donors).
- b. Build on and expand participatory monitoring approaches. Complement quantitative results monitoring with qualitative models such as outcome harvesting and most significant change. Socialize donors on the value of alternatives for the measurement of results to predetermined quantitative indicators.
- c. Introduce mandatory disaggregation of data within monitoring and reporting, including in the global results framework, to better assess how the principle of leaving no one behind is being implemented.
- d. Integrate a value-for-money framework at the time of design of the Spotlight Initiative 2.0 based on the framework utilized by the value-for-money assessment of the Spotlight Initiative undertaken during the final evaluation. The framework should include a comprehensive definition of value for money, as well as criteria, sub-criteria, standards, and indicators to guide monitoring and collection of data during implementation of the Initiative to serve as a key input for future value-for-money assessments and to inform investment decisions.
- e. Embed plans for cross-learning and sharing of experiences within the country, particularly within locales where the programme is not implemented, while also including systems for global cross-learning to extend reach and to better capture evidence of influence and impact.
- f. Consolidate knowledge products and communication channels to ensure greater accessibility and clearer platform usability. Disseminate good practices from the Spotlight Initiative 2018–2023 to inform wider uptake of innovative approaches and key learnings, building on the Compendium of Innovative and Good Practices and Lessons Learned (2024).

**Recommendation 5 – Strengthen and extend models of expanded stakeholder engagement in programme governance, while establishing systems that facilitate bi-directional communications across levels. Build on good practice models to support positive momentum for enhanced civil society organization and non-traditional actor engagement in governance structures, including formalizing, expanding and adequately resourcing the civil society reference group structure. Share and expand on good practice models for enhanced civil society organization engagement, including setting budgetary targets, building capacities and facilitating joint and simplified financing and reporting structures to reach grassroots and civil society organizations.**

**Timing: 2-3 years**

**Directed to: Spotlight Initiative Secretariat**

**Action Points:**

- a. Maintain multisectoral governance bodies, while establishing mechanisms for bi-directional communications and feedback loops across the different levels of governance structures.
- b. Maintain a focus on civil society organizations as a core component of the design within a mandatory pillar and cutting across all pillars with associated funding targets.
- c. Work with the Civil Society Global Reference Group (or its equivalent under Spotlight Initiative 2.0) to develop and disseminate a good practice compendium, highlighting mechanisms (for example, small grants, human resource development, institutional funding, etc.) to reach a broader group of civil society organizations engaged in EVAWG as implementing partners, including grassroots groups, women’s organizations, and non-traditional partners in line with LNOB principles.
- d. Identify and share good practice models for civil society organization engagement to promote learning on integrating these approaches across UNCT work and UNDCO guidance and common processes for UNCTs.

**Recommendation 6 – Develop a holistic funding strategy for consideration of UNSDG to step up joint UN programming at country, regional and global levels for EVAWG and to expand approaches to resource mobilization in line with the Spotlight Initiative comprehensive model, the principals of UN Development System reform and the commitments of the Funding Compact.**

**Timing: 2 years**

**Directed to: Spotlight Initiative Secretariat**

**Action Points:**

- a. In line with the Spotlight Initiative comprehensive approach, the Spotlight Initiative Secretariat, with engagement of UN entities and in consultation with development partners, should develop a holistic funding strategy to support joint UN programming for EVAWG for the consideration by UNSDG, taking into account:
  - a. Models from UN multi-partner trust funds, local trust funds and other mechanisms overseen by the UN Resident Coordinator in line with the principles of UN Development System reform.
  - b. Innovative approaches and linkages with private sector funding for investing “seed money” in middle and higher-income countries with enabling environments (via either global or regional programme reach) to capitalize on opportunities to support fast-tracked good practices that may be replicable in other countries.
  - c. Performance measurement and incentive structures of UN entities to support joint resource mobilization to address complex development challenges including ending VAWG and gender-based violence.
  - d. The importance of both institutional and programmatic funding for civil society organizations within UN EVAWG programming, particularly for grassroots and women’s organizations, recognizing the vital role of civil society in combatting VAWG and supporting sustainability and LNOB principles.

**Recommendation 7 - To further support UN Development System reform objectives, incorporate learning from the operationalization of the Spotlight Initiative to inform UN system-wide and entity-level efforts to harmonize practices and processes to deliver coherent, integrated support and maximize collective results on EVAWG at country and regional levels.**

**Timing: 2 years**

**Directed to: UNDCO, Spotlight Initiative Secretariat**

**Key elements for consideration include:**

- a. The development and dissemination of a good practice compendium to capture Spotlight Initiative learning on harmonizing UN entity-level operations at the country level (for example, joint procurement, collective peer review of terms of reference, joint expressions of interest and calls for proposals, joint trainings for implementing partners, and joint monitoring activities).
- b. The envisaged review of the Management and Accountability Framework (2021) and Cooperation Framework Guidance could be entry points to further delineate the accountabilities and responsibilities for UN Resident Coordinators and Heads of Agencies for integrated and joint programming.
- c. Future updates to the Guidance Note on a New Generation of Joint Programmes (2022) could include the operational dimensions of programme design and delivery, such as those related to joint procurement, recruitment and financial reporting.
- d. Clarifying roles for Resident Coordinator's Office coordination for integrated programming (with reference to the UN Peacebuilding Fund model and UNSDG Joint Programming Guidance) (*action point directed at UNDCO*).
- e. Giving increased attention to programmatic and operational risks, including the potential impact of operational issues associated with the processes and procedures of UN entities, as part of risk management in joint and integrated programmes, particularly programmes to EVAWG where such risks may affect service delivery and support to survivors of violence.

**Recommendation 8 – Embed the comprehensive Spotlight Initiative approach to EVAWG ('Spotlight Standard') into the implementation of the UN System-Wide Gender Equality Acceleration Plan (2024), UN-SWAP (entity level) and the UNCT-SWAP (country level) and other common UN Development System processes such as common country analyses and UN cooperation frameworks to serve as driving forces for collective UN work to prioritize a comprehensive approach to EVAWG. This will support extended geographical reach and coverage of comprehensive EVAWG programming across the UN development system and expand resource mobilization opportunities.**

**Timing: 2-3 years**

**Directed to: Spotlight Initiative Secretariat in consultation with UNDCO, UN Women (UN System Coordination Division)**

**Key opportunities include:**

- i. The development of a branded "Spotlight Standard" for UNCT comprehensive approaches to EVAWG to provide benchmarks to support processes needed for UN EVAWG integrated programming, working within existing tools and mandatory processes for UNCTs, including common country analyses, UNSDCFs, and linking to UNCT-SWAP requirements.
- ii. The development of capacity-building initiatives of UNCTs to support integration of the Spotlight Standard in common country analyses and UNSDCFs for an integrated UN system approach reinforced by linkages to UNCT-SWAP requirements.
- iii. The establishment of linkages to embed the Spotlight Initiative model and standards into UN systems to implement the UN System-Wide Gender Equality Acceleration Plan such as: 1.3. coordinated and joint activities result in the reversal of systemic gender inequality across all sectors; 2.2. adoption of entity plans to operationalize the Gender Equality Acceleration Plan; 3.3. biennial gender equality reviews of UN activities with the UN leadership in all UN Member States.
- iv. The articulation and integration of a Spotlight Standard into new iterations or updates of mandatory gender accountability frameworks for the UN, specifically the UN-SWAP (entity-level framework) and the UNCT-SWAP (country-level framework).



# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Context and Background

### Introduction

1. Gender-based violence (GBV) is a widespread global phenomenon that is deeply embedded in unequal power structures and in patriarchal values, cultures and traditions. One of the most pervasive violations of human rights, violence against women and girls (VAWG), is perpetuated by longstanding, systemic gender inequality in countries around the world, supported by discriminatory norms and practices.
2. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) builds on foundational international frameworks for achieving gender equality and eliminating violence against women and harmful practices (VAWG/HP) including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the four pillars of the Council of Europe's Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention): prevention, protection, prosecution and coordinated policies. The 2030 Agenda identifies gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) as central to achieving sustainable development, recognizing that violence against women and girls presents a critical barrier to realizing gender equality as well as to the achievement of other goals, such as poverty eradication, good health and well-being, quality education and food security.
3. In 2017, the United Nations (UN), in partnership with the European Union (EU), launched the Spotlight Initiative to End Violence Against Women and Girls in line with the 2030 Agenda and guided by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The intended impact of the Initiative was for all women and girls to live free from violence and harmful practices. The Initiative concluded its first stage at the end of 2023 and is positioning to commence a second stage.
4. Against this background, the Spotlight Initiative Secretariat commissioned the System-Wide Evaluation Office (SWEO) to conduct an independent evaluation of the first phase of the Initiative (2017-2023). The evaluation builds on monitoring and assessment exercises including mid-term assessments of all country and regional programmes, a review of the management unit functions, the European Union Court of Auditors audit, a thematic assessment of the Spotlight Initiative's contribution to the engagement of civil society, the implementation of "leaving no one behind" and movement building and the Spotlight Initiative final evaluation scoping and evaluability assessment.<sup>1</sup>

### Violence against women and girls

5. The United Nations defines violence against women and girls as "any act of gendered violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women and girls, including

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<sup>1</sup>Hera. Spotlight Mid-Term Assessment Report Using Results Oriented Monitoring (ROM) Review. Country and regional programmes. Global Goals Consulting (2022) Spotlight Initiative Independent Review of the Management Unit Functions. European Court of Auditors. (2023) The Spotlight Initiative to end violence against women and girls – Ambitious but so far with limited impact. Social Development Direct. (2024 draft) Assessing Spotlight Initiative's contribution to the engagement of civil society, the implementation of "leave no one behind", and movement building.

threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life”.<sup>2</sup> Harmful practices, such as child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM), violate human rights, but are seen as “normal” and “acceptable” to societies and communities in which they are practiced.<sup>3</sup> Gender-based violence and harmful practices manifest in various forms that may be more or less prevalent in different social and cultural contexts. Types of gender-based violence and harmful practices include intimate partner or domestic violence, femicide, sexual violence, female genital mutilation and child marriage.<sup>4</sup>

6. Rooted in gender inequality and power imbalances, VAWG limits attainment of a global vision of peace and prosperity as laid out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and further elaborated in the Secretary-General’s report on Our Common Agenda. The World Health Organization (WHO) recognizes VAWG as one of the world’s most prevalent human rights violations and a global public health problem affecting women and girls of all ages, races and socioeconomic backgrounds. Prevalence data across 161 countries and areas found that, worldwide, nearly one in three (30 per cent) women have been subjected to physical or sexual violence at least once in their lifetime.<sup>5</sup>
7. The magnitude of the impact of VAWG and harmful practices on individuals’ lives and society is immeasurable, with long-term physical, economic and psychological consequences. Despite the significant personal and societal costs of VAWG, progress to end VAWG has been slow and challenging. Work to address the causes and consequences of VAWG has been historically underfunded. Less than 0.5 per cent of development funding (combined official development assistance (ODA) and private funding) targeted VAWG in 2018, and this figure has not risen significantly in recent years.<sup>6</sup>
8. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns generated a significant uptick in gender-based violence.<sup>7</sup> Countries covered by the Spotlight Initiative saw a 35 per cent increase in cases of violence reported to the police. Other forms of violence against women and girls also increased during the pandemic, with evidence from Spotlight Initiative countries pointing to increases in rape, child marriages and teen pregnancies.<sup>8</sup>
9. Persistent challenges to ensuring women’s and girls’ rights to live free from violence include inadequate law enforcement with associated immunity for perpetrators, insufficient allocation of resources and weak monitoring and coordination of initiatives. The essential services needed to help survivors and bring offenders to justice are often inadequate, uncoordinated, inaccessible and of varying quality. This is especially true for girls and women who experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.<sup>9</sup>
10. Despite challenges and setbacks, evidence of changing attitudes and beliefs have been documented in some countries where women’s acceptance of being beaten by their partners has decreased. In other countries, deep-seated patriarchal values persist with widespread beliefs among both men and women that it is acceptable for husbands to punish wives through physical, emotional, economic and other forms

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<sup>2</sup> United Nations. 1993. Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, UNICEF, n.d. ‘Child Protection, Harmful Practices’ and OHCHR, 2020, ‘Information Series on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights: Harmful Practices’.

<sup>4</sup> See Annex P for a complete list of definitions.

<sup>5</sup> WHO. 2021. Violence Against Women Prevalence Estimates, 2018. Data covers 2000-2018.

<sup>6</sup> Dalberg. 2022:1. Imperative to Invest.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, European Institute of Gender Equality. 2021. Gender Equality Index: Health and UN Women. 2020. EAW COVID-19 Briefs.

<sup>8</sup> Spotlight Initiative. 2022. Global Annual Report.

<sup>9</sup> Spotlight Initiative Annual Report 2017-2018.

of violence.<sup>10</sup> Global prevalence rates for early marriage have declined from 23 per cent to 19 per cent in the last decade, offering positive signs of progress toward changing attitudes and practices around some forms of gender-based violence.<sup>11</sup>

### **The Spotlight Initiative to End Violence Against Women and Girls**

11. A joint initiative of the United Nations and the European Union, the Spotlight Initiative was the first large-scale initiative to systematically address both the drivers and the consequences of gender-based violence. The Spotlight Initiative was launched in September 2017 with a funding commitment of 500 million euros from the European Union. Envisioned as a Sustainable Development Goals demonstration fund, the Spotlight Initiative sought to show that a significant, concerted and comprehensive investment in gender equality and ending violence can contribute to the realization of the 2030 Agenda as a whole.
12. The Spotlight Initiative's theory of change (ToC) laid out the Initiative's framework to support actions to address the drivers of violence against women and girls and harmful practices as well as to provide services and support to mitigate the consequences of VAWG and harmful practices. The representation of the theory of change evolved over time, but the main elements remained stable, focused on the overarching goal that all women and girls, especially those most vulnerable, live free from violence and harmful practices (Figure 1).
13. The theory of change posited that a robustly resourced, rights based, comprehensive approach – one that addresses the root causes of violence – will, over time, contribute to ending violence against women and girls.<sup>12</sup> While seeking to positively support all SDGs, the results framework identified five direct and three indirect impact indicators tied to global indicators for SDG 5 and SDG 16, aimed at promoting progress toward achieving these SDGs in line with global human rights obligations. See Annex L for details.
14. The Spotlight Initiative's theory of change and its associated global results framework presented a comprehensive structure to inform programme design via a six-pillar approach: 1) strengthening laws and policies; 2) strengthening institutions; 3) challenging harmful social norms; 4) strengthening services, access to justice and referral systems; 5) strengthening data and tracking systems; and 6) supporting civil society and movement building.
15. The six-pillar model for preventing and addressing VAWG and harmful practices was designed for comprehensive application in all regions and countries. Each pillar had an associated outcome that was monitored by three outcome-level indicators as well as multiple output-level indicators.<sup>13</sup> The theory of change identified key assumptions under each pillar and included root causes, underlying causes and drivers. A further feature of the theory of change was the identification of cross-cutting principles to be adhered to in all programming: 1) mainstreaming women's empowerment; 2) leaving no one behind (LNOB); and 3) civil society organization (CSO) engagement and participation.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> UN DESA. 2020. *The World's Women 2020: Trends and Statistics*.

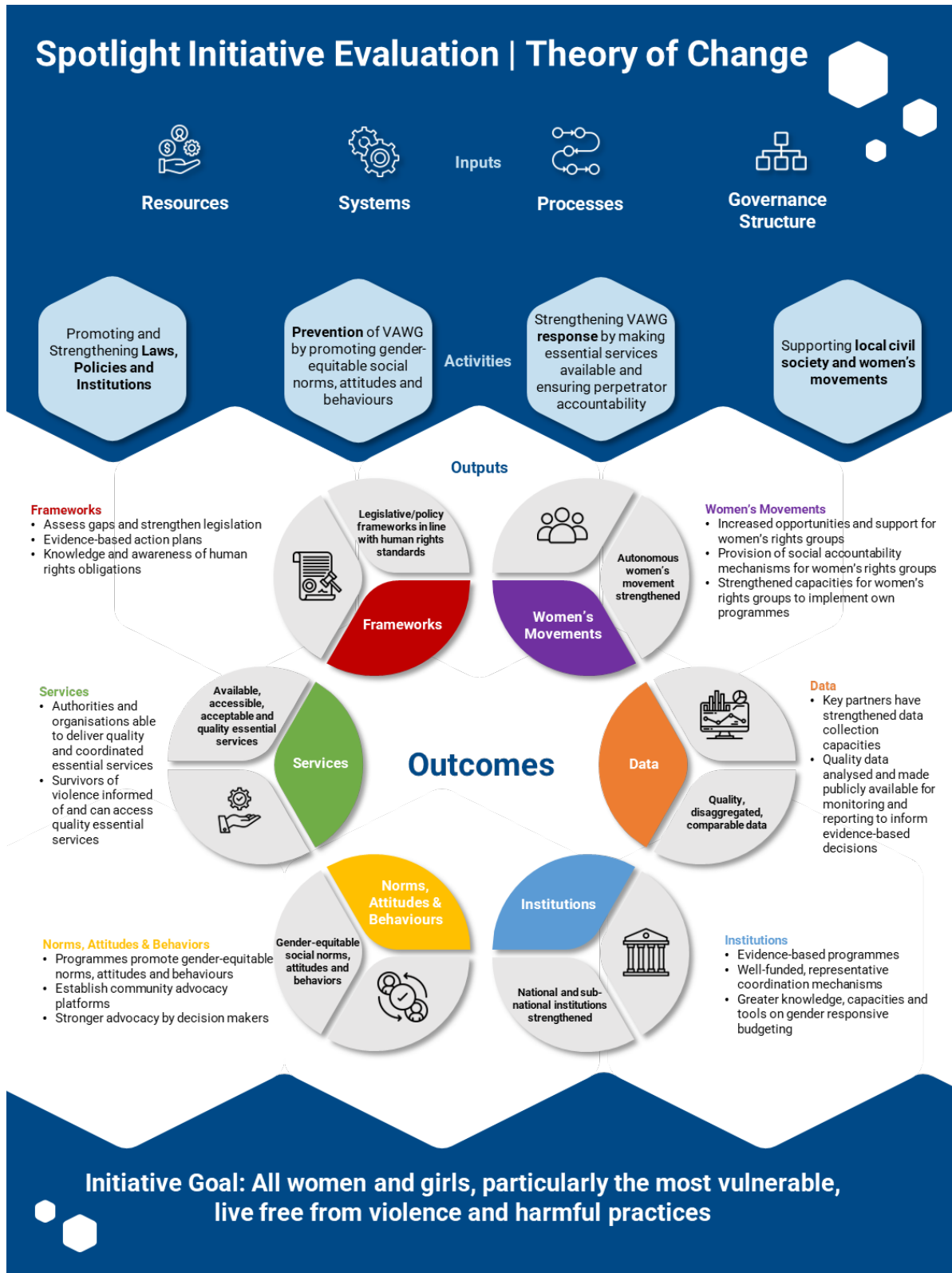
<sup>11</sup> UNICEF. 2023. *Is an End to Child Marriage Within Reach? Latest trends and future prospects*.

<sup>12</sup> Spotlight Initiative. 2022 and 2021 global annual reports.

<sup>13</sup> Spotlight Initiative. Annex A: Global Results Framework, 01 January 2021–31 December 2021.

<sup>14</sup> Spotlight Initiative. 2018. *Global Annual Report 2017:22*.

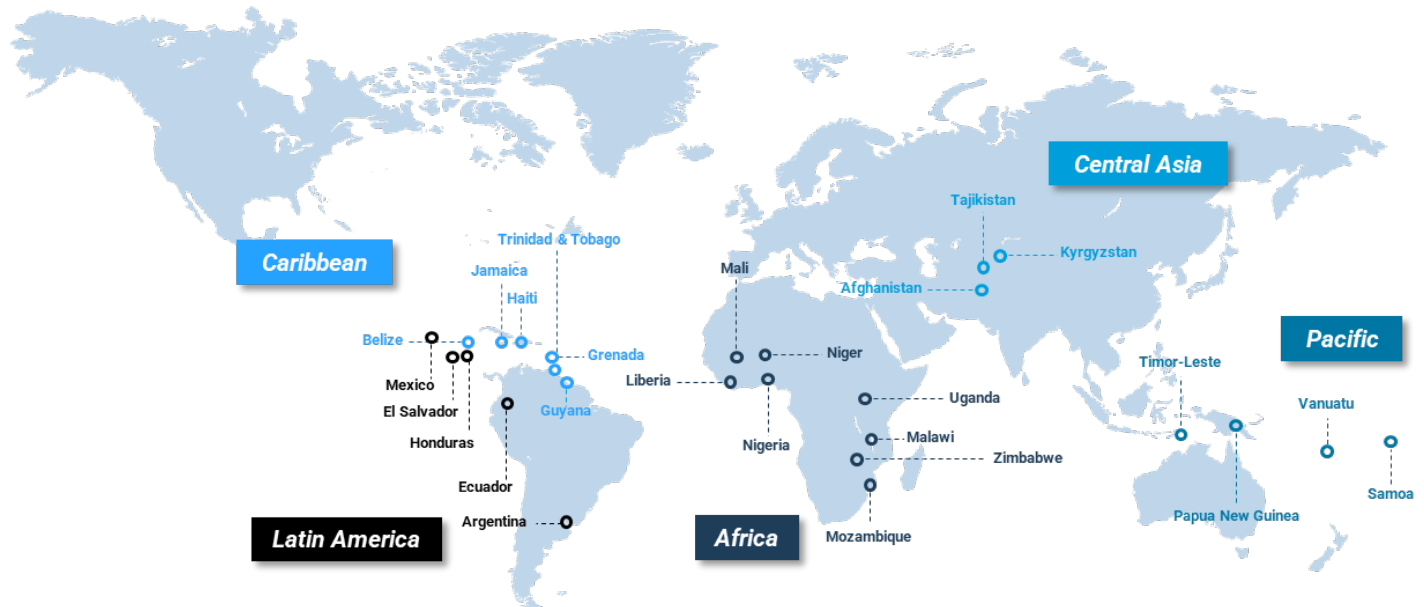
Figure 1: Spotlight theory of change



Source: Created by evaluation team based on the Spotlight Initiative ToC

16. The Spotlight Initiative was implemented through 26 country programmes, five regional programmes; one thematic regional programme (Figure 2); and two civil society grant-giving programmes in partnership with the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women (UN Trust Fund) and the Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF).

Figure 2: Overview of Spotlight Initiative’s country and regional programmes



Source: Created by evaluation team based on the Spotlight Initiative Annual Report (2017).

17. The regional component of the Initiative was designed to amplify impact by reaching a larger number of countries.<sup>15</sup> The Spotlight Initiative’s theory of change established a different programmatic focus for each programme region:

- **Africa:** Sexual and gender-based violence (with a focus on harmful practices including female genital mutilation and child marriage)
- **Asia:** Sexual and gender-based violence and child marriage
- **Caribbean:** Family violence
- **Latin America:** Femicide
- **Pacific:** Domestic violence and intimate partner violence.

18. As a model for UN reform, the Spotlight Initiative sought to leverage the expertise of multiple UN agencies to address a complex development challenge. The approach was characterized by partnerships across the UN agencies, governments, regional bodies, civil society and other stakeholders including academia, media, the private sector and religious institutions to advance a whole-of-society approach to EVAWG.

### Funding and governance structure

19. The Spotlight Initiative operated as a United Nations Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) with the Spotlight Initiative Secretariat and the United Nations Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office (MPTFO) jointly providing operational guidance and the MPTFO acting as Administrative Agent. Fund establishment was done

<sup>15</sup> Spotlight Initiative. 2018. Global Annual Report 2017:9/18.

through the Spotlight Initiative’s terms of reference and memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed between the United Nations and MPTFO, as well as the memorandums of understanding and the memorandum of understanding addenda for European Union contribution signed between the Recipient UN Organizations (RUNOs) and the MPTFO.<sup>16</sup>

### **Global governance**

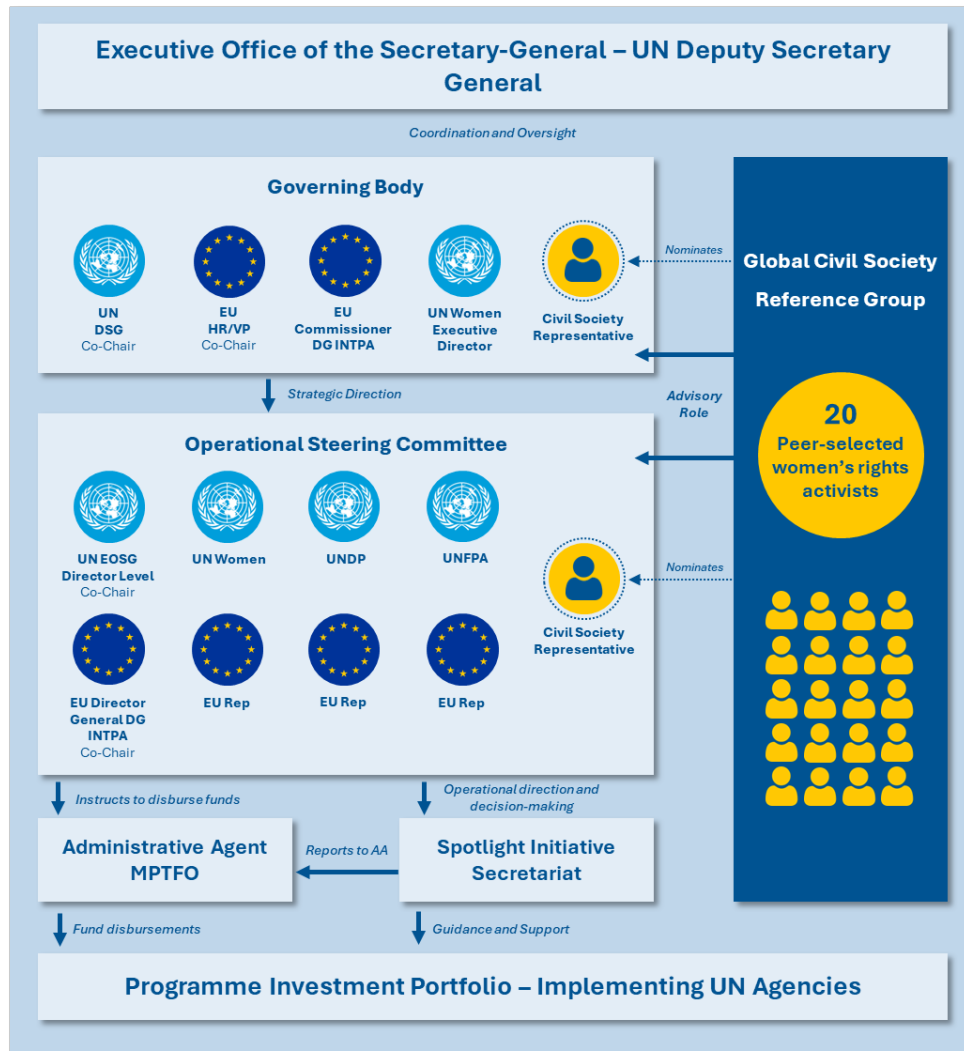
20. As a Secretary-General Fund, the Fund was managed at the highest level by the Deputy Secretary-General (DSG) having final decision-making as described in the Fund’s terms of reference. The Spotlight Initiative was managed by the Governing Body and the Operational Steering Committee (OSC). The Governing Body was co-chaired by the UN Deputy Secretary-General and the European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy or Vice-President of the Commission. It also included the European Union Commissioner for International Partnerships, Executive Director of UN Women and a civil society representative nominated by the Civil Society Global Reference Group.
21. The Operational Steering Committee was co-chaired by director-level staff of the Executive Office of Secretary-General (EOSG) and the European Union and included three representatives from the European Union and one each from the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women (UN Women), the United Nation Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) ( the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) had observer status), as well as a civil society representative. The Operational Steering Committee provided operational direction to the Spotlight Initiative Secretariat and was also responsible for directing the MPTFO to make disbursements to RUNOs.
22. The Spotlight Initiative Secretariat was responsible for “ensuring effective and sound Fund and programme management and implementation that maximizes the European Union’s investment and achieves transformational results”.<sup>17</sup> The Secretariat was composed of a management unit and a technical unit to carry out functions around programme reporting, monitoring and evaluation, technical support, oversight, coordination, partnership engagement, communications and knowledge generation, and resource management. See Figure 3 for an overview of the global governance structure.

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<sup>16</sup> Spotlight Initiative and UN MPTFO: The Spotlight Initiative Guidance Note on Programme Operationalization, N.D., p.1.

<sup>17</sup> Spotlight Initiative. 2022. Global Annual Report 2021:22.

Figure 3: Spotlight Initiative global governance



Source: Developed by the evaluation team based on report: *Tracing the Institutional History of the Spotlight Initiative*.

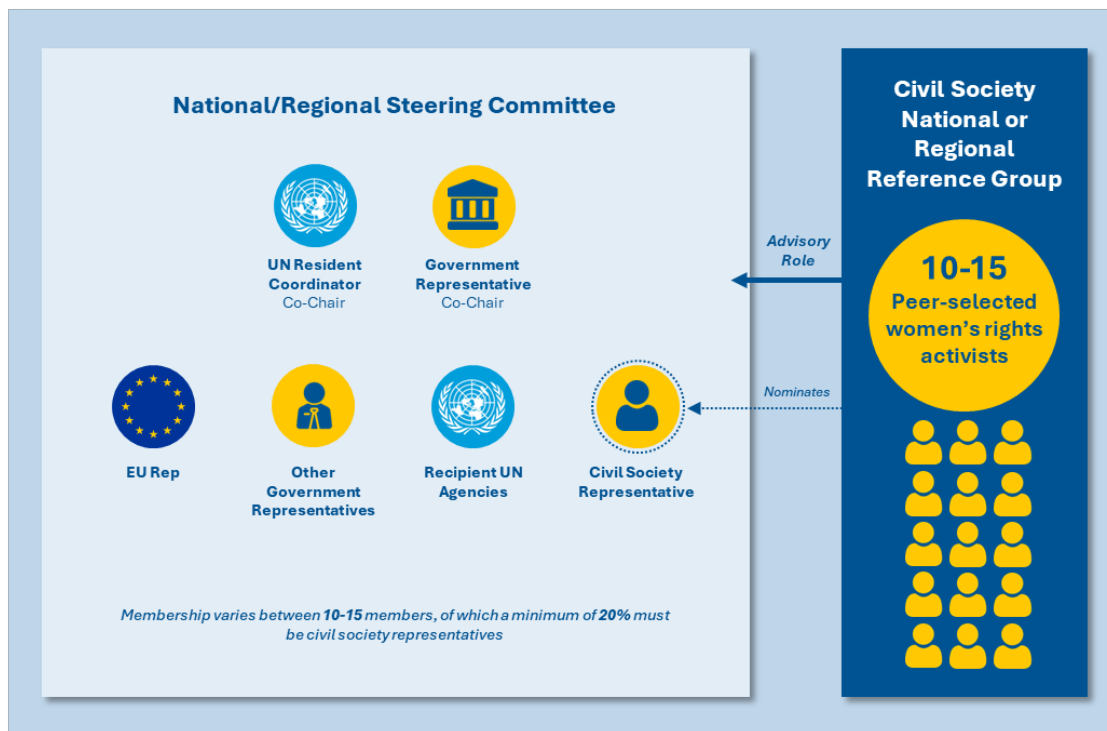
### Country and regional governance

23. Country programmes were operationalized over two project cycles, with programmes in **Latin America** and **Africa** implemented from 2019, and programmes in **Asia**, **Caribbean** and the **Pacific** starting in 2020. Regional programmes started at different times between 2019 and 2020.<sup>18</sup>
24. Regional and country programmes were governed by steering committees chaired by a senior UN official and a government representative. Other members included the EU Representative, Heads of RUNOs and other government officials. Civil society reference groups played an advisory role with the power to nominate representatives to steering committees. See Figure 4.

<sup>18</sup>Start dates for regional programmes are as follows: Africa 13 July 2020; Caribbean 24 July 2020; Central Asia 24 July 2020; Latin America 15 June 2019; Pacific (excluding Pillar 6) 1 January 2020.



Figure 4: Country and regional governance



Source: Developed by the evaluation team based on report: *Tracing the Institutional History of the Spotlight Initiative*.

### Other governance structures

- UN Women functioned as the Technical Secretariat for both the UN Trust Fund and WPHF at the global level. Country-level governance structures for the UN Trust Fund operated independently of the Spotlight Initiative. WPHF national steering committees either drew upon existing national decision-making mechanisms, such as the Spotlight Initiative National Steering Committees, or established new governance structures.<sup>19</sup> The regional thematic programme “Safe and Fair”, focused on violence against women migrant workers in Southeast Asia, also functioned under separate coordination, governance and management structures.<sup>20</sup>

### Funding

- The approved budget for the Spotlight Initiative was USD 542,022,137. As of 31 December 2023, the three contributors<sup>21</sup> to the Spotlight Initiative had deposited USD 529,868,747,<sup>22</sup> of which USD 523,727,874 had been net funded to 11 Recipient UN Organizations as shown in Figure 5. As of 31 December 2023, Spotlight Initiative had an expenditure of USD 499,717,297.

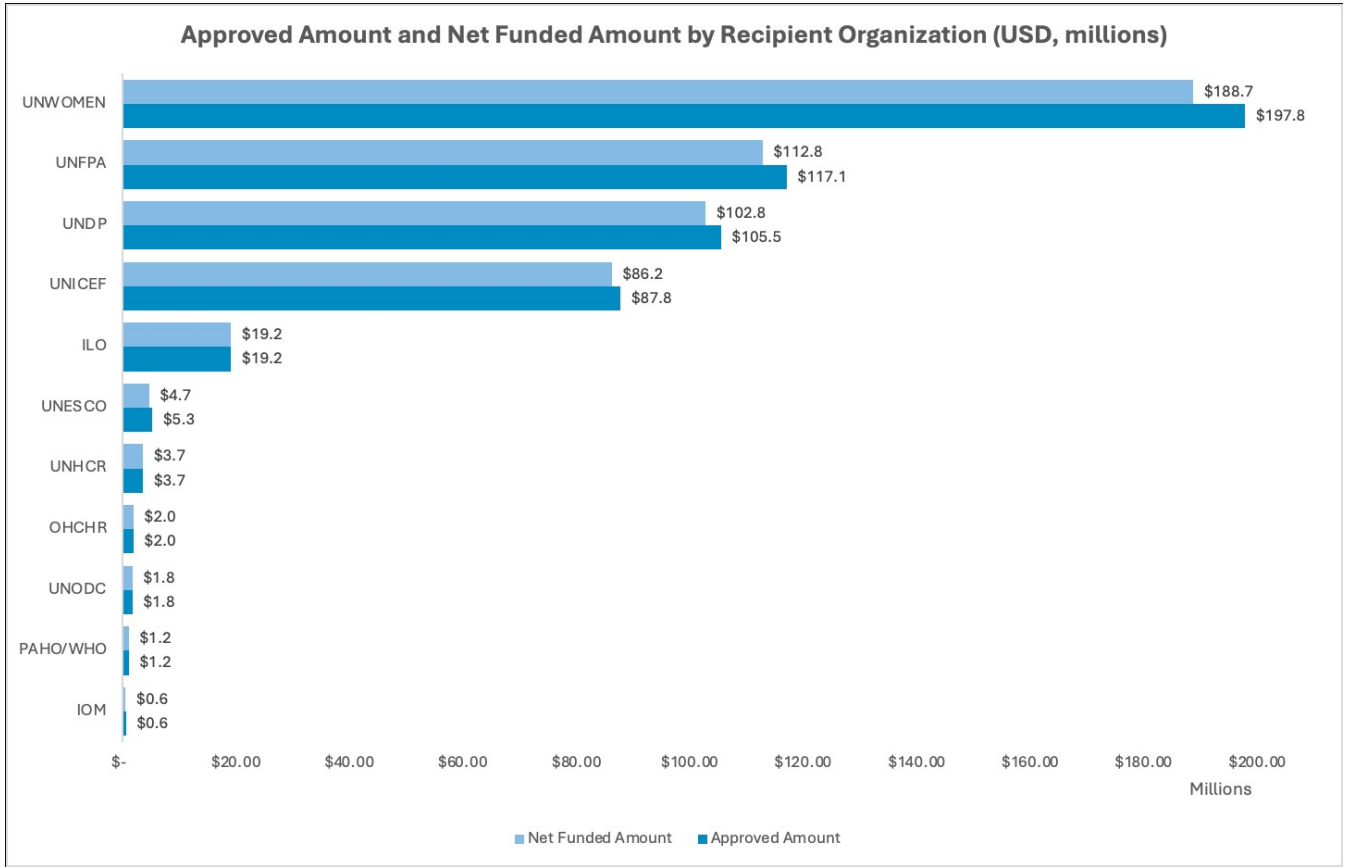
<sup>19</sup> Spotlight Initiative. Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) grant-giving to civil society organizations under the Spotlight Initiative: Annual Narrative Programme Report 01 January 2021 to 31 December 2021.

<sup>20</sup> The ‘Safe and Fair’ programme was established previously and brought under the Spotlight Initiative portfolio at the time of creation of the Fund.

<sup>21</sup> European Union, Portugal and Albania.

<sup>22</sup> As of 31 December 2023, three contributors deposited USD 529,868,747 and USD 2,466,600 was earned in interest. UN MPTFO GATEWAY, 2024; UN MPTFO. Consolidated Annual Financial Report of the Administrative Agent. Spotlight Initiative Fund. 1 January to 31 December 2023.

Figure 5: Approved budget and net funded amount to Recipient UN Organizations<sup>23</sup>



<sup>23</sup> UN MPTFO. Consolidated Annual Financial Report of the Administrative Agent. Spotlight Initiative Fund. 1 January to 31 December 2023.

## 1.2 Evaluation Purpose, Objectives and Scope

27. The evaluation's purpose is to assess the Initiative's overall performance, inclusive of its design (including its commitment to UN reform and the principle of leaving no one behind), its management and operations, and the results it has achieved (vis-à-vis its global results framework and other measures of success). The specific objectives of the evaluation are to:
- Assess how the Spotlight Initiative design and theory of change, including the whole systems approach and its six pillars, were structured to guide and influence programming including coherence, stakeholder participation and geographic scope, as well as flexibility and suitability to global, regional and national contexts
  - Assess the extent to which management and operational systems were fit for purpose to efficiently support collective results at country, regional and global levels
  - Assess the functionality of governance structures and the extent to which key stakeholders engaged in collaborative partnerships and decision-making
  - Assess progress and results achieved including the extent to which the Initiative contributed to transformative change
  - Assess the extent to which the United Nations has demonstrated the ability to function as a collective to achieve the Initiative's goals, including consideration of how UN reform supported the Initiative and how the Initiative impacted on the reform process
  - Assess of the extent to which progress and results achieved are sustainable
  - Identify lessons learned on how stakeholders can work within complex realms to design programmes to accelerate progress toward eliminating VAWG and other development challenges.
28. The evaluation focuses on the first phase of the Spotlight Initiative from December 2017 to December 2023. The evaluation covers implementation at the global, regional and country levels inclusive of two civil society grant-giving programmes (UN Trust Fund and WPHF). It focuses on seven areas of investigation (AOIs): 1) programme design; 2) management and operationalization; 3) governance, leadership and coherence; 4) results and progress; 5) UN reform and new ways of working; 6) sustainability; and 7) lessons learned for models of integrated programming. The areas of investigation were identified during the scoping and evaluability phase of the evaluation.<sup>24</sup>
29. The evaluation does not address the performance of individual programmes or projects at country or regional levels nor the performance of individual actors or entities, but rather focuses on the extent to which systems functioned effectively to deliver results. It also excluded the Safe and Fair programme, as its design, theory of change and operational framework differed from the broader initiative.
30. The intended users of the evaluation are members of the Spotlight Initiative governing bodies including the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, Deputy Secretary-General, European Commission, United Nations Development Coordination Office (UNDCO), United Nations entities and the Spotlight Initiative Secretariat and Administrative Agent. Further users are expected to be governments globally, including Member States and bilateral agencies, and civil society organizations working to eliminate violence against women and girls.

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<sup>24</sup> System-Wide Evaluation Office. 2023. 'Spotlight Initiative Scoping and Evaluability Assessment'. Executive Office of the Secretary-General, United Nations.

## 1.3 Evaluation Questions and the Evaluation Matrix

31. The evaluation's seven areas of investigation were translated into seven evaluation questions (EQs) aligned to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee's (OECD DAC) evaluation criteria (relevance, coherence, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability).<sup>25</sup>

Table 1: Areas of investigation and evaluation questions

<b>AOI 1 – Programme design (relevance)</b>
Q1: What are the key strengths and weaknesses of the design of the Spotlight Initiative, including the whole systems approach and the six pillars with cross-cutting principles? To what extent has the Spotlight Initiative design process and programme scope influenced results, coherence, <sup>26</sup> stakeholder participation and flexibility and suitability to global, regional and national contexts?
<b>AOI 2 – Management and operationalization (efficiency)</b>
Q2: To what extent has the Spotlight Initiative put in place adequate resources and systems at all levels to achieve the results as articulated in the theory of change and the results framework? What have been the strengths and challenges as a result of the processes established and resources put in place at the headquarters, country and regional levels including management and administrative systems (for example. architecture, personnel, capacities, finances)?
<b>AOI 3 – Governance, leadership and coherence<sup>27</sup> (external coherence)</b>
Q3: To what extent has Spotlight programming been coherent at country, regional and global levels? To what extent were the right stakeholders (including marginalized groups) engaged and to what extent have key actors at all levels demonstrated the required engagement, ownership and shared responsibilities and decision-making? What evidence is there of collaborative partnerships across the United Nations, government, European Union and civil society organizations?
<b>AOI 4 - Results and progress (effectiveness)</b>
Q4: To what extent have the results achieved by the Spotlight Initiative provided a robust proof of concept for the theory of change and the six pillars whole systems approach with cross-cutting principles, including evidence of progress against the results framework plus other results such as SDG localization and acceleration; innovation; qualitative significant changes; and the impact or reach of advocacy, communications and knowledge management to influence change?
<b>AOI 5 - UN reform and new ways of working (internal coherence)</b>
Q5: To what extent has the Spotlight Initiative been able to operate as a shared system to achieve a common purpose? In particular, how has UN reform supported the Initiative and how has the Spotlight Initiative supported reform? Is there credible evidence of a collaborative systems approach to working internally and with external stakeholders on the Initiative (and beyond)?
<b>AOI 6 – Sustainability</b>
Q6: To what extent has the Initiative demonstrated sustainable changes in line with plans including evidence of institutionalization and ownership? What are the risks of a return to less joined approaches?
<b>AOI 7 - Lessons learned for models of integrated programming</b>
Q7: What are the key strengths and weaknesses in design, systems, targets, operations, management structure, architecture and donor base of the Spotlight Initiative that have implications for design of other complex programmes (including VAWG) and UN reform? How can these lessons be applied at all levels?

<sup>25</sup>OECD DAC Network on Development Evaluation in “Better Criteria for Better Evaluation, Revised Evaluation Criteria and Principles for Use” (November 2019).

<sup>26</sup> Internal coherence under AOI 1 looks at whether the design of the different programme elements is coherent (reinforcing and non-contradictory) with each other.

<sup>27</sup> External coherence under AOI 3 refers to the Initiative's fit with external programmes, policies and initiatives at country, regional and global levels.

32. The evaluation criteria and questions were used to develop the evaluation matrix, which also contains assumptions underlying each question, sources of information and data collection methods. The matrix was utilized as a framework for the collection and analysis of data. See Annex C for a detailed evaluation matrix.

## 1.4 Evaluation Approach and Methodology

33. The evaluation utilized a theory-based approach which involved the analysis of Spotlight Initiative’s planning documents and theory of change and use of contribution analysis. The evaluation also used a mixed-methods approach, drawing on qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection and analysis to strengthen the reliability of data, to capture a broader range of perspectives and obtain a deeper understanding of the effects of the Spotlight Initiative. The evaluation approach employed a utilization focus and was conducted to enhance the utilization of results and the process itself by users to inform decisions and improve performance. The evaluation was also participatory in its approach, involving stakeholders in the evaluation process at all stages of the evaluation. The evaluation prioritized the experiences and perspectives of stakeholders and beneficiaries and adapted a “most significant change”<sup>28</sup> (MSC) approach to explore high-level results and contributions to “transformative change”.
34. The evaluation integrated a gender equality and human rights-based approach throughout, aligned with the United Nations Evaluation Group’s guidance,<sup>29</sup> including in the evaluability assessment; stakeholder analysis and mapping; evaluation criteria and questions; team composition; and in the evaluation methodology. See Annex E for a full overview.
35. Ethical considerations and safeguards were designed to ensure informed consent, confidentiality and data protection; cultural sensitivity and fair identification of participants; and adherence to “do no harm” and “survivor-centred” principles in relation to participants and their communities. Safety and ethical protocols for site visits conducted by the evaluation team drew on a body of global guidance on monitoring, researching and collecting information on gender-based violence as detailed in Annex H.
36. The evaluation had multiple components and employed various data collection methods as depicted and elaborated in Figure 6.

*Figure 6: Evaluation methodology*

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<sup>28</sup> The MSC is a participatory, qualitative methodology used to capture and analyse stakeholder perceptions of the most significant changes that the Spotlight Initiative contributed to in case study countries.

<sup>29</sup> United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG). 2011. Integrating Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluation – Towards UNEG Guidance (UNEG/G(2011)2).



Source: Developed by the evaluation team.

## Evaluation Components

### Country case studies with participatory workshops

37. Country case studies were conducted in eight countries to deepen understanding of Spotlight programmes across diverse national contexts. Sampling criteria applied for country selection included: country size (population); programme size (budget); socioeconomic classification; RUNO configuration; programme performance based on mid-term assessments (MTAs); and gender parity status (Gender Development Index and Gender Inequality Index). The case study methodology included document review, key informant interviews and focus group discussions while furthermore integrating opportunities for stakeholders to reflect upon and shape preliminary findings during collaborative workshops at the close of each mission. Workshops utilized a most significant change methodology to further explore high-level results and contributions to transformative change. See Annex E for more details. Case study findings were further shared with key stakeholders in the form of a case study report for feedback and validation. See Annex F-1 for protocols.

### Regional missions

38. Five regional programmes were visited to elaborate on the diversity of regional results as well as to assess the extent to which bi-directional synergies were evidenced between regional and country level programmes. The methodology included document review and key informant interviews with key stakeholders. Regional mission reports structured around the seven areas of investigation were shared with key stakeholders for feedback and validation. See Annex F-2 for guidelines.

## Counterfactual missions

39. Five non-programme countries (one per region) were visited to offer insights into how gender-based violence programming is undertaken outside of the Initiative, as well as to look for evidence of spillover effects from the Initiative. Sampling criteria for country selection included: country size (population); socioeconomic classification; and Gender Development Index and Gender Inequality Index rankings. See Annex E for details. The methodology included document review and key informant interviews. Internal working documents were developed for each counterfactual country to outline preliminary findings related to the context and stakeholder perspectives on the status of initiatives to end violence against women and girls. See Annex F-1 for guidelines.
40. Figure 7 sets out the country case studies, regional programmes and non-programme countries.

Figure 7: Evaluation case studies and global coverage



Source: Created by evaluation team.

## Synthesis

41. Findings and lessons learned from completed assessments and evaluations related to the Spotlight Initiative or with a sub-focus on the Spotlight Initiative were synthesized. The synthesis review was structured around the seven areas of investigation to identify patterns as well as inconsistencies in key findings. Resources reviewed included mid-term assessments, audits, internal assessments and independent reviews. In addition, a synthesis review was undertaken of core RUNO country and regional programme evaluations as a means of triangulating programme results against other primary and secondary data sources.



## Review and analysis

42. Selected programme elements were reviewed to extract evidence and support analysis related to distinct aspects of the Initiative (the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women and the WPHF Trust Funds, acceleration plans, risk matrices, knowledge products, beneficiary methodology and the global results framework). A review was also undertaken of selected United Nations and European Union institutional frameworks to support an understanding of the extent to which involvement in the Initiative may have influenced EAWG programming as elaborated in key frameworks. Key frameworks analysed included: cooperation frameworks (United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs)), core RUNO strategic plans and European Union country level implementation plans (EU CLIPs) for the Gender Action Plan III (GAP III). Each research workstream led to the production of an analytical report that identified key evidence to inform the broader evaluation.

## Value-for-money assessment

43. The SWEO conducted a value-for-money (VFM) assessment<sup>30</sup> of the Spotlight Initiative to assess how well resources were used and whether use was justified based on observable features of programme delivery, outputs, outcomes and agreed definitions of what good performance and value look like informed by comparative data when available.<sup>31</sup> The assessment integrated an interdisciplinary approach combining evaluation theory and practice and economic analysis to allow for complementary insights to address the value-for-money question in the framework of a complex programme, as well as a broader and more holistic assessment of value based on a more comprehensive set of criteria and standards developed in consultation with key stakeholders. A combination of methods and data sources, as well as a mix of qualitative and quantitative evidence, was utilized to strengthen reliability of data and validity in order to better understand and make evaluative judgements on the Spotlight Initiative's value for money.

## Data Collection

44. The evaluation drew on a variety of mixed methods for data collection to support reliability of findings with triangulation across methods and data sources. Tools were refined and adjusted following a pilot case study to simplify core questions and further elaborate on procedures in the field in line with do no harm principles and standards.
45. **Document review.** Key reports and data at global, regional and country levels were reviewed, building on the initial review conducted as part of the scoping and evaluability exercise. Programmatic and operational documents were made available to the evaluation team supported by the Spotlight Initiative Secretariat throughout the evaluation. Documents were also collected during country and regional missions, as well as sourced through the internet and online repositories. Over 500 documents were reviewed and synthesized to inform the evaluation. See Annex J.
46. **Semi-structured key informant interviews (KIIs).** Interviews at global, regional and country levels were undertaken with a range of stakeholders across levels and institutions with questions tailored to the areas of investigations that pertained to each stakeholder's scope of involvement. Targets for key informant

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<sup>30</sup> SWEO, Assessment of Value for Money for the Spotlight Initiative.

<sup>31</sup> King, Wate, Namukasa, Hurrell, Hansford, Ward, & Faramarzarif, 2023

interviews were informed by stakeholder mapping and a purposeful sampling strategy focused on ensuring diversity of stakeholder groups to capture multiple viewpoints and experiences. See Annex D for details. In total, 940 stakeholders were consulted through key informant interviews (723 at country, 148 at regional, and 69 at global levels). A total of 689 women, 228 men and 23 who chose not to specify. For details on stakeholders consulted refer to Annex I.

47. **Focus group discussions.** These were conducted with beneficiaries in case study countries in target areas. Participants included women in community groups, community and religious leaders, adolescent girls and health care and social welfare services providers. In total 279 beneficiaries (207 women and girls, 49 men and boys, 23 who chose not to specify) were consulted through focus groups.
48. **Online survey.** A survey was sent to 26 programme countries to complement other data sources and check for consistencies or inconsistencies in preliminary findings or patterns as well as to fill in any gaps in evidence. A total of 249 responses were received, representing all 26 countries from all key categories of stakeholders targeted: European Union delegations, governments, civil society organization reference groups, implementing partners, Resident Coordinators and their offices, RUNOs and programme management units. Quantitative and qualitative results from the global survey were collated and synthesized as part of the evidence base to support findings. See Annex G for details.

## Analytical Approach

49. Data collected throughout the evaluation was recorded and coded in the evaluation matrix structured around the evaluation questions and assumptions to support rigorous analysis. Multiple analytical methods were employed to support evaluation findings including **descriptive analysis** to position programmes within diverse contexts and **content analysis** of primary and secondary data sources to support identification of common trends, themes and patterns for each of the key evaluation questions. **Contribution analysis** was employed to support a better understanding of results in relation to Spotlight Initiative interventions and other external factors in line with good practice in evaluating complex social change processes. **Comparative analysis** was used to examine evidence across different countries (including comparator countries), regions, themes, or other criteria to identify the extent to which patterns were universal or unique.
50. Evidence was triangulated across data collection sources and methods to ensure the reliability and credibility of the evaluation findings. The evaluation included internal and external validation techniques. Internal validation included a consolidation workshop to review and analyse data collected to synthesize findings across diverse sources and methods. The methodology facilitated testing of assumptions to document the strength of findings and identify where inconsistencies or uncertainties were present, allowing for greater nuancing to reflect variations encountered across diverse contexts. External validation included feedback loops incorporated into field missions via participatory workshops at the conclusion of case studies, reports shared with key stakeholders following country and regional missions for feedback and validation, stakeholder workshops for consultation and a consultative forum with the reference group.
51. Quality assurance was provided at key points throughout the evaluation by the Quality Assurance Panel and the System-Wide Evaluation Office.

## Limitations and Mitigation Measures

52. Limitation challenges were identified and responded to with various strategies throughout the evaluation. Key elements are highlighted below.
53. **Geographic coverage.** Short timeframes for missions and other constraints (security, remoteness) reduced access to some countries and some sites within case study countries. Mitigation measures included scheduling virtual interviews with hard-to-reach programme partners and utilizing a global online survey to gather responses from informants in all 26 countries, including those with fragile and conflict-affected contexts.
54. **Respondent availability and bias risk.** Field missions faced challenges that impacted engagement levels, including programme closures, stakeholder turnover, changes in government administrations and availability of key informants over mission timeframes. This risk was mitigated through well-organized field visits with adjustments made up front, such as flexible meeting times and advance and remote interviews. To mitigate the risk of response bias, the evaluation team explained to each informant the independence of the evaluation and the maintenance of confidentiality and anonymity of responses. The selection process for interviewees followed guidelines developed by the team to mitigate the risk of informant selection bias; evaluators sought additional interviews with targeted stakeholders who were deemed important to broaden perspectives.
55. **Data availability.** The evaluation required a review of existing documents and data, including data related to monitoring, results, knowledge management and financial reporting. Some data sources were found to be unreliable due to incomplete results and data inconsistencies. Financial data presented two challenges which made analysis more complex. Firstly, it was recorded against United Nations Development Group (UNDG) “Harmonized” categories and not against outcome areas. Secondly, the initial financial data on expenditures were available only up to the end of September 2023, requiring updating in May 2024 to capture the figures from the final audited consolidated annual financial report.<sup>32</sup> These limitations were addressed by using complementary sources: combining available programme data with key informant interviews, case studies, independent audits and assessments as well as other publicly available information to triangulate findings

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<sup>32</sup> UN MPTFO. Consolidated Annual Financial Report of the Administrative Agent. Spotlight Initiative Fund. 1 January to 31 December 2023.

## 2. Evaluation Findings

### 2.1 Programme Design

*This area of investigation focuses on the design of the Initiative at all levels. Findings reveal that the theory of change supported a comprehensive programming approach that allowed for contextualization, supported by inclusive design processes at country and regional levels. Challenges were faced at lower levels to develop programmes within short timeframes further compounded by the lack of an inception phase.*

**Finding 1 – The Spotlight Initiative’s theory of change, with its six pillars and three cross-cutting principles, was comprehensive, serving as a critical framework to support coherent design of country and regional programmes. While supporting a holistic approach, the theory of change was ambitious and lacked elaboration on interactions across pillars and across programme levels. The global design structure of the Initiative was complex, leading to challenges in ensuring coherence across components. The design was flexible enough to allow for country and regional contextualization, though challenges were faced with localizing the results framework especially for regional programmes.**

#### **Spotlight Initiative’s theory of change**

56. The overarching design of the Spotlight Initiative, with its theory of change and six-pillar strategy, was developed with inputs from a range of stakeholders.<sup>33</sup> The design was recognized across stakeholder groups at all levels as an essential framework for addressing VAWG comprehensively and holistically. Of the global survey respondents, 91 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that the six-pillar systems approach was a key strength of the Spotlight Initiative design, demonstrating a comprehensive approach to ending violence against women and girls. The design was seen by stakeholders in regional and country programmes as relevant, offering a valuable opportunity to align and expand work to end VAWG among the United Nations and other stakeholders for greater coherence, including fostering interactions among stakeholders who may not have traditionally collaborated on the issue of gender-based violence. In particular, the focus on civil society organizations in the programme design as a cross-cutting and pillar-specific strategy was identified as a strength and an innovative aspect of the design.<sup>34</sup>
57. The six-pillar design supported a comprehensive approach, however, the mandatory requirement for country programmes to work across all six pillars in Phase I posed challenges in some contexts, leading to adjustments in Phase II for some country programmes. For example, political challenges and disruptions in **Afghanistan** and **Mali** led to a narrowed focus on three of the six pillars in the second phase, and strong legislative grounding in **Argentina** led to exclusion of a focus on Pillar 1 in Phase II.<sup>35</sup> The omission of a focus on women’s economic empowerment within the six-pillar structure was identified as a limitation, although some country programmes were able to incorporate this aspect over the course of the programme in response to lessons learned.<sup>36</sup> The theory of change was predicated on stable operational environments and the model could be adapted to navigate complex and dynamic environments to deliver results.

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<sup>33</sup> A preliminary framework, comprising four pillars, was circulated for feedback. Further consultations involving the UN, EU and civil society led to the incorporation of two additional pillars (“laws and institutions” and “women’s movements”).

<sup>34</sup> KIIs and FGDs at country and regional levels; European Court of Auditors (ECA) report; MTAs; secondary data reviews.

<sup>35</sup> KIIs Argentina; KIIs global; Argentina Annual Report (AR) 2022; Mali AR 2022; ECA Report, para 57.

<sup>36</sup> KIIs Mozambique, Malawi, Central Asia, global annual reports.

58. Regional programmes (RPs) were designed within the same theory of change as country programmes. Regional programmes were not required to work across all six pillars, allowing programmes to narrow their focus. The **Africa** and **Latin American** regional programmes each focused on three pillars; the **Caribbean** regional programme focused on four pillars; and the **Central Asia** and **Pacific** regional programmes each worked across five pillars. The ability to selectively focus on pillars as part of the regional design was identified by stakeholders as a benefit to targeting and prioritizing focus areas in line with budget allocations and complex operational contexts.<sup>37</sup> The **Latin America** regional programme's focus on three pillars allowed the programme to concentrate on strategic entry points in line with the regional context and comparative advantages of the three RUNOs. The **Pacific** regional programme adjusted its pillar focus areas with the addition of activities under Pillar 6 after the programme launch.<sup>38</sup>
59. Stakeholders who worked on the designs of regional programmes faced challenges to translate a theory of change developed for country-level programmes to regional contexts.<sup>39</sup> In addition, there was a lack of consistency in understanding global directives on developing linkages between country and regional programmes, with stakeholders expressing inconsistent or contradictory understanding of guidelines for country and regional programme interactions. Synergies between global and country programmes were not well integrated into programme designs as a result of variable interpretations of guidelines as well as stipulations placed on regional programme interactions with country programmes as stipulated in the Resident Coordinator's Guidance on Regional Programmes.<sup>40</sup>
60. The Spotlight Initiative's theory of change did not clearly identify interactions across pillars so that strategies could be developed to intentionally foster synergies between activities.<sup>41</sup> This represented a missed opportunity during the design phase to guide a strategic approach that considered how activities could be staged (or staggered) over the life of the programme to allow progress in one pillar to leverage results in another pillar.<sup>42</sup> The pillar structure was furthermore seen by stakeholders in some case study countries (**Kyrgyzstan**, **Nigeria**) as having the unintended effect of promoting siloed ways of working by establishing pillar-specific divisions of labour within the United Nations system despite the programme's intention of involving various agencies in operationalizing each pillar.
61. This evaluation found insufficient focus during the design phase on developing strategies for cross learning and replication of programme experiences in targeted geographical regions of country programmes. This was evidenced in case study missions to **Malawi**, **Mozambique** and **Samoa**, which highlighted how strategies for sharing across districts or provinces were not systematically built into the programme at the design stage, leading to missed opportunities to facilitate scale-up or foster potential catalytic impacts through cross-fertilization of strategies.<sup>43</sup>

### Integration of cross-cutting principles

62. The Spotlight Initiative's theory of change identified three cross-cutting principles to be adhered to in programming: 1) mainstreaming women's empowerment; 2) leaving no one behind (LNOB); and 3) the

<sup>37</sup> KIIs regional missions; RPDs; MTAs.

<sup>38</sup> KIIs Latin America and Pacific; Regional ProDocs.

<sup>39</sup> KIIs all RPs and global.

<sup>40</sup> Regional programme documents (RPDs); regional implementing partners (RIPs); KIIs regional and global level, ECA report, para 34.

<sup>41</sup> Scoping and evaluability assessment; KIIs country and regional levels; Fund ToR.

<sup>42</sup> KIIs all levels, country programme documents (CPDs), ARs.

<sup>43</sup> CPDs for country case studies; KIIs and site visits in country case studies.

engagement and participation of civil society organizations.<sup>44</sup> This evaluation found evidence of concerted efforts to ensure integration of cross-cutting principles during the design phase, though there was variability in the extent to which integration was fully achieved across country and regional programmes and there were challenges in monitoring programme reach to vulnerable groups.<sup>45</sup> Positive examples included mapping exercises to identify vulnerable groups, consultations with marginalized groups and analysis of those most at risk as part of country and regional programme designs.<sup>46</sup>

63. The designation of cross-cutting principles as integral to programme design positively supported efforts toward reaching the most vulnerable through programme activities. For example, in **Mozambique** the LNOB principle was reflected in geographical targeting and engagement with grassroots and community-based organizations to reach excluded populations. The central role of civil society in implementation, as well as an explicit focus on remote communities, were highlighted as particular strengths of the **Guyana** programme design by key informants from the European Union, the United Nations and civil society. The principle of LNOB was incorporated into the **Latin America** regional programme design with an intersectional approach that addressed vulnerabilities based on age, race, class, sexual orientation and disability.<sup>47</sup> Programmes demonstrated an ability to work toward inclusivity. Engagement of men and boys was not generally well featured in initial designs, requiring many countries to make adjustments in response to mid-term assessment findings.<sup>48</sup>

#### **Ambitious and complex design**

64. The Spotlight Initiative encompassed a complex mix of components under a global umbrella that included 26 country programmes, five regional and one thematic programme. In addition, it incorporated two lines of grant-giving through two pre-existing trust funds: the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women (UN Trust Fund) and the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF). The UN Trust Fund worked to support civil society and women's rights organizations dedicated to addressing VAWG; the WPHF focused on augmenting funding for smaller and grassroots feminist organizations.<sup>49</sup> The trust funds operated in 21 countries in Africa and Latin America both with and without Spotlight Initiative country programmes.<sup>50</sup>
65. Individual programming streams were internally coherent, but coherence was not well articulated across the various components of the Initiative. For example, the Trust Fund's focus on supporting women's rights organizations to eliminate VAWG was in line with the Spotlight Initiative's approach, but the funds only operated in two of the five global regions, often without direct linkages to the wider Initiative at country or regional level.<sup>51</sup> The Safe and Fair programme was designed before the Spotlight Initiative. Its framework did not align to the Spotlight Initiative's theory of change although the programme document was revised to support alignment with the Initiative's principles.<sup>52</sup> See also Finding 10.

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<sup>44</sup> Spotlight Initiative, Global Annual Report 2017:22.

<sup>45</sup> See AOI 4 Results and Progress for further elaboration.

<sup>46</sup> KIIs regional and country level; CPDs; Thematic Assessment 2024; Meta-review 2023.

<sup>47</sup> KIIs and FGDs country and regional programmes; CPDs, RPDs, Meta-review 2023.

<sup>48</sup> KII country and regional levels, global survey, MTAs, Meta-review 2023; Thematic Review 2024.

<sup>49</sup> Spotlight Initiative. UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women: Global Annual Narrative Report 01 January 2019 to December 2019; Spotlight Initiative. Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund grant-giving to civil society organizations under the Spotlight Initiative: Annual Narrative Programme Report 01 January 2022 to 31 December 2022; KIIs global and country levels.

<sup>50</sup> The WPHF Spotlight Initiative partnership worked in eight countries including one non- Spotlight Initiative country. The UN Trust Fund partnership reached 13 countries including five non- Spotlight Initiative countries. The two funds overlapped in five countries (Malawi, Liberia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Nigeria, Uganda).

<sup>51</sup> Analysis of trust funds conducted for final evaluation; KIIs country and counterfactual missions.

<sup>52</sup> Safe and Fair Prodoc; MTA; KIIs global.

66. Stakeholders at all levels characterized the design of the initiative as “ambitious”. The programme's duration and funding levels were considered insufficient to achieve the overarching goal of effecting enduring changes in norms and behaviours.<sup>53</sup> The programme’s scope and scale were able to garner focused national attention on the issue. However, stakeholders in several case study countries (**Guyana, Honduras, Kyrgyzstan, and Samoa**) noted that broad-based involvement in the design and high-profile engagement<sup>54</sup> in the launch of the Initiative served to set expectations at a national level that were unrealistically high given the programme’s timeframe. Stakeholders from within the United Nations and European Union identified a need to manage those expectations over time.

### Contextualization

67. Country- and regional-level programme design required evidence-based contextualization and broad consultations to develop tailored programmes. Design processes generally led to the development of meaningful theories of change for each programme drawn from the global theory of change. Programme documents for seven of the eight case study countries (**Argentina, Honduras, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, and Samoa**) included outcome-level theories of change that were relevant and appropriate. The theory of change developed for the **Guyana** programme was less well defined with stakeholders identifying issues of a lack of critical data and challenges with adapting the global framework to the country context.<sup>55</sup>

68. The global model was generally flexible enough to allow for meaningful contextualization, although this depended on stakeholders finding the right balance between global guidelines and local realities. Design processes generally supported programmes to align with national strategies and cultural constructs as well as to prioritize geographical needs, leading to 26 distinct country programme documents (CPDs) and five distinct regional programme documents (RPDs) that demonstrate the adaptability of the design to different contexts. Of the global online survey respondents, 76 per cent agreed that the programme was well contextualized at the country level.<sup>56</sup>

69. Despite the advantages of the global model and efforts to contextualize the approach, the design was perceived by some stakeholders as rigid and top-down, with some opining that inputs into programme design amounted to validation, rather than contextualization, of the model. Written responses to the online global survey as well as key informant interviews in case study countries highlighted the challenges inherent in translating a global model to local realities. Requirements for country programmes to work with pre-defined multi-stakeholder engagement were seen by some stakeholders to have allowed insufficient space for local adjustments to the design. Evidence from **Guyana** and **Samoa** case studies pointed to the need for greater flexibility to adapt to Small Island Developing State (SIDS) contexts with options to develop lighter processes for design and implementation. Requirements for civil society organization and government actors to share spaces within the programme posed an especially significant challenge in the **Honduran** context, requiring substantive negotiations and extended timelines to accommodate stakeholders.<sup>57</sup>

70. Regional programmes faced considerable challenges to contextualize a global programme that had been developed for country-level implementation without factoring in regional complexities and operational

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<sup>53</sup> KII all country case studies and regional missions; global survey; ECA report.

<sup>54</sup> Involving in varying configurations: Heads of State, Ministers, EU and UN dignitaries.

<sup>55</sup> KII country case studies; CPDs case study countries; MTA case study countries, Meta-review 2023.

<sup>56</sup> Online survey results; CPDs and RPDs, MTAs.

<sup>57</sup> KII country and regional levels; Meta-review 2023; global survey.

challenges. For example, the **Central Asia** regional programme design sought to accommodate an irregular geographical regional designation in the absence of regional bodies, resulting in a complicated regional programme document that stakeholders found difficult to comprehend. The **Caribbean** and **Pacific** regional programmes noted heightened levels of complications with countries spread between multiple multi-country organizational structures within a single “region”.<sup>58</sup>

### Global results framework

71. The process of developing the results framework at the global level was consultative involving discussions with the United Nations system, the European Union, and civil society. It also drew on models and experiences from other global joint programmes such as those addressing female genital mutilation and early child marriage (ECM). The Spotlight Initiative design encompassed a broad scope of indicators to ensure that the Initiative would be able to capture change across the comprehensive model with a total of 18 outcome-level and 72 (119 with disaggregation) output-level indicators.<sup>59</sup> The large volume and complex framing of indicators offered a harmonized approach for standardized reporting and aggregation of results, but had the unintended consequence of complicating the design and operationalization of the framework (see also Finding 8).<sup>60</sup>
72. Some stakeholders at the country level noted the benefits of a common global framework to help shape the programme focus. However, most found it restrictive and complicated during the design phase. Contextualization of the framework proved cumbersome with countries displaying a tendency to over-sample from the menu of indicators and subsequently struggle to establish baselines and targets.<sup>61</sup> For example, **Nigeria** monitored 63 output indicators (88 per cent of those possible); **Argentina** and **Honduras** monitored 53 output indicators (74 per cent) and **Malawi** monitored 41 output indicators (57 per cent).<sup>62</sup> Case study respondents cited as influencing factors the ambitious programme objectives and perceived pressure to construct a comprehensive framework encompassing as many global indicators as possible. The possibility to add custom indicators was communicated in the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Strategy, but few programmes utilized this option (see Finding 8 for elaboration).
73. Challenges were particularly acute for the design of regional programmes’ results frameworks whereby indicators developed for country-level programmes required significant interpretation and revision to be articulated at a regional level. Common issues faced included a lack of available data and a lack of suitability of outcome-level indicators to regional units of analysis. Two of the five regional programme documents (**Caribbean** and **Central Asia**) were finalized with incomplete results frameworks.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> KIs regional missions; RPDs, MTAs, ARs

<sup>59</sup> By comparison, the FGM programme monitors seven outcome and 22 output indicators; the ECM programme monitors eight outcomes and 27 outputs. UNFPA-UNICEF. Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation. Delivering the Global Promise. Programme Document 2022-2023. UNFPA-UNICEF. 2023. Programme Document for Phase III of the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage.

<sup>60</sup> KIs regional and country level, annual reports, ECA report, Meta-review.

<sup>61</sup> KIs country, regional, global levels; Meta review 2023; global survey.

<sup>62</sup> Nigeria, Honduras, Argentina and Malawi annual reports Annex A.

<sup>63</sup> RPDs Caribbean and Central Asia; KIs regional missions.



**Finding 2 – The countries selected for the programme offered diverse testing grounds for the Spotlight Initiative model. A thematic focus by region provided a strategic entry point and an opportunity to raise the profile of key regional challenges, however irregular classifications of regions led to programme design challenges.**

### **Country programme selection and resource allocation**

74. The selection of countries was informed by an analysis of situations and contexts, using the following criteria:

- Prevalence of the particular form of violence in the region
- Gender Inequality Index (GII)
- Level of government commitment towards ending VAWG
- Absorption capacity at the national level
- Presence and capacity of United Nations Country Teams (UNCTs) to deliver
- Presence and capacity of EU delegations in country to engage
- Enabling environment in country, in particular for civil society
- Existing initiatives on VAWG at regional and country levels with the potential to be scaled-up
- Possibility to produce “models” for replication in other countries and capacity to influence others in the region.<sup>64</sup>

Countries in crisis contexts were excluded from consideration, although several of the selected countries (**Afghanistan, Haiti, Mali**) faced crises or emergency situations after the start of the programme.<sup>65</sup> The final designation of countries was the result of an iterative negotiation process involving the United Nations and the European Commission under the framework of the top tier governance structure (see AOI 3 Governance, Leadership and Coherence). The decision-making process was not well documented but factored in a range of political and strategic considerations in addition to the above criteria.<sup>66</sup> The resulting 26 countries selected for country programmes offered a broad range of contexts that served the strategic purpose of testing the Spotlight Initiative’s theory of change in a variety of settings and conditions.

75. Resource allocations were divided across the five regional and one thematic programme as well as other programme components as shown in Figure 8. Allocations at regional levels were elaborated by investment plans for each of the five geographical regions that laid out the funding allocation and programming framework as well as governance structures.

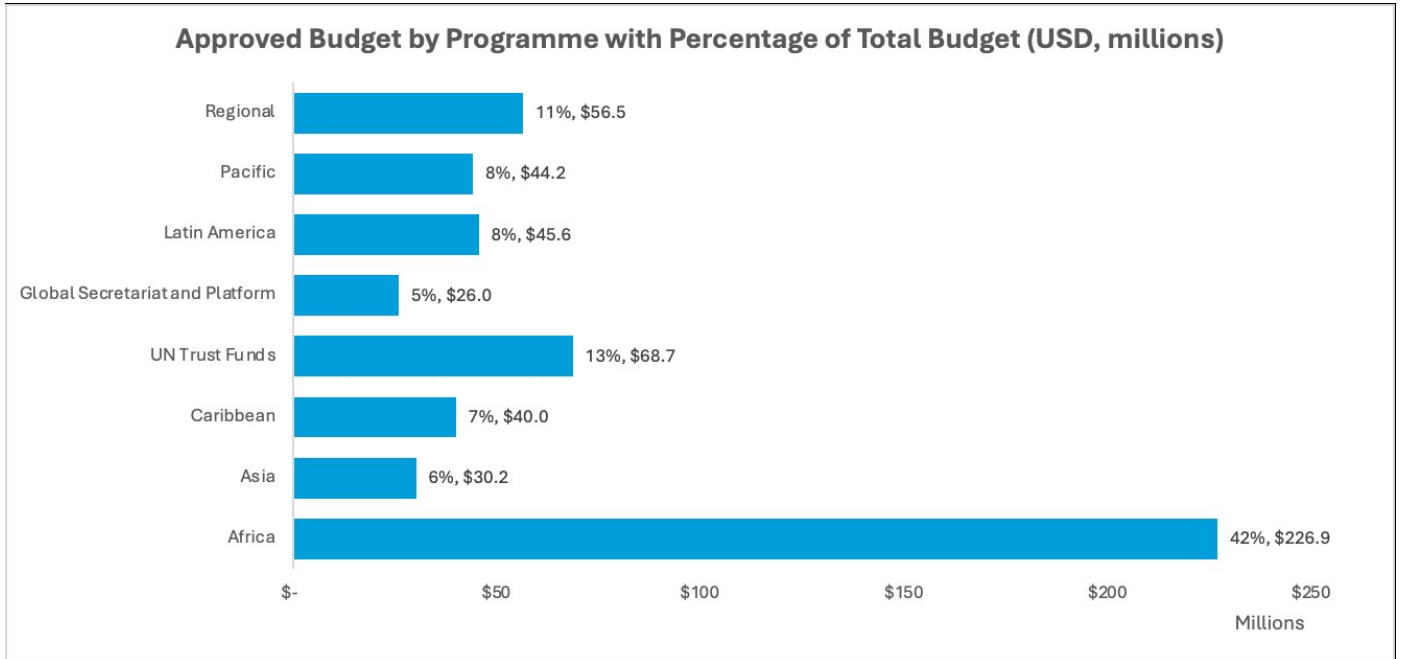
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<sup>64</sup> OSC meeting minutes October 2017; Spotlight Initiative 2017 Annual Report, p. 32.

<sup>65</sup> See section on operational responses to COVID-19 and other crises in the results section for AOI 2 for further details.

<sup>66</sup> ECA report (para 45-46), KILs, Africa Regional Investment Plan, p 52, Latin America Regional Investment Plan, p. 54.

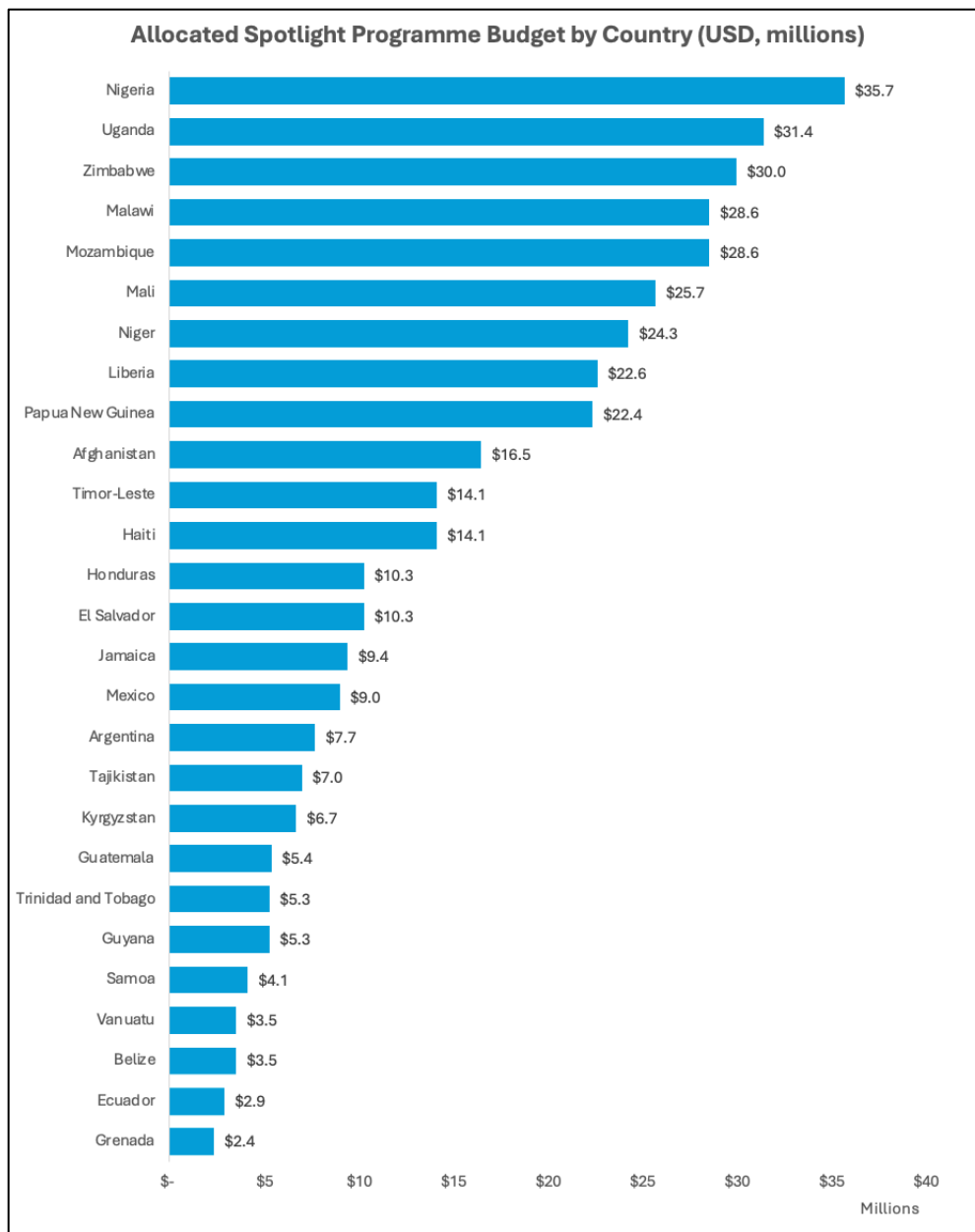
Figure 8: Spotlight Initiative approved budget



Source: UN MPTFO. Consolidated Annual Financial Report of the Administrative Agent. Spotlight Initiative Fund. 1 Jan to 31 Dec 2023. The approved budget of the Global Secretariat was USD 25,118,103; the global platform was USD 927,837. Both are direct costs.

76. The introduction of a large-scale, well-resourced programme focused exclusively on EVAWG was seen to raise the profile of the issue in many countries. Countries were allocated specified amounts between 2 and 35 million USD as shown in Figure 9. Funding envelopes were perceived to hold variable levels of significance in different contexts. For example, in **Argentina**, the funding was particularly significant given the country’s upper middle-income status, providing a rare opportunity for the United Nations and European Union to support progress on the issue. Conversely, despite receiving the largest allocations, funding levels in countries like **Mozambique** and **Nigeria** were perceived as less substantial relative to population sizes and funding landscapes. Rationale for funding decisions was not well documented although key informant interviews suggest that decisions were informed by political considerations as well as practical assessments of conditions including country size and absorption capacities, among other factors.

Figure 9: Allocated funds to Spotlight Initiative programme countries



Source: UN MPTFO. Consolidated Annual Financial Report of the Administrative Agent. Spotlight Initiative Fund. 1 Jan to 31 Dec 2023. For Nigeria the budget was adjusted to reflect the OSC approved budget in discussion with Spotlight Initiative Global Secretariat.

### Regional programmes and themes

77. The five regional programmes<sup>67</sup> aimed to extend the reach and amplify the impact of the Initiative.<sup>68</sup> The delineation of “regions” posed challenges in cases where the countries covered by the programme did not align fully with either UN regional designations or regional intergovernmental organizations. For example, the Spotlight **Pacific** regional programme included **Timor-Leste** and **Papua New Guinea**, but the Resident

<sup>67</sup> The Safe and Fair thematic programme was designed separately.

<sup>68</sup> Spotlight Initiative 2017 Annual Report, pages 9, 18; KIIs global.

Coordinator in charge of the programme did not have jurisdiction over either of these countries. The **Central Asia** regional programme covered five Central Asian countries plus **Afghanistan**, although the UN regional offices for Central Asia have no jurisdiction over **Afghanistan**.<sup>69</sup>

78. Regional programme designs focused on strengthening regional intergovernmental mechanisms and networks to end violence against women and girls. This proved particularly challenging to conceptualize and operationalize in the **Central Asia** region due to the lack of a regional institution to ground the programme. Challenges were also notable in the **Caribbean** region with limited human resources available within regional bodies, and in the **Pacific** region where regional bodies had already committed considerable resources to pre-existing regional EVAWG programmes. The **Caribbean** and **Pacific** regional programmes also encountered issues with limited regional and national civil society organizations to draw on to strengthen networks.
79. A thematic focus was established for each of the five Spotlight Initiative regions based on consultations and considerations of prevalence rates for types of violence. The selected themes were generally perceived as appropriate strategic choices that helped to give focus to the programmes.<sup>70</sup> For example, the focus on intimate partner violence (IPV) and domestic violence (DV) was seen as appropriate to the local context in **Samoa**, while the family violence focus was identified by stakeholders in **Guyana** as a positive aspect of the programme design. The **Africa** regional focus on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and harmful practices allowed teams in **Malawi**, **Mozambique** and **Uganda** to leverage work undertaken in other programmes to address child marriage and other harmful practices. Feedback was generally positive, but the relevance and efficacy of mandating femicide as a regional priority in **Latin America** was questioned, noting the risk that the prescribed focus may constrain a broader perspective and distract attention from other types of VAWG relevant to local contexts.<sup>71</sup>

**Finding 3 – The design process at global, regional and country levels brought together a broad base of stakeholders though some stakeholders with specialized expertise were not initially involved in the global design. Country and regional levels had to develop complex programmes within short timeframes in contexts where critical data were often unavailable. The lack of an inception phase left little room to develop relations and structures needed to support implementation. RUNO selections at country and regional levels were in line with mandates and comparative advantages, but the designation of “core” and “non-core” entities was ultimately not unifying.**

80. At the global level, the Spotlight Initiative was designed by a core team from UN Women, UNFPA, UNDP, and the MPTFO working under the EOSG in close consultation with the European Union. UNICEF joined later as the fourth key entity involved in the global design. The selection of three United Nations entities as core (with the addition of UNICEF as a technical entity) was in line with the global mandates and comparative advantages for each entity, covering many (but not all) critical aspects of EVAWG programming. The World Health Organization (WHO), which has specialized expertise and plays a key role globally in tackling gender-based violence, was notably absent from the design table.<sup>72</sup> Civil society was also not involved in the early stages of design although inputs from civil society were later taken on board

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<sup>69</sup> RPDs, KIs regional missions.

<sup>70</sup> MTA 2023; ECA report; KIs CS and RPs.

<sup>71</sup> KIs Argentina, Latin American RP.

<sup>72</sup> See '[Inventory of United Nations Activities to End Violence Against Women](#)' for an overview of WHO work to EVAWG.

with adjustments to the design that included formal engagement in governing and advisory bodies, setting targets for civil society organization grants and including a sixth pillar on building women's movements.<sup>73</sup>

81. Consultative, participatory design processes were integral to the development of comprehensive country programmes. Consultations were generally broad and intentional, facilitating high-level engagement from the United Nations, the European Union, government and civil society, as well as other stakeholders depending on the context.<sup>74</sup> In **Malawi**, key actors involved in programme design included women's rights groups, community-based organizations, persons with disabilities and their representative organizations, traditional and religious leaders, and the EU delegations. The design process in **Samoa** brought together for the first time an expanded group of stakeholders into a common space around EVAWG, including those representing marginalized groups, traditional leaders and faith-based organizations. In other countries, meaningful engagement with the EU delegations and government from the earliest stage of the programme was seen to positively support continued engagement throughout implementation.
82. There were successes in facilitating inclusive processes, but the design phase for country programmes was commonly characterized as "heavy", regarding collaborative processes required and "rushed", regarding timelines.<sup>75</sup> Design processes were hindered by a lack of critical quantitative and qualitative data available to provide the needed evidence base to inform programme activities and some contexts required extensive negotiations to bring together players with contentious relations. Limitations were noted with encompassing the full breadth of stakeholders in initial consultations including, for example, representatives from remote areas and some marginalized groups.<sup>76</sup>
83. Like country programmes, regional programmes sought to employ inclusive regional consultative processes while working within limited timeframes. High-level engagement from the earliest stages was seen as an important means of building ownership and sending a powerful message about the importance of EVAWG. Challenges to full engagement were identified in some instances and efforts were made to redress. For example, the **Central Asia** regional programme addressed insufficient stakeholder engagement during the Phase I design by ensuring consultative engagement of regional groups in the Phase II design.<sup>77</sup> In the case of the **Pacific** regional programme, limited consultation and involvement of civil society during the design phase impacted negatively on engagement and buy-in of civil society organizations throughout the programme despite efforts at redress.<sup>78</sup>
84. The lack of an inception phase in the programme design was a critical omission and an obstacle to smooth functioning from design to launch, leaving little room for developing relations and establishing foundational structures needed to support programme implementation. Regional programmes especially struggled to design and launch programmes in short timeframes working within complex regional institutional environments.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> KII's global level; Count Me In! (CMI!) [Feminist Recommendations to Spotlight](#); Co-design of Spotlight Initiative 2.0 CSO Discussion Paper December 2023; ECA report, para 54. See also AOI 3 Governance, Leadership and Coherence.

<sup>74</sup> KIIs and FGDs country case studies; CPDs; MTAs; Meta-review 2023; global online survey.

<sup>75</sup> KIIs country and regional level; Meta-review 2023; MTAs.

<sup>76</sup> KIIs regional and country level; global survey, MTAs.

<sup>77</sup> Central Asia MTA, KIIs regional level; regional annual report.

<sup>78</sup> Pacific MTA, KIIs regional level, regional annual report.

<sup>79</sup> KIIs country, regional, global level, MTAs.

## RUNO designation and selection

85. The Initiative was implemented by 11 RUNOs globally, including four core (UN Women, UNFPA, UNDP, UNICEF) and seven non-core (the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Pan American Health Organization and World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)).<sup>80</sup> RUNO selection and delegation of responsibilities within country and regional programmes were generally suitably aligned to expertise and programmatic focus areas, supported by an assessment of the comparative advantage of different agencies as part of the design process with oversight by Resident Coordinators.<sup>81</sup> The Spotlight Initiative was designed to be implemented by a maximum of five UN organizations per country programme (six if justified), with two to four set by the Operational Steering Committee as the preferred number of organizations.<sup>82</sup> At the close of the programme, 16 (62 per cent) of the programmes had three or four RUNOs; eight programmes (31 per cent) had five RUNOs and two programmes had six RUNOs.

Table 2: Number of Recipient UN Organizations by country programme

Number of RUNOs	Country Programmes (Phase II)
3	Belize, Ecuador, Mali
4	Afghanistan, El Salvador, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Malawi, Mozambique, Niger, PNG, Tajikistan, Vanuatu
5	Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Mexico, Nigeria, Samoa, Timor Leste, Trinidad & Tobago, Uganda
6	Argentina, Zimbabwe

86. Assessments found that a larger number of RUNOs led to higher levels of inefficiency,<sup>83</sup> but this evaluation did not observe this to be the case, noting that some country programmes (**Argentina, Kyrgyzstan, Timor-Leste, Uganda, Zimbabwe**) functioned well with larger numbers of RUNOs.<sup>84</sup> The ability of RUNOs to work together collaboratively and efficiently was found to be more strongly dependent on the capacity of entities to deliver, the internal dynamics of the UNCT and the personnel involved, especially at senior levels, rather than the number of RUNOs. Operational efficiency issues, as detailed in Findings 4-7, were common to all programmes regardless of the number of entities engaged. In most cases, the inclusion of additional UN entities with specialized expertise added value and helped expand the collective knowledge of technical teams notwithstanding challenges encountered.<sup>85</sup>
87. The designation of core and non-core UN agencies as part of the programme design was aimed at simplifying a complex engagement process, but ultimately faced resistance from non-core agencies, members of which noted that the distinction ran contrary to the principles of UN reform and did not allow each agency an equal seat at the table.<sup>86</sup> Interviews across diverse stakeholder groups at the global level revealed broad recognition of the challenges with the use of core and non-core classifications and understanding of a need for adaptation in future programme framing.

<sup>80</sup> See Figure 5 for budgetary overview by entity.

<sup>81</sup> CPDs, MTAs, KIs country and regional missions.

<sup>82</sup> OSC meeting minutes June 2018; KIs global.

<sup>83</sup> ECA report; Meta-review 2023.

<sup>84</sup> Case study analysis, MTAs, ARs.

<sup>85</sup> For example, the inclusion of a non-resident agency to deliver field components proved cumbersome in Argentina.

<sup>86</sup> KIs global, regional and country levels.

88. The engagement of “associate agencies” as part of field-level programmes also garnered limited success. UN stakeholders interviewed at all levels noted that the designation of associate agencies as bodies engaging and contributing to the goal of the Initiative was in line with the spirit of UN reform. However, few entities were able to dedicate the needed human or financial resources to do so, with some notable exceptions. For example, UNICEF engaged fully in Phase I of the **Argentina** country programme as an associate agency; UNFPA participated in implementing pillars 3 and 4 as an associate agency in **Grenada**; and the **Latin America** regional programme successfully included associate agencies on the regional steering committee on a rotational basis.

## 2.2 Management and Operationalization

*This section focuses on the systems put in place at all levels to operationalize the Initiative. Efforts were made to implement the comprehensive programme design to ensure standardization and accountability across diverse contexts. Country and regional programmes demonstrated an ability to adapt and flexibly respond to local contexts, however the operational set-up presented structural issues that posed challenges for efficient programme delivery.*

**Finding 4: While expenditure and financial delivery rates increased over time, the lack of an inception phase, short implementation timelines, and a multi-layered process for releasing funds caused operational challenges and delays in the implementation of country and regional programmes.**

### **Programme implementation and delivery rates**

89. The Spotlight Initiative programmes at country and regional levels were operationalized over two phases whereby progression to Phase II was contingent on results achieved in Phase I.<sup>87</sup> Across both phases, the Initiative faced challenges with expenditure and financial delivery rates affected in part by an implementation timeframe that was widely perceived across stakeholder groups as unrealistic given the nature of the topic, breadth of stakeholders involved, ambition to demonstrate UN Development System (UNDS) reform, and the impact of contextual factors including the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters and conflicts.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, there was an inherent tension in operationalizing the Initiative between the expectations set forth for swift delivery and inclusive processes: on the one hand demonstrating proof of concept quickly and at scale, and on the other hand allowing time and space for consultation and development of cohesive operational processes needed for efficient programme implementation.
90. By the end of Phase I, country and regional programmes in **Latin America** and **Africa**, which transitioned to Phase II in 2021,<sup>89</sup> were significantly behind their expected financial implementation rates.<sup>90</sup> Programmes in the **Caribbean, Central Asia** and **Pacific** faced even tighter timelines for delivery with later start-ups, moving into Phase II in 2022. Global programme implementation rates (expenditure against approved budget) stood at 19 per cent by the end of 2020, gaining momentum between 2021 and 2023. By the end of 2023, the Spotlight Initiative was able to deliver outputs at an increased delivery rate of 94 per cent (Figure 10).

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<sup>87</sup>Spotlight Initiative. 2018. Spotlight Initiative to Eliminate Violence against Women and Girls. Annex I Description of the Action. November 2018. Page 58.

<sup>88</sup> programme documentation, 2022 and 2023 meta-reviews, global goals consulting report; case studies.

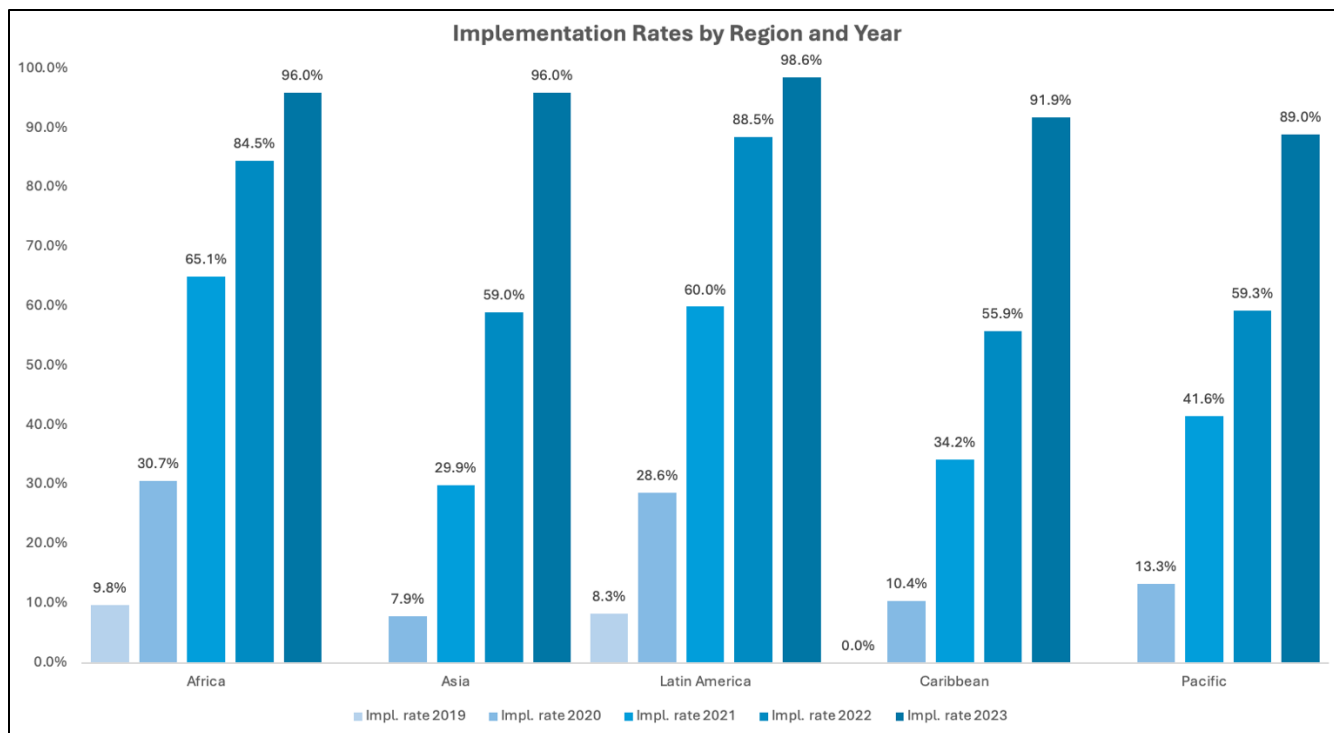
<sup>89</sup> Except for Ecuador, which began later and moved into Phase II in 2022.

<sup>90</sup> 2022 Meta-review; SIS documentation; MPTFO gateway expenditures and real time approved budgets; global secretariat.



91. Slower-than-anticipated programme implementation in Phase I led to pressure on RUNO personnel to increase expenditure rates, creating a sense among some stakeholders that the focus on accelerated delivery was at odds with realities on the ground and the requirements to work in an inclusive and holistic manner.<sup>91</sup>

Figure 10: Implementation rate by region and year



Sources: UN MPTFO gateway expenditures and real time approved budgets; KII global secretariat.

92. These challenges were exacerbated by the omission of an inception phase (see Finding 3) that did not allow time for the diverse stakeholders engaged in country and regional programmes to develop relations and establish systems to facilitate cohesive operational processes needed for programme delivery. The mid-term assessment (MTA) for **Zimbabwe** noted that the lack of an inception phase contributed to operational challenges and delays, even before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>92</sup> Lack of an inception phase was also found to contribute to operational challenges in several case study countries (**Honduras, Malawi, Mozambique**).<sup>93</sup> The country programme in **Kyrgyzstan** offers an interesting counterpoint, demonstrating the management and operational benefits that flowed from undertaking an inception phase, though this was not part of original programme design. See Box 1 below.

<sup>91</sup> OSC, Governing Body (GB) and HoA meeting minutes, 2022 Meta-review; triangulated with final evaluation KI country and regional

<sup>92</sup> Madzingira, N. and D Timmermans, D. 2020. Spotlight Mid-Term Assessment Report using ROM review. Spotlight Initiative Zimbabwe. Hera. P16.

<sup>93</sup> KIIs case studies Honduras, Malawi, Mozambique, MTAs Honduras, Malawi, Mozambique.



After programme onset, the COVID-19 lockdown and other operational restrictions created an opportunity for the five RUNOs (UN Women, UNFPA, UNDP, UNICEF, UNODC,) to collaborate further on contextualizing the theory of change and pillar implementation plan. This process initiated an inception phase that was not originally planned for in the design of the country programme. Undertaken at the initiative of the Programme Coordinating Unit (PCU) and RUNOs, this inception phase mapped activities under each pillar, systematized processes and approaches, and built effective relationships within the programme's technical team. It provided space to reinforce cross-pillar coherence and to engage with implementing partners and the Civil Society National Reference Group prior to commencement of activities, many of which were being adjusted in response to the pandemic and changing political landscape. Developing an inception phase for the Spotlight Initiative country programme in Kyrgyzstan was widely viewed by RUNOs and the PCU as crucial for laying a solid foundation for the remainder of Phase I and Phase II implementation.

93. Extended timelines for Phase II disbursement were experienced, presenting challenges to overall programme delivery and affecting country and regional programmes to varying degrees.<sup>94</sup> This was due to a complex multi-stage process, consistently cited in documentation and across stakeholder groups as a major cause of operational issues in country and regional programmes (Figure 11). For example, the time between Operational Steering Committee Phase II Approval Date and Phase II First Cash Transfer Date took on average fifty days despite efficient handling by the UN MPTFO. Seven countries (**Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Samoa, Trinidad and Tobago, Papua New Guinea, Zimbabwe**) experienced a wait of 70 to 118 days between Approval Date and First Transfer Date.<sup>95</sup>
94. The replenishment model<sup>96</sup> also contributed to setbacks and delays in implementation. A contractual rule between the European Union and the United Nations stipulated that fund replenishments could only be requested at the global level when all Spotlight Initiative programmes in one region reached the 70 per cent threshold. This presented challenges and created cash flow deficiencies at the global level, which were addressed through providing partial cash replenishments to country and regional programmes.<sup>97</sup> RUNO and Programme Management Unit (PMU) key informants at the country level described the partial replenishment of funds as difficult and frustrating, adding further layers of complexity to an already complicated process.<sup>98</sup>
95. Though intended to promote the principle of the UN delivering as one, the “70 per cent rule”, which required a cumulative expenditure of all RUNOs within a programme to have delivered 70 per cent of received funds before the next instalment could be requested, overlooked that activities may not be undertaken in parallel or require the same levels of expenditure. It was also a root cause for delays in the availability of funding and<sup>99</sup> this perception still held among UN country and regional key informants at programme close, despite mitigating measures being put in place at the global level,<sup>100</sup> and some evidence of improvement in the situation between 2022 and 2023. For example, RUNOs increasingly made available funding from internal sources when the budget of their agency had been spent and when the other RUNOs had not yet reached the 70 per cent threshold. The Secretariat also enabled some flexibility on fund transfers.

<sup>94</sup> Global Goals report; 2022 and 2023 meta-reviews; case studies; KII – global, regional, country; final evaluation online survey (qualitative responses).

<sup>95</sup> MPTFO gateway Fund transfer data (Vouchers); Operational Steering Committee approval dates.

<sup>96</sup> UNFPA. 2023. Office of Audit and Investigation Services: Audit of the UNFPA Spotlight Initiative Final Report 18 May 2023.

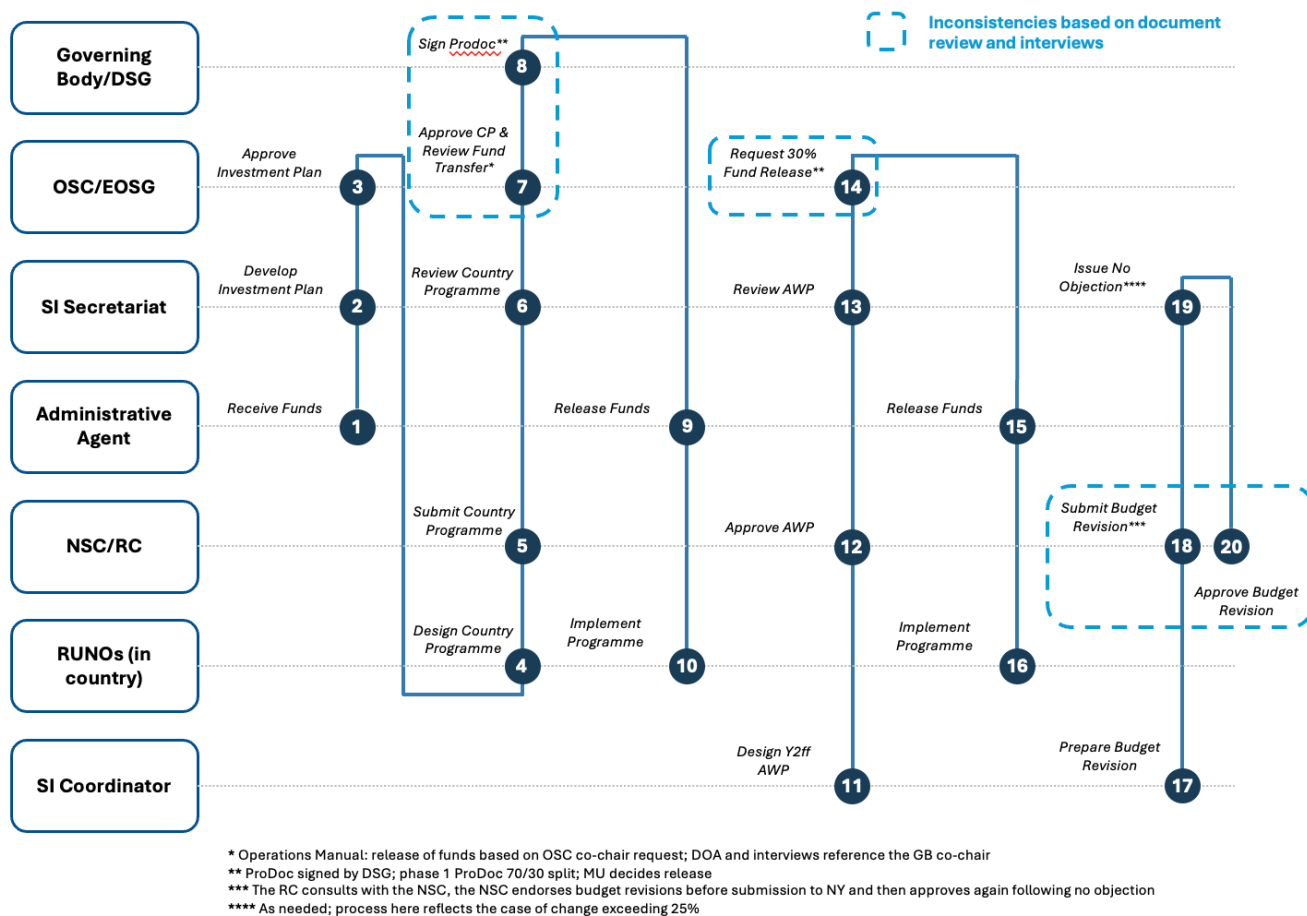
<sup>97</sup> 2023 Meta-review; Operational Manual 2021.

<sup>98</sup> 2023 Meta-review triangulated with final evaluation KII (country level).

<sup>99</sup> 2021 – MTAs; 2022 – MTAs and Global Goals Consulting Report; 2023 – final evaluation case studies and KII at country, regional and global levels.

<sup>100</sup> For example, there was an agreement that core RUNOs would balance any cash needs of their agency should there be a time lag between their agency's progress and that of the other RUNOs and to manage cash flows across countries and regions.

Figure 11: Receipt to implementation



Source: recreated by Spotlight team based on KIIs.

96. The 70 per cent rule was reported to have frustrated programme coordination efforts among UN agencies, with some RUNOs experiencing stop-start implementation while placing pressure on other RUNOs and their implementing partners to accelerate delivery without compromising programme quality or, in the context of the pandemic, increasing individuals’ exposure to COVID-19 in the conduct of activities.<sup>101</sup> In three of the eight case studies (**Argentina, Malawi, Samoa**) and three of the five regional programmes (**Africa, Caribbean, Pacific**), RUNO and PMU key informants reported that lengthy Phase II negotiations with the Global Secretariat led to confusion and uncertainties about programme continuation and the funding envelope available. This contributed to personnel turnover, further adding to operational challenges (see Finding 5).
97. The availability of pre-financing for country programmes was not always well understood or clearly communicated across the Initiative,<sup>102</sup> despite pre-financing modifications being introduced in July 2021 with the intention of enhancing operational efficiencies. Half (13) of Spotlight Initiative programme countries (**Argentina, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Mexico, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Uganda, Zimbabwe**) utilized the pre-financing modality in the early stages of design and implementation.<sup>103</sup> Nevertheless, a degree of confusion persisted around governance and the operational

<sup>101</sup> KII with RUNOs and IPs (country and regional level); final evaluation survey; UNFPA. 2023. Office of Audit and Investigation Services: Audit of the UNFPA Spotlight Initiative Final Report.

<sup>102</sup> Global Goals Consulting Report; final evaluation KII global, regional, country.

<sup>103</sup> UN MPTFO gateway; final evaluation KII (Global Secretariat).

aspects of these provisions. This was reflected in the different perceptions and understanding of these arrangements reported by key informants at all levels.<sup>104</sup> Among the 13 country programmes that utilized the pre-financing modality between July and December 2018, the amounts advanced by Spotlight Initiative (via the UN MPTFO) ranged between USD 69,000 and USD 200,000. Based on data sources included in this evaluation, it was not possible to ascertain whether these levels of pre-financing delivered operational benefits or efficiencies (such as increases in implementation rates) to country programmes.

98. In terms of management of resources, the value for money assessment<sup>105</sup> rated Spotlight Initiative's overall performance, including indirect and direct costs, as good. Spotlight Initiative's indirect fee of 7 per cent of direct costs is within the standard range for external cooperation funding by the European Commission. It is lower than that charged by non-UN entities and is reasonable and coherent with established decisions by Executive Boards and European Commission Contribution Agreements. The fee of less than 1 per cent of direct costs retained by the MPTFO as Administrative Agent fees is a standard charge and is in line with UNDG standards and the memorandum of understanding (the UN MPTFO can allocate up to 1 per cent).
99. Most of the funding for all country programmes was allocated to direct costs. An average of 76 per cent of the total budget was allocated to programme activities across all six pillars and country programmes. A cost-capping mechanism was established for essential programme implementation activities including programme design, quality control, technical assistance, policy advisory functions, advocacy, knowledge management, and reporting at country and regional levels, which facilitated comparisons across different countries. The average country programme management cost was 16.7 per cent, which is slightly below the established range of 18-22 per cent. A total of 3 per cent of programme costs were allocated to monitoring and evaluation, which is aligned with recommended standards and guidance on expenditure on monitoring and evaluation (3 per cent to 5 per cent). The inclusion of programme management costs of 18-22 per cent compares favourably with the female genital mutilation joint programme implemented by UNFPA and UNICEF, which allocated 26 per cent to general operating and direct costs.

**Finding 5: Adequate human resources were apportioned to enable the Global Secretariat and UN Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office to operate effectively and support programme implementation. However, significant challenges were faced in ensuring adequate human resources to operationalize country and regional programmes. Insufficient staffing levels, turnover in personnel, setbacks in UN recruitment processes and a limited pool of experts from which to draw in some contexts (such as Small Island Developing States) were identified as challenges to operational effectiveness.**

#### **Human resources for the Global Secretariat and Fund administration**

100. At the global level, the Spotlight Initiative Secretariat comprised a Management Unit and a Technical Unit (with a total approved budget of USD 25 million). It was perceived as adequately staffed and resourced to operationalize its role in harmonizing Spotlight Initiative programmes by providing: management support; technical assistance; and support to communications, monitoring and evaluation and knowledge management.<sup>106</sup> Secretariat personnel were reported to be responsive and helpful in providing technical support, though RUNO and PMU key informants noted that some guidance could have been provided earlier.<sup>107</sup> This finding was consistent with responses received in the global online survey, where 61 per cent of respondents agreed that the Secretariat added value to country-level programme operationalization with

<sup>104</sup> Global Goals Consulting Report; 2023 Meta-review; final evaluation KII (country and regional).

<sup>105</sup> SWEO, Assessment of Value for Money for the Spotlight Initiative.

<sup>106</sup> 2023 Meta-review; final evaluation KII (country, regional); case studies; regional programme mission reports.

<sup>107</sup> case studies; final evaluation KII (country); 2022 and 2023 Meta-review; evaluation review of guidance timeline.

timely guidance and support. The highest levels of disagreement came from RUNOs. This is partially corroborated by qualitative evidence. In key informant interviews, UN personnel placed greater emphasis on specific operational challenges linked to monitoring and reporting processes overseen by the Secretariat (see Finding 8) rather than on the resourcing or staffing of the Secretariat itself.<sup>108</sup> The UN MPTFO was perceived as adequately resourced to perform its role as Administrative Agent with UN key informants reporting the knowledge of pooled funds among UN MPTFO personnel as instrumental in the early months of the programme when the Spotlight Initiative needed to be operationalized quickly.<sup>109</sup>

### **Human resources to operationalize country and regional programmes**

101. The Initiative faced significant challenges in ensuring adequate human resources to operationalize country and regional programmes. Despite funding to cover programme costs (capped at between 18 and 22 per cent at the level of country and regional programmes),<sup>110</sup> and additional human resource contributions of RUNOs<sup>111</sup> and the Resident Coordinator's Offices, there was broad consensus across all stakeholder groups that the human resources needed to deliver at the speed and scale required, working within the agreed governance structures, had been underestimated and under-resourced in terms of personnel and capacities.<sup>112</sup>
102. Available quantitative data shows that RUNOs had varied levels of costs for personnel assigned to country and regional programmes,<sup>113</sup> although data available do not allow for a comprehensive view of UN expenditures on human resources under the Spotlight Initiative.<sup>114</sup> This challenge notwithstanding, Figure 12 illustrates that United Nations "staff & personnel" costs were the third-highest expense category (14 per cent), but the actual figure is most likely higher since non-staff personnel expenses are often classified as "contractual services" (24.6 per cent).

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<sup>108</sup> 2022 and 2023 meta-review; MTAs; final evaluation KII (country, regional); case studies; final evaluation online survey (qualitative responses).

<sup>109</sup> KIIs global and country levels. The total approved budget for the UN MPTFO as Administrative Agent was USD 5 million.

<sup>110</sup> Under the delegation agreement between the EU Commission and the UN, and encompassing tasks such as programme design, analysis, coordination and technical coherence and quality control of interventions, technical assistance and policy advisory functions, advocacy, knowledge management, and monitoring and reporting.

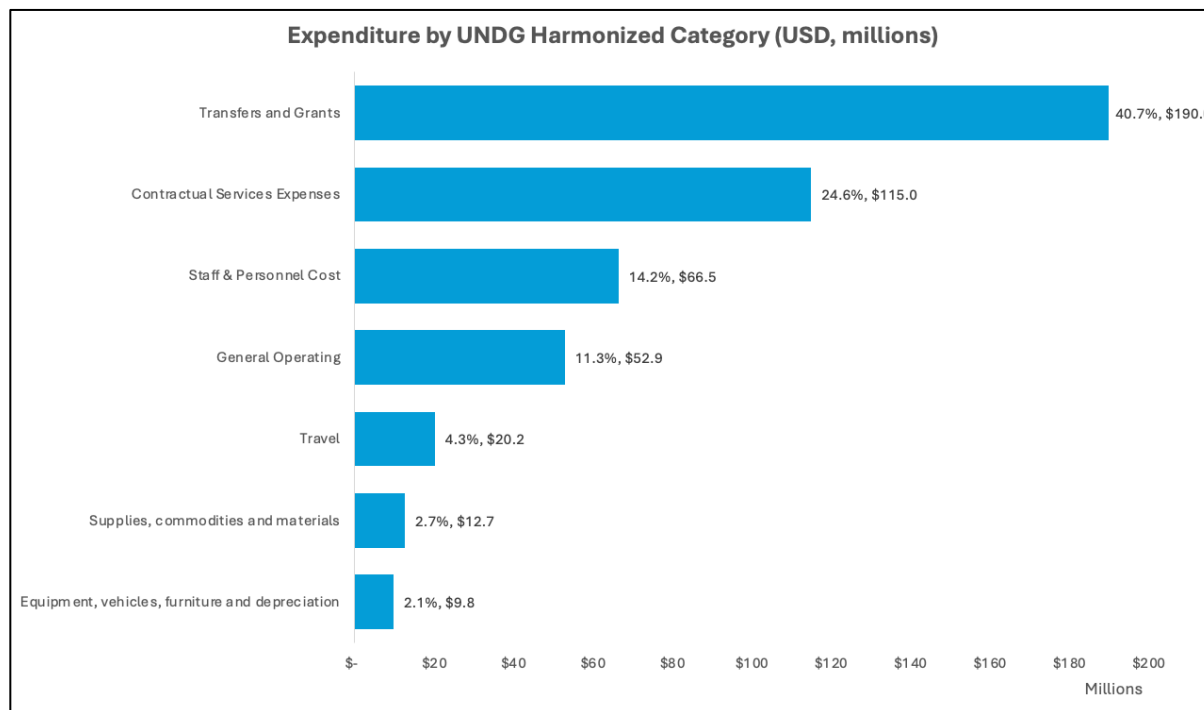
<sup>111</sup> The Spotlight Initiative Operations Manual (2021) stated that it was mandatory for each RUNO to contribute to the Spotlight Initiative programme, though it did not specify the type or level of contributions.

<sup>112</sup> KII cited in MTAs, 2022 and 2023 meta-reviews and final evaluation KII (country, regional, global) and further corroborated by the results of the audit of the UNFPA Spotlight Initiative conducted by the UNFPA Office of Audit and Investigation Services (OAIS) between December 2021 and April 2022. Source: UNFPA. 2023. Office of Audit and Investigation Services: Audit of the UNFPA Spotlight Initiative Final Report 18 May 2023.

<sup>113</sup> This included staff as well as non-staff personnel such as consultants or individual contractors.

<sup>114</sup> MPTFO data – UNDG Harmonized Budget Categories. Human resource costs associated with Spotlight Initiative programmes are reflected across multiple UNDG Harmonized Budget Categories (that is, both "staff and other personnel costs" and "contractual services") so that it is not possible to delineate.

Figure 12: Expenditure by UN Development Group Harmonized Category



Source: UN MPTFO. Consolidated Annual Financial Report of the Administrative Agent. Spotlight Initiative Fund. 1 January to 31 December 2023.

103. Analysis of the mid-term assessment reports of all country and regional programmes showed that gaps among RUNOs in technical or operational capacity and insufficient numbers of personnel affected operational effectiveness in most countries,<sup>115</sup> independent of the country programme’s performance level at the time of the review.<sup>116</sup> This was a consistent finding across other data sets reviewed by the evaluators.<sup>117</sup> Challenges were most acute in country programmes operating on smaller budgets in **Latin America, the Caribbean, the Pacific and Central Asia** where RUNO and PMU personnel reported particularly high workloads.<sup>118</sup> The reasons attributed include: insufficient RUNO staffing;<sup>119</sup> additional level of effort required to work together in an integrated manner; lack of harmonization in back-office structures and systems; setback in UN recruitment processes, as well as loss of staff; and complicated and demanding management structures and processes associated with the Spotlight Initiative.<sup>120</sup> Gaps in capacity and an inadequate workforce presented operational challenges for regional programmes as well.<sup>121</sup>

<sup>115</sup>Independent mid-term assessments were conducted by Hera, an evaluation and research company based in Brussels, Belgium. The MTAs included a specific question relating to human resources: “Are the management arrangements for the Initiative at national level adequate and appropriate? [are staffing levels appropriate?].”

<sup>116</sup> 2023 Meta-review, page 37.

<sup>117</sup>2023 Meta-review; MTAs – all were reviewed by the evaluation team for the 25 countries (excluding Afghanistan) and the 5 regional programmes; eight case studies; final evaluation online survey (qualitative responses).

<sup>118</sup> Sources: 2023 Meta-review, MTAs (country and regional); country case study mission reports and KIIs.

<sup>119</sup> 2023 Meta-review, final evaluation KII (country, regional).

<sup>120</sup> Final evaluation KII (country, regional); case studies; regional programme mission reports; 2022 and 2023 meta-reviews; MTAs.

<sup>121</sup>Final evaluation regional mission reports; KII with PMU and RUNO personnel working on regional programmes); MTAs (Africa, Caribbean, Pacific).

104. The scale and complexity of the Spotlight Initiative required an adequately staffed PMU to help ensure a coherent and collaborative system response, including to facilitate coordinated planning and communication, joint monitoring and reporting and knowledge management.<sup>122</sup> Gaps in staffing for key personnel in the PMU, particularly the two positions of coordinator and M&E officer, created critical capacity gaps for programmes that were not easily overcome.<sup>123</sup> This was an identified issue in seven (**Guyana, Honduras, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Samoa**) of the eight case study country programmes and two of the five regional programmes (**Central Asia, Pacific**) and confirmed in several mid-term assessments (**Pacific Regional Programme, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu**) and qualitative evidence from the online survey (**Belize, Grenada**).<sup>124</sup> Gaps led to setbacks or delays in areas of: monitoring and results reporting; operational support to governance structures; and stakeholder engagement (including with the European Union).<sup>125</sup>
105. Precise rates of personnel turnover could not be assessed through the data sources included in this evaluation but evidence from case studies and regional programme consultations present the problem as pervasive. Operational problems caused by loss or turnover of personnel were identified as a significant issue affecting implementation in seven of the eight case studies (**Honduras, Guyana, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Samoa**) and two of the five regional programmes (**Central Asia, Pacific**). Qualitative responses to the global online survey also identified this as an issue in other country programmes (**Belize, Tajikistan**). Efforts by the Resident Coordinator and their Office and RUNOs to mitigate staffing challenges, included: utilizing personnel funded under other programmes; drawing on core RUNO and Resident Coordinator's Office resources; and transferring personnel already resourced through the Spotlight Initiative (for example, through a role change).<sup>126</sup>
106. Factors that influenced the departure of key PMU personnel during programme implementation included high workloads and insecure contract conditions,<sup>127</sup> exacerbated by the multi-layered process for releasing funding and uncertainties surrounding Phase II (Finding 4).<sup>128</sup> Recruitment of new personnel took time, and challenges were heightened in SIDS contexts where country and regional programmes found themselves competing to recruit from a relatively small pool of local gender experts.<sup>129</sup> Replacement of PMU personnel was further complicated by the operational setup of these units, which were usually co-located in the Resident Coordinator's Office. Since the Resident Coordinator's Office did not administer PMU-related funds, recruitment depended on the cooperation and responsiveness of the RUNO managing those resources on its behalf. This, combined with lengthy UN recruitment processes, resulted in common patterns of continuity gaps in the final years of programme implementation. In some instances, the Resident Coordinator and their Office invested the necessary human resources to support programme delivery. For example, in **Guyana, Honduras, Kyrgyzstan, Nigeria, Samoa**, and the **Pacific** and **Central Asia** regional

<sup>122</sup> Final evaluation KII (country, regional); case studies.

<sup>123</sup> Case studies; regional programme mission reports; final evaluation KII (country, regional); 2023 Meta-review; final evaluation online survey (qualitative responses).

<sup>124</sup> Case studies; regional mission reports; MTAs (Pacific Regional Programme, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu); online survey (qualitative responses), and further confirmed in the 2022 and 2023 meta-reviews conducted by Hera.

<sup>125</sup> Case studies and KII (Guyana, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Samoa); regional programme consultations (Central Asia, Pacific).

<sup>126</sup> Final evaluation KII (country, regional); case studies.

<sup>127</sup> RUNOs at country and regional levels were unable to extend contracts prior to Phase II approval, leading to repeated monthly contract extensions for key personnel, including PMU personnel. Sources: 2023 Meta-review; final evaluation KII (country, regional, global), case studies.

<sup>128</sup> KII country, regional, global (including with former and present Spotlight Initiative Coordinators); 2023 Meta-review; final evaluation online survey (qualitative responses).

<sup>129</sup> MTAs, 2023 Meta-review; case studies; final evaluation KII (country, regional); final evaluation online survey (qualitative responses).

programmes human resource contributions from the Resident Coordinator’s Office had to increase significantly following turnover of personnel in the PMU (particularly the Spotlight Initiative’s coordinator position).

*Box 2: Collaborating to overcome operational bottlenecks: the Malawi experience*

The Programme Management Unit and RUNOs in Malawi demonstrated an ability to adapt and respond to a series of internal and external challenges throughout the implementation of the Initiative. Challenges included funding delays, turnover in personnel, climatic shocks, public health emergencies, and currency volatility. The ability of UN personnel to work creatively and flexibly during Phase I was critical to enabling joint financial delivery of 86 per cent of funds received by 30 September 2020. However, lack of clarity concerning the programme’s funding envelope and disbursement schedule for Phase II was a contributing factor in turnover of key programme personnel, including the positions of Spotlight Initiative coordinator and M&E officer. These departures created human resource gaps that made coordination and implementation more challenging in the final years of the programme. Mitigation measures were applied through a collaborative effort by the Resident Coordinator, Resident Coordinator’s Office and RUNOs to reassign roles, increase backstopping from the entity responsible for technical coherence (UN Women), and extend the engagement of the Resident Coordinator’s Office and RUNO Heads of Agency in operational matters supported by a “we-can-make-it work” attitude among RUNO technical and operations personnel.

*Sources: Malawi case study and associated KII; 2022 Meta-review; acceleration plan; MTA.*

**Finding 6: The Spotlight Initiative demonstrated an ability to be responsive to changing national and regional contexts through timely and adaptive actions, including the response to COVID-19 and other crises during programme implementation. However, the integration of more flexible and responsive strategies into the operational framework would have better anticipated and mitigated the impacts of significant external changes in context.**

#### **Operational responses to COVID-19 and other crises**

107. The Spotlight Initiative was able to respond to rapidly changing contexts as demonstrated by the response of country and regional programmes to the COVID-19 pandemic and other crises such as climate shocks, natural disasters, humanitarian crises, government collapse, protracted election processes and public health emergencies other than COVID-19. Timely and appropriate adaptive actions were undertaken in response to crises and were reflected in updates to country programme risk management matrices from 2020 onwards.<sup>130</sup> Mitigation measures identified in programme documentation, including country acceleration plans, were confirmed in key informant interviews with RUNOs and implementing partners and found to be appropriate with a focus on operational agility (for example, shifts to online modalities, accelerated procurement processes) and putting in place safety and protection measures (for example, provision of personal protective equipment, measures to address increased incidence in VAWG, striving to do no harm or to minimize potential harm when implementing activities).

<sup>130</sup> Spotlight Initiative mid-term assessments, annual reports, final evaluation key informant interviews (country, regional, global).



Box 3: Responsiveness of the Spotlight Initiative across humanitarian-development-peace contexts

All Spotlight Initiative programmes were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and in many countries, this was compounded by humanitarian emergencies, exacerbating violence against women and girls (VAWG). The Spotlight Initiative was designed for development contexts and has also been able to adapt and flexibly respond across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, including in crises contexts.

Between 2018 and 2023 several programme countries shifted into crisis situations, significantly altering the operating context for RUNOs and their implementing partners. This was particularly pronounced in **Afghanistan**, **Haiti**, and **Mali**, where programmes had to make multiple adjustments to operational and implementation arrangements in order to meaningfully respond to shifting needs and national priorities.

In **Haiti**, challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic, an earthquake in August 2021, and a deteriorating political and security situation required multiple changes to the programme's work plan and budget. Drawing on additional support from the Global Secretariat, the programme effectively adjusted its risk management arrangements to ensure continuity of interventions despite successive crises. The programme demonstrated flexibility and agility in response to the earthquake, which saw swift collective action by the United Nations and by government and civil society partners aimed at preventing and responding to a potential increase in cases of VAWG following the disaster.

In **Mali**, the 2020 coup d'état and uncertainties linked to the transitional government caused difficulties in implementing all six pillars during Phase I. The programme responded with a robust acceleration plan that focused on more efficient programmatic and operational coordination between RUNOs to address implementation bottlenecks, alongside increased investment in activities that had already demonstrated results.

In **Afghanistan**, following the Taliban takeover in August 2021, the programme took steps to reduce adverse effects and prepared an activity-based risk mitigation plan covering UN personnel, civil society partners and all programme participants, including survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, with efforts to not transfer the risk to implementing partners. The migration of women's rights activists, civil society leaders, non-profit staff and many other Afghans seeking security outside of the country left a vacuum in gender-based violence services and response, which required the programme to fast-track capacity-building training for new personnel and volunteers engaged in the programme. Other adjustments included: repivoting interventions so that more services were channelled through a decentralized, community-based approach; changing implementation modalities and language that seemed sensitive in the eyes of the de facto authorities; and greater use of grant-giving mechanisms to support the functioning of women's rights and women-led, small and grassroots civil society organizations through flexible core and programmatic funding.

Additionally, a joint effort between the Spotlight Initiative and the **Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF)** provided vital financial support to grassroots and women-led civil society organizations in **Afghanistan** and **Haiti** working on the front lines of crisis response to EAWG. For example, new adaptive strategies, tools and systems were adopted for continuity of civil society organization operations, including in **Haiti** where three women's rights organizations developed risk management and contingency plans or strategies. This funding has also helped organizations sustain themselves during crises, with 221 staff and volunteers in **Haiti** retained in 2021 for the continuity of their operations.

Sources: Spotlight Initiative global annual reports (2021; 2022); Spotlight Initiative country programme annual reports (Mali 2022; Afghanistan 2021; 2022); MTAs (Haiti, Mali); Spotlight Initiative. 2020. Mali Acceleration Plan Analysis. October 2020; final evaluation global online survey (qualitative responses); Trust Fund Analysis; OCHA. 2021. Haiti: Earthquake Situation Report No. 5 (14 September 2021); Spotlight Initiative. 2021. Adaptability of the Spotlight Initiative: Strengthening the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus to End Violence Against Women and Girls. November 2021.

108. Programme documentation for the 13 Spotlight Initiative programmes<sup>131</sup> that developed acceleration plans to mitigate against time lost due to COVID-19 or other crises<sup>132</sup> indicate that these had an overall positive impact on implementation rates. This was confirmed by case study key informants in **Argentina**, **Honduras**, **Malawi** and **Mozambique**. Strategies included: streamlined procurement processes and trainings for civil society partners (**Mozambique**, **Liberia**); increased coordination and communication with implementing partners (**El Salvador**, **Niger**, **Latin America Regional Programme**); and scaling up work with existing civil society partners and larger non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to accelerate

<sup>131</sup> Argentina, El Salvador, Honduras, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Mexico, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Uganda, Zimbabwe, and the Latin America Regional Programme.

<sup>132</sup> For example, in Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe programme implementation was delayed in 2019 because of tropical cyclones, in Argentina, Mexico, Uganda and Nigeria because of election processes and changes in government, and in Mali because of the coup d'état in August 2020.



programme delivery (**Honduras, Liberia, Mexico, Mozambique**). At the same time, a focus on increasing expenditure rates and developing acceleration plans was reported to have led to a reduction in time spent on collaborative or participatory working approaches and feedback processes.<sup>133</sup> Additionally, there was no structured annual follow-up and reporting on these plans.<sup>134</sup>

**Finding 7: UN systems and procedures presented operational challenges for RUNOs in reaching grassroots organizations and for of the Initiative. Different financial and administrative systems hindered UN system-wide operational efficiencies in the context of the Initiative, despite a concerted effort by personnel to mitigate these impacts.**

### **Procedures and processes of different UN system entities**

109. The different operational systems and internal processes of RUNOs ran counterproductive to joint operationalization of the Spotlight Initiative country and regional programmes. Efforts to work collaboratively to improve programme efficiencies had limited success although the evaluation identified “bright spots” of success in operational collaboration including RUNO joint expressions of interest (**Malawi, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea**), joint trainings on Harmonized Approach to Cash Transfers (HACT) for civil society (**Nigeria**), and joint monitoring missions (**Guyana, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Nigeria**).<sup>135</sup>
110. Instances of collaboration contributed to operational efficiencies, but UN personnel and implementing partners noted these efficiencies were generally insufficient to overcome the challenges of operating under different systems and procedures.<sup>136</sup> The global online survey indicated that 58 per cent of respondents (both internal and external to the United Nations) agreed that UN operational systems and processes enabled effective implementation of the Spotlight Initiative. However, high levels of disagreement with this statement came from RUNOs and Resident Coordinators and their Office. Qualitative global survey responses also highlighted the need to achieve greater harmonization and coordination across the operational systems of UN entities, with several respondents directly attributing delays in disbursement of funds to disparate and cumbersome administrative and procurement procedures that led to shortened timeframes for conducting activities.
111. The need to collectively deliver at pace was often described by key informants as being at odds with different UN system entity procedures and processes, further complicated by the “heavy” reporting requirements related to the Spotlight Initiative.<sup>137</sup> Implementing partners of country and regional programmes, particularly those that received funds from multiple UN entities, expressed frustration with the lack of harmonization across RUNO systems and their different recruitment, procurement, cash management, reporting and monitoring procedures. According to key informants this required additional time and effort to navigate, leading to perceived inefficiencies and, at times, confusion for implementers.<sup>138</sup>
112. UN systems presented challenges in reaching grassroots organizations that had limited human resources, weaker auditing and financial reporting capacity, or were physically located in remote areas with

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<sup>133</sup> 2022 Meta-review, final evaluation KII country (Mozambique).

<sup>134</sup> ECA report, para 65; final evaluation KII global (Spotlight Initiative Secretariat).

<sup>135</sup> Final evaluation country case studies.

<sup>136</sup> Final evaluation case studies; MTAs; final evaluation online survey (qualitative responses).

<sup>137</sup> Final evaluation case studies; MTAs, final evaluation online survey (qualitative responses).

<sup>138</sup> Case studies; MTAs; final evaluation KII (country, regional); further triangulated with thematic CSO review and final evaluation online survey (qualitative responses).

associated challenges around reporting and connectivity.<sup>139</sup> Even among larger civil society organizations, UN procedural requirements<sup>140</sup> were cited as disincentives to working with the Spotlight Initiative.<sup>141</sup> Over the life of the Initiative, processes were successfully introduced by RUNOs to increase the involvement of grassroots organizations, including women's rights, feminist and women-led organizations, and in some contexts those supporting key populations.<sup>142</sup> Initiatives included: the use of the “small grants” modality to simplify requirements; provision of training to ensure compliance with RUNO requirements; and working with partners to problem-solve within budgetary constraints.<sup>143</sup> Working through consortia arrangements with larger civil society organizations enabled more groups to be involved in the Spotlight Initiative and build their organizational capacities to continue and expand their work on EAWG beyond the lifetime of the programme.<sup>144</sup> Field efforts were supported by the Grassroots Action Plan, a guidance document developed by the Global Secretariat on how to work with (and adapt) UN policies and procedures to better engage local and grassroots organizations.<sup>145</sup>

113. There has been increased attention over time to programmatic and operational risks.<sup>146</sup> However most country and regional programmes overlooked or underestimated the potential impact of operational issues associated with the processes and procedures of UN system entities.<sup>147</sup> A far-reaching example of this was the switch to a new enterprise resource planning system for UNDP, UNFPA and UN Women in the first quarter of 2023. This had a significant impact on Spotlight operations globally, resulting in delays of up to three months in funds transfer to implementing partners and payments to essential personnel, leading to cessation or delay of activities. Adverse impacts to programme delivery had other knock-on effects, such as reduced time to focus on sustainability considerations (see Finding 17).<sup>148</sup>

**Finding 8: While centralized performance management, monitoring and reporting systems promoted standardization, these required extensive human resource investment with limited evidence of positive impact on programme operational efficiency or performance. Implementation of the global results framework was challenging and there was significant variability in the quality of results reporting. Participatory M&E approaches and mid-term assessments were valuable for learning and accountability purposes, however the tie-in of the mid-term assessment to a performance-based continuation of programmes created unintended operational disruptions.**

114. The performance management systems established to operationalize the Spotlight Initiative included a global results framework, annual reporting, independent mid-term assessments of all country and regional programmes (except for **Afghanistan**) and a two-phase, performance-based roll-out plan. Operationalizing these systems facilitated standardization and fostered accountability, but also faced challenges, as detailed below.

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<sup>139</sup> Case studies; MTAs; final evaluation KII (country, regional); thematic CSO review; final evaluation online survey (qualitative responses).

<sup>140</sup> These included the specific requirements of RUNO operational systems and processes as well as those specific to the Initiative, such as monitoring and reporting in compliance with donor requirements.

<sup>141</sup> 2023 Meta-review; 2024 Thematic Review; KII country and regional levels.

<sup>142</sup> See Annex P: Glossary of key terms for the working definition of key populations as used in this report.

<sup>143</sup> Case studies; KII regional, country; thematic CSO review; final evaluation online survey (qualitative responses).

<sup>144</sup> Case studies (Argentina, Mozambique); Annual Report Timor-Leste 2022.

<sup>145</sup> Spotlight Initiative. 2020. Spotlight Initiative Grassroots Action Plan. Ensuring Spotlight Initiative funding reaches local and grassroots civil society organizations. Version April 2020.

<sup>146</sup> Analysis of risk management matrices, annual reports, MTAs eight case study countries; final evaluation KII (country and regional).

<sup>147</sup> Analysis of risk management matrices, annual reports, MTAs eight case study countries; final evaluation KII (country and regional).

<sup>148</sup> KII regional and country level (Argentina, Guyana, Nigeria; Caribbean, Central Asia and Afghanistan, Latin America); case studies; regional mission reports. Draft consolidated 2023 report, Nigeria; 2022 AR Argentina KII regional and country level (Argentina, Guyana, Nigeria, Samoa; Caribbean, Central Asia and Afghanistan, Latin America); case studies; regional mission reports.

## Global results framework

115. Development of the results framework was guided by accountability requirements set out by the European Union, which was primarily at the global level. The use of a harmonized results framework allowed for standardized reporting of results, offering the Initiative the ability to aggregate results across programmes to facilitate communication of the Spotlight Initiatives' achievements.<sup>149</sup> The centralized approach to the global results framework also helped to ensure the use of quality indicators.<sup>150</sup>
116. Operationalizing the results framework at lower levels faced considerable challenges. Contextualization difficulties were highlighted by UN personnel in six of the eight case studies (**Argentina, Guyana, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria**) with colleagues relying on the comments or note section within the results framework to offer supplementary explanations regarding data interpretation or significance.<sup>151</sup> Despite the methodological notes provided by the Global Secretariat, key informants recorded various difficulties and limitations in interpreting and applying the standardized indicators.<sup>152</sup> Commonly cited challenges included concerns that indicators: did not effectively show incremental progress; were not well adapted to local contexts (**Argentina Guyana, Mexico, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste, Vanuatu** confirmed by document review, case studies and qualitative responses to the online survey); and had limited relevance in the context of the regional programmes (see also Finding 1).<sup>153</sup>
117. Quantitative ratings in the global online survey indicated that 70 per cent of respondents agreed that the results framework was adaptable to the national context and was well able to capture change and demonstrate results. This was not consistent with other data sets reviewed. Analysis of survey results found the highest levels of disagreement with the statement came from RUNOs, the Resident Coordinator and their Office and EU delegation respondents. This is corroborated by evidence from case studies and regional missions that identified challenges in tailoring the results framework to specific contexts. The lack of harmonization between standardized indicators in the results framework and national government indicators was cited as a further challenge by key informants in **Guyana and Mozambique**,<sup>154</sup> since this could have helped to more directly inform national policy and decision-making and provide a means of measuring some outcomes and outputs where baseline was missing. Online survey responses from programme stakeholders in **Belize, Jamaica and Mozambique** also highlighted challenges in monitoring the implementation of the leaving no one behind (LNOB) principle with no specific associated indicator. This was also noted in the European Union Court of Auditors report.<sup>155</sup> Although the possibility of adding country- or regional-specific indicators was communicated in the global Spotlight Initiative M&E Strategy,<sup>156</sup> adding a high number of indicators was discouraged, and the option of adding custom indicators was utilized by only a limited number of country and regional programmes.<sup>157</sup> Limitations in disaggregated beneficiary data by vulnerable groups further impeded the evaluation's ability to fully assess the results of

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<sup>149</sup>2022 Meta-review; KII (global).

<sup>150</sup>2023 Meta-review; KII (Kyrgyzstan).

<sup>151</sup>KII (country - Argentina, Guyana, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria); case studies.

<sup>152</sup>2022 Meta-review, final evaluation KII (country, regional, global).

<sup>153</sup>Meta-review; MTAs; KII country and regional; final evaluation online survey (qualitative responses).

<sup>154</sup>Final evaluation KII (Guyana, Mozambique); final evaluation online survey.

<sup>155</sup> EU Court of Auditors Report. 2023.

<sup>156</sup> 2022 Meta-review; SI M&E Strategy.

<sup>157</sup> 2022 Meta-review; final evaluation KII (Africa RP, Global Secretariat, Argentina, Guyana, Latin America RP).

the programme's cumulative reach and impact on these populations (see Finding 12).<sup>158</sup> For example, a lack of programme data on refugees and internally displaced persons led to limitations in the ability to assess reach to these populations of men, women, girls and boys in various contexts.<sup>159</sup>

118. Between 2018 and 2023, the Secretariat undertook multiple initiatives to support operationalization of the results framework for country and regional programmes. This included developing and disseminating comprehensive methodological and guidance notes, providing training to personnel on M&E and reporting, and establishing a quality assurance system.<sup>160</sup> Despite these efforts, comprehensive analysis of the results frameworks for the eight case study countries (**Argentina, Honduras, Guyana, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Samoa**) identified issues and inconsistencies in how data were understood and reported at each level, as well as how they were aggregated at higher levels, ultimately raising reliability concerns.<sup>161</sup>
119. A review of the results frameworks for the case study country programmes identified issues across all eight frameworks. Availability of baseline data for indicators varied and, in many instances, a baseline of zero was applied without an indication as to whether zero represented the actual baseline or the absence of data. Absent or unclear baseline data were particularly evident at the output level.<sup>162</sup> Outcome baselines were more consistently present, with 80 per cent of reviewed outcome indicators containing baselines.<sup>163</sup> Deficiencies or delays in baseline data created issues in setting appropriate targets.<sup>164</sup> Problems with targets we identified such as setting targets of zero and targets that were lower than baselines. In some programmes, targets were surpassed prior to implementation; in others, targets were significantly exceeded suggesting they had not been appropriately set in the first instance.<sup>165</sup>

### Monitoring systems, processes and annual results reporting

120. The Spotlight Initiative's monitoring system was intended to gather performance data at the outcome and output levels and link programme-related and financial result indicators to provide measures of efficiency and effectiveness of the Initiative.<sup>166</sup> However, the monitoring system did not link outputs and outcomes to information on actual spending, thereby limiting the ability to assess the programme in terms of what was achieved in each pillar against costs (see Finding 12). The Global Secretariat made efforts to provide technical support and guidance to programmes (for example, through webinars, dedicated M&E WhatsApp Groups and optional check-ins).<sup>167</sup> However there was persistent and significant variability in the quality of results reporting due to changes to monitoring platforms, staffing and capacity gaps in M&E personnel, and a disconnect between reporting on the results framework and programme monitoring and results reporting more broadly

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<sup>158</sup> Spotlight Initiative. 2021. Spotlight Initiative Secretariat: Capturing Beneficiaries - Spotlight Guidance. Analysis of SI programme narrative reports from 2019 and 2022 indicated that 280,343,948 direct beneficiaries and 644,051,716 indirect beneficiaries were reached.

<sup>159</sup> Noting that in some contexts, confidentiality of refugee data meant it was not possible for this type of information to be shared with the SI programme and its implementing partners. Sources: Final evaluation KI interviews; case studies (Nigeria, Malawi).

<sup>160</sup> The four layers were defined as: SI M&E personnel, RUNO M&E personnel, Global Secretariat M&E Quality Assurance, and the UN Resident Coordinator.

<sup>161</sup> ECA report and MTA.

<sup>162</sup> This finding is consistent with findings of the EU Court of Auditors Report. 2023 and 2022 meta-reviews.

<sup>163</sup> As of February 2024, only the 2022 programme results frameworks were available for all eight case study countries.

<sup>164</sup> ECA report. 2023. Also 2023 Meta-review.

<sup>165</sup> This finding is consistent with findings of the EU Court of Auditors Report. 2023. paragraph 81.

<sup>166</sup> Spotlight Initiative. 2018. Spotlight Initiative to End Violence Against Women and Girls. Annex I Description of the Action. A Multi Partner Trust Fund. November 2018. page 63.

<sup>167</sup> Spotlight Initiative (2021). Spotlight Initiative Secretariat. MPTF Office Generic Annual Programme Narrative Progress Report Reporting Period: 1 January. 31 December 2021. KIs all levels.

121. Between 2018 and 2023 the Initiative utilized three separate monitoring platforms for data tracking and aggregation against the global results framework.<sup>168</sup> Changes were intended to streamline and improve accuracy of data management, but by 2021 the second system in place struggled to handle the increasing volume of data.<sup>169</sup> The subsequent data migration process to a third platform encountered significant hurdles, prompting concerns among PMU, the Resident Coordinator's Office and RUNO personnel about the system's reliability and operational effectiveness. Informants in **Argentina, Guyana and Malawi** reported that some data failed to migrate entirely or was incorrectly classified. This led to interruptions in operations and additional workloads for UN personnel and created a lack of confidence in the integrity and reliability of the migrated results data.
122. Challenges with successive monitoring platforms placed renewed importance on the need for robust quality assurance processes. Despite instituting a four-layer quality assurance process to support accuracy of reporting,<sup>170</sup> the Initiative fell short of achieving the desired quality for its results reporting. Within country and regional programmes, the evaluation found quality assurance relied heavily on staffing and capacities within the PMU. Turnover of PMU personnel in many countries, particularly the M&E officer position (see Finding 5) impacted the timeliness and quality of reporting. Evidence from case studies and regional programme consultations indicate that consistent, dedicated M&E support and a well-resourced PMU supported the efficient functioning of M&E practices while programmes that faced staffing gaps or a reliance on ad-hoc and part-time M&E support experienced greater issues with monitoring and results reporting.
123. PMU and RUNO personnel universally reported spending considerable time and resources to comply with reporting requirements. Under the Initiative, country and regional programmes reported annually through a systematic and extensive collection of information. The reporting was important for transparency and accountability, but a review of country annual reports<sup>171</sup> identified a disjoint between reporting on the global results framework and programme monitoring and reporting more broadly. This was consistent with evidence and findings from other sources, which identified a disconnect between information on indicator performance from the global results framework and information requested for the annual report.<sup>172</sup>

### **Participatory monitoring and evaluation and mid-term assessments**

124. Learnings and insights from the Initiative's centralized monitoring and reporting systems did not sufficiently channel back to those responsible for collecting or enabling the collection of the data, including government and civil society stakeholders.<sup>173</sup> To address these concerns, some programmes (specifically, **Belize and Malawi**) introduced participatory monitoring and evaluation (PME) approaches early on in programme implementation. The aim was to ensure the effectiveness and relevance of M&E processes through more collaborative engagement with civil society and other stakeholders. Other programmes (for example, **Guyana, Jamaica, Niger, Nigeria**) developed and refined participatory monitoring and evaluation approaches later into implementation, benefiting from experiences of UN personnel, guidance from national and global civil society reference groups, or support from the Global Secretariat. For example, in

<sup>168</sup> The three monitoring platforms were: (i) Excel sheets (2018-2019); (ii) SMART Platform via Jotform (2020-2021); and (iii) ActivityInfo from 2022.

<sup>169</sup> Final evaluation KII (all levels); Spotlight Initiative (2021). Spotlight Initiative Secretariat. MPTF Office Generic Annual Programme Narrative Progress Report Reporting Period: 1 January. 31 December 2021.

<sup>170</sup> The four layers were defined as: PMU M&E personnel and RUNO M&E personnel of Spotlight Initiative country and regional programmes, relevant technical personnel of the Global Secretariat responsible for aspects of M&E, and the UN RC for Spotlight Initiative country programmes or equivalent UN leadership structure depending on the regional programme.

<sup>171</sup> Based on a random sampling of 13 out of 26 Spotlight Initiative country programme annual reports: Afghanistan, Belize, Ecuador, Guyana, Jamaica, Honduras, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Papua New Guinea, Tajikistan, Timor-Leste and Uganda.

<sup>172</sup> 2023 Meta-review, ECA triangulated with final evaluation KII (country, regional).

<sup>173</sup> 2022 and 2023 meta-reviews; final evaluation KII (regional, country level); case studies with specific reference to Malawi, Guyana, Argentina.

the Caribbean, UN personnel were able to learn from one other through a virtual “Caribbean community of practice”, which allowed for exchange of M&E strategies, tools and approaches for transitioning to participatory monitoring and evaluation approaches in Spotlight Initiative country programmes.

125. Participatory monitoring and evaluation helped to mitigate the perceived disconnect between centralized Spotlight Initiative monitoring and reporting processes and local realities by engaging women and girls, rights holders and communities in some countries, including **Guyana, Malawi and Nigeria**. Establishing transparent, inclusive and participatory monitoring processes was also viewed by key informants as important to ensuring alignment of Spotlight Initiative M&E processes with the principle of leaving no one behind. Additionally, participatory monitoring and evaluation approaches provided important opportunities for capturing change that was not planned and for cross-learning and replication (for example, through bringing implementing partners together within and across programme districts and communities and engaging government and civil society representatives in joint monitoring missions).

*Box 4: Improved monitoring through participatory monitoring and evaluation approaches*

In **Belize**, PME approaches evolved and adapted over time and in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. From the outset of Phase I implementation, the programme sought to ensure civil society partners, including Civil Society National Reference Group members, were engaged in PME activities. Examples included community-based dialogues with implementing partners to inform the development of monitoring tools and standardized data collection activities, stakeholder consultations with women’s groups and beneficiaries to ensure ongoing feedback on the relevance and effectiveness of interventions and learning sessions with civil society networks to identify key issues and address emerging challenges during implementation.

In **Guyana**, the programme established monitoring teams composed of representatives from various stakeholders including RUNOs, the Civil Society National Reference Group, lead government ministries, and local EU delegations. Participatory monitoring approaches were adjusted throughout implementation based on feedback from programme partners and beneficiaries and used to improve the data and evidence needed for learning and reporting around results.

In **Malawi**, the programme set up monitoring structures at the district level during Phase I implementation. Called “communities of practice”, these structures were composed of all stakeholders and led by district officials. The decentralized approach created a more autonomous and open approach to reporting and helped capture critical feedback from community members to inform programme learning and adaptation. This feedback was reflected in district reports helping to strengthen programming monitoring and reporting at the subnational level. Towards the end of Phase I, the PMU and RUNOs also sought to include the perspectives and experiences of communities and rights holders into the design and implementation of the programme’s mid-term review process. Through focus groups discussions, key informant interviews and an anonymous survey, this inclusive process had two objectives: to check whether women and girls and other stakeholders felt the programme was relevant and sustainable; and to assess what was and was not working (and why) so that RUNOs could recalibrate programming as necessary. As a result of rights-holders’ feedback and insights, UN personnel were able to identify bottlenecks and find mitigating solutions that informed the development and prioritization of interventions in Phase II.

*Sources: Spotlight Initiative programme documentation, final evaluation case studies, KIIs.*

126. Mid-term assessments for country and regional programmes helped to inform decision-making and refine interventions and strategies under the Initiative.<sup>174</sup> Within the Secretariat, the centralized roll-out of mid-term assessments was cited as advantageous, affording the opportunity to conduct global-level meta-reviews and utilize results to guide Phase II programming.<sup>175</sup> No action plans were drafted for a structured follow-up of mid-term assessment findings and recommendations,<sup>176</sup> however, analysis of addendums to country programme documents demonstrate that programmes were intentional in incorporating and

<sup>174</sup> Following the Taliban takeover in August 2021, no MTA was conducted for the Spotlight Initiative Afghanistan country programme. The two Trust Fund partnerships did not undergo a mid-term assessment.

<sup>175</sup> 2023 Meta-review, page 36 triangulated with KII global level (SI Secretariat).

<sup>176</sup> ECA report, paragraph 65, page 29.



addressing recommendations during Phase II implementation.<sup>177</sup> Examples of adjustments included streamlining and shifts in RUNO operational practices, improved risk management practices, and changes to programme delivery strategies to facilitate greater engagement of men and boys, as well as women and girls experiencing intersecting forms of discrimination.<sup>178</sup>

127. In practice, the timing of mid-term assessments did not always fall at the mid-point for programmes. For countries experiencing start-up delays, mid-term assessments were conducted early in the programme life cycle, which meant that limited monitoring data were available and little time had passed to generate meaningful insights and lessons learned from implementation. Nonetheless, most key informants recognized the value of the mid-term assessment process for learning and accountability, even for those conducted early cycle.<sup>179</sup> However, the tie-in to a performance-based continuation of the programme in the form of a second phase, and the way in which this affected and informed negotiations with the Global Secretariat, was cited as disruptive to operations and damaging to programme momentum (see Finding 4).<sup>180</sup> Negative repercussions included heavy demands of stakeholders to “redesign” programmes, stop-start implementation, and (because of a lack of clarity regarding the programme’s continuation) personnel turnover and strains to relations between RUNOs and their implementing partners.<sup>181</sup>

### 3.3 Governance, Leadership and Coherence

*This section focuses on how the Spotlight Initiative’s governance structures was set out to achieve programme coherence. Spotlight was governed through a three-tiered structure. At the highest level, the Governing Body (GB) was responsible for setting strategic directions and ensuring partnership cohesion while the Operational Steering Committee (OSC) handled the operational and technical aspects of the Initiative. At country and regional levels, programmes were led by steering committees.*

**Finding 9: The Spotlight Initiative's governance structures at global, regional and country levels engaged a broad base of high-level stakeholders, though functional challenges were faced at all levels of governance. The inclusion of formal governance structures for civil society engagement was an important and innovative aspect of the programme that nevertheless required adjustments and adaptations along the way to improve functioning.**

#### **Global governance structures (the Governing Body, the Operational Steering Committee and the Civil Society Global Reference Group (CSGRG))**

128. The global governance structures of the Spotlight Initiative, specifically the Governing Body and the Operational Steering Committee, demonstrated high-level commitments to the Initiative, though functionality challenges were encountered. Many stakeholders at the global level considered that the functioning of the Governing Body and the Operational Steering Committee were overly complex and high-level, which limited the opportunity for technical discussions that could have been better handled at lower levels of governance.<sup>182</sup> These arrangements were seen as a response to the high profile of the Spotlight

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<sup>177</sup> Analysis of CPDs and their Phase II addendums, and MTAs for the eight case study countries; KIIs country and regional programmes.

<sup>178</sup> Case studies; final evaluation KII (country, regional).

<sup>179</sup> 2023 Meta-review, final evaluation case studies, regional missions, and KII (specifically Guyana, Kyrgyzstan).

<sup>180</sup> Final evaluation case studies; KII (country, regional, global).

<sup>181</sup> Final evaluation case studies; KII (country, regional).

<sup>182</sup> KIIs with global stakeholders; review of OSC and GB meeting minutes; Meta-review Final Report.

Initiative, as the first European Union global strategic partnership with the United Nations on EVAWG. This entailed close engagement of high-level actors and intense scrutiny by the European Union.<sup>183</sup>

129. The Governing Body was co-chaired by the United Nations Deputy Secretary-General and the European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy or the Vice-President of the European Commission, as the ultimate decision-making body, which met four times over the duration of the programme. The representation from high levels within the United Nations and European Union signaled the prominence given to the Initiative, however stakeholders considered that its composition and high-level nature of its proceedings did not meet their expectations that it would be a consultative forum.<sup>184</sup> Effectiveness was further hampered by infrequent meetings.<sup>185</sup>
130. For the period of 2017 to 2023, the Operational Steering Committee addressed issues and made decisions in accordance with the memorandum of understanding and term of reference that identify the role of the Operational Steering Committee to ensure effective management and coordinate all operational and technical aspects of the Initiative. It convened on 34 occasions between 2017 and 2023, with the majority of discussions centred around operational matters and strategic considerations in line with the committee's designated role. Stakeholders interviewed for the 2023 Meta-Review Final Report raised concerns related to a perceived lack of transparency in decision-making processes.<sup>186</sup> Stakeholders interviewed for this evaluation raised similar concerns.
131. The Civil Society Global Reference Group (CSGRG) structure evolved over time, positively impacting the programme's governance. The CSGRG involvement of civil society adapted, based on feedback and consultations with civil society representatives. Initially established as an advisory body, the role of the CSGRG was described inconsistently across various documents, creating uncertainty about its decision-making influence. Over time, its role was formalized to allow for greater civil society contributions to the Initiative's governance. Initially (up to and including most of 2019), there were no civil society representatives on the Operational Steering Committee, but the CSGRG successfully advocated for the inclusion of one. During this period, the CSGRG also managed to change the status of a civil society representative on the Governing Body from observer to full member. This expanded civil society engagement in the Operational Steering Committee and the Governing Body, facilitated enhanced discussions and provided a broader platform for civil society voices to be heard.<sup>187</sup> The influence of the CSGRG on decision-making was evident in its ability to review and edit its own terms of reference to include holding the Initiative accountable and developing compensation guidelines for reference group members.<sup>188</sup>

### **Regional governance structures (regional steering committees (RSCs), the Civil Society Regional Reference Group (CSRRG), technical committees)**

132. Regional-level context-specific governance structures allowed for more localized approaches, but they often resulted in complex and time-consuming administrative processes, making it challenging to engage stakeholders effectively and establish efficient management and governance frameworks.<sup>189</sup> The

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<sup>183</sup> KIIs across case study countries; KIIs at global level, Meta-review Final Report.

<sup>184</sup> Independent Review of Management Unit Functions, 2022; KIIs with global stakeholders

<sup>185</sup> The GB met four times over the duration of the programme: September 2017; March 2018; September 2020; May 2022.

<sup>186</sup> Independent Review of Management Unit Functions, 2022; Meta-review Final Report; KIIs with global stakeholders.

<sup>187</sup> KII global, review OSC minutes.

<sup>188</sup> Thematic Assessment of Spotlight Initiative's contribution to the engagement of civil society (LNOB); KIIs at a global level; GSCRG discussion paper.

<sup>189</sup> Meta-review Final Report; KIIs across regional programmes.



integration of Civil Society Regional Reference Groups (CSRRGs) into regional programmes demonstrated an innovative approach to integrating regional civil society expertise, yet effectiveness varied across regions. Additionally, the varying roles and effectiveness of regional technical committees showed mixed outcomes in supporting effective governance across the regional programmes.

133. Governance structures for regional programmes were adapted to regional contexts. The **Africa Regional Programme** governance structure promoted ownership by the African Union (AU) and other regional institutions, although with a somewhat cumbersome administrative framework.<sup>190</sup> In **Central Asia**, adjustments were made over time to streamline governance and enhance effectiveness, including engaging ambassadors, the UN Europe and Central Asia Issue-Based Coalition on Gender Equality, and UN Regional Development Coordination Office (UNDCO) within the Spotlight Initiative regional steering committee.<sup>191</sup> The **Latin America Regional Programme** steering committee was chaired by UN Women and the European Union with representation from RUNOs and civil society. This approach proved effective, with the Regional Director of a RUNO successfully representing the UN system during programme governance discussions.<sup>192</sup> The **Pacific Regional Programme**, however, faced challenges with its regional steering committee, which met infrequently and struggled to secure engagement from key regional bodies to co-chair the committee.<sup>193</sup>
134. Integrating Civil Society Regional Reference Groups (CSRRGs) into regional governance structures was an innovative approach to formalizing regional civil society organization engagement, although setup and effectiveness varied significantly. In **Africa**, establishing the CSRRG was complicated by political and cultural sensitivities, affecting membership diversity and complicating compensation discussions.<sup>194</sup> In **Central Asia**, member selection process was slow, and members were unclear about their roles. The **Pacific** faced delays in setting up the CSRRG and experienced limited engagement from members and disruptions between phases.<sup>195</sup> The **Caribbean** CSRRG garnered sound participation and engagement. Members' links with national counterparts increased visibility in non-Spotlight Initiative countries and expanded the reach of the regional programme's small grants facility.<sup>196</sup> Similarly, the **Latin America** CSRRG played an active role, providing advice to decision-making and as part of the technical advisory group that reviewed studies developed under the programme. The **Latin America** CSRRG additionally provided input into the selection of civil society organizations to receive small grants and proactively established dialogues with Civil Society National Reference Groups in Spotlight countries to support greater coherence.<sup>197</sup>
135. Many regional programmes included an extra governance layer focused on operational decision-making, often referred to as a "technical committee". These committees played varying roles depending on their context, with mixed findings on their contributions. In the **Caribbean**, the technical advisory group promoted effective collaboration and open communication, supported by the strategic placement of technical personnel in Barbados.<sup>198</sup> In **Africa**, the technical committee focused on addressing operational

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<sup>190</sup> KIIs in Africa RP; Meta-review Final Report; RPD.

<sup>191</sup> KIIs in Central Asia RP; RPD.

<sup>192</sup> KIIs in LATAM RP.

<sup>193</sup> KIIs in Caribbean RP; Meta-review Final Report.

<sup>194</sup> KIIs in Africa RP.

<sup>195</sup> KIIs in Central Asia RP.

<sup>196</sup> KIIs in Caribbean RP.

<sup>197</sup> KIIs in Latin America RP.

<sup>198</sup> KIIs in Caribbean RP.

issues rather than making strategic decisions.<sup>199</sup> In contrast, in the **Pacific**, the technical working group met irregularly and generally focused on sharing information.<sup>200</sup>

### **Country governance structures (national steering committees (NSCs), Civil Society National Reference Groups (CSNRG), technical committees)**

136. National steering committees (NSCs) showed potential to enhance multi-stakeholder governance and operational coherence of the Spotlight Initiative. However, their effectiveness was influenced by their composition, their frequency of engagement, and the clarity of roles among participating entities. Overall, CSNRGs added significant value to Spotlight programmes by enhancing civil society engagement and providing critical insights into programme governance. Nevertheless, their full potential was often constrained by structural and operational challenges such as unclear role definitions, inadequate compensation mechanisms and a lack of operational support.<sup>201</sup> Technical committees exhibited variable degrees of effectiveness, often hampered by operational inefficiencies and complex structures that impeded their functionality.

#### **National steering committees**

137. National steering committees put in place to guide the Spotlight Initiative at the country level were generally considered in line with stakeholder commitments and mandates and were deemed to have expanded formal stakeholder engagement and successfully brought different actors to a common table to work toward EVAWG. National steering committees included representatives from civil society organizations, the European Union, high-level government officials, and the Resident Coordinator. In all eight case study countries (**Argentina, Guyana, Kyrgyzstan, Honduras, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Samoa**), national steering committees engaged senior leadership across key stakeholder groups, enhancing visibility of the Initiative at the highest political levels. However, the extent to which this engagement was sustained and meaningful varied. In several instances this was complicated by changes in national government during programme implementation.
138. Broad-based and senior representation on steering committees underscored a commitment to high-level participation and shared responsibilities for the Initiative, yet national steering committees faced operational difficulties. Effectiveness was sometimes compromised by high numbers of members, leading to cumbersome coordination and negatively impacting on the efficiency of committees. In several case study countries, national steering committees did not meet as regularly as planned, which raised concerns about the consistency of stakeholder commitments.<sup>202</sup> For example, in **Malawi** and **Mozambique**, infrequent meetings impacted the central leadership's ability to guide the initiative effectively. Global online survey results found that 65 per cent of respondents agreed that the national steering committee was actively engaged and provided relevant strategic input and direction for the Spotlight Initiative, 24 per cent remained neutral, and 11 per cent disagreed.

#### **Civil Society National Reference Groups (CSNRGs)**

139. Established to serve an advisory role with the authority to nominate representatives to national steering committees, CSNRGs played a key role in bringing forth a diversity of perspectives to programme governance structures including, in many instances, non-traditional actors. In some countries, CSNRGs were involved in programme monitoring activities and providing technical inputs on the development of

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<sup>199</sup> KIIs in Africa RP.

<sup>200</sup> KIIs in the Pacific RP.

<sup>201</sup> Thematic Assessment of Spotlight Initiative's Contribution to the engagement of civil society (LNOB).

<sup>202</sup> MTAs case study countries; KIIs case study countries; NSC meeting minutes case study countries.

programme strategies as well as advocacy campaigns and quality assurance processes. CSNRGs demonstrated a capacity to enrich the Initiative with a broad range of perspectives from women's rights and feminist activists, incorporating representatives of marginalized groups that included key populations in some contexts.<sup>203</sup> Coherence was supported by CSNRG-led initiatives to establish communications and develop collective action across levels (global, regional and national). For most CSNRGs, members were selected through a civil society-led process. The diversity of members within CSNRGs helped to elevate a broader variety of viewpoints in decision-making processes. Of the global survey respondents, 70 per cent felt that this was an important aspect of the Spotlight Initiative.

140. The roles and responsibilities of CSNRG members formed a valuable component of governance structures. Nevertheless, they were often ambiguous or misunderstood, leading to confusion and differing expectations about their level of influence and the effort required for meaningful engagement (**Argentina, Guyana, Kyrgyzstan, Mozambique, Samoa**).<sup>204</sup> CSNRG effectiveness was hampered by operational challenges, including issues surrounding appropriate compensation for members, administrative requirements, and limited budgets for carrying out activities (**Guyana, Kyrgyzstan, Samoa**).<sup>205</sup> Though some progress was demonstrated in defining roles and establishing mechanisms for remuneration, operational issues affected members' ability to fully engage and at times led to reduced participation or high turnover rates (**Mozambique**).

#### **Technical committees**

141. Spotlight Initiative programmes had an additional body to support technical decision-making; some programmes used the term "technical committee" or "technical working group" for this body. Technical committees generally met more frequently than steering committees and focused on coordination of the six pillars with the aim of ensuring synergies and coherence of interventions. However, the effectiveness varied, with some facing significant challenges such as operational inefficiencies and complexities in structures that hindered their functionality.<sup>206</sup> For example, in **Guyana**, the gender technical working group was found to have slowed down processes significantly, leading to its eventual cessation. In **Nigeria**, complex governance structures, compounded by tensions among and between UN personnel, ascribed to factors including communication, personalities, power dynamics and organizational culture, led to capacity gaps and inefficiencies, exacerbated by personnel turnover and unclear role expectations. In contrast, **Argentina** had two technical committees - one focused on monitoring and the other on communication - which enhanced programme coherence and created greater synergies.<sup>207</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Thematic Assessment of Spotlight Initiative's Contribution to the engagement of civil society (LNOB).

<sup>204</sup> KIIs with CSNRG members in mentioned case study countries; Thematic Assessment of Spotlight Initiative's Contribution to the engagement of civil society (LNOB).

<sup>205</sup> Meta-review Final Report; KIIs with CSNRG member in case study countries; Thematic Assessment of Spotlight Initiative's Contribution to the engagement of civil society (LNOB).

<sup>206</sup> KIIs case study countries; ARs.

<sup>207</sup> Meta-review of the Spotlight Initiative: Latin America and Africa. Final Report. March 2022. KIIs with RUNO's in Argentina.

**Finding 10: The Spotlight Initiative demonstrated mixed results in fostering coherence<sup>208</sup> within and between governance structures. The Initiative faced coherence challenges between its governance structures, marked by a top-down approach from global bodies that was not well connected to regional and country levels. WPHF and UN Trust Fund governance structures at country levels had limited engagement with Spotlight Initiative structures though protocols were in place to avoid duplication and foster coherence.**

#### **Internal coherence at country and regional levels of governance**

142. At the country level, the governance structures contributed to supporting a coherent approach to EVAWG involving key national stakeholders. This was seen in some case study countries (**Argentina, Guyana, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi and Mozambique**<sup>209</sup>) to mark a significant shift away from ad-hoc, donor-driven initiatives to more strategic and coherent efforts to prevent and respond to EVAWG, helping to elevate the issue on the national agenda. At the regional level, several programmes encountered challenges in achieving similar coherence. In **Central Asia** and the **Caribbean**, misalignment between geographic regional programme designations and stakeholder jurisdictions complicated efforts to maintain coherence (see Finding 2). In the **Pacific**, challenges were compounded by overlapping agendas from regional bodies' engagement in other large initiatives to end VAWG.<sup>210</sup>
143. Coherence within the UN system at the country level was overseen by the UN Resident Coordinator. Placing country programmes under the leadership of the Resident Coordinator was in line with UN reform principles, but UN personnel (including Resident Coordinators themselves) reported confusion in the early stages of implementation about how to merge the ongoing rollout of UN reform with Spotlight Initiative objectives in order to effectively operationalize the Resident Coordinator role.<sup>211</sup> Despite recognizing Resident Coordinators accountability for country programmes,<sup>212</sup> UN personnel at technical and senior management level noted that Resident Coordinators were not responsible for overseeing programming directly nor were they able to influence how RUNOs integrated the Initiative into their work.<sup>213</sup> Nevertheless, Resident Coordinator leadership was viewed by stakeholders internal and external to the United Nations as important in bringing the UN system together to ensure a coherent approach to EVAWG within the country (see Finding 14).<sup>214</sup> Conversely, weak engagement from Resident Coordinators or disruptions in leadership continuity ran the risk of negatively impacting programme coherence.<sup>215</sup>
144. In both country and regional programmes, evidence of the impact of the technical coherence function<sup>216</sup> on overall programming coherence is mixed. Programmes established different arrangements for the technical

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<sup>208</sup> OECD definition of coherence as 'the compatibility of the intervention with other interventions in a country, sector or institution' (OECD library, 'Applying Evaluation Criteria Thoughtfully').

<sup>209</sup> KIIs in cited case study countries.

<sup>210</sup> KIIs in Caribbean RP and Pacific RP.

<sup>211</sup> Independent Review of Management Unit Functions, 2022; Fund ToR, KIIs.

<sup>212</sup> RC guidance states "the role of the RC will include overall oversight of the implementation of SI country programmes. The RC will play the crucial role of leveraging relevant technical experience and expertise from the most relevant UN agencies, in an impartial and inclusive way. The overall programmatic and operational accountability for the Spotlight Initiative at country level will rest with the RCs, supported by the RUNOs. "

<sup>213</sup> Final evaluation KIIs; case studies; global online survey (qualitative responses).

<sup>214</sup> MTAs; final evaluation KII (country); case studies; global online survey (qualitative responses).

<sup>215</sup> KIIs across most case study countries; 2023 Meta-review; Independent Review of Management Unit Functions, 2022; Metareview Final Report; Global Interviews.

<sup>216</sup> The Spotlight Initiative Operations Manual (2021) outlines the responsibility of the Technical Coherence Specialist as the provision of technical advice and guidance to the RC, Spotlight Initiative Coordinator and RUNOs, including activities under monitoring, evaluation and reporting, capacity development, knowledge management and communications. Source: Spotlight Initiative. 2021. Funds Operations Manual Compendium. Version 1. February 2021.

coherence function. Documentation and evidence from case studies show in many instances these arrangements changed over time,<sup>217</sup> presenting challenges in assessing the overall influence of technical coherence specialists on programme coherence. This evaluation identified examples where the technical coherence function contributed positively to programme coherence and other instances where challenges with the function hindered it, as illustrated in the box below.

*Box 5: A mixed picture: evidence of the technical coherence function on overall programming coherence*

The mid-term assessments (MTAs), final evaluation case studies and key informant interviews identified instances where the technical coherence function made positive contributions to programming coherence, for example: in the facilitation of programme revision exercises and pillar coordination meetings; in streamlining RUNOs' interventions targeting the same stakeholders; in the harmonization of capacity strengthening initiatives across RUNOs; and in the engagement of civil society and government stakeholders (including national civil society reference groups). In some contexts, these efforts were attributable to the agency in charge of technical coherence ("technical coherence lead") while in other cases, they were a result of a collective effort by the PMU and RUNOs.

In **El Salvador**, the programme established a technical coherence unit (managed by UN Women), which was critical and integral to management and coordination processes by helping to define the actors involved in the programme, their roles, their spaces for participation, and their relationship with each other. Similar positive contributions to programming coherence were identified in the **Trinidad and Tobago** programme, where there was strong collaboration between the PMU and agency operationalizing the technical coherence function (UN Women). Working together, a technical coherence matrix was developed to assist RUNOs in performing a pre-evaluation of deliverables to ensure alignment with Spotlight Initiative objectives and guidelines, and UN principles, standards and global conventions. This also accelerated the ability of RUNOs to deliver in a more streamlined and efficient way, as it established criteria for joint assessment of terms of reference, consultancies and procurement.

At the same time, confusion over the technical coherence function was reported as a common issue in country and regional programmes that took time to understand and resolve, hindering coherence in the early stages of implementation. This was reported in mid-term assessments and corroborated by the case studies (**Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Nigeria, Samoa**) and regional programme consultations (**Caribbean, Central Asia**). A well-documented challenge was the lack of clarity on the distinct roles and responsibilities between the Spotlight Initiative coordinator and the technical coherence specialist. Key informants reported that the information provided in the Operations Manual was useful as an orientation, but not helpful to understand the delineation between the two roles, given overlaps in the descriptions. During implementation, this was compounded by personnel turnover, which led to a further blurring of roles in some contexts as technical coherence specialists (or equivalent) were appointed as interim Spotlight Initiative coordinators or vice versa.

Sources: Spotlight Initiative. 2021. *Funds Operations Manual Compendium. Version 1. February 2021*; Spotlight Initiative ARs (*El Salvador, Haiti, Trinidad & Tobago*); MTAs; 2022 and 2023 meta-review; case studies; final evaluation KII (country and regional); 2023 meta-review; MTAs (*El Salvador, Haiti, Kyrgyzstan, Nigeria, Samoa, Trinidad & Tobago*); case studies (for example, *Kyrgyzstan and RUNO/PMU Pathways of Change exercise*); 2022 and 2023 meta-review triangulated with final evaluation KII at country and regional level; UN Women. 2022. *UN Women Community of Practice on Technical Coherence for EVAWG. July 2022*; UN Women. 2023. *UN Women Community of Practice on Technical Coherence for EVAWG: Newsletter No. 2 January 2023*.

### **Coherence across levels (global, regional and country)**

145. The Spotlight Initiative has faced challenges in facilitating coherence across governance levels, reinforced by a gap in forums for bi-directional communications across governance bodies. This led to perceptions of a top-down approach to governance from global to lower levels and a perceived disconnect between the decisions of global governance bodies and the realities of experiences on the ground.<sup>218</sup> Key informants from country and regional programmes reported a lack of clarity on the origins of numerous requirements and feeling pressured to comply with a global agenda, noting limited opportunities to provide feedback or effectively influence decisions taken at a global level.<sup>219</sup>

<sup>217</sup> 2022 and 2023 meta-reviews; MTAs; final evaluation KIIs (country, regional); final evaluation case studies.

<sup>218</sup> Independent Review of Management Unit Functions, 2022; KIIs at all levels.

<sup>219</sup> Independent Review of Management Unit Functions, 2022; Meta-review Final Report; KIIs global level.

146. A lack of linkages in coordination mechanisms between country and regional programmes resulted in missed opportunities for synergies and resource optimization.<sup>220</sup> For example, in **Latin America** and **Africa**, stakeholders displayed little knowledge of regional programme activities and limited understanding of how regional programmes could support country-level efforts, leading to a lack of strategic alignment.<sup>221</sup> Identified missed opportunities for synergistic programming included: knowledge exchange and better sharing of knowledge products between regional and country programmes; stronger networking among civil society organizations addressing gender-based violence across Spotlight countries; and improved coordination between country and regional programmes that work with the same implementing partners.<sup>222</sup> The evaluation found some evidence of coherence between country and regional programmes in **Guyana** and the **Caribbean Regional Programme** and in **Kyrgyzstan** and the **Central Asia Regional Programme**, where efforts to ensure complementarity and avoid overlap were largely successful, primarily because the programmes engaged with the same institutions and partners during implementation.<sup>223</sup>

### **Trust Fund governance structures and coherence**

147. The WPHF and UN Trust Fund operated under distinct governance structures at the country level. The UN Trust Fund governance structures worked independently of the formal Spotlight Initiative governance framework without direct connections to the country or regional Spotlight Initiative programmes. Collaboration and communication with the Spotlight Initiative Global Secretariat were limited to updates, guidance and instructions on reporting. The WPHF worked with Spotlight focal points (mostly UN Women focal points), the EU delegation (as member of the WPHF National Steering Committee) and the UN Resident Coordinator or Humanitarian Coordinator. The WPHF utilized existing national decision-making mechanisms, such as Spotlight Initiative national steering committees, or established new WPHF national steering committees as needed.<sup>224</sup>
148. At the global level, UN Women functions as the Technical Secretariat for both the UN Trust Fund and WPHF. Regular quarterly meetings with the European Union and Spotlight Initiative Secretariat were conducted to foster collaboration and complementarity and avoid duplication. Organizations applying to the UN Trust Fund were effectively ineligible for WPHF grants, and the UN Trust Fund cross-verified application data with WPHF applicants during the pre-screening process. The UN Trust Fund had no formal mechanism to verify whether the organizations funded were also receiving financial support from the national Spotlight Initiative programme. The WPHF leveraged its direct access to UN Women country offices to maintain an informal table on civil society organization selection and successful grantees. Efforts to support coherence between the funds and the Spotlight Initiative included ensuring each fund focused on a unique constituency.

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<sup>220</sup> European Court of Auditors Report; KIIs with RUNOs in country and RPs.

<sup>221</sup> ECA Report, Meta-review Final Report; KIIs country level.

<sup>222</sup> Country and regional case studies.

<sup>223</sup> KIIs with RUNOs in mentioned country and regional case studies.

<sup>224</sup> Spotlight Initiative. Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) grant-giving to civil society organizations under the Spotlight Initiative: Annual Narrative Programme Report 01 January 2021 to 31 December 2021.

**Finding 11: There are exemplary cases of effective national and subnational government engagement and ownership, however, the programme has faced continuity challenges due to changes in government administrations and political instability that have hindered potential for government ownership in some instances. Ownership of the agenda by regional bodies varies by region due to a range of factors. Interactions between the United Nations and the European Union at all levels has been multifaceted, reflecting a complex interplay of issues including governance, personal dynamics and visibility.**

### **Engagement and ownership of government and regional bodies**

149. The success of the Spotlight Initiative is intricately tied to government ownership and engagement, as highlighted by evidence from all regional and case study countries. The programme demonstrated an ability to significantly elevate the visibility of ending gender-based violence and VAWG on national agendas, leading to heightened levels of government commitment and engagement in many contexts.<sup>225</sup> However, the degree of ownership and the effectiveness of engagement in the programme has varied significantly, influenced by factors such as political stability, administrative consistency and strategic alignments.
150. Evidence from case study countries found varying levels of government engagement in the Spotlight Initiative at the national level, challenged in some countries by personnel changes in government administrations and political instability. For example, in **Guyana**, despite ownership of the Spotlight Initiative's holistic approach to EVAWG by the lead government ministry, there were significant gaps in understanding and ownership across government agencies and the lack of an interministerial coordination mechanism posed challenges to a coherent response.<sup>226</sup> In **Honduras** and **Nigeria**, Spotlight Initiative faced setbacks due to political changes that necessitated re-engaging and re-training new government personnel, impacting the continuity and institutionalization of its strategies.
151. **Kyrgyzstan** showcased a more robust model of interministerial coordination, linking Spotlight Initiative governance structures to existing platforms, thereby enhancing multisectoral collaboration on EVAWG.<sup>227</sup> This approach was also reflected in **Malawi** and **Mozambique**, where the integration of Spotlight Initiative strategies into existing provincial and district-level governance structures fostered strong local ownership and sustainability prospects, despite challenges at the national level due to political transitions and limitations.<sup>228</sup> In total, five of the eight case study countries (**Argentina, Honduras, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria**) demonstrated high levels of government ownership at lower levels of governance (province, district).<sup>229</sup>
152. The degree to which regional bodies have demonstrated ownership of the Spotlight programme has been inconsistent. In **Africa**, the African Union and other regional entities have demonstrated commitment and ownership of the approach.<sup>230</sup> In contrast, the **Pacific Regional Programme** struggled to achieve similar ownership and encountered difficulties in engaging key regional bodies due in part to competing focus on other regional programmes dealing with gender-based violence.<sup>231</sup>

### **Partnerships (United Nations, European Union, governments, civil society organizations)**

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<sup>225</sup> KIIs with RUNOs, EU, CSO and government partners in country case studies.

<sup>226</sup> KIIs with RUNOs and government partners in Guyana.

KIIs with RUNOs and government partners in Honduras and Nigeria.

<sup>227</sup> KIIs with RUNOs and government partners in Kyrgyzstan.

<sup>228</sup> KIIs with RUNOs and government partners in Mozambique and Malawi.

<sup>229</sup> Open-ended survey responses; KIIs in relevant countries; global KIIs, Ars.

<sup>230</sup> KIIs in Africa RP.

<sup>231</sup> KIIs in Pacific RP.

153. Spotlight has facilitated the formation of new and strengthened partnerships among various stakeholders, including civil society organizations and other key stakeholders. Relevant stakeholders from the highest levels of key institutions have generally demonstrated a collaborative partnership approach to governing the programme. According to the global online survey, 75 per cent of respondents believed there was strong ownership and shared responsibility within the programme's governance structures, highlighted by high-level engagement of governments, the United Nations, the European Union, and civil society organizations. This is supported by evidence from countries like **Argentina, Guyana, Honduras, Kyrgyzstan** and **Samoa**, where there was clear leadership and engagement from critical stakeholders throughout the programme.<sup>232</sup>
154. The partnership between the United Nations and the European Union, spearheaded at the global level by the active involvement of the Deputy Secretary-General and former European Union Commissioner, significantly heightened the focus of the Initiative and laid the groundwork for collaboration.<sup>233</sup> The partnership was further enhanced by the strong partnership between the Spotlight Initiative Global Secretariat and the Gender Equality, Human Rights and Democratic Governance International Partnership of the European Union. The UN-EU partnership within the Initiative aimed to shift traditional donor-grantee hierarchies toward more collaborative relationships. Some country and regional programmes achieved notable progress towards developing UN-EU collaborative relationships, while others faced challenges to break hierarchical dynamics of traditional donor-grantee interactions.
155. The partnership between the United Nations and the European Union delegation across the Initiative was meant to enhance the effectiveness and coherence of the Spotlight Initiative via close partnership engagement.<sup>234</sup> The extent to which this intention was realized varied significantly across regional and country programmes. In countries like **Argentina** and **Guyana**, the European Union and United Nations made considerable strides toward transitioning to closer, more collaborative partnerships, marked by commitments to openness and transparency from both sides.<sup>235</sup> Stakeholders in **Kyrgyzstan** and **Malawi** also put forth strong models of collaborative relations between the European Union and United Nations. In the regional programmes in **Africa** and **Latin America** there was an active engagement of the EU delegation across the programme cycle and in governance mechanisms.
156. In other country and regional contexts, there were challenges and tensions, particularly around protocols and visibility. Operational complexities and coordination challenges within governance structures were also highlighted as challenges to smooth partnership engagement.<sup>236</sup> Visibility of the European Union's contributions was a contentious issue, exacerbated by shifts in how the initiative was framed from a joint UN-EU initiative to being perceived as a United Nations initiative funded by the European Union.<sup>237</sup> The degree of tensions around this issue were influenced by various factors including the individual personalities involved.
157. As a globally designed initiative, EU delegations lacked traditional structures for programme and financial management. Despite the inclusion of EU delegations in country-level governance structures as key members of steering committees, many key decisions were made in Brussels or New York, fostering a perception of a top-down, headquarters-led initiative.<sup>238</sup> The evaluation notes that, as part of broader EU

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<sup>232</sup> KIIs with relevant key stakeholders in mentioned countries.

<sup>233</sup> KII, Independent Review of the Management Unit Functions, July 2022.

<sup>234</sup> Global Annual Narrative Report 2022; KIIs.

<sup>235</sup> KIIs with relevant key stakeholders in Argentina and Guyana; Ars.

<sup>236</sup> Independent Review of Management Unit Functions, 2022; KIIs all levels.

<sup>237</sup> KIIs with stakeholders at global level; KIIs with EUDs, RUNOs, RCOs, in Honduras, Argentina.

<sup>238</sup> KIIs stakeholders at all levels.



policy, EU financing instruments since 2021 have required a more prominent EU delegation operational management.<sup>239</sup>

## 2.4 Results and Progress

*This section focuses on programme effectiveness, assessing results across the six pillars of Spotlight Initiative support: legislative change; institutional strengthening; prevention; service delivery; data collection; and support for women's movements. A comprehensive assessment of results was not possible due to data availability and inconsistencies in data quality and integrity within the Initiative results framework (see Finding 8). Considering these limitations, a mixed method approach was utilized to analyse the evidence of Spotlight Initiative contribution to results achieved. This approach involved triangulating primary and secondary evidence from case studies, including country case study reports, mid-term assessments and independent UN country programme evaluations and annual reports. Qualitative and quantitative data was triangulated to map results against pillars. Findings in this section reflect the application of this approach, which allowed for an assessment of results with an acceptable degree of confidence. Additionally, the section draws on results achieved around knowledge management and knowledge products.*

**Finding 12: The Spotlight Initiative achieved notable results across its six pillars. In Pillar 1, Spotlight Initiative strengthened and supported new and existing VAWG legislation, advancing national and global efforts to combat VAWG and gender-based violence. In Pillar 2, it trained parliament members, government officials and traditional leaders to foster effective programmes for preventing and addressing VAWG. In Pillar 3, it promoted gender-equitable norms and prevented violence through school initiatives, creative awareness activities and mentorship programmes. In Pillar 4, it improved access to services for women and girls by boosting the capacity of service providers. In Pillar 5, it successfully contributed to collecting and increasing the usage of qualitative and disaggregated gender-based violence data. With the incorporation of Pillar 6, Spotlight Initiative empowered women's movements and local feminist organizations, significantly impacting national civil society organizations and grassroots groups. The comprehensive approach, combined with substantive funding allocations and high-level, multi-stakeholder engagement, made important contributions to significant changes toward eliminating violence against women and girls at country and regional levels.**

158. While achieving or contributing to outcome- and impact-level results necessitate a longer-term timeframe beyond the Spotlight Initiative implementation period of four years, the evaluation found evidence of the Spotlight Initiative's contribution to outcome-level results as well as notable results at the output level across the six pillars. The Initiative was able to support important results aided by the multi-agency, multisectorial approach, significant investment and high-profile support from the United Nations and European Union.<sup>240</sup> The introduction of a large-scale, well-resourced programme focused exclusively on EVAWG played a crucial role in bringing the issue to the forefront at the national level, integrating and making civil society organizations active implementers and decision-makers, fostering expanded national ownership, and providing a unique opportunity for the United Nations and European Union to support progress on this critical national issue.

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<sup>239</sup> European Court of Auditors. 2023. Programming the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe Comprehensive programmes with deficiencies in the methods for allocating funds and impact monitoring.

<sup>240</sup> UNFPA-UNICEF. Joint Evaluation of the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation: Accelerating Change Phase III (2018-2021). 2021.

## Results by Pillar

### Pillar 1: Laws and legislation

159. The evaluation found evidence of Spotlight Initiative’s contribution to outcome-level change in Pillar 1 with new or strengthened VAWG legislation. Spotlight Initiative support effectively addressed legislative hurdles and bottlenecks, creating a conducive environment for shaping and strengthening existing gender-based violence laws and policies, advancing national and global efforts to combat VAWG and gender-based violence, thereby building a stronger legislative foundation. In several case studies, draft and amended laws supported by the Spotlight Initiative were still awaiting ratification at the close of the programme. For other case studies, the Spotlight Initiative contributed to new or strengthened laws,<sup>241</sup> but questions remained at the close of programmes as to whether strengthened legislative frameworks would lead to improved legislative implementation plans or better enforcement.<sup>242</sup>

**Global Outcome: Legislative and policy frameworks, based on evidence and in line with international human rights standards, on all forms of violence against women and girls and harmful practices are in place and translated into plans.**

Planned outcome investment: USD 30.1m  
(8.2 per cent)

Civil society funding: USD 15.6m (50 per cent)

Source: Spotlight Initiative Secretariat; Global Initiative Civil Society Tracker Data reflects expenditure until 31 December 2023 (Data provided April 2024)

160. The most significant change and the mixed method approach evidenced that the Initiative's contributions to legislative strengthening were crucial in advancing efforts to combat VAWG and gender-based violence. Four out of eight case study countries (**Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Mozambique and Samoa**) identified legislative strengthening through reviews, amendments and the passing of laws and policies to prevent and respond to gender-based violence as a higher-order result of the programme. Stakeholders from other case studies noted that work under Pillar 1 provided direct or indirect support to other significant changes, such as fostering an enabling environment for legislative change (**Guyana**) and elevating the issue of EVAWG on the national agenda (**Honduras**).

161. Spotlight Initiative advanced efforts to combat VAWG and gender-based violence to build a stronger legislative foundation by strengthening legislative frameworks across the eight case study countries. In **Argentina**, Spotlight Initiative supported the drafting of new laws at the national level such as the ratification of gender-sensitive legislation and international norms: for example, the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Convention C190 concerning violence and harassment in the workplace. In **Guyana**, Spotlight Initiative supported legislators in the development of key gender-based violence legislation with approval expected in 2024. In **Nigeria**, Spotlight Initiative, together with other partners, contributed to the domestication of the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP Act), which was identified as one of the Initiative's higher-order results (“most significant change”).

<sup>241</sup> Evaluation of the 4th UNFPA Country Programme for Kyrgyzstan (2018-2022) Final Evaluation Report.

<sup>242</sup> UNFPA. Evaluation of the 6th Sub-Regional Programme of the UNFPA Sub-Regional Office For The Caribbean: Sub-Regional Programme Evaluation 2017-2021 Final Report (29 October); Evaluation of the 6th Sub-Regional Programme of the UNFPA Sub-Regional Office for the Caribbean: Sub-Regional Programme Evaluation 2017-2021, Final Report (29 October).

The programme has supported significant results in the adoption and amendment of key laws and policies. Notably, amendments to the Criminal Procedure Code (CPC), including the new CPC Article 504, which allowed for the detention of alleged perpetrators of domestic violence for up to 48 hours. Amendments to the law on alimony have strengthened the rights of women to receive alimony and enhanced enforcement mechanisms in cases of non-payment, signed into law by the President in August 2020 with the backing of Members of Parliament, civil society and legal experts.

The revised law on state-guaranteed legal aid, which entered into force on 10 August 2022, marks a milestone in improving access to free legal aid and strengthening access to justice for vulnerable groups nationwide. This law now includes survivors of domestic violence, refugees, minors in difficult life situations and citizens from low-income families among those eligible for qualified (secondary) legal aid. These legislative changes have collectively contributed to a stronger legal framework and better protection for vulnerable populations.

162. The Initiative contributed to increased institutional awareness of laws and regulations pertaining to violence against women and girls through legislative capacity-building and enhanced incorporation of laws at the national level. This has led to more effective implementation and enforcement of these laws, fostering a stronger, more coordinated response to gender-based violence at both national and community levels. For example, the Initiative strengthened the knowledge and capacities of national and local government partners to assess gaps, draft new laws or strengthen existing legislation and formulate action plans related to EVAWG in line with international human rights standards. In **Argentina**, the Spotlight Initiative provided crucial capacity-building support to legislative staff to increase awareness of laws and regulations. This training equipped them with essential skills to advise on action protocols for gender violence and evaluate laws, strengthening legislative responses to violence against women and girls. The Spotlight Initiative programme in **Honduras** bolstered the capacities of national and local institutional actors to formulate action plans on femicide, harmonizing them with international human rights standards and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Results included: the formation and capacity-building of various commissions and working groups to tackle issues like commercial sexual exploitation and internal displacement due to violence; and the development of a detailed analysis that identified legislative and policy gaps in addressing femicide aligned with the Latin American Protocol Model.

### Pillar 2 - Institutional strengthening

163. Evidence from the eight case studies indicated that the Spotlight Initiative played a crucial role in equipping members of parliament, government officials and traditional leaders with knowledge and skills, thereby creating an environment conducive to developing and implementing effective (service) programmes aimed at preventing and addressing violence against women and girls.

164. The most significant change method further corroborated the evidence, with stakeholders identifying that Pillar 2 activities directly or indirectly supported notable changes, including better-integrated services to meet community needs and increased outreach to remote areas in **Malawi** and **Mozambique**, and the institutionalization of approaches within key national institutions in **Argentina** and **Kyrgyzstan**.

**Outcome Goal 2: National and subnational systems and institutions plan, fund and deliver evidence-based programmes that prevent and respond to violence against women and girls and harmful practices, including in other sectors.**

Planned outcome investment: USD 33m (8.2 per cent)

Civil Society Funding: USD 11.6m (35 per cent)

*Source: Spotlight Initiative Secretariat; Global Initiative Civil Society Tracker Data reflects expenditure until 31 December 2023 (Data provided April 2024)*

165. The evaluation found that the Spotlight Initiative improved the capacity of stakeholders to address gender-based violence through targeted training and technical assistance<sup>243</sup> in multiple countries and strengthened the multisectoral and multi-stakeholder coordination mechanism,<sup>244</sup> enhancing the overall effectiveness and coherence of the national response to gender-based violence. Spotlight Initiative provided monitoring and evaluation training to district government officials and civil society organization implementing partners, which improved reporting and enhanced multisectoral coordination among stakeholders.
166. The **Malawi** and **Mozambique** programmes demonstrated increased participation of women and women's organizations in the formulation of district development plans, enabling them to successfully advocate for the inclusion of measures to address gender-based violence. In **Argentina**, the Spotlight Initiative bolstered the newly formed National Ministry of Women, Gender and Diversity with technical assistance, leading to enhanced service provision for women and improving the gender-based violence case data registry. The Spotlight Initiative in **Kyrgyzstan** significantly enhanced the capacities of direct service providers interacting with gender-based violence survivors, including legal aid lawyers, social workers and police officers, through training, resulting in improved support provision.
167. The most significant change method evidenced Spotlight Initiative's contribution to improving multisectoral coordination on ending VAWG and gender-based violence among state authorities at both national and subnational levels. This led to strengthened mechanisms for preventing and responding to gender-based violence and better-coordinated services for survivors in countries like **Kyrgyzstan** and **Malawi**. Additionally, strengthened multi-stakeholder collaboration and partnerships across governments to address gender-based violence coherently at national levels were identified as a higher-order contribution of the programme in six case study countries (**Argentina, Guyana, Kyrgyzstan, Mozambique, Nigeria, Samoa**).
168. Evidence from case studies and documentation review showed notable progress in several areas. However, an increase in dedicated national budgets for the issue of gender-based violence due to Spotlight Initiative support could not be fully substantiated for the eight case studies. **Samoa** showed positive signals of increased budget allocations for civil society organizations working to EAWG, but reported increases in other countries could not be triangulated. In **Mozambique**, the operationalization of gender-sensitive planning and budgeting remained incomplete and, as of September 2023, no distinct government budget was allocated for ending gender-based violence. In **Malawi**, specific data on gender-based violence budget allocation was unavailable, hindering the assessment of the contribution of advocacy and capacity strengthening efforts. In **Honduras**, Spotlight Initiative developed a National Plan of Action and partnered with various institutions to enhance gender-responsive budgeting and policymaking, yet a distinct budget did not materialize at the end of the programme.
169. Results were achieved by employing innovative approaches to EAWG, as evidenced by numerous examples across country and regional programmes where interventions were creatively adapted and contextualized to maximize catalytic potential. Spotlight Initiative built on and adapted existing effective and promising approaches to ending violence against women and girls, tailoring interventions to specific community and country contexts. Examples highlighted in programme documentation<sup>245</sup> and corroborated by site visits conducted during the case studies include engaging traditional leaders in **Malawi** and

<sup>243</sup> Evaluation of the 4th UNFPA Country Programme for Kyrgyzstan (2018-2022).

<sup>244</sup> UNFPA. Formative evaluation of UNFPA support to adolescents and youth (2019-2022).

<sup>245</sup> Spotlight Initiative programme annual reports; 2014 Compendium of Innovative and Good Practices and Lessons Learned; SI programme narrative reports; global narrative reports.

**Mozambique** to end the harmful practice of early or child marriage. In **Kyrgyzstan**, the programme adopted the Gender Action Learning System (GALS) to the local context. The community-led empowerment methodology was subsequently integrated into experiential training for staff of key national and state institutions and community-level interventions. The GALS methodology, alongside other tools and approaches promoted by the programme, were further institutionalized in several government departments and applied in other initiatives by civil society and development partners.

Box 7: Malawi: Spotlight Initiative engagement with chiefs

In Malawi, traditional leaders served as drivers for social change and community transformation, acting as custodians of culture and traditions. In 2020, the Spotlight Initiative, in partnership with the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, enhanced the engagement of these leaders by establishing Chiefs’ Forums. These forums provided spaces for dialogue, harmonization and peer-to-peer exchanges on effectively preventing and responding to violence against women and girls at the community level. As a result, the programme contributed to developing a national framework that defined the roles and responsibilities of chiefs in addressing violence against women and girls. Through consultations with 3,421 community stakeholders, the Spotlight Initiative ensured that the missions and roles of the Chiefs’ Forums were locally embraced, holding chiefs accountable to their communities, particularly to women and girls.

Source: Case Study Malawi/Site visits; Spotlight Initiative annual narrative reports; 2014 Spotlight Initiative compendium of Good Practices and Lesson Learned.

### Pillar 3 – Prevention

170. Spotlight Initiative support within Pillar 3 contributed to promoting gender-equitable norms and attitudes and preventing violence through a variety of in-school and out-of-school initiatives, awareness-raising activities employing creative approaches and mentorship programmes. The level of implementation varied across case study countries, and limitations in data reliability and availability on beneficiary reach hindered a comprehensive analysis. The most significant change method identified that the Spotlight Initiative had substantial success in raising community awareness and supporting mindset changes regarding gender-based violence in five countries (**Guyana, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Mozambique, Samoa**).

**Outcome Goal: 3. Gender equitable social norms, attitudes and behaviours change at community and individual levels to prevent violence against women and girls and harmful practices.**

Planned outcome investment: USD 93.5m (25 per cent)  
 Civil society funding: USD 53.9m (57 per cent)

Source: Spotlight Initiative Secretariat; Global Initiative Civil Society Tracker Data reflects expenditure until 31 December 2023 (Data provided April 2024)

171. Although changing social norms, attitudes, and behaviours requires more time than the programme's implementation period, significant progress was made in some targeted geographical areas. Site visits in the selected case studies showed that Spotlight Initiative was able to play a role in influencing attitudes and behaviours towards gender-based violence, fostering a supportive environment for gender-based violence prevention and response. The Initiative demonstrated effectiveness in engaging local populations through national and grassroots organizations to address cultural norms to promote gender equality and reduce violence against women and girls. Examples include the programme in **Mozambique**, which made critical investments in raising awareness of the rights of women and girls to live free from violence and harmful practices, employing diverse communication channels such as television, radio, social media, door-to-door campaigns and mentoring sessions. The use of media and advocacy campaigns in **Samoa** were an important tool that were especially noteworthy for raising the visibility of the issue in creative ways that were culturally grounded.

172. The Spotlight Initiative successfully promoted gender-equitable norms and violence prevention through in-school and out-of-school initiatives despite disruptions caused by COVID-19.<sup>246</sup> In **Malawi**, the Safe Schools model was scaled up in 2019, expanding the coverage of multimedia campaigns to transform harmful behaviours, norms and attitudes, providing a framework for safety within educational environments and contributing to a supportive atmosphere for gender equality and violence prevention. In **Mozambique**, Spotlight Initiative leveraged two pre-existing joint programmes on female genital mutilation and early child marriage to invest in awareness campaigns aimed at preventing gender-based violence and child marriage. Campaigns utilized television and radio broadcasts, door-to-door community awareness campaigns, mentoring sessions and mobilization in schools to reach<sup>247</sup> a wide audience and effect change at multiple levels. The advancements made in these targeted geographical areas highlighted Spotlight Initiative's effectiveness in promoting gender-equitable norms and violence prevention.
173. The Safe Space Mentorship Programme<sup>248</sup> in **Malawi** demonstrated a tangible contribution to empowering young women to become “agents of change” within their communities. This success led to the launch of a second cohort under the Spotlight Initiative. The effectiveness of this programme was further corroborated by the most significant change method. Stakeholders in **Malawi, Mozambique** and **Samoa** identified that the Initiative “enabled key actors to become agents of change at lower levels to reduce harmful norms and practices” as a critical outcome supported by the work in Pillar 3. This highlights the programme's contribution to fostering local leadership and driving community-level transformations.<sup>249</sup>
174. Programmes demonstrated varying levels of success in engaging men and boys.<sup>250</sup> **Argentina** was able to advance substantive work with men toward changing toxic masculinities, including novel approaches such as dedicated support for men who were at risk of re-offending. **Samoa** demonstrated important progress in working with men and boys as agents of change through a focus on community-level initiatives that effectively engaged men as leaders and champions. Spotlight Initiative support in **Malawi** resulted in developing and validating the National Male Engagement Strategy, engaging men and boys more effectively as agents of change as validated by site visits. In other case studies, evidence of progress was less evident (**Honduras, Guyana, Mozambique**). While the importance of increased engagement by men and boys was widely acknowledged, respondents to the global survey highlighted the need for greater inclusivity and earlier integration of engagement strategies for men and boys within the programmes.

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<sup>246</sup>Comparatively lower engagement rates were recorded during COVID-19 due to the closure of schools and children remaining at home and in other Spotlight Initiative programmes that dealt with unforeseen situations like political instability and conflict (Afghanistan, Mali, Niger).

<sup>247</sup> UN Women Country Portfolio Evaluation. Final Report Mozambique (2017-2021).

<sup>248</sup> Case studies, Government of Malawi and UNFPA 8th Country Programme, (2019-2023); Spotlight Initiative 2014 Compendium of Good Practices and Lessons learned.

<sup>249</sup> UNFPA. Evaluation of the 6th Sub-Regional Programme of the UNFPA Sub-Regional Office for the Caribbean: Sub-Regional Programme Evaluation 2017-2021 Final Report (29 October).

<sup>250</sup> Global Survey; Case Studies, Annual Narrative Report, LNOB review.

## Pillar - 4 Services

175. Spotlight Initiative contributed to strengthening access to services and support for women and girls, including integrated and multisectoral responses, by enhancing the knowledge and capacity of government and other service providers to deliver services to survivors of violence against women and girls. Several Spotlight Initiative programmes demonstrated positive examples of women's economic empowerment activities, showing potential for scaling up.

**Outcome Goal 4: Women and girls who experience violence and harmful practices use available, accessible, acceptable and quality essential services, including for long-term recovery from violence.**

Planned outcome investment: USD 90.3m (24.4 per cent)

Civil society funding: USD 43.3m (48 per cent)

*Source: Spotlight Initiative Secretariat; Global Initiative Civil Society Tracker Data reflects expenditure until 31 December 2023 (Data provided April 2024)*

176. Evidence from the mixed method approach and the most significant change method indicated progress in enhancing the capacities of service providers and strengthening access to services as a result of the Spotlight Initiative. Four case study countries (**Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Mozambique** and **Nigeria**) identified “strengthened response systems and improved referral networks and integrated services for SGBV” as a higher order change. **Honduras** and **Malawi** highlighted the development and strengthening of multi-stakeholder community-level structures to support gender-based violence prevention and response as a critical change within Pillar 4. Results led to more effective and coordinated support for survivors of VAWG, demonstrating the programme's impact on enhancing service delivery and access within targeted areas. In **Kyrgyzstan**, the Spotlight Initiative completed a comprehensive assessment and participatory mapping of essential services for gender-based violence survivors that identified gaps and opportunities for improved intersectoral coordination in gender-based violence-related service provision. The programme promoted coordinated work across stakeholders and institutionalized survivor-centred approaches, evidenced by the adoption of four new standard operating procedures.

177. Spotlight Initiative expanded coverage to remote areas and enhanced local services for marginalized groups through support to integrated service centres, mobile clinics, grassroots involvement and targeted training. In **Argentina**, the Initiative supported the enhancement of local services, particularly for groups facing intersectional discrimination, such as indigenous women and key populations. In **Honduras**, it supported the review of treatment protocols across healthcare, social, legal and policing sectors and the introduction of a mobile unit contributing to the expansion of comprehensive care to remote areas. In **Mozambique**, it developed operating regulations for integrated centres, with significant civil society involvement, contributing to strengthened capacities and multisectoral coordination among service providers. Despite the limited geographic scope, these initiatives showcased the potential for meaningful service provision and coordination improvements. However, the evaluation found few opportunities embedded in Spotlight Initiative programmes for cross-learning between districts served by the Spotlight initiative and those that were not. This was a missed opportunity to expand coverage nationwide.

178. Spotlight Initiative contributed to strengthening access to legal aid services for victims and survivors and delivering targeted training for forensic units on survivor-centric investigative techniques. In **Guyana**, legal support services were strengthened by operationalizing a legal pro bono initiative in collaboration with the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security and the Guyana Bar Association. In **Argentina**, the Initiative developed judicial protocols and tools, including a Protocol for Investigating Femicide Cases, and an enhanced “Line 144”, a key federal resource for VAWG cases. Additionally, the Initiative collaborated with



provincial ministries to support male perpetrators of violence through the Hablemos Line and assisted the Lawyer Corps for Gender-Based Victims to ensure free legal aid access for victims.

*Box 8: Malawi and Mozambique supporting economic empowerment of women*

Spotlight Initiative support in **Malawi** and **Mozambique** contributed to long-term and sustainable recovery of survivors by accelerating efforts around economic empowerment. Women and girls received assistance in income generation, including entrepreneurial training, market linkages and start-up capital. Examples included an increase in the size and coverage of community funds offering financial assistance to survivors of SGBV and harmful practices and the expansion of mentoring programmes for girls previously managed by civil society organization implementing partners but now owned and led by the communities.

The Survivor Fund in Malawi provided gender-based violence survivors with opportunities to engage in economic activities, promoting their long-term recovery and social reintegration. Operating as an interest-free loan model, beneficiaries had nine months to repay the funds according to a collectively developed payment plan.

*Source: Case Study/site visits; Spotlight Initiative programme annual narrative reports; 2014 Spotlight Initiative Compendium for Good Practices and Lesson Learned.*

179. In **Malawi**, Spotlight Initiative supported creative EAWG approaches, introducing mobile courts to improve the accessibility of legal aid in remote areas. This initiative not only increased awareness of legislation among all population groups, but also ensured that justice was served to victims. In **Kyrgyzstan**, Spotlight Initiative catalysed advancements such as extending free legal assistance to survivors of violence and expanding the innovative "Bus of Solidarity" initiative to provide legal support to remote communities. These efforts collectively strengthened the legal framework and support services for survivors, demonstrating significant progress in enhancing survivor-centric legal assistance.

### **Pillar 5 - Data**

180. Contributions to outcome-level results were identified in Pillar 5, where Spotlight Initiative successfully contributed to collecting and increasing usage of qualitative and disaggregated data on gender-based violence. The evaluation found that Spotlight Initiative contributed to improving the accessibility and accuracy of publicly available data and VAWG statistics in several case studies. The creation of targeted data, which showed substantial increases in gender-based violence reporting in the Initiative's targeted states, was effectively utilized to support targeted EAWG national responses. In four case study countries (**Argentina, Kyrgyzstan, Nigeria, Samoa**), improved systems and capacities for generating data-driven inputs to guide policies and programmes, better data collection, management and use and increased visibility and understanding of gender-based violence were identified as a higher-order change to which the programme contributed.
181. Data among various agencies and platforms were standardized, developing national assessments on the prevalence and incidence of violence against women and improving data collection methodologies to

**Outcome Goal 5: Quality, disaggregated and globally comparable data on different forms of violence against women and girls and harmful practices, is collected, analysed and used in line with international standards to inform laws, policies and programmes.**

Planned outcome investment: USD 36.0m (9 per cent)  
Civil society funding: USD 5.2m (14 per cent)

*Source: Spotlight Initiative Secretariat; Global Initiative Civil Society Tracker Data reflects expenditure until 31 December 2023 (Data provided April 2024)*



enhance the quality of information for policymaking. Despite limited involvement of civil society,<sup>251</sup> the enhancements in data collection and standardization under Pillar 5 supported a stronger foundation for informed policy decisions and a more coordinated response to VAWG across the programme countries.

182. In **Mozambique**, Spotlight Initiative provided support to the Ministry of Interior in developing the InfoViolencia digital platform to manage data on violence against women and girls. In **Malawi**, it strengthened national capacities for gender-based violence data management through the development and upgrade of information management systems. In **Nigeria**,<sup>252</sup> Spotlight Initiative, together with national government counterparts, developed the National Gender-Based Violence Data Situation Rooms and a Data Dashboard, which facilitated real-time data collection and analysis across the country. A VAWG index in **Honduras** facilitated policy formulation, while new online gender-based violence-related statistics, including data on violence against individuals with disabilities, was created in **Kyrgyzstan**.
183. However, missed opportunities for comprehensive gender-based violence data reporting systems were identified. In **Nigeria**, while the establishment and expansion of gender-based violence data reporting systems improved data collection and reporting, stakeholders were concerned about the effectiveness of parallel-running data systems with no centralized entry point. In **Guyana**, the development of data systems to improve tracking and follow-up of cases at a national level was delayed and incomplete in the last months of the programme. In **Kyrgyzstan**, the capacity to collect and analyse disaggregated data on VAWG was strengthened, but stakeholders emphasized the need for ongoing improvements in data disaggregation. The development and maintenance of gender-based violence data systems were highly dependent on skilled, trained individuals and the willingness of national governments to invest further.

## Pillar 6 - Women's movements

184. The incorporation of Pillar 6 as a standalone pillar supporting and capacitating women's movements and local women's rights and feminist organizations had a profound impact on the contributions of civil society organizations to this programme, particularly for national civil society and grassroots organizations. Grassroots organizations received USD 19 million of the grants awarded to civil society organizations,<sup>253</sup> underscoring the critical role the Initiative played in strengthening grassroots organizations. The strategic allocation of Spotlight Initiative funds to national and grassroots organizations not only reinforced civil society organization capacities but also helped to ensure that interventions were contextually relevant.
185. Stakeholders identified the strengthening of civil society organizations as one of the most significant changes in five case study countries (**Argentina, Guyana, Honduras, Mozambique, Samoa**). The Spotlight Initiative contributed to strengthening civil society organizations by: building capacities;<sup>254</sup> developing

**Outcome Goal 6: Women's rights groups, autonomous social movements and civil society organizations, including those representing youth and groups facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and marginalization, more effectively influence and advance progress on GEWE and ending VAWG**

Planned outcome investment: USD 85.0m (23.1 per cent)  
Civil Society Funding: USD 66.0m (77 per cent)

Source: Spotlight Initiative Secretariat; Global Initiative Civil Society Tracker Data reflects expenditure until 31 December 2023 (Data provided April 2024)

<sup>251</sup> Global Initiative Civil Society Tracker; Data reflects expenditure until 31 December 2023.

<sup>252</sup> Case study report; Independent Country Programme Evaluation Nigeria, 2018-2022.

<sup>253</sup> Civil Society Tracker, April 2024.

<sup>254</sup> UNFPA-UNICEF. 2021. Joint Evaluation of the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation: Accelerating Change Phase III (2018-2021).

stronger networks; enhancing collective advocacy; and expanding engagement, particularly among small, grassroots organizations. Strategic funding under Pillar 6 facilitated more effective collective advocacy and community-level changes, which enhanced the impact of the Spotlight Initiative. In **Argentina, Niger and Samoa**,<sup>255</sup> Pillar 6 activities effectively mobilized marginalized voices and challenged harmful social norms by partnering with local organizations to raise awareness and promote gender equality, particularly among the most vulnerable populations.

*Box 9: UN trust funds*

The inclusion of established UN trust funds (UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women and the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund) played a pivotal role in increasing civil society funding for the Spotlight Initiative by more than 8 percentage points (from USD 48 million to USD 85 million). Both trust funds prioritized "small" women's rights organizations,<sup>1</sup> placing strong emphasis on ensuring meaningful participation for groups experiencing intersecting forms of discrimination including individuals affected by factors such as poverty, ethnicity, disability, age, geographic location, migratory status and HIV. WPHF emphasized working with women's rights organizations with no prior United Nations funding as well as those operating in remote areas.

*Sources: Case Study/site visits; Spotlight Initiative programme annual narrative reports; 2014 Spotlight Initiative Compendium for Good Practices and Lesson Learned.*

186. Direct programme support to civil society supported better networked, trained and capacitated organizations to advance work related to gender-based violence across all the case studies. Evidence from Spotlight Initiative programmes and site visits demonstrated that effective capacity-building under the Spotlight Initiative has enabled certain civil society organization groups to successfully seek and secure additional funding from new donors. Pillar 6 activities under the Spotlight Initiative in **Papua New Guinea**,<sup>256</sup> for example, established a local civil society organization capacity-development hub to strengthen the institutional and technical capacities of civil society organizations to support the women's movement in promoting gender equality. However, capacity-building activities were often focused on supporting organizations to meet UN reporting requirements rather than exploring the organizations' identified needs.<sup>257</sup>
187. Despite the strong commitment by the Spotlight Initiative through Pillar 6 support and the two trust funds, meaningful and active engagement of grassroots civil society organizations in the Spotlight Initiative was hindered by inability to meet funding criteria and other UN procedural requirements (see Finding 7).<sup>258</sup> Issues faced in reaching smaller, non-traditional civil society organizations pointed to an inherent tension between UN administrative systems and UN commitment to prioritizing those furthest behind, highlighting the imperative for streamlining funding access for grassroots organizations.
188. The value-for-money assessment rated the overall effectiveness of the Spotlight Initiative in terms of delivery of outputs, contribution to outcomes, value created and positive externalities, as good, with the Spotlight Initiative achieving significant results under all pillars of support. The Initiative leveraged support from

<sup>255</sup> Joint Evaluation of Phase II (2020–2023) of the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage.

<sup>256</sup> Corporate Formative Evaluation Of UN Women's Support for Capacity Development of Partners to Respond to the Needs of Women and Girls at the National Level, 2018-2021.

<sup>257</sup> Thematic review, 2024.

<sup>258</sup> Thematic review, 2024; Case study reports; UN Trust Fund Annual narrative reports.

existing global programmes, particularly those focused on ending gender-based violence and fostering women’s empowerment, building on well-established joint UN programmes and integrating efforts with local structures and relationships.<sup>259</sup>

### Impact and higher-order changes

189. The United Nations defines an SDG Acceleration Action as “any action that builds on existing efforts (scaling up, new phase, etc.) related to the achievement of one or more of the 17 SDGs or addressing the interlinked nature of the 2030 Agenda”.<sup>260</sup> Monitoring progress against impact-level SDG indicators to understand if the Spotlight Initiative accelerated progress of SDGs proved challenging due to the complex nature of the tracked changes and the limited data availability. For SDG 5.2.1 and 5.2.2 no updated data were available. While new data for 16.2.3 for some Spotlight programme countries exist, it is not sufficient to see any trends that could be related to Spotlight Initiative contributions. The same applies for SDG 5.3.1, SDG 5.3.2 and 5.6.1. Only one country provides data for 2018 and 2021 (**Nigeria**) indicating an improvement for SDG 5.3.1 and 5.3.2. The data regarding SDG 16.1.1 and 16.2.2 present mixed results, providing inconclusive evidence regarding the role of Spotlight Initiative in accelerating SDG progress (see Annex L for more details).
190. In light of the limited availability of data to monitor the programme’s contribution to selected SDG indicators, the evaluation used an adapted model of the most significant change methodology to gather and analyse stakeholder views on the higher-order changes to which the programme made a contribution ( see Annex E for more details).<sup>261</sup> Comparative analysis of the most commonly cited stakeholder perceptions of higher-order changes at the country level (national and community levels) revealed some commonalities between countries:
- Raised the visibility of EAWG on the national agenda (put it “on the agenda”)
  - Encouraged multi-stakeholder collaboration - brought together diverse stakeholders for stronger collaborative partnerships to address gender-based violence coherently at the national level
  - Strengthened civil society organization to build capacities, develop stronger networks and advocate more collectively with greater engagement with United Nations and government (especially small, grassroots organizations)
  - Increased government ownership (leadership) of a comprehensive approach to EAWG
  - Raised awareness among communities and supported changes in mindsets
  - Strengthened response systems and improved referral networks and integrated services for SGBV
  - Empowered women and girls to understand their rights and have a stronger voice to create better lives for themselves, their families and their communities.
191. The most commonly cited stakeholder perceptions of higher-order changes at the regional level were that Spotlight Initiative raised the visibility of the issue of gender-based violence among intergovernmental institutions and enhanced collective understanding that responses require a multisectoral approach; and strengthened civil society organization capacities to work in a more strategic, networked and collaborative way to exert influence.

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<sup>259</sup> SWEQ 2024, Assessment of Value For Money for the Spotlight Initiative.

<sup>260</sup> UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA). [‘About the SDG Accelerations: What is an SDG Acceleration Action’](#).

192. Other contributions of Spotlight Initiative at the regional level included: improved data availability concerning VAWG and enhanced capacities of stakeholders in the collection and analysis of data to monitor violence against women and girls; strengthened capacities within key intergovernmental institutions to address issues of gender-based violence and harmful practices within the region; established networks and multisectoral alliances and expanded dialogue and connectivity across countries and stakeholder groups working to EAWG; and increased availability of tools, methods and standards and other practice-oriented resources to support the elimination of VAWG.
193. Participatory analysis conducted during multistakeholder workshops highlighted the interconnectivity of many of the identified higher-order changes. Mapping of pillar support to identified changes revealed how each change was supported either directly or indirectly by multiple pillars, thereby validating the criticality of the programme’s comprehensive approach to achieving higher-order changes. Discussions further explored the extent to which the programme contributed to the institutional and personal aspects of transformative change. Those discussions elicited varying degrees of certainty as to whether changes qualified as fully transformational, although they found consensus that changes were, at the very least, foundational elements of transformational change.<sup>262</sup>

**Finding 13: The Spotlight Initiative generated a wealth of learning and knowledge to support efforts to end violence against women and girls. The impact and reach of communications, advocacy and knowledge management to influence change was demonstrated in several contexts, but results were not well evidenced at scale or at all levels.**

194. The Initiative generated a substantial volume of resources to support efforts to EAWG in the form of guidance notes, tools, research, training modules and curriculums, among other content types. Despite these outputs and considerable institutional focus on these areas, the evaluation identified missed opportunities at all levels to link communications and knowledge management to influence public and policy discourse.<sup>263</sup> For example, there were missed opportunities to foster greater linkages among personnel and activities relating to communications and visibility and those relating to knowledge management. At the global level, examples of this disconnect were evident in the management and implementation of the Spotlight Initiative Global Platform.
195. There is evidence of reach, particularly for communications campaigns and activities, but evidence of influence and impact is limited. Communications and knowledge management indicators from the global results framework<sup>264</sup> focus largely on measuring reach as compared to quality, uptake and use of communications and knowledge management. Furthermore, only a subset of countries tracked key indicators, offering an incomplete picture. For example, Indicator 6.3.2 in the global results framework measures the “number of women’s rights groups and relevant civil society organizations using knowledge products developed by the participating UN agencies in the design of their own programmes on ending VAWG within the last year” yet only 10 out of the 26 Spotlight Initiative programme countries tracked this indicator.

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<sup>262</sup> Common definition from Handbook on Gender Mainstreaming (UN Women 2022:42): Gender transformative results promote changes in sociocultural norms, values, attitudes, practices as well formal and informal power structures and processes.

<sup>263</sup> Linkages between communications and knowledge management refer to the way information generated by the Spotlight Initiative was gathered, analysed and then disseminated appropriately.

<sup>264</sup> Spotlight Initiative. 2018. Annex IV Communications and Visibility Strategy. 14 December 2018 (updated). Page 8. Communications and knowledge management output indicators in the results framework.

196. At global and country levels, all communications and visibility activities were expected to raise awareness of VAWG, promote the impact and results of its programmes, support programme implementation through public advocacy and provide visibility for the Initiative, its donors and partners.<sup>265</sup> Evidence showed that country and regional programmes experienced greater success in meeting some objectives compared to others. The evaluation identified examples of public advocacy and awareness-raising in all eight case study country programmes (**Argentina, Guyana, Honduras, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Samoa**) that exerted an important influence on public and policy discourse.<sup>266</sup> These efforts both contributed to and benefited from global attention on the shadow pandemic of VAWG during COVID-19, as demonstrated in **Nigeria** in 2020 when the Nigerian Governors’ Forum (a programme partner of the Spotlight Initiative) declared a state of emergency on the increasing rates of SGBV in the country.<sup>267</sup> Awareness-raising activities and public advocacy supported by the Initiative also broadened the public and policy discourse on VAWG in all five regions (**Africa, Caribbean, Central Asia, Latin America, Pacific**), including advancing the policy discourse on EVAWG within intergovernmental forums (for example, the African Union, Caribbean Community (CARICOM), *Red Especializada en Género de la Asociación Iberoamericana de Ministerios Públicos (AIAMP)*),<sup>268</sup> while also increasing region-wide awareness through public advocacy and campaign initiatives (for example, the African Union campaign to end child marriage in **Africa** and the #PlayYourPart social behavioural change campaign to EVAWG in the **Caribbean**).<sup>269</sup>
197. Notwithstanding notable achievements in advocacy and awareness-raising, efforts to publicize and communicate the Spotlight Initiative and its results faced challenges. Respondents internal and external to the United Nations identified missed opportunities during implementation to interpret and communicate the programme’s collective impact to key stakeholders and the wider public in order to influence change.<sup>270</sup> Reasons attributed by key stakeholders included a lack of dedicated communications capacity in the PMU,<sup>271</sup> the focus of RUNOs on corporate visibility within the Spotlight Initiative, and difficulties in capitalizing on opportunities for joint UN-EU delegation advocacy and public events to increase the overall visibility of the Initiative, including its impact and results. The evaluation found these factors to be mutually reinforcing. The findings are consistent with evidence across multiple data sources.<sup>272</sup>
198. At the global level, the Secretariat’s work with external partners, including social media influencers, media, press and other campaigns, achieved significant reach. For example, as part of the Initiative’s efforts to influence international cultural norms around violence, the global #WithHer campaign reached over 146 million social media users on Facebook, X (formerly Twitter) and Instagram.<sup>273</sup> There is evidence of reach, but limited data available for evidence of usefulness and uptake that can be cross-verified and triangulated. Similar challenges were identified in knowledge management. The Spotlight Initiative generated a wealth of

<sup>265</sup> Spotlight Initiative. 2018. Annex I Description of the Action (November 2018). Page 49–50.

<sup>266</sup> Spotlight Initiative programme documentation from the eight case studies including annual narrative progress reports and MTAs, triangulated with final evaluation KIIs (country) and publicly available information including media reports. See also Finding 11.

<sup>267</sup> Spotlight Initiative. 2020. Annual Narrative Programme Report. 01 January 2020–31 December 2020; <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/more-news/397207-nigerian-governors-declare-state-of-emergency-on-sexual-violence.html?tztc=1>.

<sup>268</sup> Specialized Gender Network of the Ibero-American Association of Public Ministries (English translation).

<sup>269</sup> SI programme documentation from the five regional programmes including annual narrative progress reports and MTAs, triangulated with final evaluation KIIs (regional) and publicly available information including media reports.

<sup>270</sup> Final evaluation KII (country, regional).

<sup>271</sup> Delayed recruitment of communications officers, turnover, and positions only being partly resourced (personnel only working part-time).

<sup>272</sup> 2022 and 2023 Meta-reviews; ECA; qualitative data from online survey respondents in non-case study country programmes in the Caribbean and Pacific.

<sup>273</sup> 2023 Meta-review, SI programme documentation and online resources including <https://www.spotlightinitiative.org/work-media-end-vawg#748>.

learnings and knowledge, but the extent to which this was accessible to programme and non-programme partners and used to inform or influence policy and programming decisions is unclear.

199. In line with directives in the terms of reference and Knowledge Management Strategy, the Spotlight Initiative Global Platform was established as a virtual exchange and convening ecosystem designed to offer the combined power of an online knowledge hub, a community of practice and an advocacy channel. Components of the Global Platform include the Community of the Spotlight Initiative (COSI) email group, social media platforms including X (formerly Twitter), Instagram and YouTube, the Spotlight Initiative global website, the SHINE online knowledge exchange hub, and global learning and knowledge exchange events.<sup>274</sup> Initiated in 2021 and extended to 31 December 2024 with a budget of USD 927,837,<sup>275</sup> the Global Platform (as described in documentation)<sup>276</sup> was fully operational by late 2022. Additionally, RUNOs contributed substantially to knowledge management through their own platforms (for example, websites, intranets) and dissemination of good practices, yet these were not always methodically collated, partly due to confusion over the multiple repositories in use under the Initiative.<sup>277</sup>
200. There were efforts to centralize knowledge and learning resources via the Global Platform, but the evaluation identified persistent challenges to the ways in which knowledge was collated, stored, shared and disseminated at the global level.<sup>278</sup> As of May 2022, the Initiative's global website included a link to SHINE, but this was not easily locatable to users and there was no link to access the Community of the Spotlight Initiative (COSI) extranet,<sup>279</sup> thereby limiting accessibility. While there is evidence of platform engagement and reach,<sup>280</sup> it is unclear whether user feedback on the Global Platform was systematically gathered by the Initiative to refine knowledge management processes, including tracking of resource accessibility and use.<sup>281</sup> In case study countries and regional programmes, key informants across stakeholder groups demonstrated a lack of awareness about the Spotlight Initiative Global Platform. Counterfactual missions (**Chile, Suriname, Tonga, Zambia**) revealed that the Initiative's knowledge products were largely unknown by United Nations, government and civil society organization stakeholders working on EVAWG. Key informants from civil society and government expressed that access to knowledge

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<sup>274</sup> Spotlight Initiative. 2023. Spotlight Initiative Secretariat: Global Platform Project Document. 10 Apr 2023. Spotlight Initiative. 2021. Annual Narrative Project. Spotlight Initiative Global Platform. Reporting Period 1 January 2021–31 December 2021; Spotlight Initiative. 2022. Annual Narrative Project. Spotlight Initiative Global Platform. Reporting Period 1 January 2022–31 December 2022; final evaluation KII (global); final evaluation knowledge product analysis and synthesis report.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid. The SI Global Platform project was extended to the end of December 2024 and a revised programme document was approved to reflect the inclusion of an output to support the Civil Society Global Reference Group. This adjustment increased the budget by USD 160,500, increasing the total from the initial USD 767,337 (for 2021 – 2022) to USD 927,837.

<sup>276</sup> Spotlight Initiative. 2021. Annual Narrative Project. Spotlight Initiative Global Platform. Reporting Period 1 January 2021–31 December 2021.

<sup>277</sup> UNFPA. 2023. Office of Audit and Investigation Services: Audit of the UNFPA Spotlight Initiative Final Report 18 May 2023; final evaluation KII (global, country, regional).

<sup>278</sup> Court of Auditors Report. 2023. Special report 21/2023: The Spotlight Initiative to End Violence against Women and Girls – Ambitious but so far with limited impact. 20 September 2023; Hera. 2022. Meta-review of the Spotlight Initiative: Latin America and Africa; final evaluation KIIs (global, regional, country) level; final evaluation knowledge product analysis and synthesis report; Spotlight Initiative Sustainability strategies and plans from case study countries.

<sup>279</sup> Established in 2019, the extranet serves as a global community of practice and virtual knowledge management and exchange centre to share SI resources and tools and to link with other relevant knowledge management resources. Source: Spotlight Initiative. 2020. Global Annual Narrative Progress Report. 01 January 2020–31 December 2020.

<sup>280</sup> As of April 2024, the Shine Hub had over 1900 registered users and COSI hosted an email group of 605 members (UN, civil society, and others) facilitating exchanges and dissemination of knowledge products between Spotlight Initiative country and regional programmes that had resulted in over 500 conversations. Sources: SI programme documentation; final evaluation KIIs (global level).

<sup>281</sup> Comparative analysis of Global KP Tracker, Results Framework indicator 5.2.1 and Annexes A and D of the Annual Reports for a 13-country sample triangulated with evidence from the eight final evaluation case studies.

and learning generated by the Spotlight Initiative would be valuable for policy and programming, pointing to missed opportunities for wider learning and impact.

201. Despite limitations in global dissemination and accessibility of resources, the evaluation found evidence of learning and knowledge products generated by country and regional programmes being used to influence policy and programme change. Evidence from case study countries identified examples where knowledge products produced by RUNOs or implementing partners positively shaped institutional practices to address VAWG and inform policy development. For example, the **Malawi** country programme supported a handbook on VAWG case handling and management for judicial officers, which facilitated the work of courts in SGBV cases and led to more gender-sensitive and survivor-centred approaches to judicial process.<sup>282</sup> In **Kyrgyzstan**, RUNOs worked collaboratively to engage external experts to review laws and bylaws to generate recommendations for improving legislation and law enforcement practices relating to EVAWG (see Finding 12). This knowledge and learning informed a series of high-level policy dialogues between state authorities and women's rights groups, contributing to a threefold increase in state funding for sustaining the operations of crisis centres and the establishment of a national media campaign on SGBV.<sup>283</sup> These findings are broadly consistent with quantitative ratings in the online survey in which 67 per cent of respondents agreed that Spotlight Initiative knowledge products supported by the programme in their country were well disseminated and utilized, making an important contribution to EVAWG. The highest levels of disagreement came from Civil Society National Reference Group members and RUNO implementing partners. Among those that disagreed with the statement, qualitative responses noted challenges in the accessibility and utilization of Spotlight Initiative knowledge products at the country level, identifying missed opportunities for knowledge exchange across pillars and between country and regional programmes.<sup>284</sup>
202. While recognizing the positive examples noted above, the evaluation found it difficult to determine the extent of uptake and use of knowledge products by programme partners, non-programme partners, and beneficiaries. This information was not robustly captured in Spotlight Initiative documentation and key informants in case study countries and regional programmes found it difficult to speak to the issue without data to substantiate.<sup>285</sup> In documenting the number of knowledge products produced under the Initiative, the evaluation identified discrepancies in reporting across the Global Knowledge Tracker (intended to document all knowledge products produced across Spotlight Initiative programmes), annual programme reporting, and case study evidence. While annual programme reports provide some qualitative data about knowledge management, quantitative data on knowledge management within Spotlight Initiative programmes is limited or lacking.

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<sup>282</sup> SI Malawi programme documentation corroborated by site visits and KIIs conducted during the final evaluation case study.

<sup>283</sup> SI Kyrgyzstan programme documentation corroborated by KIIs with UN, government and civil society stakeholders.

<sup>284</sup> Global online survey, qualitative responses (Belize, Jamaica, Malawi, Mali, Mexico, Tajikistan).

<sup>285</sup> KIIs, programme documentation and other secondary data from final evaluation case studies and regional programme missions.



## 2.5 UN Reform and New Ways of Working

*The Spotlight Initiative launched in September 2017 and the UN Development System (UNDS) reform was mandated by the UN General Assembly in May 2018.<sup>286</sup> Thereafter the Initiative was positioned as a flagship programme of the Secretary-General for UNDS reform. This section focuses on the extent to which UNDS reform positively supported the Spotlight Initiative and its implementation supported the reform process, highlighting the interplay between people and systems in achieving reform objectives.*

**Finding 14: Aspects of UN Development System reform such as the Resident Coordinator system positively supported the implementation of the Spotlight Initiative. In some cases, the Initiative supported common approaches to specific areas of operations. However, there were challenges to delivering reform objectives, several of which were exogenous to the Spotlight Initiative, including factors related to the culture, business operations and performance management processes of UN entities.**

203. The Spotlight Initiative took early steps to leverage reform processes. A month after UNDS reform was mandated by the UN General Assembly in resolution A/RES/72/279, the Spotlight Initiative Secretariat disseminated guidance to UN Resident Coordinators outlining alignment between the Spotlight Initiative and UNDS reforms, placing emphasis on an empowered and impartial Resident Coordinator system, more cohesive and integrated programming at the country level, and a new generation of United Nations Country Teams (UNCT) with enhanced skill sets, an optimized physical presence and consolidated and effective back-office support.<sup>287</sup> However, with a set-up that differed from established joint programming guidance,<sup>288</sup> more detailed operational strategies and guidelines would have been beneficial to assist Resident Coordinators, UNCTs and RUNO or PMU personnel in implementing the reform's principles through the Spotlight Initiative programming architecture at country and regional levels.<sup>289</sup>

### Leadership of the Resident Coordinator

204. In line with the principles of UNDS reform, placing the programme under the overall leadership of the Resident Coordinator<sup>290</sup> was considered to be strategic positioning that positively impacted the visibility of EAWG as a critical development issue within the country.<sup>291</sup> The leadership and convening role of the Resident Coordinator was viewed as important to facilitate high-level government and EU delegation involvement.<sup>292</sup> This was a consistent finding across mid-term assessments and confirmed in the case studies and qualitative survey responses.

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<sup>286</sup> A/RES/72/279.

<sup>287</sup> Spotlight Initiative. 2018. Internal Guidance Note to the UN Resident Coordinators: Country Programme Development Modality Africa. June 2018.

<sup>288</sup> In 2018 existing [UN guidance on joint programming](#) at the country level set out that a convening agency (a RUNO with an in-country presence) is responsible for operational and programmatic coordination, including coordination among participating organizations (RUNOs) and for consolidating narrative reporting. This is different to the set-up of the Spotlight Initiative, which did not assign a programmatic lead agency. When UN system-wide guidance on joint programming was updated in [October 2022](#), it continued to stipulate that joint programmes should have a lead UN agency to ensure programmatic leadership and coordination.

<sup>289</sup> 2023 Meta-review page 43; final evaluation KII (country, regional, with specific reference to Argentina, Honduras, Kyrgyzstan; Pacific regional programme).

<sup>290</sup> In the context of UN Development System reform, the configuration of the Spotlight Initiative programme management model rests under the leadership, guidance, and decision-making authority of the Resident Coordinator (RC).

<sup>291</sup> Case studies (Argentina, Guyana, Honduras, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Mozambique, Samoa); consistent finding across MTAs, 2023 Meta-review; final evaluation online survey (qualitative responses).

<sup>292</sup> This was a consistent finding across MTAs and confirmed in the case studies and qualitative survey responses.



205. For country programmes, a neutral and impartial Resident Coordinator was described by key informants as beneficial in the selection of RUNOs during the design phase, navigating operational challenges during implementation, and facilitating sustainability discussions towards the end of the programme.<sup>293</sup> Resident Coordinator leadership was described as important to the programme on strategic as well as operational matters to ensure delivery of a complex joint programme.<sup>294</sup> The leadership and convening role of the Resident Coordinator, combined with personal commitment to the programme, was highlighted as particularly important in **Guyana** and **Samoa** because of challenges of rolling out integrated programming in SIDS contexts. Visible Resident Coordinator leadership was also perceived by stakeholders internal and external to the United Nations as critical in contexts affected by fragility, conflict or violence, for example in **Haiti** and **Liberia**, as well as in contexts marked by political changes over the course of the programme such as in **Argentina, Honduras** and **Kyrgyzstan**.<sup>295</sup> Online survey results showed that 76 per cent of respondents agreed that placing the Initiative under the Resident Coordinator’s overall leadership boosted visibility on gender-based violence issues across the UNCT. This was consistent with findings from regional key informants.<sup>296</sup> Though not all regional programmes were placed under the leadership of a Resident Coordinator,<sup>297</sup> there was broad consensus that independent UN leadership supported stronger coordination and advocacy on the Regional Steering Committee and with intergovernmental bodies, the European Union, civil society and other external partners.<sup>298</sup>

### **Programme management and operationalization**

206. Other aspects of programme management structures were less effective in promoting UNDS reform objectives. Examples include the set-up of the technical coherence function and co-location of the PMU in the Resident Coordinator’s Office, which worked well in some settings but did not always foster collaboration and coherence across the system (see also Findings 5 and 14).<sup>299</sup> Aspects of joint programme management and set-up have been clarified in updated UN system-wide joint programming guidance published in 2022.<sup>300</sup> However, the operational dimensions of delivering such programmes, such as those related to joint procurement, recruitment and financial reporting, are not discussed in the new guidance.

207. Internal UN systems and processes were a significant impediment to delivering UNDS reform objectives as elaborated in Finding 7.<sup>301</sup> This was exacerbated by some of the processes put in place under the Initiative such as the “70 per cent rule” and the phased programming approach that had the unintended effect of increasing tension between RUNOs in several country and regional programmes (Finding 4). In response, there were examples of RUNO programme and operations personnel, often in collaboration with the PMU, making efforts to adhere to the principles and spirit of UN reform, seeking to align operational practices where possible.<sup>302</sup> Though UN key informants reported this to be a steep learning curve that required concerted engagement to navigate,<sup>303</sup> the Spotlight Initiative supported common approaches to operations

<sup>293</sup> Case studies; final evaluation KII (country, with specific reference to Malawi, Kyrgyzstan, Guyana, Argentina, Honduras).

<sup>294</sup> Final evaluation KII (regional); MTAs (Africa, Central Asia and Afghanistan).

<sup>295</sup> Key informants cited in Haiti MTA and Liberia MTA; KIIs CS countries Latin America.

<sup>296</sup> Regional KII coded excel final evaluation.

<sup>297</sup> The Africa RP was led by the Regional Director of UN DCO; the Central Asia and Afghanistan RP was led by the RC in Kazakhstan; the Caribbean and Pacific RPs were led by RCs for UN Multi-Country Offices. The Latin America RP placed a RUNO (UN Women) as the lead agency responsible for inter-agency coordination.

<sup>298</sup> Final evaluation KII (regional); MTAs (Africa, Central Asia and Afghanistan).

<sup>299</sup> MTAs, 2022 and 2023 meta-reviews, final evaluation KII (country, regional, global); case studies.

<sup>300</sup> The 2022 guidance states coordination and programmatic leadership are provided by a lead RUNO. In some situations, the UN RCO may support coordination as part of the Joint Programme team (see 2.3, para 19).

<sup>301</sup> MTAs; 2022 and 2023 meta-reviews; final evaluation KII (country, regional, global); case studies; final evaluation online survey (qualitative responses).

<sup>302</sup> MTAs, final evaluation KIIs (country, regional); SI annual reports (for example, PNG).

<sup>303</sup> MTAs (Liberia, Jamaica); case studies and KIIs (Guyana, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Mozambique); regional programme KIIs (Caribbean).

in specific areas such as procurement (for example, long-term agreement contract modalities), collective peer review of terms of reference, joint expressions of interest and calls for proposals, joint trainings for implementing partners, and joint monitoring activities (see also Finding 7).<sup>304</sup> Case studies (**Kyrgyzstan**) and programme documentation (**El Salvador, Zimbabwe**) show these efforts benefited from inter-agency collaboration between RUNO programme personnel and the UNCT operations and management team in some instances.<sup>305</sup>

### **Constraining factors external to the Spotlight Initiative**

208. Many of the impediments to delivering UNDS reform objectives were exogenous to the Initiative. These challenges can be grouped under three areas: (i) entity identity (strong identity and culture of individual UN entities, the need for corporate visibility and recognition including through use of entity logos); (ii) entity business operations (for example, UN entities are audited according to the rules of their own agencies); and (iii) entity performance measurement processes (that is, UN Heads of Agency are incentivized to raise funds for their own country programmes).<sup>306</sup>
209. Each of these areas created friction points during Spotlight Initiative implementation that affected cooperation and coherence among UN entities.<sup>307</sup> Different back-office structures presented challenges for RUNO personnel and their implementing partners that were difficult to ameliorate. RUNOs at times focused on promoting their own agency and activities above the Spotlight Initiative, contrary to global Spotlight Initiative brand guidelines and the spirit of delivering as one.<sup>308</sup> In several countries, UN entity performance measurement frameworks were perceived as influencing the conduct of RUNO representatives during sustainability discussions.<sup>309</sup> This was reported by stakeholders internal and external to the United Nations to be detrimental to a collective and coherent system offering to development partners during resource mobilization efforts (see Finding 19).<sup>310</sup>

**Finding 15: The Spotlight Initiative deepened understanding of UN entity comparative advantages and synergies in EVAWG within country and regional programmes. The impact on RUNO ways of working at the global level was found to be limited. Evidence that the Initiative delivered a more collaborative and coherent UN system response to EVAWG is mixed.**

### **United Nations comparative advantage and synergies in ending violence against women and girls**

210. Modelling the vision of UNDS reform, the Spotlight Initiative sought to leverage the different expertise of UN entities in one programme to address the complex challenge of EVAWG. Supported by assessments during

<sup>304</sup> MTAs, final evaluation KII (country, regional); case studies.

<sup>305</sup> Final evaluation case studies (Kyrgyzstan); Spotlight Initiative. 2022. Spotlight Initiative Zimbabwe Annual Narrative Progress Report 01 January 2021–31 December 2021; Spotlight Initiative. 2022. Spotlight Initiative El Salvador Annual Narrative Progress Report 01 January 2022–31 December 2022.

<sup>306</sup> 2022 and 2023 meta-reviews; final evaluation KII (country, regional, global), final evaluation online survey (qualitative responses).

<sup>307</sup> 2022 and 2023 meta-reviews; MTAs; final evaluation KII (country, regional, global), final evaluation online survey (qualitative responses).

<sup>308</sup> MTAs; 2022 and 2023 meta-reviews, final evaluation KII (country, regional); final evaluation online survey (qualitative responses); European Union. European Union - Nigeria Development Cooperation Programmes Compendium. Abuja, July 2023. Pp. 118-119: 'The Spotlight Initiative'; Spotlight Initiative. 2018. Annex VI Communications and Visibility Plan (updated) November 2018; Spotlight Initiative. 2019. Spotlight Initiative Brand Guidelines Version 1.3. May 2019.

<sup>309</sup> This was particularly pronounced in case study countries with large funding envelopes. Sources: KII with RCs, RUNO HOA, RUNO programme personnel, EUD, Govt in Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria case studies.

<sup>310</sup> KII with RCs, RUNO HoA, RUNO programme personnel, EUD, government stakeholders in Honduras, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria; global online survey (qualitative responses).

the design phase of how the comparative advantage of different entities could be harnessed to achieve programme results, stakeholders found that implementation led to a clearer understanding of RUNO comparative advantages and synergies in EAWG.<sup>311</sup>

211. The comparative advantages of RUNOs were guided by entity mandates, but selection processes considered broader issues such as agency presence, relationships, capacities and ability to deliver activities.<sup>312</sup> In **Guyana**, for example, the Spotlight Initiative created a unique space for UN agencies to develop a collective understanding of how the United Nations could collaborate to EAWG, providing greater clarity around areas of comparative advantage and complementarity. RUNO personnel from the **Africa Regional Programme** reported the Initiative increased understanding of each agency's expertise in EAWG and supported new ways of working together, drawing on the coordination support of an effective PMU.
212. In implementing UNDS reform principles, a "we-can-make-it work" attitude by RUNO technical teams and managers was important for establishing new ways of working together in country and regional programmes.<sup>313</sup> In **Argentina, Kyrgyzstan** and the **Central Asia Regional Programme**, documentation and key informant interviews demonstrated the existence of a "one team" mentality within the UN technical team implementing the programme. Through formation of a cohesive technical working group, the Spotlight Initiative in **Argentina** strengthened inter-agency dynamics that extended efforts under the UNCT gender and human rights group.<sup>314</sup> In **Kyrgyzstan** and the **Central Asia Regional Programme**, the technical team blended formal and informal collaboration styles, fostering a spirit of productive partnership that was reflected in communications with civil society, government partners, the civil society reference groups and local EU delegations.<sup>315</sup> In case studies where the United Nations struggled to operate as a shared system for a common purpose to deliver the Initiative, this was ascribed to factors including communication, personalities, power dynamics and organizational culture.<sup>316</sup>
213. Sharing common premises was a facilitative factor for collaboration among RUNOs in some programmes (**Guyana, Caribbean** and **Central Asia Regional Programme**) though this was not a consistent finding across Spotlight programmes. Higher levels of collaboration were evidenced in some contexts without common UN premises, and lower levels of collaboration were observed in some programmes that shared common office spaces.
214. While there was consensus among stakeholders that the Spotlight Initiative brought together RUNOs (and more broadly the UNCT) on issues of EAWG and gender-based violence, stakeholders internal and external to the United Nations were unsure whether this was sufficiently transformational to demonstrate a whole-of-system approach. Even in countries with documented good practice of inter-agency coherence, such as **Argentina** and **Malawi**, perceptions of siloed ways of working remained.<sup>317</sup>

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<sup>311</sup> MTAs; SI Global Annual Progress Report (2019); case studies; final evaluation KII (country, regional); final evaluation online survey (quantitative and qualitative responses).

<sup>312</sup> Final evaluation KIIs (country, regional global).

<sup>313</sup> 2023 Meta-review page 27; MTAs.

<sup>314</sup> Argentina case study and associated KIIs.

<sup>315</sup> Kyrgyzstan case study and associated KIIs, SI Kyrgyzstan programme documentation.

<sup>316</sup> Nigeria case study and associated documentary evidence, with additional triangulation from KII at the global level and other written documentary evidence.

<sup>317</sup> 2019 SI global annual report (Malawi); case studies (Malawi, Kyrgyzstan); KII; Spotlight Initiative. 2022. Documentation of Programme Coordination Processes for the Spotlight Initiative in the Kyrgyz Republic. June 2022.

215. This evaluation found mixed evidence at the global level that the programme influenced RUNOs' ways of working toward EVAWG. Global-level key informants recognized the value of a systems approach and a commitment to the ideals of the Initiative, but also reported instances where engagement in the Spotlight Initiative engendered confusion and contributed to a sense of competition rather than collaboration and coordination among the core RUNOs. This was a consistent response across stakeholder groups internal and external to the United Nations. Reasons cited include institutional competition (for resources, power, visibility); different perceptions of RUNO mandates and ability to deliver EVAWG programmes; and adversarial relationships between individuals. Though referenced in the context of the Spotlight Initiative during interviews, many of these issues are recognized as persistent challenges that are extraneous to the programme.<sup>318</sup>
216. A review of the strategic plans for the primary RUNOs (UN Women, UNFPA, UNDP and UNICEF) from 2018-2021 to 2022-2025 offered mixed evidence of shifts in strategic orientation. UNICEF, UNFPA and UN Women include a dedicated focus on ending VAWG and harmful practices in their 2022-2025 plans in line with the Spotlight Initiative approach.<sup>319</sup> While three of the four RUNOs (UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women) reference gender-based violence partnership engagement in their respective 2022-2025 strategic plans, none of the entities identified lessons related to gender-based violence consistent with the Spotlight Initiative model<sup>320</sup> and only UN Women's partnership strategy for EVAWG is closely tied to the Spotlight Initiative approach. Financial analysis of integrated budget estimates found that UNICEF, UNFPA and UN Women all increased their targets for tackling gender-based violence between the two plans, but only UNFPA increased the share of estimated budget for EVAWG programming relative to overall budgets.<sup>321</sup>

### **A collaborative systems approach with partners**

217. The evaluation did not find consistent evidence of a collaborative approach to UN partnership engagement under the Spotlight Initiative. Quantitative ratings in the online survey showed that 70 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the Initiative fostered and enhanced collaboration among UN agencies to work together more effectively, but this is only partially corroborated by qualitative data, which showed agency collaboration with external partners varied by programme and the dynamics among RUNOs and between RUNOs and the PMU or the Resident Coordinator's Office.<sup>322</sup>
218. No consistent relationship was identified between the set-up of the programme pillar structure and effective inter-agency collaboration. On the contrary, in some countries (**Mozambique, Nigeria**) key informants observed significant coordination challenges despite the established pillar-led structure and agreed RUNO division of labour.<sup>323</sup> This points to missed opportunities to ensure cross-pillar coherence and cooperation, both internally and with partners. Findings indicate that the pillar structure was better able to

<sup>318</sup> Biermann, F., Hickmann, T., Sénit, C-A (eds). 2022. The political impact of the sustainable development goals: transforming governance through global goals; Dahlberg. 2023. Independent Review of the UN System's Capacity to Deliver on Gender Equality. Final Report. 11 February 2023; UNFPA. 2021. Evaluation of UNFPA support to gender equality and women's empowerment (2012-2020). UNFPA Evaluation Office.

<sup>319</sup> Although the UNDP Strategic Plan (2022-2025) does not fully reflect UNDP strategic orientation on GBV, its accompanying Integrated Results and Resources and Gender Equality Strategy (2022-2025) show strengthened focus on GBV prevention and response since the implementation of the Spotlight Initiative.

<sup>320</sup> The 2022-2025 strategic plans for UNDP, UNICEF and UN Women did not identify any lessons learned related to GBV. UNFPA Strategic Plan (2022-2025) includes as a lesson the cost of EVAWG and HP and need for additional investments (para 26).

<sup>321</sup> UNICEF, UNFPA and UN Women strategic plans (2018-2022 and 2022-2025). UNDP strategic plans do not include budget designations for EVAWG programming.

<sup>322</sup> Final evaluation online survey (qualitative responses); case studies; final evaluation KII (regional, country).

<sup>323</sup> Final evaluation KIIs (Mozambique, Nigeria, global) triangulated with the MTAs for those countries.

facilitate inter-agency collaboration where RUNOs were able to dedicate time and effort to collectively unpack proposed approaches and activities and partner engagement, as was the case in **Kyrgyzstan**.<sup>324</sup>

219. The evaluation found no consistent relationship between implementation of the technical coherence function and a more coherent UN system response to EAWG.<sup>325</sup> In **Guyana**, the programme did utilize its technical coherence budget to support the lead ministry in its coordination role on EAWG and this promoted collaboration and coherence between the UN system and the Government as well as among the RUNOs. However, in other countries, implementation of the technical coherence function by one entity became a source of friction among RUNOs, in some instances requiring the intervention of the Resident Coordinator to ensure a unified response under the Initiative.<sup>326</sup>
220. Agency collaboration and coherence with external partners differed in some contexts between national and subnational levels.<sup>327</sup> In **Malawi**, a coordinated UN approach was visible to external partners at the district level, with the Spotlight Initiative district coordinator identified as an important facilitative factor, but less so at the national level. Whereas in **Guyana** and **Mozambique**, evidence of a collaborative system response was visible at the national level, and less so at provincial or district levels, in part because of the status of decentralization processes in each country or the limited presence of RUNO subnational representation.<sup>328</sup>
221. Challenges in delivering as one were especially evident in the coordination of implementing partners and activities at subnational levels. Compressed implementation timelines<sup>329</sup> combined with each programme's focus on a specific number of geographical localities meant some civil society implementing partners found themselves working in the same communities targeting the same beneficiaries at the same time. This was a challenge identified in all regions and particularly in the **Caribbean, Pacific** and **Central Asia** regions where programmes started later and had to contend with COVID-19 at the outset as well as changes in national government (**Afghanistan, Guyana, Kyrgyzstan**) or national disasters (**Samoa, Timor-Leste, Vanuatu**), further reducing the time available in which to coordinate and implement activities in a limited number of locales.<sup>330</sup>

**Finding 16: In most countries where the Spotlight Initiative was implemented, the programme positively influenced UN Country Team guiding frameworks to more consistently address violence against women and girls. Furthermore, there was evidence of positive spillover effects from country and regional programmes to non-Spotlight Initiative countries.**

### **UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks**

222. The evaluation considered the extent to which the Spotlight Initiative and its multi-pillar approach were integrated into UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks (UNSDCFs) as a source of evidence

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<sup>324</sup> Spotlight Initiative. 2021. Annual Narrative Programme Report. Spotlight Country Programme in the Kyrgyz Republic. Reporting period: 01 January 2020–31 December 2020; Spotlight Initiative. 2022. Documentation of Programme Coordination Processes for the Spotlight Initiative in the Kyrgyz Republic. June 2022.

<sup>325</sup> 2022 and 2023 meta-reviews; MTAs; final evaluation KII (country, regional, global); case studies; global online survey (qualitative responses).

<sup>326</sup> Final evaluation KII (country); case studies; triangulated with qualitative survey responses and other documentation including the 2023 Meta-review.

<sup>327</sup> Spotlight Initiative programme documentation, MTAs, case studies.

<sup>328</sup> KIIs relevant countries; CPDs, ARs.

<sup>329</sup> Impacted by operational issues and contextual factors – see Findings 4 and 7.

<sup>330</sup> KIIs regional and case studies; ARs, MTAs.

of greater UN focus and coherence on ending violence against women and girls.<sup>331</sup> The review compared current UN cooperation frameworks to their earlier corresponding UNSDCF or UN Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs) for the 26 countries that had a Spotlight Initiative country programme, as well as for the five counterfactual countries.<sup>332</sup>

223. Prior to implementation of the Spotlight Initiative, 8<sup>333</sup> of the 26 country programmes identified ending VAWG and gender-based violence as a national development or UNCT priority in their UNDAFs. These countries continued to identify the issue as a priority in subsequent cooperation frameworks, demonstrating sustained UN focus and attention to ending VAWG and gender-based violence. Cooperation frameworks for **Ecuador, Malawi** and the **Caribbean** (covering five Spotlight Initiative country programmes: **Belize, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago**) demonstrated a stronger focus on ending VAWG and gender-based violence as a priority development issue as compared to their predecessor documents. Additionally, a more comprehensive, multisectoral programmatic approach by the United Nations to ending VAWG and gender-based violence was evident in the current cooperation frameworks (as compared to predecessors) for 12 of the 26 country programmes including **Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Liberia, Niger, Timor-Leste**, and the **Caribbean** (covering five country programmes: **Belize, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago**).<sup>334</sup>

224. The extent to which Spotlight Initiative's engagement<sup>335</sup> played a role in influencing shifts in the strategic orientation of UN guiding frameworks is largely implicit. Only the cooperation framework for **Timor-Leste** explicitly details the influence of the Spotlight Initiative in promoting a coherent systems approach to EAWG, highlighting how the programme "brings a new way of working together, harnessing individual UN agency expertise and collective experiences on EAWG in Timor-Leste and around the world".<sup>335</sup> In the other country programmes where a new cooperation framework was developed during Spotlight Initiative implementation,<sup>336</sup> evidence of increased UN system coherence on EAWG is implied rather than clearly expressed. Analysis did not show a consistent relationship between UN coherence on EAWG as reflected in cooperation frameworks and stage of Spotlight Initiative implementation at the time of its development. Neither was any correlation found with the country's Spotlight Initiative funding envelope. However, case study evidence from **Malawi, Mozambique** and **Nigeria** confirmed that the Spotlight Initiative positively influenced UNCTs in determining EAWG as a priority issue. Further analysis suggests a likelihood of influence of the Spotlight Initiative approach on the framing of the cooperation frameworks, noting that many of the Spotlight Initiative pillars are incorporated implicitly in cooperation frameworks for **Honduras, Mozambique, Niger, the Pacific, Papua New Guinea, and Tajikistan**.

#### **Influence on non-Spotlight Initiative countries and spillover effects**

225. Analysis of cooperation frameworks from five countries (**Chile, Suriname, Tonga, Uzbekistan, Zambia**) examined as part of the counterfactual methodology also demonstrate a stronger focus on EAWG as

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<sup>331</sup> The review covered current UNSDCFs and previous UNSDCF or UNDAF for all 26 of the SI country programmes. At the time of review, two UNDAFs were unavailable for analysis: for Mali and Haiti observations are made on the UNSDCF only. In the Caribbean region, the UNMCSDCFs covered the SI country programmes of Guyana, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago. In the Pacific, the multi-country frameworks covered the SI country programmes of Samoa and Vanuatu.

<sup>332</sup> The UNSDCF replaces the UNDAF as the United Nations national level guiding framework.

<sup>333</sup> Haiti, Liberia, Mozambique, Papua New Guinea, Tajikistan, Timor-Leste, Uganda, Zimbabwe.

<sup>334</sup> Though not endorsed by the then government prior to the Taliban takeover in August 2021, the Afghanistan draft cooperation framework for 2022–2025 also reflects a more comprehensive and coherent UN system response to GBV, setting out the UN system's multisectoral response to GBV, which was not evident in the previous UNDAF (2015–2021).

<sup>335</sup> Timor-Leste UNSDCF 2021-2025.

<sup>336</sup> This applies to 24 of the 26 country programmes excluding Malawi where programme implementation fully aligned with the UNSDCF cycle and Afghanistan where the draft UNSDCF 2022-2025 had not been endorsed by the then government.

compared to their predecessor documents. Reasons cited among UN key informants include expanded enabling environments, elevation of the issue during the pandemic, and learnings from joint programmes on gender-based violence, including the Spotlight Initiative. Insights from two of the five countries (**Chile, Uzbekistan**) revealed direct engagement with a Spotlight regional programme to support ending VAWG and gender-based violence encouraging a focus in their cooperation frameworks. In **Chile, Uzbekistan** and **Zambia**, leadership of the Resident Coordinator on gender equality issues, UNCT commitment to tackling violence against women and girls, and a strong UN gender theme group were also identified as critical influences on the prioritization of EVAWG in cooperation frameworks.

*Box 10: Positive influence of the Spotlight Initiative in Chile*

In **Chile**, the UNCT took steps to operationalize strategic activities across the six pillars of the Spotlight Initiative within the 2023–2026 cooperation framework to reflect a more comprehensive UN system approach to EVAWG than had been articulated in the earlier UNDAF. A key facilitative factor in this process was the leadership of the UN Resident Coordinator who championed gender equality and women’s empowerment and drew on positive experiences with the Spotlight Initiative approach in her previous duty station (**Malawi**). The process was supported by the regional Spotlight Initiative programme in **Latin America**, which provided technical support to the UN in **Chile** during development of its cooperation framework.

*Sources: Case Study/site visits.*

226. Further evidence of positive spillover effects from the Spotlight Initiative on national priorities and programming to end gender-based violence in countries without a Spotlight Initiative programme were found in the **Africa** and **Caribbean** regions. Examples include the formulation of a Spotlight Initiative country programme in **Sierra Leone** and the engagement of United Nations, governments and civil society organizations from **Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa** and **Zambia** in developing a Spotlight Initiative subregional programme to end gender-based violence in Southern Africa.<sup>337</sup> On the latter, engagement of the African Union and Southern African Development Community was highlighted as a spillover effect of their participation and partnership in the Spotlight Initiative **Africa Regional Programme**.<sup>338</sup> In the **Caribbean**, the Government of **St. Lucia** embraced the Spotlight Initiative model, with cross-government commitment to a multisectoral approach to ending VAWG and gender-based violence. Despite receiving no direct funding from the regional programme, the Government drew on the tools and resources generated through the Initiative to strengthen institutional responses to ending VAWG and gender-based violence and help attract financing in order to accelerate efforts.<sup>339</sup>

## 2.6 Sustainability

*This section examines the sustainability of the Spotlight Initiative following the close of first phase programmes in December 2023. Findings reveal positive signs for sustainability as well as challenges faced in maintaining gains.*

<sup>337</sup> Documentation (<https://www.gender.gov.zm/?p=5907>; <https://www.undp.org/zambia/press-releases/zambia-joins-clarion-call-end-gender-based-violence-southern-africa>); Key informants (Africa regional programme; Zambia counterfactual).

<sup>338</sup> <https://lesotho.un.org/en/250010-ending-gender-based-violence-lesotho-and-beyond> and key informants (Africa Regional Programme).

<sup>339</sup> Regional KII Caribbean (with Government of St Lucia representatives); Caribbean Regional Programme Annual Report 2022, page 6.

**Finding 17: Efforts were made to consider sustainability during design and implementation, but operational and contextual factors affected the focus on sustainability. Sustainability strategies, developed in the final year of programme implementation, left uncertainties about ownership and the practicalities of turning strategy into action.**

227. Sustainability considerations were incorporated into the design of Spotlight Initiative country programme documents, but operational and contextual factors did not facilitate adequate focus throughout implementation. The country programme documents reviewed articulate sustainability would be achieved primarily through securing programme ownership among stakeholders involved in implementation and through the institutionalization of activities and approaches within government systems and structures.<sup>340</sup> Further focus on sustainability was evidenced in annual reporting and updates to country programme documents after the mid-term assessment, although evidence of attention to sustainability risks varied considerably in the risk management matrices reviewed, whereby some demonstrated sustained attention to sustainability while others made scant reference to sustainability risks.<sup>341</sup> Variable levels of focus on sustainability were influenced by contextual and operational factors including national emergencies or crises and, in early 2023, a switch to a new enterprise resource planning system that disrupted RUNO operations (see Finding 6). These factors contributed to implementation pressures that diverted attention away from sustainability considerations.<sup>342</sup>
228. Most country and regional programmes developed sustainability strategies (also referred to as sustainability plans) in the final year of implementation, guided by the 2023 Guidance Note on Sustainability issued by the Global Secretariat. The guidance outlined essential elements to be included and proposed activities to ensure ongoing support across various pillars of the Initiative.<sup>343</sup> The content and structure of sustainability strategies varied but generally included action lines, timeframes, responsible parties and potential sustainability risks for activities by pillar. With some exceptions, plans were generally presented by pillar-specific activities without specifying strategic synergies or foundational elements.<sup>344</sup>
229. The evaluation found mixed evidence on the extent to which the development of the sustainability strategies engaged the right stakeholders. The development of strategies was participatory in several case study countries and regions (**Guyana, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Central Asia Regional Programme**), involving key stakeholders including government (national and subnational level), civil society (women’s rights organizations and organizations led by or representing marginalized and key populations), and local EU delegations and other development partners.<sup>345</sup> The leadership and convening role of the Resident Coordinator was an identified strength in facilitating multi-stakeholder sustainability discussions in **Guyana and Malawi** and for the **Central Asia Regional Programme**. However, the evaluation found the process was less participatory and collaborative in some case study countries and regional programmes. In certain instances, this included omission of critical stakeholders in the drafting stages.

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<sup>340</sup> Country programme documents for case study countries.

<sup>341</sup> MTAs and ARs for case study programmes; analysis of risk management matrices.

<sup>342</sup> The MTA indicated that this pressure to deliver was likely to have negative repercussions on the quality and sustainability of results. Hera Meta-review of the Spotlight Initiative: Latin America and Africa Final Report March 2022: HERA Update of the Meta-review of the Spotlight Initiative Final Report December 2023; Thematic Assessment: Assessing Spotlight Initiative’s contribution to the engagement of civil society, the implementation of LNOB, and movement building. KIIs country, global, regional.

<sup>343</sup> Guidance Note: Sustainability of the Spotlight Initiative.

<sup>344</sup> Sustainability Plan Documents for Argentina, Guyana, Honduras, Malawi, Mozambique, Samoa, Pacific, Africa, and Central Asia and Afghanistan: KII RUNO personnel interviews.

<sup>345</sup> KIIs with RUNO personnel, CSOs, and government officials in case study countries.



230. Several sustainability strategies remained unfinalized at the time of field missions.<sup>346</sup> The timing of the drafting, at the very end of the programme's lifecycle while RUNOs were focused on accelerating delivery in the final months of implementation, was identified by key informants in some country (**Nigeria, Honduras**) and regional programmes (**Caribbean**) as an obstacle to full engagement and ownership across stakeholder groups.<sup>347</sup> This perception was shared in qualitative responses from other country programmes in the online survey (**Grenada, Mexico, Zimbabwe**).
231. Despite efforts in the final year of the programme to formalize sustainability strategies, there remained widespread uncertainty among key informants in case study countries over ownership of those strategies as well as the practicality of their implementation.<sup>348</sup> Sustainability strategies were often seen as theoretically sound, but overly ambitious considering uncertain funding streams.

**Finding 18: Progress in institutionalizing programme interventions within government and regional bodies was mixed across countries and regions. The Spotlight Initiative significantly enhanced the capabilities of civil society organizations to address violence against women and girls. However, funding shortfalls jeopardize continuation of gains made. Mechanisms exist at country and regional levels to promote and sustain UN entity collaboration to end VAWG, but individuals and personal interactions also have influence over continuation of Spotlight Initiative approaches. Capitalizing on opportunities to institutionalize Spotlight Initiative efforts is predicated on funding, as well as a willingness among key stakeholders to collaborate at all levels.**

#### **Institutionalization by government and regional intergovernmental bodies**

232. The sustainability of many Spotlight Initiative interventions depends on the readiness and ability of national governments and regional intergovernmental bodies to institutionalize programme approaches and associated interventions. The extent of this institutionalization varied across regions and countries; some regional intergovernmental bodies and national and local governments have successfully integrated Spotlight Initiative activities into their ongoing operations, while others demonstrated limited progress.<sup>349</sup> In the global online survey, 60 per cent of the respondents believed that Spotlight Initiative activities have been successfully institutionalized within national and local governments or other key stakeholders.
233. Successful examples of institutionalization observed in case study countries included the establishment of gender-based or domestic violence emergency hotlines (**Argentina, Kyrgyzstan**), training for government employees on gender-based violence-related issues, (**Argentina, Kyrgyzstan**), development and implementation of standard operating procedures for service providers (**Argentina, Kyrgyzstan**), and the strengthening of legislative frameworks to protect women and girls (**Guyana, Kyrgyzstan, Nigeria**).<sup>350</sup> Some programme activities were also found to be institutionalized within academia and the private sector.<sup>351</sup> Additionally, evidence from case studies revealed enhanced capacities among local governments to address cases of VAWG supported by strategic partnerships between national and local governments and women's networks (**Argentina, Honduras, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi**) (see also Finding 11).<sup>352</sup>

<sup>346</sup> Case study and regional missions to Argentina, Guyana, Samoa, Pacific Regional Programme.

<sup>347</sup> Evaluation Survey Open-ended response analysis. Case studies, regional missions.

<sup>348</sup> KIIs with RUNO personnel, CSOs, and government in case study countries and regions.

<sup>349</sup> Global, regional and country annual narrative reports, KIIs with RUNO personnel and government officials.

<sup>350</sup> KIIs with RUNO and government officials in mentioned case study countries; annual narrative reports in cited case study countries.

<sup>351</sup> For example, training courses addressing workplace harassment adopted by the private sector; academic programmes focused on the measurement of femicide; new curricula integration or courses offered at tertiary levels.

<sup>352</sup> KIIs with RUNO and government officials in mentioned case study countries; annual narrative reports in cited case study countries.

234. However, challenges remain in fully institutionalizing Spotlight Initiative interventions and approaches. Limited government ownership represented an obstacle to the sustainability of the Spotlight Initiative in some countries, particularly those that faced unexpected crises during programme implementation (for example, **Afghanistan, Haiti, Mali, Niger**). In other contexts, changes in government administration and personnel within key institutions proved a significant challenge to institutionalizing approaches and developing the necessary skills and expertise to sustain programme gains. This was evidenced in five of the eight case study countries (**Argentina, Honduras, Kyrgyzstan, Nigeria, Samoa**).<sup>353</sup> Additionally, some gender-based violence-related legislative initiatives supported by the Spotlight Initiative remained pending at the programme's conclusion (**Guyana, Honduras, Kyrgyzstan, Samoa, Latin America Regional Programme**), presenting a level of uncertainty about the future of key legal and policy frameworks.<sup>354</sup>
235. Continuation of successful strategies to address gender-based violence is positively supported by allocation of dedicated government budgets to sustain and operationalize approaches. While the Spotlight Initiative has influenced the development of national strategies and action plans for ending gender-based violence, the allocation of budgets to implement these strategies has been less straightforward and challenging to verify.<sup>355</sup> At the regional level, it remains uncertain whether key regional institutions will have the resources to continue with new lines of programming initiated by the Spotlight Initiative.<sup>356</sup> Stakeholders across regions and countries emphasized the need for ongoing support and resources to maintain the momentum generated by the Spotlight Initiative and to ensure the long-term sustainability of its impacts.<sup>357</sup>

#### **Sustainability through civil society organization engagement**

236. Despite evidence of the initiative's positive impact on organizational strengthening and networking (see Findings 7 and 12), the funding landscape for grassroots and civil society organizations working on EVAWG is precarious, with limited assurances for sustained support, potentially compromising continued efforts.
237. Stakeholders across all case study countries and regions acknowledged the Initiative's role in strengthening civil society,<sup>358</sup> which is seen as an important contribution that holds great promise for maintaining momentum to combat VAWG and gender-based violence. Through Spotlight Initiative support, local and grassroots-level organizations were provided with new opportunities to improve their capacities in strategic planning, administration, programme management, leadership and resource mobilization (**Argentina, Guyana, Honduras, Mozambique, Samoa and the Pacific, Latin America and Central Asia Regional Programmes**).<sup>359</sup> However, securing continued institutional and programme funding for civil society organizations, particularly grassroots and women's rights organizations, continues to be a major challenge in several countries (**Argentina, Guyana, Honduras, Kyrgyzstan, Mozambique, Samoa**).<sup>360</sup>
238. Case study evidence indicates that the Spotlight Initiative equipped smaller civil society organizations with the necessary skills and capacities to attract funding to sustain and even expand initiatives to EVAWG. However, in many countries and regions, the operational landscape for civil society and grassroots organizations has grown increasingly complex due to political or security reasons. Declines in available

<sup>353</sup> KIIs with RUNO and government officials in mentioned case study countries.

<sup>354</sup> KIIs with RUNO and government officials in mentioned case study countries and regions.

<sup>355</sup> Results Framework Analysis, KIIs with RUNOs in case study countries and regions. See also Finding 12 – Pillar 2 Institutional strengthening.

<sup>356</sup> KIIs with RUNOs in all regional programmes.

<sup>357</sup> KIIs with RUNOs, CSOs, government officials, global informants, and others across case study countries, regions and globally.

<sup>358</sup> See Finding 12 with reference to Pillar 6 – Women's movements.

<sup>359</sup> KIIs with RUNOs and CSOs in mentioned case study countries.

<sup>360</sup> KIIs with RUNOs and CSOs across case study countries.

funding also present challenges to sustaining gains with limited financial resources available to supplement state allocations for EAWG-related programming and service provision. The evaluation found several case study countries faced declining official development assistance landscapes (**Argentina, Guyana, Kyrgyzstan**),<sup>361</sup> while analysis has shown that globally less than 1 per cent of official development assistance is targeted at gender-based violence responses.<sup>362</sup>

239. Further funding for civil society organizations under the Initiative's partnerships with the WPHF and the UN Trust Fund remains uncertain, with no assurance of continued support. Under the Spotlight Initiative's partnership with the WPHF, civil society organizations that successfully implemented activities may apply for continued support in future WPHF funding cycles. Within the Initiative's partnership with the UN Trust Fund, engagement with civil society organization partners was limited to the programme's duration. Although organizations funded under this partnership can reapply for additional funding, there is no guarantee of continued support. Nonetheless, grantees remain connected to the UN Trust Fund, receiving updates and communications from the UN Trust Fund.

### **Sustainability through United Nations ownership**

240. UN personnel in case study countries reported a general willingness among RUNOs to continue working together on EAWG, identifying the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) as a key tool for institutionalizing this collaboration and sustaining the achievements of the Spotlight Initiative. This observation was corroborated by qualitative responses offered by UN respondents in the online survey (**Haiti, Niger**). RUNO key informants expressed a commitment to the Spotlight Initiative approach and its integration into key frameworks and strategies, but institutionalization of these practices at all levels remains inconsistent, with partial integration into UNSDCFs and global core RUNO strategic plans and budgets. In some contexts, challenges such as internal tensions within the United Nations further complicated efforts to maintain a sustained and coherent system response to EAWG (see also Findings 14 and 15).
241. In the case study countries, interviews with most - though not all - RUNO personnel (including Heads of Agencies) indicated an expectation and willingness to maintain collaborative efforts, either formally or informally, on EAWG. Within formal processes, RUNOs and Resident Coordinator and their Offices in **Guyana, Honduras, Malawi, Mozambique** and **Samoa**<sup>363</sup> highlighted the UNSDCF as an important mechanism for promoting and institutionalizing UN collaboration on ending VAWG and gender-based violence and sustaining gains made under the programme (see Finding 15 for elaboration). Despite this recognition, efforts at the global level to work within broader UN systems to embed a comprehensive approach to EAWG in UNSDCFs for greater global reach were not systematized over the course of the Initiative.<sup>364</sup>
242. At the country level, continued coordination between RUNOs on ending VAWG and gender-based violence is positively supported through existing inter-agency platforms including the UN Country Team Gender Theme Group (GTG) and UNSDCF results groups, as observed in **Argentina, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi** and **Honduras**.<sup>365</sup> In **Guyana**, the Spotlight Initiative programme served as a catalyst for the UNCT to establish

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<sup>361</sup> OECD DAC data 2023; <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/sub-issues/oda-eligibility-and-conditions/dac-list-of-oda-recipients.html#list-updates>; KIs with RUNOs and CSOs in case study countries; Country Annual Narrative Reports in mentioned countries.

<sup>362</sup> <https://devinit.org/blog/how-track-oda-gender-based-violence-gbv-responses/>.

<sup>363</sup> KIs with RUNOs in mentioned case study countries.

<sup>364</sup> Including through marker tagging in JWPs and sensitizing peer support groups. KIs global level; UNSDCF analysis.

<sup>365</sup> KIs with RUNOs and RCO in Argentina and Honduras.

an inter-agency GTG following the close of the programme. At the regional level, RUNOs expressed a commitment to sustain UN collaboration on ending VAWG and gender-based violence through already established inter-agency GTGs in **Latin America** and **the Pacific**.<sup>366</sup> As part of the counterfactual methodology, interviews with members of the GTG in **Zambia** highlighted the critical role of a well-coordinated, effective and empowered GTG in supporting UN system coherence and joint programming on ending VAWG and gender-based violence and other gender-related issues.

243. Case study evidence from **Argentina, Guyana, Kyrgyzstan** and **Malawi** and regional programme consultations in **Africa** and **Central Asia** suggests the emergence of a one team mentality among many UN technical personnel during programme implementation, with RUNO key informants expressing ongoing commitment to continue collaborative ways of working on EAWG and sustaining Spotlight Initiative programming approaches both informally and, where opportunities could be identified, formally (for example, through joint work with stakeholders).<sup>367</sup> Across the case study countries and regional programmes this sentiment was often, though not always, reinforced by RUNO senior management.
244. At the same time, case studies identified instances where tensions between UN personnel at multiple levels including senior management adversely affected sustainability discussions within the UN system and with external partners (EU delegations, government, civil society). This demonstrates that while institutional processes and mechanisms such as the UNSDCF and UNCT GTGs facilitate a sustained UN system response to EAWG, individuals and interactions also influence United Nations ownership and continuation of Spotlight Initiative approaches.<sup>368</sup>
245. At the global level, there was a voiced commitment to sustaining Spotlight Initiative approaches from key informants in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, the United Nations Development Coordination Office (UNDCO) and within core and non-core RUNOs. Some noted that the relocation of the Secretariat to UNDCO offered new opportunities for institutionalization, particularly through the Resident Coordinator system and UNCT planning processes including the common country analysis (CCAs), UNSDCFs (see Finding 15), as well the UNCT System-Wide Action Plan (SWAP) on Gender Equality. Among RUNO respondents, institutionalization of Spotlight Initiative approaches outside of the existence of the Initiative was, in their view, largely predicated on funding. Evidence of shifts in strategic thinking on ending VAWG and gender-based violence consistent with the Spotlight Initiative theory of change and multi-pillar approach were not clearcut or conclusive across entity-specific strategic plans of the four core RUNOs, although positive signs were observed in the 2022–2025 strategic plans of UNFPA and UNICEF, which put forth strategies for delivering EAWG results consistent with the Spotlight Initiative approach (see Finding 15).<sup>369</sup>

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<sup>366</sup> KII with RUNOs in mentioned regional programmes.

<sup>367</sup> Case studies (Argentina, Guyana, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi).

<sup>368</sup> Final evaluation KIIs (country, regional, global); case studies; internal programme documentation relating to case study countries; 2022 and 2023 meta-reviews.

<sup>369</sup> Comparative analysis of four core RUNO strategic plans 2018-2021 and 2022-2025.

**Finding 19: There is evidence of the Initiative’s positive influence on development partner programming and investments on EVAWG in the countries and regions where it operated. However, the Spotlight Initiative struggled to secure broad-based financial support beyond the initial European Union funding committed. Efforts to mobilize resources under the Spotlight Initiative between 2018 and 2023 met with limited success at global, regional and country levels for a variety of reasons, including fund set-up, perceptions around visibility and influence and donor and UN entity preference for individual over joint UN programming. However, there is evidence of the Initiative’s positive influence on development partner programming and investments on EVAWG in the countries and regions where it operated.**

246. Although EU funding was intended as seed funding with the intention to attract additional donors, global resource mobilization between 2018 and 2023 was limited, with smaller contributions received from Portugal, (USD 68,474) and Albania (USD 5,000).<sup>370</sup> At country and regional levels, attempts over the same period to secure additional programme funds under the Spotlight Initiative also met with limited success. Notable exceptions include the country programmes in **Uganda** and **Ecuador**, which secured additional funding commitments from the European Union of EUR 20 million and EUR 1 million respectively in 2023 for Spotlight Initiative continuation and the **Central Asia Regional Programme**, which mobilized USD 400,000 from the Government of Kazakhstan in 2023 to support the Central Asian Alliance (an innovative regional mechanism on ending SGBV and harmful practices established with Spotlight Initiative support) beyond the lifetime of the programme. Between January and April 2024, commitments from Belgium (unearmarked contribution of USD 2,143,178<sup>371</sup>) and the USA (USD 1 million; earmarked contribution for **Ecuador**<sup>372</sup>) were secured under the Spotlight Initiative 2.0 alongside ongoing pipeline development by the Global Secretariat in consultation with UNCTs. The evaluation also identified several country programmes dealing with gender-based violence and one regional programme at the design or pipeline stage (see below) that seek to build on the Spotlight Initiative to varying degrees, though most are not being developed under the Spotlight Initiative 2.0.<sup>373</sup>

### **Global resource mobilization**

247. A global resource mobilization strategy was formulated and subsequently endorsed by the Operational Steering Committee (OSC) in 2018.<sup>374</sup> Efforts were made to find ways to channel contributions through EU modalities as well as through UN Multi-Partner Trust Fund modalities.<sup>375</sup> Further work was undertaken to garner interest from UN Member States and the private sector, marked by outreach by the UN Deputy Secretary-General and former European Commissioner for International Partnerships.<sup>376</sup> Early conversations focused on discussions with several OECD DAC countries, engagement with the private sector, and exploring potential collaborations with the UN Global Compact and the UN Foundation.

248. Despite these efforts, anticipated pledges to the Spotlight Initiative did not materialize. The requirement for donors to attain seats on the Operational Steering Committee and Governing Body was set at a substantial threshold of USD 100 million.<sup>377</sup> In hindsight, key informants from the Global Secretariat reflected this

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<sup>370</sup> ECA; KII with global stakeholders; MPTFO Gateway Spotlight Initiative.

<sup>371</sup> MPTFO website (<https://mptf.undp.org/fund/sit00>). Accessed 29 April 2024.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid.

<sup>373</sup> The second phase of the Spotlight Initiative continues as a United Nations Secretary-General's Fund. It is a continuation of Spotlight Initiative 1.0. Source: Spotlight Initiative 2.0 Fund terms of reference. 28 March 2024.

<sup>374</sup> Spotlight Initiative. 2018. Resource Mobilization and Partnership Strategy. Draft. December 2028.

<sup>375</sup> Spotlight Initiative. 2018. Minutes of the Operational Steering Committee Meeting. 9 March 2018. Internal document corroborated by KIIs with UN personnel.

<sup>376</sup> Spotlight Initiative. 2018. Minutes of the Operational Steering Committee Meeting. 14 December 2018. Internal document.

<sup>377</sup> Spotlight Initiative. 2018. Minutes of the Operational Steering Committee Meeting. 27 June 2018. Internal document; final evaluation KII (global).

requirement may have hindered efforts to attract commitments below that amount due to a perception that this would not give a donor “a seat at the table”. Key informants at all levels reported that the strong branding of the Initiative as a UN-EU partnership served as an unintended deterrent to investment because of perceptions that other contributors to the Initiative would receive limited visibility.<sup>378</sup>

249. In 2023, the Global Secretariat secured a grant of USD 17.5 million from the European Union to sustain its operations beyond the original timeframe of the Initiative, mobilize further resources and advance into the next phase. In February 2024, the Secretariat recruited a partnerships and resource mobilization advisor and commenced the development of a strategy for this purpose.<sup>379</sup>

### **Regional and country programme resource mobilization**

250. During programme implementation (up to 31 December 2023), none of the regional programmes, except for **Central Asia**, were able to mobilize additional funding under the Spotlight Initiative brand. As of April 2024, ongoing resource mobilization efforts at the regional level had not yet come to fruition but several appeared promising, particularly in **Africa** and **Central Asia**.<sup>380</sup> For example, pre-existing joint UN programmes on ending female genital mutilation and early child marriage were likely to ensure that some Spotlight Initiative activities under Stream II of the **Africa Regional Programme** would continue to be funded. Bilateral and multilateral partners also expressed interest in supporting civil society organization engagement in regional intergovernmental structures such as the African Union, including through continuation of a Civil Society Regional Reference Group.<sup>381</sup>
251. One of the objectives of the Spotlight Initiative included in its terms of reference (2017-2023) is to secure substantial, coordinated and sustainable financial resources through strategic partnerships at the country level.<sup>382</sup> Between 2018 and 2023, most UNCTs struggled to collectively mobilize additional funding for continuation of the country programme and for joint UN EVAWG programming more broadly beyond 2023.<sup>383</sup> As of April 2024, only two programme countries (**Ecuador, Uganda**) had secured further funding under the Spotlight Initiative 2.0 Fund to continue the comprehensive Spotlight Initiative multi-pillar approach. Case study evidence identified several impediments to UNCT resource mobilization efforts, some of which were relevant at all levels of the Initiative while others were contextual. For example, competition for funding among some or all RUNOs was reported by stakeholders internal and external to the United Nations to have an adverse impact on collective UNCT resource mobilization for a joint successor programme. This was a consistent finding across the case studies, particularly in countries with the largest Spotlight Initiative funding envelopes. Analysis of qualitative survey responses further corroborate these findings. Other contextual factors at the country level included donor preference for specific UN entities, a changing official development assistance landscape (for example, **Guyana**),<sup>384</sup> and slow implementation rates. Programmes that were behind in financial delivery, particularly some of those

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<sup>378</sup> KIIs with global stakeholders, ECA, CS and regional.

<sup>379</sup> KIIs with global stakeholders.

<sup>380</sup> KIIs with bilateral and multilateral development partners and UN personnel (Central Asia and Africa Regional Programmes; Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan); Tracking table provided by the Spotlight Initiative global Secretariat (internal), EU INTPA tracking table (internal), EU Project Fiche (Accessed April 2024).

<sup>381</sup> KIIs with RUNOs and the EUD in the Africa Regional Programme.

<sup>382</sup> Spotlight Initiative. 2018. Annex I Description of the Action (November 2018).

<sup>383</sup> KIIs with RCOs and RUNOs in case study countries.

<sup>384</sup> Gross national income (GNI) per capita trajectory indicates Guyana’s upcoming graduation from the OECD DAC list of ODA recipients.

in the **Caribbean, Central Asia**, and **Pacific** regions, were not well positioned to seek additional funds in the final year of the Initiative.<sup>385</sup>

252. However, the value-for-money assessment identified that RUNOs also provided contributions of an additional USD 38 million, particularly to support programme management costs and to use the specialized expertise of senior UN staff.

### **Resource mobilization with the European Union and other development partners**

253. The evaluation found evidence of sustained commitment to investment in programming to end VAWG and gender-based violence among development partners including the European Union, although their investment strategies were not typically aligned to the scale or scope of the Spotlight Initiative with its multi-pillar, “whole of government - whole of UN” approach.<sup>386</sup>
254. EU commitment to sustaining the Spotlight Initiative approach was analysed by the evaluation team through an assessment of both strategic planning and future funding allocations to end gender-based violence. The evaluation found programming to end gender-based violence is well embedded in the European Union Country Level Implementation Plans (EU CLIPS) of the Gender Action Plan III 2021-2025 (GAP III),<sup>387</sup> but funding commitments to end gender-based violence were less visibly consistent. A review of the EU CLIPs for 22 of the 26 Spotlight Initiative countries, where EU CLIPs were available, found that all 22 EU CLIPs reference the work carried out under the programme, indicative of the Initiative’s strong profile within European Union delegations.<sup>388</sup> This finding is consistent with the mid-term evaluation of the implementation of GAP III, which found that the Spotlight Initiative had some influence in the strategic orientation of EU CLIPs.<sup>389</sup> Within the EU CLIPs, the Initiative is primarily referenced in the context of European Union engagement in dialogues related to gender equality and women's empowerment. Additionally, 20 of the 22 EU CLIPs mention “ensuring freedom from all forms of gender-based violence” as a selected thematic area of engagement and objective, signaling sustained support to maintaining the elimination of gender-based violence as a priority area. Globally, 108 EU CLIPs have “ensuring freedom from all forms of gender-based violence” as their number one priority with the Spotlight Initiative cited as the model of reference.<sup>390</sup> Given that they are a first-generation tool, the impact and application of EU CLIPs is still uncertain as implementation and funding allocations to end gender-based violence have yet to be assessed globally.
255. As of April 2024, tracking data provided by: (i) the Global Secretariat; and (ii) the European Commission (EC) identifies a total of 32 global programmes to end gender-based violence (encompassing ongoing, formulation and pipeline stages) that were classified as building or following up on the Spotlight Initiative to varying degrees. Implementation partners (UN entities or otherwise) in a quarter of the listed programmes were yet to be identified in the data reviewed.<sup>391</sup> Of the remaining programmes, 38 per cent were designed

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<sup>385</sup> The implementation rates for the three regions stood at approximately 92 per cent by end 2023 (Figure 10), but 58 per cent by end of 2022.

<sup>386</sup> Tracking table provided by the SIS, EU INTPA tracking table (internal), EU Project Fiche.

<sup>387</sup> The EU’s country-specific Multi-Annual Indicative Programmes (MIPs) for 2021-2027 focus on digital transformation, green economy transitions, and good governance, and must align with the EU’s Gender Equality Action Plan (GAP III) 2020-2025. To support GAP III, each EU delegation must create a Country Level Implementation Plan (CLIP).

<sup>388</sup> CLIPs Analysis- Internal assessment conducted by the evaluation team.

<sup>389</sup> DG INTPA 2023 Mid-term Evaluation of the Implementation of GAP III.

<sup>390</sup> EU response to ECA.

<sup>391</sup> Tracking table provided by the SIS (internal), EU INTPA tracking table (internal), EU Project Fiche.

to work with a single UN entity, with 16 per cent intending to work with two UN entities. Only 12 per cent of programmes were designed to work with more than two UN entities. Case study evidence and key informant interviews with development partners, including local EU delegations, found that donors often expressed a preference for working with specific UN entities, based on mandate, local-level leadership and previous working relationships.<sup>392</sup> This was also captured in qualitative survey responses received from non-case study countries. Although Member States and multilateral organizations, including the European Union, have committed to the UN Funding Compact and UNDS reform principles, at the country level, the evaluation found that in many cases those same partners were encouraging UN entities to pursue bilateral funding routes. At the country level, RUNO and key informants from Resident Coordinators and their Offices reported this hindered collective UN system resource mobilization efforts for joint programming to EVAWG, compounded by incentive structures<sup>393</sup> that encourage UN entities to work in siloes or to fundraise individually.<sup>394</sup>

256. In total, 12 Spotlight Initiative programme countries (**Afghanistan, Ecuador, El Salvador, Jamaica, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Mexico, Mozambique, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Uganda, Zimbabwe**) and the **Africa Regional Programme** were reflected in the tracking data, demonstrating a promising likelihood of continuation. This was corroborated by the case studies (**Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria**); regional programme consultations (**Africa, Central Asia**) and in qualitative survey responses (**El Salvador, Uganda**). Additionally, several Spotlight Initiative Pillar 6-related activities in **Africa** and **Latin America** look set to continue through the EUR 22 million programme “ACT to End Violence Against Women” (Advocacy, Coalition Building and Transformative Feminist Action to End Violence Against Women) to accelerate efforts to EVAWG. Announced in September 2023, ACT is a collective commitment between the European Commission and UN Women as co-leaders of the Action Coalition on Gender-Based Violence, in collaboration with the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women. Implemented initially in **Africa** and **Latin America**, the programme also has a global component and builds on the Spotlight Initiative’s results and lessons learned to empower women’s organizations at regional and global levels, thereby contributing to its sustainability.<sup>395</sup> The ACT programme intends to work in close coordination with the Spotlight Initiative, particularly with the Civil Society Global Reference Group, to ensure that the evidence, results and knowledge generated from the Spotlight Initiative inform the evidence-based advocacy of the ACT programme.<sup>396</sup>
257. Case study evidence and key informant interviews found the Spotlight Initiative had influenced or informed ending VAWG and gender-based violence programming strategies and approaches of several multilateral and bilateral partners.<sup>397</sup> In Spotlight programme countries and regions (for example, **Guyana, Kyrgyzstan, Mozambique, Caribbean**) bilateral partners (Global Affairs Canada, USAID, France) and multilateral financing institutions (World Bank Group, the Inter-American Development Bank, Caribbean Development Bank) expressed an interest in continuing or building upon some Spotlight-initiated activities, though in

<sup>392</sup> Case studies; final evaluation KII (country, regional). Sources case studies; final evaluation KII (country, regional).

<sup>393</sup> In this context, incentive structures relate to individual UN entity performance measurement processes as well as those set by donors.

<sup>394</sup> Case studies; final evaluation KII (country, global).

<sup>395</sup> [https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/news-and-events/news/eu-and-un-women-boost-womens-rights-coalitions-ending-violence-against-women-2023-09-18\\_en#:~:text=ACT%20to%20End%20Violence%20against,viole%20against%20women%20and%20girls;trustfundanalysis](https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/news-and-events/news/eu-and-un-women-boost-womens-rights-coalitions-ending-violence-against-women-2023-09-18_en#:~:text=ACT%20to%20End%20Violence%20against,viole%20against%20women%20and%20girls;trustfundanalysis)

<sup>396</sup> Final evaluation KII (global); <https://unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-04/ACT%20to%20End%20Violence%20against%20Women.pdf>.

<sup>397</sup> KIIs with development partners in case study countries and global interviews.



most cases without the involvement of multiple UN entities.<sup>398</sup> UN key informants identified interest and engagement by development banks as significant because of the importance of state allocations for ending VAWG and gender-based violence and the ongoing challenges with domestic resource mobilization. At the same time, multilateral financing institutions acknowledged the critical role of civil society in ending VAWG and gender-based violence, the added value of the Spotlight Initiative in fostering civil society organization and government engagement, and the need for the wider development community to support the convening role of the United Nations in this respect.<sup>399</sup>

258. Funding landscapes for programming to end VAWG and gender-based violence in counterfactual countries, including joint UN programmes, varied considerably by country context. Key informants in **Zambia** from government, United Nations and development partners identified donor and geographical fragmentation as a key issue, especially problematic at provincial and lower levels. In **Suriname, Tonga and Uzbekistan**, multilateral and bilateral development partners were funding initiatives to tackle various aspects of ending VAWG and gender-based violence, though not comparative to the Spotlight Initiative in terms of scope (the multi-pillar approach) or scale (size of the funding envelope). Across stakeholder groups consulted (governments, United Nations, development partners, civil society), these efforts were characterized as important but generally “projectized”, with few linkages across initiatives, falling short of a systems approach.<sup>400</sup>
259. Evidence of positive influence and spillover effects on programming to end VAWG and gender-based violence in non-Spotlight Initiative countries was also identified in **Southern Africa (Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia)** where discussions among the United Nations, government and civil society representatives of the six countries, together with five development partners (European Union, Canada, France, Ireland, USA), built explicitly on the experiences, lessons learned and multi-pillar approach of the Spotlight Initiative (see Finding 16 for further examples of spillover effects).<sup>401</sup>

## 2.7 Lessons Learned

*Experiences from the design and implementation of the Spotlight Initiative hold important lessons to inform the development of global programmes designed to address complex development challenges.*

### Adaptation and contextualization

260. As a demonstration fund and model initiative, the Spotlight Initiative underscored the value of testing a global design and theory of change in a diverse range of countries and contexts. Spotlight Initiative experiences with contextualizing a standardized design template at country and regional levels highlighted the importance of allowing significant scope to tailor programmes to diverse settings. To achieve synergies between regional and country levels within a global design requires incorporating interactions as part of the

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<sup>398</sup> KIIs (UN personnel, development partners, government representatives) conducted during case studies for Guyana, Kyrgyzstan, Mozambique and during the regional programme consultation in the Caribbean triangulated with programme documentation and World Bank. 2022. Malawi GBV Assessment. March 2022; World Bank. March 2022 Malawi Gender Assessment. March 2022.

<sup>399</sup> Final evaluation KII (representatives of development banks).

<sup>400</sup> KIIs counterfactual missions across stakeholders from Gov, UN, CSO; prodocs for donor programmes.

<sup>401</sup> <https://www.undp.org/zambia/press-releases/zambia-joins-clarion-call-end-gender-based-violence-southern-africa> triangulated with final evaluation KII (regional, country, counterfactual). Engagement of the AU and Regional Economic Commission (SADC) in related discussions was also highlighted in KII, pointing to the potential influence of the regional SI programme as well (see: <https://lesotho.un.org/en/250010-ending-gender-based-violence-lesotho-and-beyond>).

design process and allowing a broad scope for flexibility to tailor to regional contexts thus responding to existing operational modalities. This sets programmes up for success.

261. The experience of the Spotlight Initiative has shown that to be able to respond to rapidly changing contexts, such as a global pandemic, natural disasters and humanitarian emergencies, it is important to have a flexible model that can be adapted to changing circumstances to maintain relevance and that the model incorporates preparedness against risks to effective implementation. New ways of working and flexible models support continued progress toward results despite changing circumstances.

### **Collaborative approaches**

262. The Spotlight Initiative relied on a multi-stakeholder collaborative approach that required new partnerships and new ways of working to succeed. Co-creation of activities with development partners, government agencies and civil society from the design stage supports enhanced ownership but requires significant time investment to plan to the timelines of multiple stakeholders and navigate government and UN administrative systems.
263. Incorporating an inception phase within the design of joint or multi-agency programmes that address a complex issue and rely on new partnerships is important to allow time to build relations and instill trust. Sufficient time allocated during design and inception is key to allow for broad-based engagement and secure buy-in of key stakeholders for implementation. Sufficient time is also essential to provide the necessary space to conduct critical mapping and planning to support greater coherence and convergence including gathering and generating baseline data.
264. Multisectoral programming has been shown to benefit from a coordinated approach in pilot sites to serve as a testing ground to refine strategies for working effectively with provincial- or lower-level stakeholders before wider roll-out. The Spotlight Initiative experience has also shown that sharing models of good practice with neighbouring locales and more broadly can maximize potential for expanded geographic coverage and catalytic effects. Furthermore, sharing in forums at country, regional and global levels during the earlier stages of implementation allows for greater space for application of learnings.

### **Governance and operationalization**

265. The experiences of the Spotlight Initiative demonstrated the value of high-level expanded stakeholder engagement in governance structures with enhanced forums for civil society organization involvement to support broad-based ownership and engagement. However, lessons point to the importance of ensuring that interactions across country, regional and global levels at governance and technical levels are systematic and intentional for bi-directional interactions.
266. Lessons from the Initiative highlight the importance of simplifying programme monitoring systems and reporting wherever possible while focusing during design on ensuring relevance to users at all programme levels. Global monitoring and reporting systems for complex programmes need to be flexible and responsive to various contexts including regional and multi-country, allowing for the capture of both qualitative and quantitative results. In addition, lessons from the Spotlight Initiative pointed to the importance of systematically integrating plans for knowledge sharing during the programme design to maximize opportunities for learning and influence with stakeholders within and outside the programme structure.

267. Lessons from Spotlight Initiative have highlighted that to expand partnerships with civil society organizations, particularly smaller grassroots organizations, it is important to utilize innovative modalities such as “small grants” to simplify requirements and provide training to partners to support them in complying with RUNO requirements as well as working through consortia arrangements with larger civil society organizations.

### 3. Conclusions

268. Overall, the evaluation found proof of concept for the Spotlight Initiative model while also highlighting areas for improvement. The comprehensive design demonstrated the ability of an integrated, inter-agency approach to EVAWG to contribute to higher-order changes at regional, national and local levels. The Initiative was able to respond to contextual changes to deliver important results across pillars, while deepening understanding across stakeholders of the need for a broad range of actors to work collaboratively to address violence against women and girls, providing proof of concept for the approach. The governance model brought together expanded stakeholders with an elevated role for civil society engagement. While noting these achievements, the evaluation found that programme delivery was significantly challenged by a complicated operational model and by limitations in the compatibility of UN administrative and financial systems, which restricted their capacity to function collaboratively. While some elements and activities of the Initiative show signs of continuation, the sustainability of the overarching approach is still to be determined. The evaluation produced seven conclusions as detailed below.

**Conclusion 1 - The conceptual six-pillar model was comprehensive, and the programme played an important role in raising visibility and focusing attention on a comprehensive approach to EVAWG in the countries and regions where it operated. The evaluation confirmed proof of concept for the six-pillar approach with cross-cutting principles of the theory of change while also highlighting a need for clearer elaboration on interactions across pillars and across programme components.**

**Derived from findings: 1, 2, 3, 12,16**

269. The theory of change was an essential strength of the programme that facilitated a comprehensive approach to EVAWG.<sup>394</sup> The “whole of UN - whole of government” approach, combined with significant funds dedicated to a traditionally underfunded issue, played a positive role in raising the visibility of the issue and enhancing government ownership in many contexts. The inclusion of civil society organizations as a pillar-specific and cross-cutting approach supported greater engagement with civil society, adding valuable perspectives to efforts to end violence against women and girls. While the theory of change was predicated on stable operational environments, the model was able to be adapted to navigate complex and dynamic environments to deliver results (see Conclusion 4).

270. While supporting a comprehensive approach, the theory of change did not clearly identify interactions across pillars so that intentional strategies could be developed to foster synergies. The evaluation highlighted a need for greater attention during the design phase on guiding a strategic approach to implementation that considered how activities could be staged (or staggered) to allow progress in one pillar to leverage results in another pillar. The Spotlight Initiative does not contain a theory of value creation, identifying and defining the value that will be created by the Initiative, to complement the theory of change and allow for a more comprehensive capture of the Initiative’s value and tangible and intangible effects.

271. Furthermore, coherence was not well articulated across the 26 country programmes, five regional programmes, one thematic programme and two lines of grants with missed opportunities to foster greater synergies, particularly between regional and country programmes.

**Conclusion 2 - The governance model was able to bring together diverse stakeholders in line with the multisectoral approach, with an elevated role for civil society organizations within all levels of governance. However, expanded stakeholder engagement (including civil society reference groups (CSRGs)) required time and space to develop new relations and define systems.**

**Derived from findings: 3, 8, 10,11**

272. The Initiative's governance structures at all levels brought together an expanded group of stakeholders, many of whom had never shared common space around EVAWG. In many contexts, this supported the development of new alliances and coalitions to work more collaboratively to EVAWG including bringing non-traditional actors (for example, religious, traditional and sports leaders) to the table.
273. At country and regional levels, steering committees played a role in overseeing programmes and facilitating multi-stakeholder engagement. Variations were notable, with some demonstrating a commitment to high-level participation and shared responsibility, while others grappled with cumbersome coordination and infrequent meetings. Civil society reference groups faced challenges in defining roles and responsibilities and establishing influence on decision-making though overall their involvement substantially enriched discussions by bringing diverse perspectives and ensuring the representation of marginalized voices.
274. Global-level governance structures included senior personnel from the UN and EU, which raised the profile of the Initiative while at the same time offering limited space for technical discussions that would have been more appropriately handled at lower levels of governance. Coherence and knowledge exchange across governance levels, exacerbated by inadequate bi-directional communication, led to a perceived disconnect between global decisions and local realities.

**Conclusion 3 - The operational model was overly complex to efficiently operationalize the Spotlight Initiative at the speed and scale envisioned. Root causes of operational inefficiencies stemmed from the lack of an inception phase, insufficiently flexible funding release and replenishment modalities and human resources that were not commensurate with programme goals and the timeframe for implementation.**

**Derived from findings: 3, 4, 5, 7,14**

275. Though ambitious in its scope and intent, the Spotlight Initiative operational model was convoluted and insufficiently flexible, posing challenges to efficient implementation. The evaluation identified an inherent tension within the operational model between demonstrating proof of concept at a fast pace and at scale and allowing time and space for the development of cohesive operational processes needed for efficient programme implementation. This was exacerbated by the lack of an inception phase, which did not allow time for country and regional programmes to establish the relationships and systems needed for efficient implementation.
276. The replenishment model and disbursement and flow of funds between Phase I and Phase II were key causes of operational issues for country and regional programmes, contributing to setbacks and delays in implementation. In particular, the Spotlight Initiative's "70 per cent rule" led to stop and start implementation by RUNOs, resulted in complex programme coordination efforts, and contributed to personnel turnover, further compounded by other system operational bottlenecks. The need to deliver at a fast pace was frequently at odds with UN entity procedures and processes. While there were examples of operational collaboration, the overall lack of harmonization across RUNO administrative and financial

systems caused confusion and challenges for implementers and contributed to delayed recruitment and procurement processes.

277. Within the operational model, the Initiative faced significant challenges in ensuring adequate human resources. The staff and capacities needed to deliver at the speed and scale required, working within agreed governance structures and timeframes, was largely underestimated and under-resourced. Gaps among RUNOs in technical or operational capacities or an insufficient number of staff presented operational challenges for most country and regional programmes (particularly in SIDS contexts) while turnover and staffing gaps within programme management units led to shortfalls in capacities relating to monitoring and results reporting, communications and coordination.

**Conclusion 4 – Aspects of global monitoring, reporting, knowledge management and communication systems contributed to learning and accountability, however, these were not fully effective, efficient or responsive enough to guide programme implementation and communicate results achieved to stakeholders. Overall, the complexity of the results framework and indicator guidance proved challenging to operationalize and the use of standardized indicators across diverse country and regional contexts has not provided a consistently reliable picture of programme performance. The impact and reach of communications, advocacy and knowledge management to influence change were particularly challenging to measure and to demonstrate results at scale.**

**Derived from findings: 1,8,13**

278. Monitoring and reporting systems incorporating the global results framework, annual reporting and mid-term assessments, encountered significant obstacles in their operationalization. These included burdensome reporting requirements and changes to online platforms for data tracking and aggregation, exacerbated by staffing and capacity gaps in monitoring and evaluation personnel, which rendered the monitoring function of the programme complicated and time consuming. Participatory monitoring and evaluation approaches and the mid-term assessments helped to inform decision-making and refine interventions and strategies to EVAWG. However, learning and insights did not sufficiently channel back to stakeholders, including governments and civil society, to guide programme implementation and revise and refine implementation plans through adaptive management.
279. The results framework's use of standardized indicators across diverse country and regional contexts has not provided a consistently reliable picture of programme performance, highlighting the challenges inherent in monitoring complex social change processes. Overall, the complexity of the results framework and indicator guidance proved challenging to operationalize, despite some limited scope to add custom indicators to ensure contextual relevance. While the framework was designed to track progress toward results, impact-level tracking has not been possible due to lack of available data for selected SDG indicators within the programme timeframe. Tracking of outcome- and output-level indicators was more effective, but with inconsistencies. A disproportionate focus was also placed on quantitative indicators at the expense of capturing qualitative changes to better address some of the widely acknowledged challenges inherent in monitoring complex social change processes, which may have offered a richer and more accurate portrayal of the important results achieved by country and regional programmes (see Conclusion 5).
280. The Spotlight Initiative does not contain a value-for-money framework integrated into its design, which hindered the articulation and capture of the comprehensive costs and effects of the Initiative to meet the expectations of key stakeholders.

281. The large volume of learning and knowledge generated demonstrated evidence of wide reach within specific contexts, particularly for communications campaigns and activities. However, evidence of influence and impact of knowledge and communications at scale is limited. Challenges were faced in fully capitalizing on opportunities for cross-learning and cross-fertilization of knowledge.

**Conclusion 5 - Country and regional programmes demonstrated an ability to be responsive in the face of dynamic environments to demonstrate important results across all six pillars, with evidence of contributing to higher-order changes supported by work across multiple pillars.**

**Derived from findings: 6, 12, 13, 16, 18, 19**

282. The Spotlight Initiative showcased results across all six pillars, evidencing contributions to higher-order changes and helping to lay crucial foundations for transformative change. In delivering results, the Initiative demonstrated an ability to be responsive to dynamic external factors that included a global pandemic, environmental disasters, political upheaval and conflicts, while at the same time navigating internal challenges (see Conclusions 3 and 4).

283. The contribution to higher-order changes at regional, national and lower levels would not have been possible without the comprehensive design, scale of funding and high-level visibility that the UN-EU partnership afforded. At the national level, these included raising the visibility of VAWG and developing stronger partnerships and broader multi-stakeholder engagement, as well as enhanced government ownership of a comprehensive approach to EVAWG. Regional-level changes included: enhanced visibility of the issue and greater understanding of the importance of a multisectoral approach; improved availability of data and practice-oriented tools; and greater engagement across stakeholder groups. The Spotlight Initiative strengthened civil society organization capacities at both national and regional levels. It contributed to higher-order changes at community levels including raising awareness and changes in mindsets, empowering women and girls and strengthening response systems, services and referral networks.

284. The Spotlight Initiative's support to, and engagement with, civil society organizations were strengths of the programme that resulted in better networked, trained, and capacitated civil society organizations to advance work related to gender-based violence. In the context of rapidly changing contexts, strengthening civil society organizations was a strategic result that can offer some level of stability in dynamic environments.

**Conclusion 6 – The Spotlight Initiative has demonstrated a broader influence on UN Development System processes and with non-Spotlight Initiative countries that have adapted elements of the model. However, the sustainability of results and the Initiative's overarching approach is influenced by multiple factors including variable degrees of ownership of sustainability strategies, a changing official development assistance landscape, development partner preference for individual over joint entity engagement, and competition for funding among UN entities underpinned by incentive structures.**

**Derived from findings: 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19**

285. The Spotlight Initiative model influenced approaches to EVAWG in some countries as evidenced by the ongoing development of Spotlight Initiative-inspired programmes globally as well as the identification of spillover effects in some non-Spotlight Initiative countries that adopted aspects of the model and theory of

change. Despite examples of successful institutionalization of Spotlight Initiative approaches and activities at the country and regional levels, there were missed opportunities at all levels to embed the Spotlight Initiative programming approach more systematically within governmental, intergovernmental and UN system processes, and to more effectively share knowledge and learning to influence public and policy discourse.

286. Between 2018 and 2023, the Spotlight Initiative struggled to secure broad-based financial support beyond the initial EU funding, although there is evidence of positive influence on development partner programming and investments in EAWG in some countries and regions. While some RUNOs have secured funds to continue specific elements or activities of the Initiative, there are uncertainties regarding ownership and implementation of sustainability strategies, highlighting challenges in future funding for civil society. Institutional and programme funding for civil society organizations, especially grassroots and women's rights organizations, remains a critical challenge given the crucial role of civil society in reaching the most vulnerable and maintaining momentum to EAWG.
287. Whether the United Nations or other stakeholders can mobilize adequate funding for the envisaged shift to the Spotlight Initiative 2.0, continuation of the comprehensive approach to EAWG is still to be determined. Contextual factors, such as a changing official development assistance landscape, government priorities and donor preferences, have impacted resource mobilization. In several contexts, competition for funding between RUNOs was found to adversely affect collective resource mobilization efforts led by the UN Resident Coordinator for joint successor programmes. Development partner (including EU delegations) preferences for funding single entities has encouraged UN entities to pursue unilateral funding, compounded by the existing incentive structures under which UN entities and their staff operate.

**Conclusion 7 - The Spotlight Initiative was supported by, and is supportive of, the principles of UN Development System reform, positively contributing to clearer understanding of entities' comparative advantages in EAWG and supporting more comprehensive approaches to EAWG in UNSDCFs. However, significant challenges were encountered to working coherently across UN entity systems, several of which were exogenous to the Initiative. Individuals and interactions were found to have had equal, if not greater, primacy over processes in the delivery of a coherent UN system response to EAWG at country, regional and global levels.**

**Derived from finding 5, 7, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19**

288. The timing of the launch of the Spotlight Initiative relative to the UN Development System reform meant that the learning process took hold as country and regional programmes were implemented. Against this backdrop, there are clear instances where UN Development System reform efforts supported implementation and vice-versa, although evidence that this was able to deliver a more coherent UN system response to EAWG at country, regional and global levels is mixed.
289. In line with UN Development System reform principles, placing the programme under the overall leadership of the UN Resident Coordinator at the country level positively impacted the visibility of EAWG as a critical development issue within the country, facilitated high-level government, civil society and EU delegation involvement, and supported RUNOs in navigating operational challenges during implementation. This led to a clearer understanding among RUNOs at country and regional levels of areas of comparative advantage and synergies in EAWG and supported new ways of working together in structures and processes aligned



to reform principles. For example, there was positive influence on UNCT guiding frameworks, including the cooperation framework, to prioritize a more coherent and multisectoral approach to EVAWG.

290. Significant challenges were experienced in streamlining operational practices in the face of different UN entity systems, which has been a steep learning curve for UN personnel, who would have benefited from more detailed operational guidance beyond that provided by the Secretariat and in current UNSDG Guidance on Joint Programming.
291. Challenges in delivering reform objectives within the programme architecture were, to a significant degree, identified as institutional in nature and exogenous to the Spotlight Initiative. These included cultural factors (strong identity and culture of individual UN entities and the need for corporate visibility and recognition including through use of entity logos), factors related to business operations, and performance management mechanisms that create barriers and disincentives to collaboration. These challenges created friction points during programme implementation that affected cooperation and cohesion among UN entities at all levels.
292. The implementation of the Spotlight Initiative demonstrated that individuals and interactions have played a prominent role over processes and tools in the delivery of a coherent UN system response to EVAWG at the country, regional and global levels. Inter-agency collaboration with external partners varied depending on the context and particular dynamics among the RUNOs, and between RUNOs and the Programme Management Unit at country and regional levels. Even though committed individuals working together demonstrated an ability to overcome systems challenges to coherence, UN systems were not sufficiently robust to mitigate challenges in personal, interpersonal and team dynamics.

## 4. Recommendations

*This section presents eight recommendation areas developed based on the evaluation findings and conclusions. While timelines for execution vary, all the recommendations are considered to be high priority.*

**Recommendation 1 – For the Spotlight Initiative 2.0, work with key stakeholders to review the theory of change to simplify the focus to encompass fewer pillars, while still maintaining the comprehensive approach and cross-cutting elements and promoting interaction across pillars and programme levels. Allow for greater flexibility within programmes for prioritizing and adapting to different contexts (including full UN entity engagement without core and non-core designations) while maintaining key non-negotiable requirements. Develop a simplified results framework while maintaining the comprehensive framing.**

**Relevant conclusion: 1, 4**

**Timing: Immediate (within one year as part of 2.0 design)**

**Directed to: Spotlight Initiative Secretariat**

**Rationale:** The evaluation confirmed the strengths of the Spotlight Initiative’s comprehensive approach and provided proof of concept, while also highlighting areas that would benefit from refinement. Engagement with all key stakeholders in the design process was highlighted as critical to draw from the full range of expertise within and outside the UN development system and ensure alignment with existing standards and processes.

### **Action Points:**

- a. Ensure that all key stakeholders are engaged in the redesign process including civil society and all entities with specialized expertise including the World Health Organization (WHO) given its proven expertise and deep experience of the health services sector on issues of VAWG and gender-based violence.
- b. Simplify the six-pillar model to fewer pillars to allow for greater tailoring and prioritization across contexts, including consideration of an approach tailored to SIDS contexts, while retaining all elements of the proven model.
- c. Complement the theory of change with the development of a theory of value creation at the inception phase of the Spotlight Initiative 2.0 to facilitate the comprehensive capture of the value created by the Initiative and tangible and intangible results.
- d. Work with key stakeholders to identify specific aspects of women’s economic empowerment programming with strong linkages to EVAWG to provide guidelines in order to clarify the focus of this area within the Spotlight Initiative model as a critical component of a comprehensive response in certain contexts
- e. Provide flexibility on pillar focus at regional and country levels to allow for prioritization and staging, while maintaining the comprehensive approach. The design should include key core elements to preserve the integrity of the model including a focus on civil society organization engagement as a pillar-specific and cross-cutting element.
- f. Clarify and formalize relationships and interactions between and across regional and country programmes to capitalize on opportunities for synergistic programming.
- g. Allow for engagement with the full spectrum of UN entities without designation of core and non-core.
- h. Develop a simpler results framework with fewer indicators, drawing on good practice from the United Nations joint programmes to end female genital mutilation and early child marriages, maintaining the comprehensive framing, while ensuring the more systematic capture of disaggregated data on programme reach to vulnerable groups.

**Recommendation 2 - For the Spotlight Initiative 2.0, ensure that programme design and operations maintain relevance and dynamic responsiveness to changing contexts in design and operationalization of Spotlight Initiative 2.0 including establishing systems to enable swift and coordinated adjustments to changing contexts so that programming can pivot with agility. Consider how the Spotlight Initiative 2.0 may allow for intervention in existing crises or emergency contexts by establishing simplified operational processes and selective focus interventions to support a comprehensive approach to EVAWG, complementing existing humanitarian-focused gender-based violence systems and structures.**

**Relevant conclusion: 3, 5**

**Timing: Immediate (within one year as part of 2.0 design)**

**Directed to – Spotlight Initiative Secretariat**

**Rationale:** The Spotlight Initiative experience highlighted the importance for global programmes to be designed to function within dynamic environments specifically in response to emergencies and humanitarian crises. Learning from Spotlight Initiative, as well as other UN joint models, that function in emergency contexts underline the need to support a comprehensive approach to EVAWG that targets gaps and reinforces work across wider programming to end gender-based violence in complex contexts in partnership and complementarity with existing systems.<sup>402</sup>

**Action Points:**

- a. Assume dynamic environments in the design stage to create more agile systems to adjust and respond to changing contexts, drawing on learning from MPTFs in complex contexts (for example, the UN Peacebuilding Fund and the Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund).
- b. Develop crisis preparedness guidance and systems for adaptation to substantial changes to context, based on lessons learned from the Spotlight Initiative and other programmes.
- c. Consult with key stakeholders in the GBV space for humanitarian and conflict settings to develop a Spotlight Initiative design model tailored to complex contexts, allowing for nimbler implementation and pillar-specific focus areas to support a broader comprehensive approach to EVAWG that targets gaps and reinforces work across wider gender-based violence programming in complex contexts.
- d. Systematize minimum standards for do no harm considerations throughout programme design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation.

**Recommendation 3 – For the Spotlight Initiative 2.0, explore alternative phasing and sequencing approaches to implementation and revise aspects of the Spotlight Initiative operational model including the fund disbursement modality. Ensure human resource planning by RUNOs, including staffing of programme management units, is aligned with programme delivery and operational requirements.**

**Relevant conclusion: 3, 7**

**Timing: Immediate (within one year as part of 2.0 design)**

**Directed to – Spotlight Initiative Secretariat, RUNOs**

**Rationale:** The Spotlight Initiative experience highlighted the criticality of ensuring both functionality and flexibility of operational models designed to support the implementation of large-scale integrated programmes

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<sup>402</sup> Such as the UN Action Multi-Partner Trust Fund or work historically labeled as “GBV in Emergencies” or affiliated with the IASC GBV Area of Responsibility.

across varying contexts. Learnings from the Spotlight Initiative underscore the importance of ensuring that operational systems and human resource planning are fit-for-purpose to optimize efficiency and maximize results in line with programme goals and timeframes.

**Action Points:**

- a. As part of programme development, allow time and space (specifically, an inception phase) for the development of cohesive operational processes needed for efficient programme implementation, drawing on documented good practice examples (for example, Kyrgyzstan).
- b. Review fund disbursement modalities to mitigate challenges in maintaining implementation timelines and the recruitment and retention of key programme personnel. This includes revisiting pre-financing mechanisms and amending the current fund disbursement modality requiring all RUNOs to achieve 70 per cent rate of fund utilization before replenishments are released to participating agencies.
- c. Build on efforts to operationalize the principles of budget flexibility and adaptive programming within the Spotlight Initiative operational model, prioritizing contexts where RUNOs and their implementing partners are likely to face greater operational and human resource challenges, including multi-country office and SIDS contexts and countries shifting into crisis situations (see also Recommendation 2).
- d. Ensure programme management units are adequately staffed to perform monitoring and evaluation, communications and coordination functions while also ensuring that the coordination capacities required to operationalize joint and integrated UN EVAWG programmes are reflected in programme design and allocations.
- e. Ensure RUNO staffing needs and capacities are adequately assessed and aligned to support implementation of Spotlight Initiative programmes, from the design stage onwards (*action point directed at RUNOs*).
- f. Accelerate recruitment and procurement processes to mitigate operational bottlenecks for implementation of Spotlight Initiative programmes, leveraging UN efficiency gains in business operations where possible (see also Recommendation 7 below) (*action point directed at RUNOs*).

**Recommendation 4 - For the Spotlight Initiative 2.0, strengthen and simplify monitoring, reporting and learning systems in line with a streamlined results framework. Expand efforts to ensure that monitoring systems report on disaggregated data to highlight the programme reach to vulnerable groups. Expand on and systematize utilization of qualitative approaches to capture a richer and more holistic picture of programme results on the ground. Integrate a value-for-money framework to guide data collection and monitoring during implementation and to serve as a key input for value-for-money assessments. Develop stronger systems to enable real-time learning and knowledge sharing to drive the scaling-up of good practices and innovative approaches.**

**Relevant conclusion: 4**

**Timing: Immediate (within one year as part of 2.0 design)**

**Directed to: Spotlight Initiative Secretariat**

**Rationale:** The evaluation underscores the need for integrated programming to develop performance management monitoring and reporting systems that are streamlined and responsive to local contexts and needs. Monitoring, reporting and learning systems should meet the needs of the global programme operating at different levels, while establishing mechanisms for bi-directional engagement. Findings point to the importance of developing a more intentional approach for sharing of learning and knowledge generated.

## Action Points:

- a. Develop streamlined and simplified annual reporting formats with inputs from users at country and regional levels to ensure relevance and reduce time and effort spent. Where possible generate reports that serve various purposes for reporting requirements set forth (for example, entities, donors).
- b. Build on and expand participatory monitoring approaches. Complement quantitative results monitoring with qualitative models such as outcome harvesting and most significant change. Socialize donors on the value of alternatives for the measurement of results to predetermined quantitative indicators.
- c. Introduce mandatory disaggregation<sup>403</sup> of data within monitoring and reporting, including in the global results framework, to better assess how the principle of leaving no one behind is being implemented.
- d. Integrate a value-for-money framework at the time of design of the Spotlight Initiative 2.0 based on the framework utilized by the value-for-money assessment of the Spotlight Initiative undertaken during the final evaluation. The framework should include a comprehensive definition of value for money, as well as criteria, sub-criteria, standards, and indicators to guide monitoring and collection of data during implementation of the Initiative to serve as a key input for future value-for-money assessments and to inform investment decisions.
- e. Embed plans for cross-learning and sharing of experiences within the country, particularly within locales where the programme is not implemented, while also including systems for global cross-learning to extend reach and to better capture evidence of influence and impact.
- f. Consolidate knowledge products and communication channels to ensure greater accessibility and clearer platform usability. Disseminate good practices from the Spotlight Initiative 2018–2023 to inform wider uptake of innovative approaches and key learnings, building on the Compendium of Innovative and Good Practices and Lessons Learned (2024).

**Recommendation 5 – Strengthen and extend models of expanded stakeholder engagement in programme governance, while establishing systems that facilitate bi-directional communications across levels. Build on good practice models to support positive momentum for enhanced civil society organization and non-traditional actor engagement in governance structures, including formalizing, expanding and adequately resourcing the civil society reference group structure. Share and expand on good practice models for enhanced civil society organization engagement, including setting budgetary targets, building capacities and facilitating joint and simplified financing and reporting structures to reach grassroots and civil society organizations.**

**Relevant conclusion: 2**

**Timing: 2-3 years**

**Directed to: Spotlight Initiative Secretariat**

**Rationale:** The Spotlight Initiative put forth new models of enhanced civil society organization engagement in various capacities including governance, advisory and implementation. Benefits include opportunities to strengthen civil society institutional and programme capacities and women’s movement building while supporting greater reach of programmes to reach those furthest behind. Adjustments undertaken along the way to refine approaches provide important good practice examples that can support further refinement and application of this approach.

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<sup>403</sup> Disaggregation by sex, age, disability status, and population groups most at risk of being left behind (for example, migrants, refugees, internally displaced persons, key populations, indigenous peoples, among others).

**Action Points:**

- a. Maintain multisectoral governance bodies, while establishing mechanisms for bi-directional communications and feedback loops across the different levels of governance structures.
- b. Maintain a focus on civil society organizations as a core component of the design within a mandatory pillar and cutting across all pillars with associated funding targets.
- c. Work with the Civil Society Global Reference Group (or its equivalent under the Spotlight Initiative 2.0) to develop and disseminate a good practice compendium, highlighting mechanisms (for example, small grants, human resource development, institutional funding, etc.) to reach a broader group of civil society organizations engaged in EVAWG as implementing partners, including grassroots groups, women's organizations, and non-traditional partners in line with LNOB principles.
- d. Identify and share good practice models for civil society organization engagement to promote learning on integrating these approaches across UNCT work and UNDCO guidance and common processes for UNCTs.<sup>404</sup>

**Recommendation 6 – Develop a holistic funding strategy for consideration of UNSDG to step up joint UN programming at country, regional and global levels for EVAWG and to expand approaches to resource mobilization in line with the Spotlight Initiative comprehensive model, the principals of UN Development System reform and the commitments of the Funding Compact.**

**Relevant conclusion: 6, 7**

**Timing: 2 years**

**Directed to: Spotlight Initiative Secretariat**

**Rationale:** Efforts to mobilize resources under the Spotlight Initiative between 2018 and 2023 met with limited success for a variety of reasons including donor and UN entity preferences and incentives for individual over joint UN programming. To institutionalize the comprehensive approach demonstrated by the Spotlight Initiative requires development partners and the senior leadership of UN entities to demonstrate greater commitment to joint programming and funding in line the principles of UN Development System reform and the Funding Compact to support longer-term programming for EVAWG.

**Action Points:**

In line with the Spotlight Initiative comprehensive approach, the Spotlight Initiative Secretariat, with engagement of UN entities and in consultation with development partners, should develop a holistic funding strategy to support joint UN programming for EVAWG for the consideration by UNSDG, taking into account:

- a. Models from UN multi-partner trust funds, local trust funds and other mechanisms overseen by the UN Resident Coordinator in line with the principles of UN Development System reform.
- b. Innovative approaches and linkages with private sector funding for investing “seed money” in middle and higher-income countries with enabling environments (via either global or regional programme reach) to capitalize on opportunities to support fast-tracked good practices that may be replicable in other countries.
- c. Performance measurement and incentive structures of UN entities to support joint resource mobilization to address complex development challenges including ending VAWG and gender-based violence.

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<sup>404</sup> Good practice may include CSO reference group modalities, roles and responsibilities, and funding or compensation and composition to ensure representation of marginalized populations.

- d. The importance of both institutional and programmatic funding for civil society organizations within UN EAWG programming, particularly for grassroots and women's organizations, recognizing the vital role of civil society in combatting VAWG and supporting sustainability and LNOB principles.

**Recommendation 7 - To further support UN Development System reform objectives, incorporate learning from the operationalization of the Spotlight Initiative to inform UN system-wide and entity-level efforts to harmonize practices and processes to deliver coherent, integrated support and maximize collective results on EAWG at country and regional levels.**

**Relevant conclusion: 3, 7**

**Timing: 2 years**

**Directed to: UNDCO, Spotlight Initiative Secretariat**

**Rationale:** The Spotlight Initiative faced considerable challenges in joint implementation that were exogenous to the Initiative, including factors related to UN entities' culture, business operations and performance management processes. Spotlight Initiative experiences point to the need for greater effort supported by UNDCO and the UNSDG Business Innovations Group to accelerate efforts toward harmonizing operational practices and administrative processes to facilitate integrated programming to address development challenges.

**Key elements for consideration include:**

- a. The development and dissemination of a good practice compendium to capture Spotlight Initiative learning on harmonizing UN entity-level operations at the country level (for example, joint procurement, collective peer review of terms of reference, joint expressions of interest and calls for proposals, joint trainings for implementing partners, and joint monitoring activities).
- b. The envisaged review of the Management and Accountability Framework (2021) and Cooperation Framework Guidance could be entry points to further delineate the accountabilities and responsibilities for UN Resident Coordinators and Heads of Agencies for integrated and joint programming.
- c. Future updates to the Guidance Note on a New Generation of Joint Programmes (2022) could include the operational dimensions of programme design and delivery, such as those related to joint procurement, recruitment and financial reporting.
- d. Clarifying roles for Resident Coordinator's Office coordination for integrated programming (with reference to the UN Peacebuilding Fund model and UNSDG Joint Programming Guidance) (*action point directed at UNDCO*).
- e. Giving increased attention to programmatic and operational risks, including the potential impact of operational issues associated with the processes and procedures of UN entities, as part of risk management in joint and integrated programmes, particularly programmes to EAWG where such risks may affect service delivery and support to survivors of violence.

**Recommendation 8 – Embed the comprehensive Spotlight Initiative approach to EAWG ('Spotlight Standard') into the implementation of the UN System-Wide Gender Equality Acceleration Plan (2024), UN-SWAP (entity level) and the UNCT-SWAP (country level) and other common UN Development System processes such as common country analyses and UN cooperation frameworks to serve as driving forces for collective UN work to prioritize a comprehensive approach to EAWG. This will support extended geographical reach and coverage of comprehensive EAWG programming across the UN development system and expand resource mobilization opportunities.**

**Relevant conclusion: 1, 6, 7**

**Timing: 2-3 years**

**Directed to: Spotlight Initiative Secretariat in consultation with UNDCO, UN Women (UN System Coordination Division),**

**Rationale:** The Spotlight Initiative comprehensive design (theory of change) working across pillars offers proof of concept for a collaborative, comprehensive approach to EAWG. Adaptation and translation of the design principles within guiding frameworks and key UN processes offers opportunities to leverage the model for wider reach and greater resource mobilization opportunities at the country level.

**Key opportunities include:**

- a. The development of a branded “Spotlight Standard” for UNCT comprehensive approaches to EAWG to provide benchmarks to support processes needed for UN EAWG integrated programming, working within existing tools and mandatory processes for UNCTs, including common country analyses, UNSDCF, and linking to UNCT-SWAP requirements.<sup>405</sup>
- b. The development of capacity-building initiatives of UNCTs to support integration of the Spotlight Standard in common country analyses and UNSDCF for an integrated UN system approach reinforced by linkages to UNCT-SWAP requirements.<sup>406</sup>
- c. The establishment of linkages to embed the Spotlight Initiative model and standards into UN systems to implement the UN System-Wide Gender Equality Acceleration Plan such as: 1.3. coordinated and joint activities result in the reversal of systemic gender inequality across all sectors; 2.2. adoption of entity plans to operationalize the Gender Equality Acceleration Plan; 3.3. biennial gender equality reviews of UN activities with the UN leadership in all UN Member States.
- d. The articulation and integration of a Spotlight Standard into new iterations or updates of mandatory gender accountability frameworks for the UN, specifically the UN-SWAP (entity-level framework) and the UNCT-SWAP (country-level framework).<sup>407</sup>

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<sup>405</sup> See [UNCT-SWAP Gender Equality Scorecard](#): Performance indicators for gender equality and women’s empowerment for UN Country Teams (2023). Relevant indicators include: 1.1 CCA; 1.2 UNSDCF; 1.3 UNSDCF Indicators; 3.1 Government; 3.2 Civil society.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid. Relevant indicators: 1.1 CCA; 1.2 UNSDCF 1.3 UNSDCF Indicators; 5.2 Capacities.

<sup>407</sup> The UNCT-SWAP was updated in 2023. The UN-SWAP 2.0 was updated in 2020 and an update to UN-SWAP 3.0 is planned.