



# FINAL EVALUATION OF SPOTLIGHT INITIATIVE

## BACKGROUND

Spotlight Initiative is the United Nations (UN) high impact initiative to eliminate violence against women and girls.

Launched in 2017 with \$530 million in seed funding from the European Union (EU), Spotlight Initiative demonstrates how a comprehensive, whole-of-society approach to ending violence against women and girls promotes gender equality (SDG 5) and contributes to peaceful societies (SDG 16), while driving change across all of the SDGs.

During its first phase, Spotlight Initiative implemented 34 programmes (including country, regional and CSO grant-giving programmes) across Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America and the Pacific.

The UN System-Wide Evaluation Office recently completed an evaluation of the Initiative's first phase (2017–2023), assessing its performance and achievements. This brief summarizes the evaluation's findings and outlines how the Initiative is adopting the evaluation's recommendations.

## METHODOLOGY

The evaluation used a theory-based, mixed-methods approach, drawing on data and interviews from global, regional and country levels. Key methods included: 8 country case studies, 5 regional visits, and 5 visits to countries with no established Spotlight Initiative programme, reviewing more than 500 documents, conducting 940 individual interviews, consulting 279 rights holders ("beneficiaries") in focus groups, and conducting an online survey of 26 Spotlight countries and a value-for-money assessment.

## THE EVALUATION'S KEY FINDINGS

- **Proof-of-concept validated:** The Initiative's comprehensive, six-pillar model proved highly effective. Better linkages across pillars and among programme levels would maximize this impact.
- **Governance and stakeholder engagement:** The governance model engaged diverse and high-level stakeholders, while elevating the role of civil society through innovative mechanisms. Improved connection and communication across governance bodies at all levels would have further benefited this model.
- **Adaptability:** The Initiative demonstrated responsiveness to shifting environments, including during the onset of COVID-19, and adapted well to local contexts.
- **Monitoring and reporting:** Monitoring and reporting systems allowed for evidence-based design at scale, global aggregation, and learning and accountability. Data reliability varied, reflecting common challenges inherent in monitoring and reporting on complex social change processes.
- **Operational hurdles:** Operationalizing a large and comprehensive investment, which included piloting new technical and management models, posed challenges. This was partly due to the lack of an inception phase, tight implementation timelines, a multi-layered process of releasing funds and underestimated or insufficient human resources at the programme level.
- **Value for money:** The evaluation's value-for-money assessment rated the Initiative's overall management of resources as good, including its indirect and direct costs.
- **UN Reform and new ways of working:** Under the leadership of the Resident Coordinator, the Initiative leveraged the comparative advantage of UN agencies and fostered collaboration to deliver effective programming across country and regional programmes. Impact at global level, however, was limited.
- **Sustaining gains:** The principle of sustainability was integrated in programme design and investment decisions, but sustaining the Initiative's contributions was constrained by unclear national ownership strategies, donor decisions, and a challenging funding landscape.

## Looking ahead

*Spotlight Initiative is focused on building what works, refining what doesn't, and working across the UN system and with partners to accelerate efforts to end violence against women and girls.*

### How is Spotlight Initiative addressing the evaluation's recommendations?

| Recommendation  | Response  |
|---|---|
| <p>Maintain the Initiative's comprehensive model, but simplify its global results framework to better promote cross-pillar interaction and improve data collection and disaggregation, particularly for marginalized groups. Improve monitoring and learning systems to better capture and report on change, and consider integrating a value-for-money framework to guide data collection and foster real-time learning to scale successful practices.</p> | <p>The Initiative is enhancing flexibility while maintaining its comprehensive, evidence-based approach. Spotlight Initiative is revising its global results framework to ensure it is more responsive and captures change more effectively across diverse contexts. Efforts to streamline operations are also underway, further enhancing adaptability and responsiveness in rapidly evolving contexts and humanitarian settings. The Initiative is further promoting comprehensive gender-based violence programming through new research and learning.</p> |
| <p>Develop additional strategies to pivot in emergencies and rapidly changing contexts, and simplify operations to do the same. Deepen stakeholder engagement and formalize support structures to better partner with civil society, including by allocating clear budgets for civil society reference groups and improving funding modalities for civil society.</p>   | <p>Meaningful engagement with civil society remains central to the Initiative. The role of civil society reference groups is being clarified, and strategies to better resource local and grassroots civil society organizations (CSOs) are being refined. The Initiative is improving communication across governance structures, which will strengthen multisectoral collaboration and enable collective action.</p>  |
| <p>Develop a holistic funding strategy to support joint UN programming and resource mobilization to end violence against women and girls. Embed the Initiative's comprehensive approach into broader UN frameworks, guidance and strategies to enhance system-wide coherence and maximize collective impact.</p>  | <p>The Initiative is working to embed its proven model into UN sustainable development cooperation frameworks, programming guidance and reform processes, and enhancing joint resource mobilization. Harmonized processes across UN agencies will drive more impactful programming for women and girls.</p>   |

For more information, please scan the QR code for the final evaluation or write to Spotlight Initiative at [info@spotlightinitiative.org](mailto:info@spotlightinitiative.org).

