



UNSDG SYSTEM-WIDE EVALUATION OFFICE

# Value for Money Assessment of the Spotlight Initiative



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## **Value for Money Assessment of the Spotlight Initiative – Report**

October 2024

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## Acronyms

|       |  |
|-------|--|
| COSI  | Community of the Spotlight Initiative            |
| CPD   | Country Programme Document                       |
| CSNRG | Civil Society National Reference Group           |
| CSRRG | Civil Society Regional Reference Group           |
| CSO   | Civil Society Organization                       |
| DFID  | Department for International Development (UK)    |
| ECA   | European Court of Auditors                       |
| ECM   | Early Child Marriage                             |
| ERP   | Enterprise Resource Planning                     |
| EU    | European Union                                   |
| EVAWG | Ending Violence Against Women and Girls          |
| FAFA  | Financial and Administrative Framework Agreement |
| FCDO  | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office     |
| FGM   | Female Genital Mutilation                        |
| GALS  | Gender Action Learning System                    |
| GBV   | Gender-Based Violence                            |
| GPECM | Global Programme to End Child Marriage           |
| GVV   | Gender-Based Violence and Vulnerability          |
| HP    | Harmful Practices                                |
| ICR   | Indirect Cost Recovery                           |
| IP    | Implementing Partner                             |
| KM    | Knowledge Management                             |
| LNOB  | Leave No One Behind                              |
| M&E   | Monitoring and Evaluation                        |
| MoU   | Memorandum of Understanding                      |
| MPTFO | Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office                  |
| MTA   | Mid-Term Assessment                              |
| MTR   | Mid-Term Review                                  |
| MU    | Management Unit                                  |
| NGO   | Non-Governmental Organization                    |
| NSC   | National Steering Committee                      |
| OAS   | Organization of American States                  |
| OSC   | Operational Steering Committee                   |
| PME   | Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation          |
| PMU   | Programme Management Unit                        |
| QCPR  | Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review          |
| RC    | Resident Coordinator                             |
| RCO   | Resident Coordinator Office                      |
| RUNO  | Recipient United Nations Organization            |
| SDGs  | Sustainable Development Goals                    |
| SI    | Spotlight Initiative                             |
| SIDS  | Small Island Developing States                   |
| SWEO  | System-Wide Evaluation Office                    |
| TA    | Temporary Appointment                            |

|        |  |
|--------|--|
| ToC    | Theory of Change                                   |
| TU     | Technical Unit                                     |
| UN     | United Nations                                     |
| UNCT   | United Nations Country Team                        |
| UNDG   | United Nations Development Group                   |
| UNDP   | United Nations Development Programme               |
| UNDS   | United Nations Development System                  |
| UNFPA  | United Nations Population Fund                     |
| UNGA   | United Nations General Assembly                    |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund                     |
| UNSDG  | United Nations Sustainable Development Group       |
| USAID  | United States Agency for International Development |
| VAWG   | Violence Against Women and Girls                   |
| VFM    | Value for Money                                    |
| WHO    | World Health Organization                          |

## Executive Summary

### Introduction

The Spotlight Initiative (SI) is a flagship programme of the Secretary-General to end all forms of violence against women and girls (EVAWG) and a model fund for United Nations Development System (UNDS) reform to accelerate progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Spotlight Initiative was launched in December 2017 with a funding commitment of 500 million euros from the European Union (EU) amidst the articulation of UNDS reform as first outlined by the Secretary-General in June 2017.

In 2023, the United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) System-Wide Evaluation Office (SWEO) initiated the final evaluation of the Spotlight Initiative to assess overall performance including its contribution to United Nations (UN) reform. In parallel, the SWEO has undertaken a value for money (VFM) assessment of the Spotlight Initiative to feed into the analysis and reporting of the final evaluation. Both exercises aim to foster accountability, learning and improvement. This VFM assessment responds to observations in the European Court of Auditors' (ECA) Special Report on the Spotlight Initiative.

This VFM assessment is informed by the final evaluation of the Spotlight Initiative and draws on primary and secondary documentation of the Spotlight Initiative and external assessments of the Initiative, as well as data on indirect and direct costs of other programmes and cost recovery fees of UN and non-UN system organizations. The approach and methods draw on a literature review of external reports of VFM assessments, academic publications on approaches, methodologies and practical application of VFM, and studies on effective interventions in the area of violence against women and girls (VAWG).

### Objectives of the value for money assessment

The main objectives of the value for money assessment are to: a) assess the economy, efficiency, effectiveness and equity of the Spotlight Initiative; b) provide inputs to the evaluation of the Spotlight Initiative; c) provide action points on how the Initiative can better integrate VFM dimensions in the design and implementation of the Spotlight Initiative 2.0; and d) contribute to the body of work on undertaking assessments of value for money for complex programmes or initiatives focusing on social and behavioural change.

The main question for the assessment is: "To what extent: has the Initiative managed its resources well; was the Initiative productive in the delivery of organizational outputs; did the Initiative achieve results and create value in an equitable way; and can the Initiative's value be improved? The question will be addressed by consideration of the following sub-questions:

- How well has the Spotlight Initiative managed resources?
- How efficient has the Spotlight Initiative been in terms of delivery of organizational outputs?
- What were the effects and what value has been created by the Spotlight Initiative?
- Has the Spotlight Initiative integrated equity dimensions in its design and implementation?
- How could the Spotlight Initiative add more value for the resources invested?

For this exercise, assessing VFM will be determined as a judgement on how well the available resources are being used and whether the resource use is justified based on observable features of programme delivery, outputs, short-, medium- and long-term outcomes and agreed definitions of what good performance and value look like, informed by comparative data when available.

## **Approach and methodology for the value for money assessment**

The VFM assessment integrates an interdisciplinary approach, combining evaluation theory and practice and economic analysis, drawing on elements from both disciplines. This interdisciplinary approach allows for complementary insights to address the value for money question in the framework of a complex programme. It also allows for a broader and more holistic assessment of value based on a more comprehensive set of criteria and standards that adequately represent the perspectives of different stakeholders. A combination of methods and data sources, as well as a mix of qualitative and quantitative evidence, is utilized to strengthen reliability and validity of data and to better understand and make evaluative judgements on the Spotlight Initiative's value for money. The exercise was participatory and included consultation with key stakeholders for the design of the assessment, validation of data collected and discussion of results.

The assessment is based on value for money criteria of worth (dimensions of performance), sub criteria, performance standards (levels of VFM for each criterion and sub criterion) and indicators aligned to the Spotlight Initiative theory of change. For this exercise four criteria are utilized: economy, efficiency, effectiveness and equity. For each of the overarching criteria, sub criteria describe the most important dimensions or aspects of the criteria that will be examined. Four standards, adapted to the programme, define levels of performance: excellent, good, adequate and poor. The criteria, sub criteria, performance standards and indicators are organized into a VFM rubric or framework, which is the basis for designing the assessment, organizing and analysing the evidence collected and structuring the findings. The VFM framework also presents the evidence needed to address the criteria and methods to be used to gather the evidence.

The evidence gathered includes a mix of quantitative and qualitative data. This exercise utilizes evidence from the Spotlight Initiative independent evaluation, including case studies conducted during the data collection phase, as well as survey data, interviews, Spotlight Initiative planning, programming, monitoring and reporting data and Spotlight Initiative's external assessments, as well as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UN Women, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and global, regional and country level independent evaluations.

The analytical methodology includes descriptive analysis of each stream of evidence, which was verified and triangulated to develop findings in relation to each criterion. A judgement is made related to the level of performance for each criterion, highlighting strengths and weaknesses under each sub criterion.

## **Findings and assessment**

The value for money assessment rated 20 indicators under the four criteria of economy, efficiency, effectiveness and equity (Table 1). For one of the indicators there was insufficient evidence to make a judgement. Of the 20 indicators that were assessed, 12 were rated as good and 7 as adequate. No indicators were assessed as poor. The value for money assessment for the Spotlight Initiative was overall rated as good. Economy, efficiency and effectiveness were rated as good overall while equity was rated as adequate. The Spotlight Initiative has generally met the reasonable expectations and targets and there is an acceptable progress overall, although some improvement is needed for some dimensions of performance. Table 5 provides an overview of the final value for money judgement made for each criterion and sub criterion and their areas of performance.



Table 1: Summary of assessment findings

| Criteria and areas of performance  | Final VFM judgement   |
|--|-----------------------|
| <b>Economy</b>   |                       |
| #1 Indirect average costs of the programme   | Good                  |
| #2 Direct average costs of the programme   | Good                  |
| #3 Costs of interventions (activities)   | Insufficient evidence |
| #4 Human resource management including number and skill set of staff and management of human resources   | Adequate              |
| #5 Leveraging support from partner contributions (monetary and in-kind)  | Good                  |
| <b>Efficiency</b>  |                       |
| #1 Programme has a clear, relevant, evidence-based theory of change to guide programme implementation  | Good                  |
| #2 Delivery of outputs: budget allocation is clear and transparent and based on data and evidence, allocation of resources to the right mix of interventions linked to intended outcomes, delivery of programme as planned | Adequate              |
| #3 Implementing partners are effectively selected, and partnerships are monitored  | Good                  |
| #4 Adaptability and responsiveness to external factors   | Good                  |
| #5 Use of innovation in programme delivery   | Good                  |
| #6 Leveraging support and interventions from other programmes to increase efficiency   | Good                  |
| #7 There are processes in place for identifying and managing risk  | Adequate              |
| #8 Programme management, governance and quality assurance arrangements are working well  | Good                  |
| #9 The results of the programme are being consistently and effectively measured and monitored  | Adequate              |
| #10 Learning and knowledge management is efficient and integrated into decision-making and programming   | Adequate              |
| <b>Effectiveness</b>   |                       |
| #1 Delivery of outcomes and other effects including value created  | Good                  |
| #2 Positive externalities and catalytic effects  | Good                  |
| <b>Equity</b>  |                       |
| #1 Integration of human rights-based approaches at the design phase (needs assessments were undertaken and “leave no one behind” (LNOB) groups were identified, and strategies developed to reach them)                    | Good                  |
| #2 Integration of human rights-based approaches and LNOB in implementation   | Adequate              |
| #3 The programme reached groups identified under the leaving no one behind principle   | Adequate              |

## Economy

The overall value for money assessment of the economy criterion was **good**. Under this criterion five areas of performance were assessed, comprising: indirect costs, direct costs, costs of interventions, human resource management and leveraging of partner contributions. One area of performance, “costs of interventions”, could not be fully assessed due to insufficient evidence although interventions implemented by country programmes under several outcomes align with the “best-buys” and cost-effective interventions identified by independent studies. The Spotlight Initiative demonstrated strengths such as aligning its indirect costs with standard agreements, maintaining reasonable programme management costs and effectively leveraging government and partner support to enhance policy implementation and grassroots

advocacy for VAWG prevention and response. However, it faced challenges including a lack of specific guidelines for costing interventions, underestimated human resource needs leading to staffing gaps and difficulties in securing additional financial backing beyond the initial EU funding.

#### **Main areas for development:**

- For Spotlight Initiative 2.0, and building on the valuable knowledge on EVAWG costs, consider an economic evaluation to build the critical evidence needed to inform policy and resource allocation decisions based on the value for money of interventions and to better understand the societal impacts of programmes at scale.
- Given that the 18-22 per cent management costs are a unique feature of a trust fund, consider documenting the lessons learned from this modality to provide valuable insights for future trust funds.
- Enhance human resource planning and improve the estimation and planning of human resource needs, particularly in regions with smaller budgets and high workloads. Streamline recruitment processes and ensure staffing for key positions, such as the Spotlight Initiative coordinator and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) officer, through more predictable contracts to enhance programme implementation and continuity.
- Increase efforts to broaden the base of financial support by engaging more multilateral and bilateral partners, private sector partners, and local governments to ensure the sustainability and expansion of VAWG prevention and response initiatives.

#### **Efficiency**

The overall value for money assessment of the efficiency criterion was **good**. Under this criterion 10 areas of performance were assessed, comprising: adequacy of the theory of change; delivery of outputs and work plans; partner selection; adaptability and responsiveness; innovation in programming; leveraging other programmes; risk management; programme management, governance and quality assurance; results measurement and monitoring; and learning and knowledge management. The Spotlight Initiative's evidence-based theory of change was relevant, innovative and a strong asset for addressing violence against women and girls comprehensively and holistically. The Spotlight Initiative demonstrated strong responsiveness and adaptability to external factors including political instability, natural disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic, employing creative approaches to adapt implementation. It leveraged existing global programmes to enhance its impact and efficiency and engaged constituency-led civil society organizations as partners, ensuring marginalized groups were meaningfully involved in implementation. However, it faced challenges including: an ambitious and complex results framework that proved challenging to operationalize; an unclear rationale for country selection and budget allocation; initial slow operationalization and implementation rates; complex fund replenishment processes that affected the pace of implementation; inefficiencies in coordination among multiple UN agencies; gaps in monitoring progress; underestimation of risks and the impact of operational issues linked to internal UN system processes; and insufficient integration of learning and knowledge management.

#### **Main areas for development:**

- Design and incorporate an inception phase to ensure stakeholder engagement and systems development to facilitate smoother implementation and avoid delays (human resources, baseline studies etc).
- Document rationale for country selection and budget allocation decisions to ensure clarity and accountability.

- Review mechanisms and processes to facilitate engagement of local, grassroots and constituency-led organizations as partners. Further develop monitoring tools for measuring partner engagement and performance based on lessons learned from Spotlight Initiative 1.0.
- Streamline the multi-stage fund approval and disbursement processes to avoid delays and improve delivery. Review operationalization and disbursement rules such as the “70 per cent delivery rate rule”.
- Re-design and simplify the results framework to ensure adaptability to local contexts for better operationalization.
- Strengthen results-based measurement and improve data reliability and quality assurance systems.
- Develop clear guidelines for cross-learning and replication, supported by a centralized knowledge-sharing platform (where Shine and COSI are clearly mentioned and linked), to facilitate the dissemination of successful strategies and promote scalability.
- Build on the gains made and strengthen national steering committees and civil society national reference groups with clear definitions, adequate compensation and operational support to enhance multi-stakeholder governance.
- Ensure increased coordination and complementarity with existing programmes on gender-based violence and women’s empowerment to increase reach and impact based on successful experiences during Spotlight Initiative 1.0.

## Effectiveness

The overall value for money assessment of the effectiveness criterion was **good**. Under this criterion two areas of performance were assessed, comprising: delivery of outcomes; and positive externalities and catalytic effects. The Spotlight Initiative created value by implementing an evidence-based model for addressing violence against women and girls and incorporating a multi-disciplinary, whole-of-government, comprehensive, rights-based approach, which also integrates civil society organizations (CSOs) as key partners. It contributed to results at output and outcome levels across all six pillars and to important achievements of higher order changes at national and regional levels. The Spotlight Initiative has demonstrated positive externalities, with its model being utilized by non-programme countries. Evidence from the evaluation shows that the model was utilized by countries that were not part of the Spotlight Initiative.

### Main areas for development:

- Improve the reliability and availability of outcome and output data, as well as data on beneficiary reach, to enable comprehensive analysis and assessment of the Initiative’s effects.
- Ensure the sharing of best practices and lessons learned to encourage non-programme countries to adopt the Spotlight Initiative model to address VAWG.
- Foster collaboration with multilateral and bilateral partners to continue and expand under Spotlight Initiative 2.0.

## Equity

The overall value for money assessment of the effectiveness criterion was **adequate**. Under this criterion, three areas of performance were assessed, comprising: integration of human rights-based approaches at the design phase; integration of human rights-based approach including LNOB during implementation; and programme reach of LNOB groups. The Initiative faced challenges such as a limited geographical focus, gaps in reaching all groups and the lack of a robust mechanism to track the impact on marginalized groups, despite efforts to include LNOB principles and substantial funding to national and grassroots organizations.

The identification of communities and groups of people that are vulnerable to being left behind remains inconsistent. Out of the groups identified as at risk of being left behind, persons with disabilities, women and girls, and children and youth are the most frequently cited. However, groups that are often missing from official statistics such as migrants and refugees, or other groups that face discrimination or marginalization receive less attention. In addition, in reporting on the pledge to leave no one behind, there is still insufficient evidence on intersecting inequalities (people that are vulnerable because they are part of more than one category of deprivation) and how this impacts progress on the SDGs.

#### **Main areas for development:**

- Consider strategies for expanding geographical reach to include and reach a broader range of LNOB groups.
- Ensure comprehensive and systematic engagement with all relevant stakeholders, including men and boys, and ensure that this is reflected in the design and inception phase.
- Provide more robust, contextualized guidance on LNOB and resources tailored to specific local contexts and challenges.
- Ensure consistent and equitable support for all civil society organizations, including smaller grassroots organizations, to mainstream LNOB principles effectively and balance financial support and strengthening grassroots organizations, with a focus on long-term sustainability and impact.
- Develop and implement specific indicators and robust data collection methods to comprehensively track the reach and outcomes for LNOB groups.

#### **Integration of value for money dimensions**

In addition to developing a theory of change for the Spotlight Initiative 2.0 that captures resources and inputs, assumptions and the intended process of change, the Spotlight Initiative could consider developing a theory of value creation at the inception phase of the Initiative to identify and define the value that will be created by the Initiative. This extension of the theory of change would contribute to a better understanding of how the Initiative will utilize and convert resources and inputs (for example, funding, expertise, relationships) into new or superior value. The development of a value proposition would entail exploring: how people will benefit from the programme; what kinds of resources are invested in the programme and by whom; what kinds of value the programme will create; from whose perspective does this constitute value; and what the mechanisms are by which the programme will use resources efficiently, effectively, and equitably. A value proposition would also explore creating sufficient value to justify the investment and what factors influence the extent to which resources are transformed into worthwhile value. Having an explicit value proposition would facilitate evaluative judgements on value for money about value creation and effects.

In addition, the integration of a value for money framework designed with a participatory approach at the inception of the Initiative, would guide data collection and monitoring during implementation and serve as a key input and framework for value for money assessments.

## 1. Introduction

1. Spotlight Initiative is a flagship programme of the Secretary-General to end all forms of violence against women and girls (EVAWG) and a model fund for United Nations Development System (UNDS) reform to accelerate progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Spotlight Initiative was launched in December 2017 with a funding commitment of 500 million euros from the European Union (EU) amidst the articulation of UNDS reform as first outlined by the Secretary-General in June 2017. The first phase of the Initiative concluded at the end of 2023 and is presently transitioning to a second phase (Spotlight Initiative 2.0).
2. In 2023, the United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) System-Wide Evaluation Office (SWEO) initiated the final evaluation of the Spotlight Initiative to assess overall performance including its contribution to United Nations (UN) reform. The evaluation was conducted by a team of independent consultants. In parallel, the SWEO has undertaken a value for money (VFM) assessment of the Spotlight Initiative to feed into the analysis and reporting of the final evaluation.<sup>1</sup> This VFM assessment responds to observations in the European Court of Auditors' (ECA) Special Report on the Spotlight Initiative.<sup>2</sup> Both exercises aim to foster accountability, learning and improvement.
3. This VFM assessment is informed by the final evaluation of the Spotlight Initiative and draws on primary and secondary documentation<sup>3</sup> and external assessments of the Initiative, as well as data on indirect and direct costs of other programmes and cost recovery fees of UN and non-UN system organizations. The approach and methods draw on a literature review of external reports of VFM assessments, academic publications on approaches, methodologies and practical application of VFM, and studies on effective interventions in the area of VAWG.<sup>4</sup>
4. The objectives of the value for money assessment are to:
  - Assess the economy, efficiency, effectiveness and equity of the Spotlight Initiative
  - Provide inputs to the evaluation of the Spotlight Initiative
  - Provide action points on how the Initiative can better integrate a VFM dimension in the design of Spotlight Initiative 2.0.

### 1.1 Context

5. The Spotlight Initiative's theory of change (ToC) sets out the framework to support a comprehensive approach to address the drivers of violence against women and girls and harmful practices (VAWG/HP) as well as to provide services and support to mitigate the consequences of violence against women and girls and harmful practices in order to contribute to ending violence against women and girls (Figure 1). The theory of change postulates 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>5</sup> The Spotlight Initiative adopts a comprehensive six-pillar approach for preventing and addressing VAWG: 1) targeting inequitable laws and policies; 2) strengthening institutions; 3) challenging harmful social

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<sup>1</sup> The SWEO has taken on this task given the evaluation team does not have experience undertaking economic analysis.

<sup>2</sup> European Court of Auditors. 2023. Special report 21/2023: The Spotlight Initiative to end violence against women and girls – Ambitious but so far with limited impact.

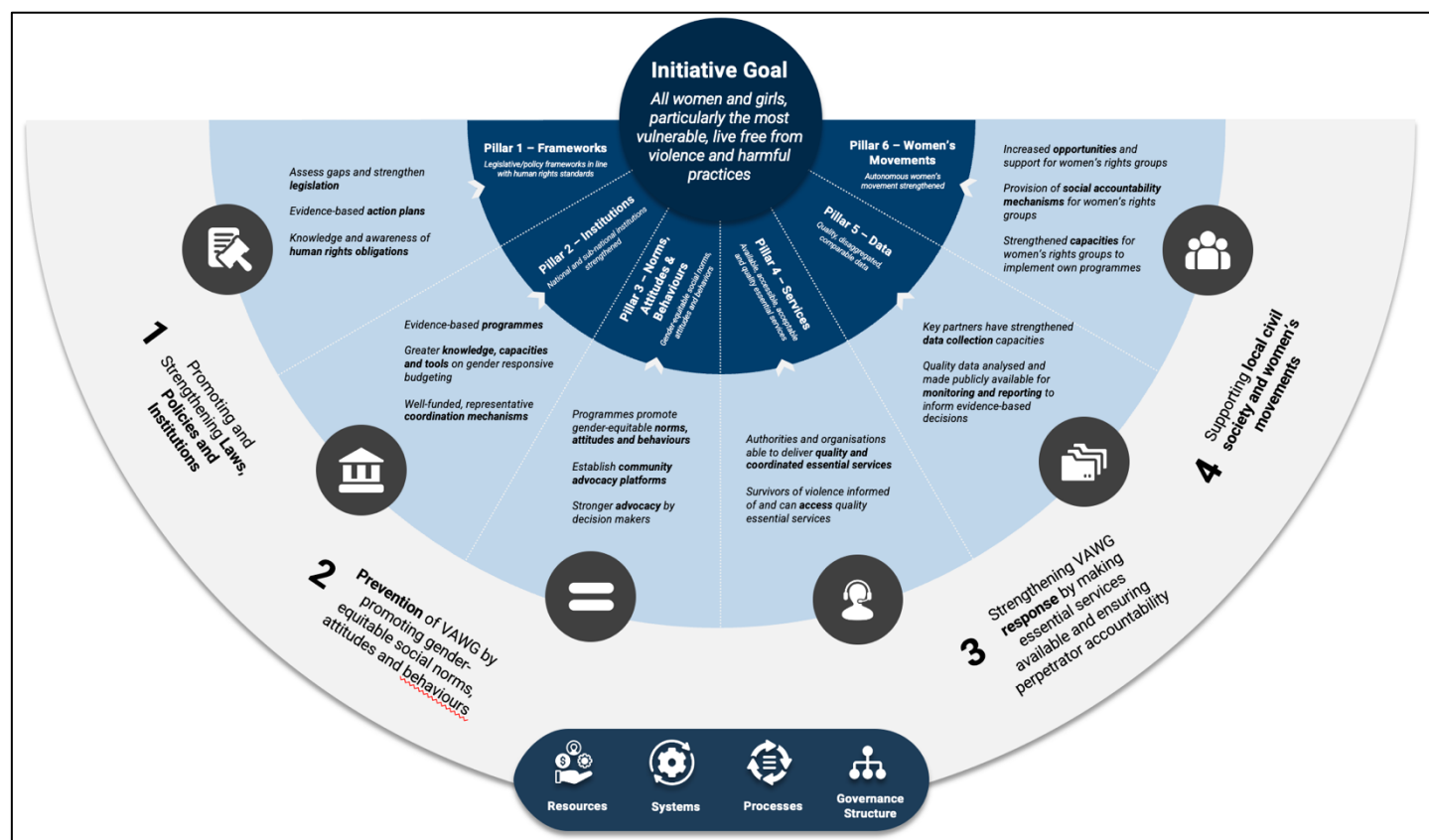
<sup>3</sup> SI officials report (global annual narrative reports 2019-2023; SI programme annual narrative reports 2019-2023, SI impact reports and any other SI reports available publicly); UN Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office (MPTFO) financial reports, UN MPFO Gateway; UN system global, thematic and programme evaluations; independent reviews and evaluations and audits.

<sup>4</sup> The assessment follows the approach and practical guidance in *Assessing Value for Money: The Oxford Policy Management Approach* (2018; 2023) as well as *Value for Investment: Application and Insights* (2023). The assessment draws on the technical note on ensuring value for money in the Global Programme to End Child Marriage and the Department for International Development's (DFID) *Approach to Value for Money* (2011).

<sup>5</sup> Spotlight Initiative. 2022 and 2021 global annual reports.

norms; 4) strengthening services, access to justice and referral systems; 5) strengthening data and tracking systems; and 6) supporting civil society and movement building. Each pillar has an associated outcome that is monitored by three outcome-level indicators as well as multiple output-level indicators.<sup>6</sup> The theory of change identifies key assumptions under each pillar and includes root causes, underlying causes and drivers. The theory of change also identifies cross-cutting principles to be adhered to in all programming: 1) mainstreaming women’s empowerment; 2) leaving no one behind; and 3) civil society organization engagement and participation.<sup>7</sup>

Figure 1: Spotlight Initiative theory of change



Source: Figure from SWEO, reproduced from 2022 Spotlight Initiative Annual Report.

6. 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).

<sup>6</sup> Spotlight Initiative, Annex A: Global Results Framework, 01 January 2021–31 December 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Spotlight Initiative. 2018. Global Annual Report 2017:22.

Figure 2: Overview of Spotlight Initiative country coverage



Source: Figure from SWEQ, reproduced from 2022 Spotlight Initiative Annual Report.

7. The regional component of the Initiative was designed to amplify impact by reaching a larger number of countries. 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.

## 1.2 Approach and methodology

### Questions for assessment

8. The main question for the assessment is: To what extent: has the Initiative managed its resources well; was the Initiative productive in the delivery of organizational outputs; did the Initiative achieve results and create value in an equitable way; and can the Initiative’s value be improved? The question will be addressed by consideration of the following sub-questions:
  - How well has the Spotlight Initiative managed resources?
  - How efficient has the Spotlight Initiative been in terms of delivery of organizational outputs?
  - What were the effects and what value has been created by the Spotlight Initiative?
  - Has the Spotlight Initiative integrated equity dimensions in its design and implementation?
  - How could the Spotlight Initiative add more value for the resources invested?
9. In general, VFM assessments are undertaken at the design stage of interventions, at the point when data requirements are specified. There are relatively few VFM assessments that focus on initiatives in the area of social and behavioural change. However, this is a growing area of interest, reflecting the need for better tools to inform investment decisions. There are some examples of integration of value for money in a social

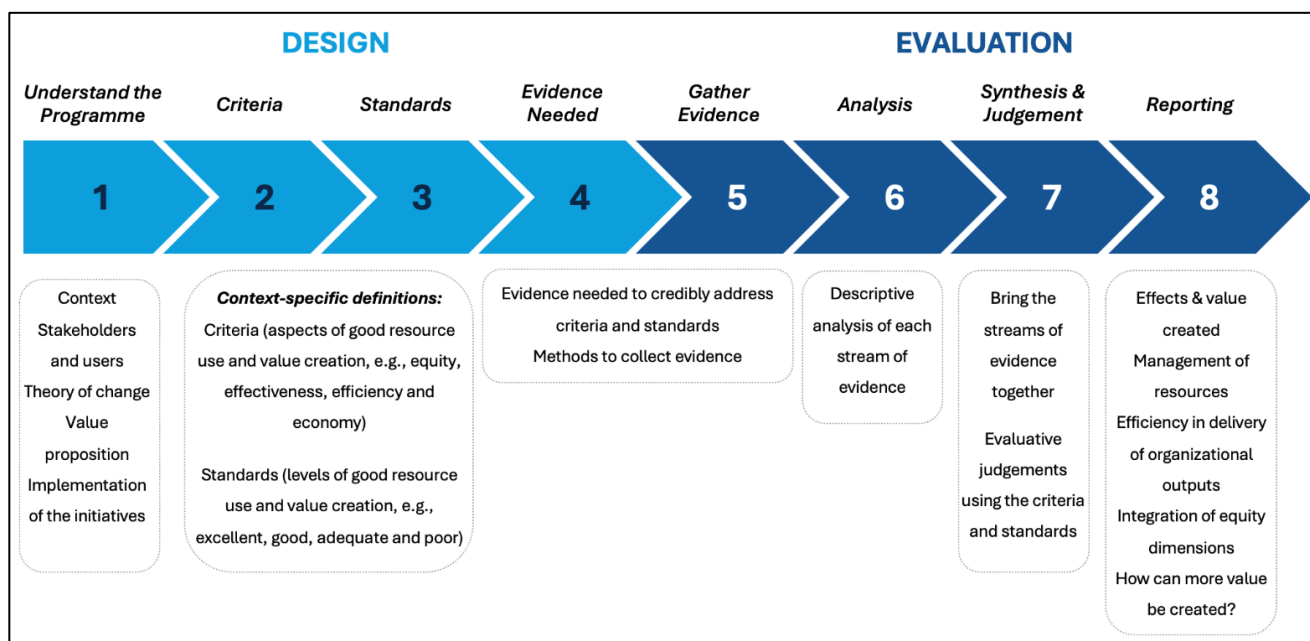
change programme such as the UNFPA-UNICEF Programme to End Child Marriage, but VFM has been rarely utilized when conducting summative evaluations.<sup>8</sup>

- There are several definitions for value for money, mostly focusing on the justified and effective use of resources. For this exercise, assessing VFM will be determined as a judgement on how well the available resources are being used and whether the resource use is justified based on observable features of programme delivery, outputs, short-, medium- and long-term outcomes, and agreed definitions of what good performance and value look like, informed by comparative data when available.<sup>9</sup>

### Approach for the value for money assessment

- The VFM assessment integrates an interdisciplinary approach combining evaluation theory and practice and economic analysis, drawing on elements from both disciplines, including: evaluative thinking; criteria; standards and a framework; a participatory approach; a mixed-methods approach; causal inference; opportunity cost; efficiency; and productivity.<sup>10</sup> This interdisciplinary approach allows for complementary insights to address the VFM 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 that adequately represent the perspectives of different stakeholders.<sup>11</sup> A combination of methods and data sources, as well as a mix of qualitative and quantitative evidence, is utilized to strengthen reliability and validity of data to better understand and make evaluative judgements on the VFM of the Spotlight Initiative. The exercise is participatory and included consultation with key stakeholders for the design of the assessment, validation of data collected and discussion of results.
- The process for the design and conduct of the VFM assessment was based on the following sequence of steps (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Steps of the value for money assessment



Source: Figure from SWEQ, reproduced from King J, Wate D, Namukasa E, Hurrell A, Hansford F, Ward P and Faramarzifar S. 2023. *Assessing Value for Money: the Oxford Policy Management approach*. Oxford Policy Management.

<sup>8</sup> CEPA. 2015. Stop TB Partnership: External Evaluation Final Report.

<sup>9</sup> King, Wate, Namukasa, Hurrell, Hansford, Ward, & Faramarzifar, 2023.

<sup>10</sup> The exercise draws on King & Crocket & Field (2023) Value for Investment: application and insights. Youth primary mental health and addiction evaluation.

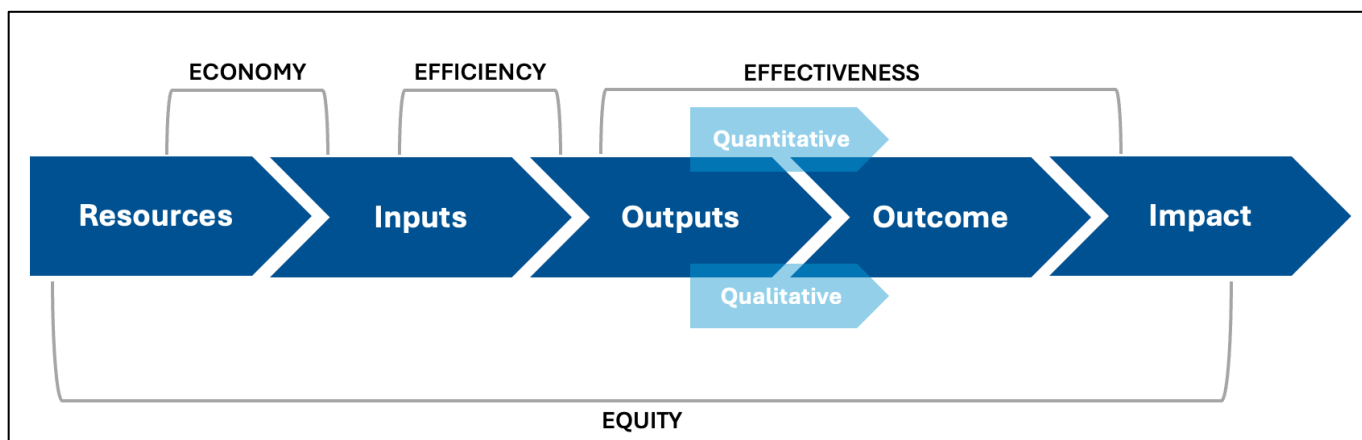
<sup>11</sup> Gargani, J & King, J (2024). Principles and methods to advance value for money. *Evaluation*, 30 (1).



## Criteria and standards

13. The assessment is based on value for money criteria of worth (dimensions of performance that are relevant for good resource use), sub criteria, performance standards (levels of VFM for each criterion and sub criterion) and indicators aligned to the Spotlight Initiative theory of change. For this exercise four criteria are utilized: economy, efficiency, effectiveness and equity. For each of the overarching criteria, sub criteria describe the most important dimensions or aspects of the criteria that will be examined. Four standards, adapted to the programme, define levels of performance: excellent, good, adequate and poor. The criteria, sub criteria, performance standards and indicators are organized into a VFM rubric or framework, which is the basis for designing the assessment, organizing and analysing the evidence collected and structuring the findings. The VFM framework also contains the evidence needed to address the criteria and methods to be used to gather the evidence. The Spotlight Initiative did not contain a VFM framework developed at the time of programme design.
14. Criteria and definitions (Figure 4):
- **Economy:** stewardship of resources
  - **Efficiency:** productivity of organizational actions including delivery of outputs (transformation of inputs by activities into outputs), programme adaptation and ways of working
  - **Effectiveness:** achievement of desired outcomes from outputs and levels of impact
  - **Equity:** Integration of a human rights-based approach, including leaving no one behind in the design and implementation of the Initiative, ensuring that interventions reach the poorest and most marginalized, even if they might be harder or more costly to reach. Target interventions at the right populations, with no person disadvantaged due to social, economic, demographic or geographical differences.

Figure 4: Value for money criteria and definitions



Source: Figure from SWEQ, reproduced from King J, Wate D, Namukasa E, Hurrell A, Hansford F, Ward P and Faramarzifar S. 2023. *Assessing Value for Money: the Oxford Policy Management approach*. Oxford Policy Management.

15. Four standards, adapted to the programme, define levels of performance: excellent, good, adequate and poor (Table 2).<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Standards follow King J & Wate D & Namukasa E & Hurrell A & Hansford F & Ward P & Faramarzifar S (2023): *Assessing value for money: the Oxford Policy Management approach*. Oxford Policy Management.

Table 2: Definitions of the value for money performance standards

| Performance standard | Definition   |
|----------------------|--|
| Excellent            | Meeting or exceeding all reasonable expectations and targets bearing in mind context. Room for incremental improvements.   |
| Good                 | The intervention is generally meeting reasonable expectations and targets, allowing for a few minor exceptions. Some improvements may be needed.   |
| Adequate             | The intervention, though not meeting all expectations and targets, is fulfilling minimum ‘bottom-line’ requirements, and is showing acceptable progress overall. Significant improvements may be needed. |
| Poor                 | The intervention is not fulfilling minimum ‘bottom-line’ requirements or not showing acceptable progress overall. Immediate and major improvements are needed.   |

16. The VFM framework (Table 3) includes criteria, sub criteria, standards, indicators and evidence needed to address the criteria and methods to be used to gather the evidence. For the full VFM framework refer to Annex 1.

Table 3: Value for money framework

| VFM criteria | Sub criteria/ dimensions  | Standard                              | Indicators  |
|--------------|---|---------------------------------------|---|
| Economy      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Management of resources</li> </ul>                                       | Excellent<br>Good<br>Adequate<br>Poor | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Indirect average costs of the programme</li> <li>Direct average costs of the programme including management and monitoring and evaluation (M&amp;E)</li> <li>Costs of interventions (activities)</li> <li>Human resource management: number and skill set of staff. Strengths and challenges in human resources management</li> <li>Leveraging support from partner contributions (monetary and in-kind)</li> </ul>  |
| Efficiency   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delivery of outputs, ways of working and programme adaptation</li> </ul> | Excellent<br>Good<br>Adequate<br>Poor | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Initiative has a clear, relevant, evidence-based theory of change to guide implementation</li> <li>Delivery of outputs: budget allocation is clear and transparent and based on data and evidence, allocation of resources to the right mix of interventions linked to intended outcomes and delivery of programme as planned (timely delivery and implementation rates)</li> <li>Implementing partners are effectively selected and partnerships are monitored</li> <li>The Initiative adapts and responds to external factors</li> <li>The Initiative uses innovation in programme delivery</li> <li>The Initiative leverages support or interventions from other programmes to increase efficiency</li> <li>There are processes in place for identifying and managing risk</li> <li>Programme management, governance and quality assurance arrangements are working well</li> <li>The results of the Initiative are being consistently and effectively monitored</li> </ul> |

|               |  |                                       |   |
|---------------|--|---------------------------------------|---|
|               |  |                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learning and knowledge management is efficient and integrated into decision-making and programming</li> </ul>  |
| Effectiveness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contribution to outcomes and other effects</li> </ul>                               | Excellent<br>Good<br>Adequate<br>Poor | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Results of the Initiative: contribution to outcomes and impact</li> <li>Value created by the initiative (tangible and intangible effects)</li> </ul>   |
|               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Positive externalities and catalytic effects of the Initiative</li> </ul>           | Excellent<br>Good<br>Adequate<br>Poor | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Influence of the Initiative goes beyond Initiative resources, geographical areas of implementation and partners</li> <li>Use of Spotlight Initiative model by non-programme countries</li> </ul>   |
| Equity        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Equity of design</li> <li>Equity of delivery</li> <li>Equity of outcomes</li> </ul> | Excellent<br>Good<br>Adequate<br>Poor | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Integration of human rights-based approaches at the design phase (needs assessments were undertaken and groups identified under the leaving no one behind principle (LNOB groups) were identified, and strategies developed to reach them)</li> <li>Integration of human rights-based approaches and LNOB in implementation</li> <li>The Initiative has reached LNOB groups</li> </ul> |

### Data collection and analysis

- The evidence gathered includes a mix of quantitative and qualitative data. This exercise utilizes evidence from the Spotlight Initiative independent evaluation, including case studies conducted during the data collection phase as well as survey data, interviews, Spotlight Initiative’s planning, programming, monitoring and reporting data, Spotlight Initiative’s external assessments along with UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women, and UNICEF global, regional and country level independent evaluations.
- The analytical methodology includes descriptive analysis of each stream of evidence, which was verified and triangulated to develop findings in relation to each criterion. A judgement is made related to the level of performance for each criterion, highlighting strengths and weaknesses under each sub criterion.

### Limitations of the value for money assessment and mitigation strategies

- A VFM framework was not part of the design of the Initiative, therefore certain data needed for a VFM assessment have not been collected throughout programme implementation. As this is a retrospective VFM assessment, it is based on data and evidence available at the end of the programme combined with limited additional data collected within the short time frame to undertake the assessment. The VFM assessment team was not able to access internal data from UN agencies for comparability purposes, particularly to assess cost of activities at the country level.
- The short duration of programme implementation poses challenges in assessing contribution to long-term effects or impacts. Additionally, there is limited availability of outcome level data as the results framework does not adequately capture contribution to outcome and impact level changes. The assessment draws on evidence from the final Spotlight Initiative evaluation and other evaluative evidence, as well as Spotlight Initiative data to assess effectiveness to the greatest extent possible. The Spotlight Initiative has a range of effects that are intangible and hard to measure and quantify. The assessment utilized the “most significant change” approach to capture intangible effects and the value created by the programme.

## 2. Findings and Assessment

### 2.1 Economy

#### Sub criterion: Management of resources

| Area of Performance # 1   | Final Evaluative Judgement |
|---|----------------------------|
| Indirect average costs of the programme   | Good                       |
| Spotlight's Initiative 7 per cent indirect cost rate is aligned with EU agreements for external cooperation funding and with agreements between the European Commission and the United Nations. The cost rate is comparable to other indirect fees charged by various UN entities. Past fee waivers for lower rates of indirect costs were only granted in exceptional circumstances. Non-UN entities have generally charged indirect cost rates above 7 per cent. In addition to 7 per cent, a fee of less than 1 per cent of direct costs was retained by the Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office (MPTFO) as administrative agent fees. This is a standard charge for a UN system trust fund. |                            |

21. At the United Nations and other organizations, costs are categorized as direct (directly linked and traceable to a programme or project and benefits derived by programme or project beneficiaries) or indirect (not directly linked or traceable to a programme or project). Indirect costs support the implementation of the action and are associated with the organizational structure and services necessary to support implementation of programmes (the costs of running the organization). Indirect costs are allocated to programmes or projects as a percentage fee on direct costs. Examples of indirect costs of an organization's activities include: (a) corporate executive management; (b) corporate resource mobilization, partnership relations and corporate advocacy and communications; (c) corporate accounting and financial management staff; (d) institutional legal support; (e) corporate human resources management; (f) country office, regional or corporate management; and (g) internal audit and investigation function at headquarters and unit levels.<sup>13</sup> At the United Nations, as well as in other organizations, cost recovery rates (indirect cost fees) are important to avoid core funding subsidizing the indirect costs of non-core programmes and therefore depleting core resources.<sup>14</sup>
22. For external cooperation funding, the European Commission has capped indirect costs at 7 per cent of the direct costs.<sup>15</sup> The Financial and Administrative Framework Agreement (FAFA) between the European Commission and the United Nations sets a fixed percentage of 7 per cent (maximum) of direct eligible costs as indirect costs.<sup>16</sup> In alignment with this, under the delegation agreement between the European Commission and the United Nations, indirect costs for the Spotlight Initiative were calculated as 7 per cent of the direct costs. This standard indirect cost rate is also in line with the rate established as part of the overall cost recovery policy by the Executive Boards of UN entities, that is to say, UN Member States, including EU countries and is a harmonized cost recovery policy across the UN system. For thematic programmes, such as the Spotlight Initiative, UNFPA, UNDP, UNICEF and UN Women, 7 per cent of indirect

<sup>13</sup> Joint comprehensive cost recovery policy. Summary. DP/FPA-ICEF-UNW/2020/XXX. Executive Board of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS Second regular session 2020; Executive Board of UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS Second regular session 2024, DP/FPA-ICEF-UNW/2024/1, 12 June 2024.

<sup>14</sup> In the UN, cost recovery is guided by General Assembly resolution 71/243 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities to develop the United Nations system (QCPR).

<sup>15</sup> Common Implementation Rules (CIR – REGULATION (EU) No 236/2014).

<sup>16</sup> Financial and administrative framework agreement between the European Union represented by the European Commission and the United Nations, 31.12.2018.

<sup>17</sup> Delegation Agreement Operational Guidelines for Joint Programmes and Multi-Donor Trust Funds using Pass-Through Modalities Fiduciary Management Oversight Group September 2020; Financial and Administrative Framework Agreement between the European Community, represented by the Commission of the European Communities, and the United Nations, 29 April 2003; Independent Review of the Management Unit Functions July 2022.

costs were charged across the board.<sup>18</sup> In addition, 1 per cent was retained by the MPTFO as administrative agent fees. UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women and UNDP (who were implementing Spotlight Initiative), agreed to joint harmonized cost classifications and a joint cost recovery policy in the UN system.<sup>19</sup>

23. As of 31 December 2023, USD 529,868,747 was contributed by donors (contributed to Spotlight Initiative from EU, Portugal and Albania), and expenditure stood at USD 499,717,297. Approximately USD 32.6 million (6.99 per cent of direct costs) constituted indirect costs to 11 recipient UN organizations (RUNOs).<sup>20</sup> The Spotlight Initiative’s 7 per cent indirect costs fee for joint UN and pooled programming is comparable to other fees charged by various UN entities. Due to internal efforts to harmonize cost-recovery practices between UN agencies for joint programmes and single-agency programmes to reduce competition, fee waivers for lower fees were only granted in exceptional circumstances (see Annex 3 for data on agency waivers 2017-2022). For example, a 2022 UNICEF report<sup>21</sup> on resources highlights waivers granted for “exceptional cases where the funding would otherwise have been at risk or where it would have had a negative impact on the ability to perform urgent and life-saving work in humanitarian contexts.” Unlike joint UN or pooled programming, single UN programmes incur an additional coordination levy of 1 per cent on top of the 7-8 per cent indirect costs charged, indicating the economic value of joint UN or pooled programming as utilized by the Spotlight Initiative.
24. Table 4 sets out indirect fees charged by various UN and non-UN entities as part of their cost recovery processes. Overall, Spotlight Initiative’s indirect fee of 7 per cent is within the standard, is reasonable and is coherent with established decisions by Executive Boards, European Commission Contribution Agreements<sup>22</sup> with multilateral organizations, FAFA,<sup>23</sup> UN General Assembly resolutions (71/243; 67-226) and with the Guidance Note on a New Generation of Joint Programmes.<sup>24</sup> Non-UN entities have generally reflected indirect cost rates above 7 per cent, as depicted in the table.

Table 4: Examples of indirect costs for UN entities and non-UN entities

| Organization   | Indirect costs | Remarks   |
|--|----------------|---|
| Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office -administered funds and programmes | 7%             | Relevant programmes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Action for Girls and Young Women in Mozambique<sup>25</sup></li> <li>Joint Programme on Gender-Based Violence Zambia<sup>26</sup></li> <li>JP DRC Fight Against Gender-Based Violence (GBV) – JAD<sup>27</sup></li> <li>Promoting women and girls’ leadership in the socioeconomic and health response to COVID-19 in Tunisia<sup>28</sup></li> </ul> |

<sup>18</sup> Joint comprehensive proposal on the cost-recovery policy. Joint briefing on cost recovery with UNICEF, UNFPA, UN Women and UNDP. 30 November 2023.

<sup>19</sup> DP/FPA-ICEF-UNW/2020/CRP.1; Independent Review of the Management Unit Functions July 2022.

<sup>20</sup> UN MPTFO Consolidated Annual Financial Report 2023.

<sup>21</sup> Report on the implementation of the Integrated Results and Resources Framework of the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2022-2025.

<sup>22</sup> “The European Commission, a major donor to some of the agencies, has insisted on retaining the 7% fee in its multi-year agreements with the agencies.” DP/FPA-ICEF-UNW/2016/CRP.1, September 2016.

<sup>23</sup> Financial and Administrative Framework Agreement between the European Community, represented by the Commission of the European Communities, and the United Nations, 29 April 2003.

<sup>24</sup> Each RUNO will recover indirect costs at the established rate of 7%. Operating procedures for countries adopting the “delivering as one” approach, 2014; Guidance Note on a New Generation of Joint Programmes – Annexes, 2022.

<sup>25</sup> UN MPTFO: Action for Girls and Young Women in Mozambique.

<sup>26</sup> UN MPTFO: Joint Programme on Gender-Based Violence Zambia.

<sup>27</sup> UN MPTFO: Joint Programme, Fight Against Gender Based Violence: Justice, Empowerment, and Dignity for Women and Girls in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

<sup>28</sup> UN MPTFO: Promoting women and girls’ leadership in the socio-economic and health response to COVID-19 in Tunisia.

|                                       |               |  |
|---------------------------------------|---------------|--|
| UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA and UN Women      | 7-8%          | Harmonized cost-recovery rate for four agencies of 7% (8% for UN Women) for thematic contributions   |
| World Bank                            | 12%           | Revised Cost Recovery Framework 2021: 12% flat fee for World Bank-executed activities <sup>29</sup>  |
| World Health Organization (WHO)       | 7%-13%        | WHO utilizes diverse indirect cost recovery approaches in tandem: <sup>30</sup> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A flat indirect cost recovery rate of 13%</li> <li>• European Commission: 7% indirect costs</li> </ul> Indirect costs for partnerships with WHO: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stop TB Partnership: 13% programme support costs<sup>31</sup></li> <li>• Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health: 13% programme support costs</li> <li>• Roll Back Malaria: 13% programme support costs</li> </ul> |
| Organization of American States (OAS) | 13% (minimum) | OAS Indirect Cost Recovery (ICR) Guidelines and Procedures (Revision 2): Donors may request the indirect costs to be calculated based as a percentage of direct costs, in which case the effective cost % would be higher than 13%, but never lower <sup>32</sup>  |
| Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation       | 15% (maximum) | Indirect costs of up to 15% for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and multilateral organizations <sup>33</sup>   |

| Area of Performance # 2   | Final Judgement | Evaluative |
|---|-----------------|------------|
| Direct average costs of the programme   | Good            |            |
| <p>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. 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 programme management costs of 18-22 per cent are in line with allocations by other programmes. This cost capping mechanism for specific expenses facilitated comparisons across different countries and highlighted a novel approach to addressing VAWG.</p> |                 |            |

25. Direct costs are defined as a cost that can be attributed wholly or partially to an operation, programme or project. They include costs associated with providing direct management and other support functions. Direct costs are financed as identifiable components of an operation, programme, or project (specifically, staff and other personnel costs, travel, contractual services, operational expenses, procurement, fellowships and grants).<sup>34</sup>

<sup>29</sup> World Bank Trust Funds: New Cost Recovery Framework – 2021.

<sup>30</sup> WHO's cost-recovery mechanisms: programme support costs.

<sup>31</sup> Independent External Evaluation of the Global Stop TB Partnership.

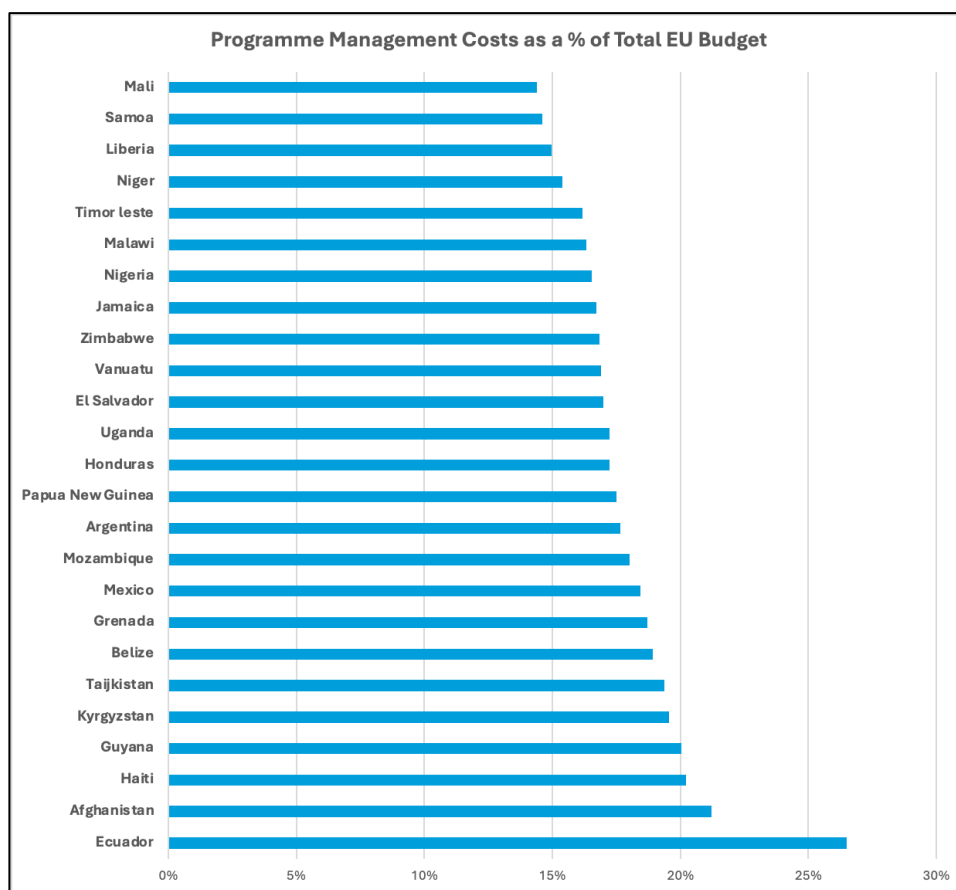
<sup>32</sup> OAS Indirect Cost Recovery (ICR) Guidelines and Procedures (Revision 2). 2019.

<sup>33</sup> Gates Foundation Indirect Cost Policy.

<sup>34</sup> DP/FPA-ICEF-UNW/2018/1 Joint report on cost recovery: Examples of direct costs relating to programmes and projects include: (a) costs of missions and travel incurred specifically to carry out or support project activities; (b) cost of staff and consultants hired for the project; (c) cost of policy advisory services (fully costed: staff cost, share of office rent, utilities, communications, supplies and office security); (d) cost of processing transactional services (finance, administration, procurement, human resources, logistics); (e) equipment, including information technology equipment, maintenance, licenses and support for the programme/project; and (f) programme/project audit and evaluation fees.

26. According to the EU Contribution Agreement for the Spotlight Initiative, eligible direct costs: a) include those necessary for carrying out the action, those directly attributable to it, those arising as a direct consequence of its implementation and those charged in proportion to the actual use; b) are incurred in accordance with the provisions of the agreement signed; c) are actually incurred by the organization, that is, they represent real expenditure definitely and genuinely borne by the organization; d) are reasonable, justified, comply with the principle of sound financial management and are in line with the usual practices of the organization regardless of their source of funding; e) are incurred during the implementation period with the exception of costs related to final report, final evaluation, audit and other costs linked to the closure of the action, which may be incurred after the implementation period; and f) are identifiable and backed by supporting documents, in particular determined and recorded in accordance with the accounting practices of the organization.
27. Direct costs constitute the largest expense category. Generally, managing multi-donor trust funds and implementing complex multi-partner or joint programmes incurs extra costs for coordination, quality assurance, monitoring and reporting. Furthermore, the European Union’s Delegation Agreement stipulates consultation, approval, visibility and reporting requirements, which increase the implementation costs. Both the UN entities implementing the action and the Spotlight Initiative Secretariat incur these direct costs.<sup>35</sup>

Figure 5: Programme management costs by country

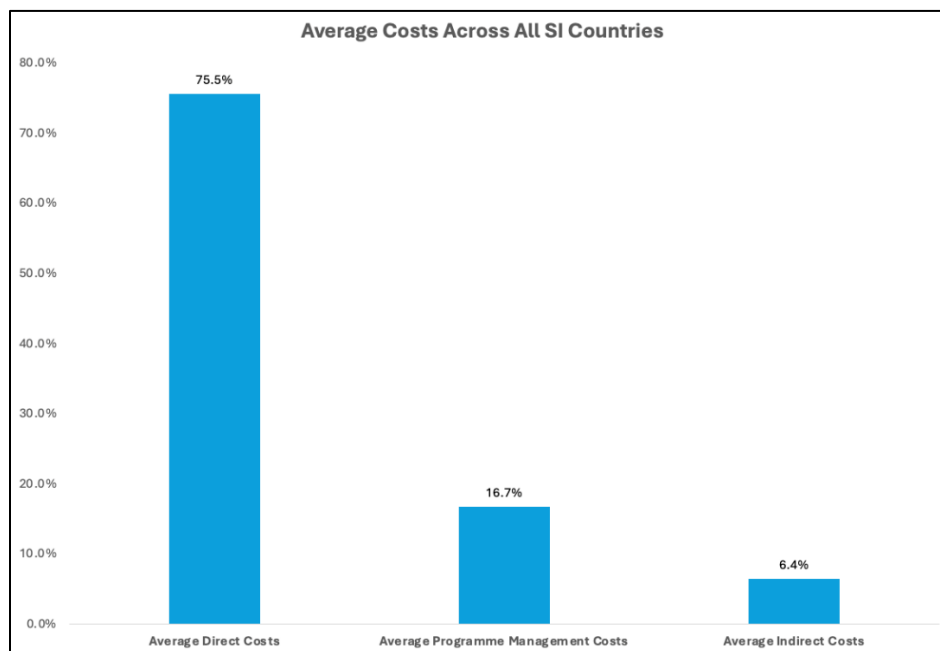


Sources: UN MPTFO Gateway, Spotlight Initiative country programme documents, OSC approved budgets provided by the Global Spotlight Initiative Secretariat.

<sup>35</sup> Meta-Review (Hera), 2022 & 2023.

28. Spotlight Initiative established a cost capping mechanism for specific types of expenses, which is not a standard practice in inter-agency pooled funds, as cost management depends significantly on the unique programming requirements and theory of change of each trust fund. As part of its direct costs, the programme management costs were capped at 18-22 per cent, covering essential day-to-day programme implementation activities. These included comprehensive programme design, analytical capacity for intervention implementation, quality control of programme interventions, technical assistance, policy advisory functions, advocacy at global, regional, and country levels, comprehensive knowledge management, application of the leave no-one behind principle, and reporting at country and regional levels. The 18-22 per cent cost ceilings were approved by the Operational Steering Committee (OSC) (comprised of European Commission and UN representatives) to facilitate the comparison of programme effectiveness costs across different countries when approving country and regional investments. Spotlight Initiative programme management expenses ranged from 18 per cent to 22 per cent of the total direct costs. While these direct costs varied across programme countries, the average was 16.7 per cent, which is slightly below the established range of 18-22 per cent (Figure 5).
29. Excluding the direct management expenses of 18-22 per cent, an average of 76 per cent of the total budget was allocated to programme activities across all six pillars and country programmes. Programme activities addressed key areas such as legislative and policy reforms, strengthening institutions, prevention and social norms change, ensuring access to quality services, supporting data and evidence generation, and promoting women's movements and civil society engagement. However, this percentage varied by region and country context (Figure 6). For comprehensive financial details, see Annex 3.

Figure 6: Average Spotlight Initiative costs



Sources: UN MPTFO Gateway, Spotlight Initiative country programme documents, OSC approved budgets provided by the Global Spotlight Initiative Secretariat.

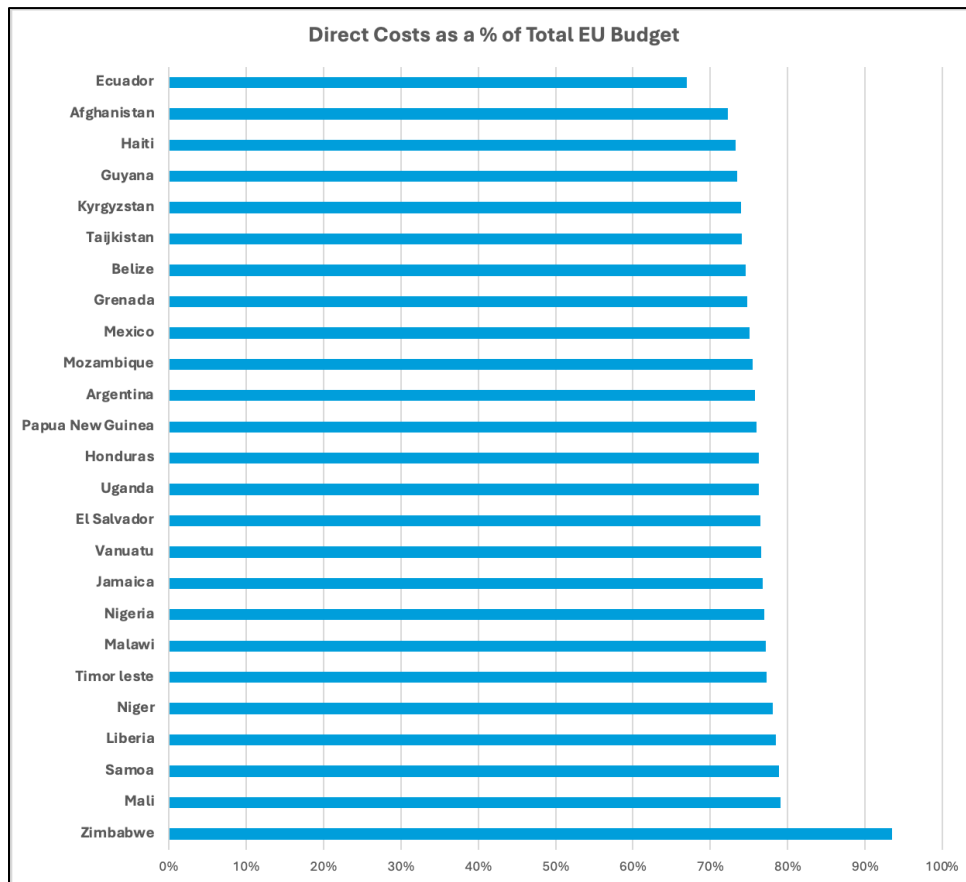
30. Direct costs associated with global fund coordination, covering overall coordination and monitoring and evaluation, amounted to approximately USD 23,009,528 by the end of 2023 out of an approved budget of USD 26,045,946 (Figure 7).<sup>36</sup> The monitoring and evaluation costs amounted to 3 per cent of programme costs. Activities included diverse evaluative and learning exercises such as mid-term assessments (MTAs), meta-reviews, thematic assessment on civil society organizations, compendium of good practices, five

<sup>36</sup> Consolidated Annual Financial Report of the Administrative Agent. Spotlight Initiative Fund. 1 to 31 December 2023.



focused thematic studies, one scoping and evaluability evaluation and one final evaluation. No data are available currently on expenditure on monitoring and evaluation at regional and country levels. The 3 per cent of programme costs is reasonable and standard costs for monitoring and evaluation based as a percentage of programme funds spent by UN agencies on evaluation only (up to 3 per cent). This amount is in line with the new Guidance Note on a New Generation of Joint Programmes<sup>37</sup> that recommends an indicative allocation of 3 per cent to 5 per cent of funds for monitoring, reporting and evaluation.

Figure 7: Spotlight Initiative direct costs



Sources: UN MPTFO Gateway, Spotlight Initiative country programme documents, OSC approved budgets provided by the Global Spotlight Initiative Secretariat.

31. The established 18-22 per cent of programme management costs for each Spotlight Initiative programme was unique to the Spotlight Initiative trust fund, making comparisons to other trust funds not feasible. Relevant joint programmes such as the UNFPA-UNICEF female genital mutilation (FGM)<sup>38</sup> and UNFPA-UNICEF child marriage<sup>39</sup> programmes do not have a distinct programme management cost budget, however the joint programme on female genital mutilation allocated 26 per cent of its budget to general operating and direct costs at the country level. The Global Partnership for Results-Based Approaches<sup>40</sup> allocated 19 per cent of its budget to preparation and supervision, 6 per cent to technical assistance and knowledge dissemination, and 3 per cent to programme management and administration expenses. These allocations are in line with the direct management costs of the Spotlight Initiative. The World Bank Financial

<sup>37</sup> Each RUNO will recover indirect costs at the established rate of 7 per cent. Operating Procedures for Countries Adopting the “Delivering As One” Approach, 2014; Guidance Note on a New Generation of Joint Programmes – Annexes, 2022.

<sup>38</sup> Joint Evaluation of the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation: Accelerating Change Phase III (2018-2021) 2021 Evaluation.

<sup>39</sup> UNICEF 2023. Joint Evaluation of Phase II of the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage.

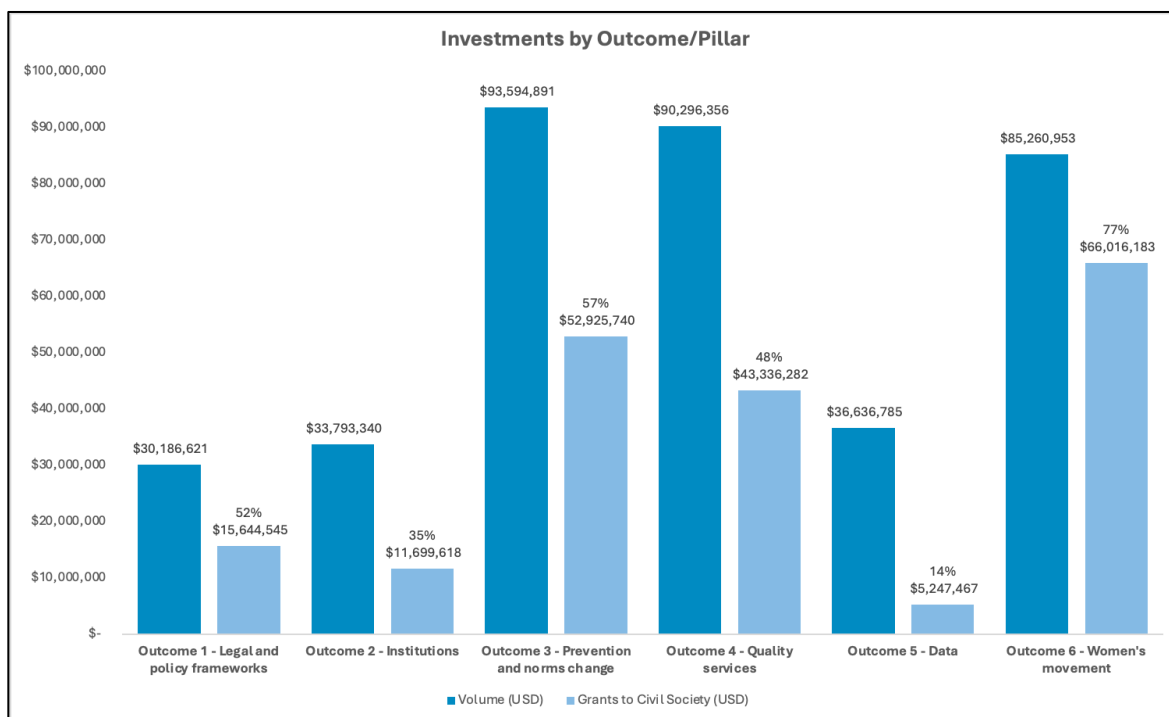
<sup>40</sup> The Global Partnership for Results-Based Approaches: Annual Report 2022.

Intermediary Fund’s new cost recovery structure has an indirect rate on personnel costs including staff benefits capped at 17 per cent, while indicating that a full cost recovery of overhead costs probably requires an indirect rate of between 28 and 30 per cent<sup>41</sup>.

| Area of Performance # 3   | Final Evaluative Judgement             |
|---|--|
| Costs of interventions (activities)   | <b>Insufficient evidence to assess</b> |
| <p>There were no specific guidelines for costing interventions in the Spotlight Initiative, leaving the process to individual RUNOs and their experience with costing VAWG activities implemented by them at the country level. Data on expenditure at the activity level for all Spotlight Initiative country programmes were available. The costs of interventions varied significantly across regions and types of EVAWG activities, reflecting differences in design, geographic location and regional programmatic focus. The largest Spotlight Initiative investments were in prevention and norms change (Outcome 3) and quality services (Outcome 4), aligning with the “best-buys” and cost-effective interventions identified by independent studies. Internal data for individual RUNOs at the activity level were not available for comparability purposes.</p> |  |

32. Spotlight Initiative costs of interventions (at the activity level) by UNSDG harmonized category and by implementing agency are summarized in the Operational Steering Committee-approved country programme document budgets. Countries were allocated amounts ranging from 2 to 35 million USD, which the RUNOs utilized to design and implement activities across the six pillars collectively aimed at achieving specific outputs to contribute to the desired outcomes. RUNOs and national governments decided on relevant interventions in line with national priorities and needs, relative to the available budget. The latest data available show that the largest investments were in prevention and norm change (Outcome 3) and quality services (Outcome 4), aligning with “best-buy” and cost-effective interventions (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Investments by outcomes



Sources: Global Spotlight Initiative Secretariat, UN MPTFO Gateway & Consolidated Financial Report May 2024.

<sup>41</sup> Norad. 2019. Evaluation of Norway’s Multilateral Partnerships Portfolio for The World Bank and UN Inter-Agency Trust Funds. Annexes.

33. Some RUNOs provided guidelines for costing interventions for a small percentage of programmes outside of VAWG. However, there were no costing guidelines for the Spotlight Initiative,<sup>42</sup> leaving the costing of interventions to the individual RUNOs and their specific experience of costing VAWG activities for similar programmes. This is not an unusual practice in the UN system. UNICEF, for example, does not collect information on the cost effectiveness of its gender-based violence and VAWG programming, unit costs or the relative cost of delivering different gender-based violence and VAWG programmes.<sup>43</sup> A UNICEF helpdesk report<sup>44</sup> on costing gender-based violence core services in humanitarian settings noted that costing gender-based violence interventions remains challenging. First, the data and information are not readily available to the public. Secondly, there is a lack of (rigorous) studies or evaluations focusing on the costings of gender-based violence or VAWG. Thirdly, the costs of activities and services are highly dependent on the country context. The level of service provision across countries is likely to produce significant differences in cost estimates. Fourthly, non-service-based programme activities, such as community engagement and empowerment, can be even harder to cost, particularly in emergency settings. To address this costing limitation, UNICEF, for example, has recently launched a new research project on the costing of gender-based violence services in emergencies.<sup>45</sup> Internal data for individual RUNOs at the activity level were not available for comparability purposes.
34. Costs of interventions at the activity level (expenditure) are available for all Spotlight Initiative country programmes. The costs of interventions were examined in three Spotlight Initiative countries (Malawi, Kyrgyzstan and Samoa). For these three programme countries, all activity costs were extracted and categorized by typology of intervention, acknowledging that this process is not free from bias.<sup>46</sup> The Spotlight Initiative identified specific types of violence that are prevalent in certain regions and focused its actions on five geographical regions and the types of violence prevalent in each. For example, in Africa, the focus was on sexual and gender-based violence, with a focus on harmful practices and sexual and reproductive health and rights, while in Asia, the focus was on trafficking in human beings, sexual and gender-based violence and child marriage. In the Pacific region, the focus was on domestic violence and intimate partner violence. The costs of interventions by type are different from one region to the other, as illustrated by service delivery costs, for example. Figures 9, 10 and 11 show the different typologies of activities implemented in the three Spotlight Initiative programme countries, evidencing variability in priorities by country and costs by context. For this assessment it was not possible to compare activity costs of Spotlight Initiative with costs of single agency or joint programme implementation given the lack of access to internal data. For more information on activity costs see Annex 3.

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<sup>42</sup> KII.

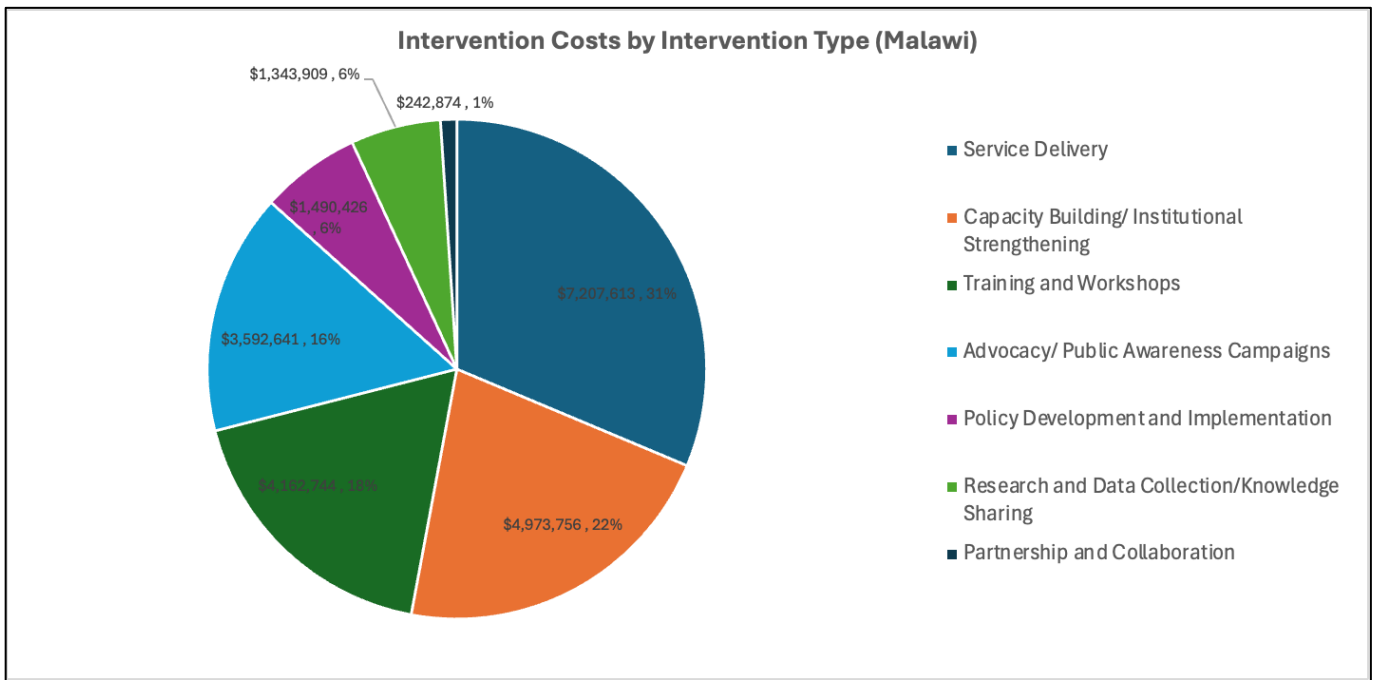
<sup>43</sup> UNICEF. Evaluation Report Child Protection Section Programme Division, December 2016.

<sup>44</sup> UNICEF. Helpdesk report, Costing GBV Core Services in Humanitarian Settings, January 2021.

<sup>45</sup> UNICEF. Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies Research Initiatives, n.d.

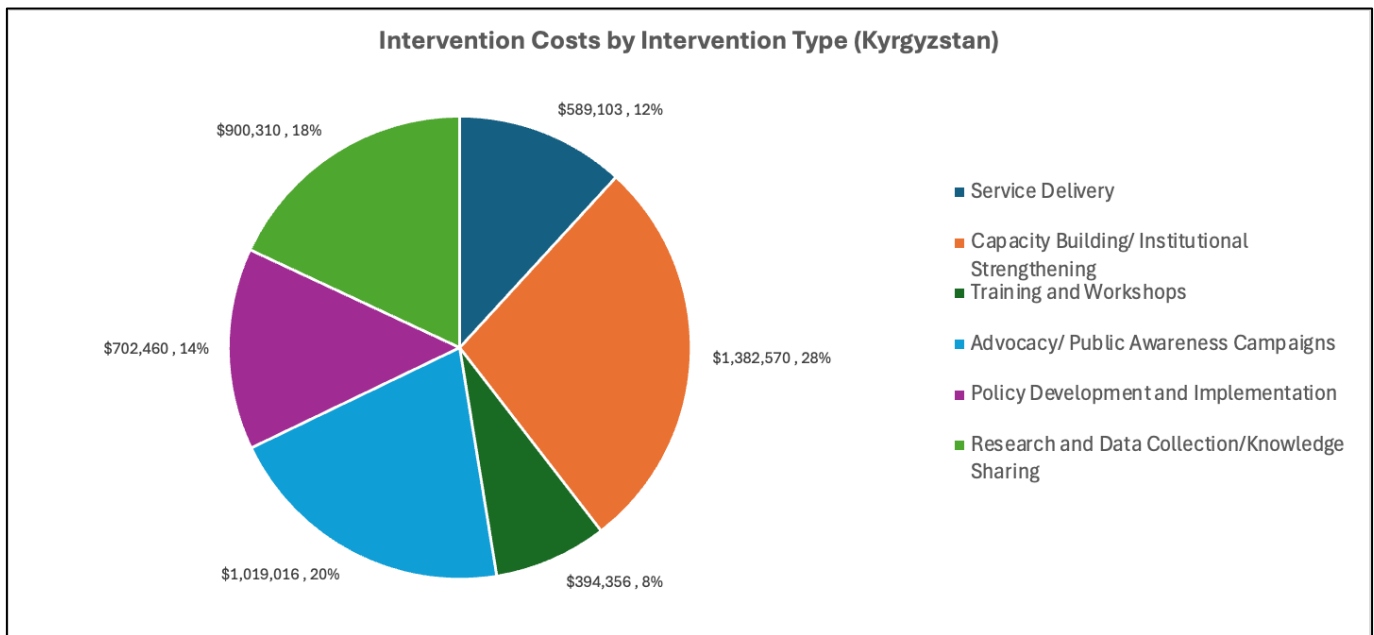
<sup>46</sup> The table is only for illustration purpose, and not grounded in a scientific methodology.

Figure 9: Intervention costs by type: Malawi Spotlight Initiative country programme



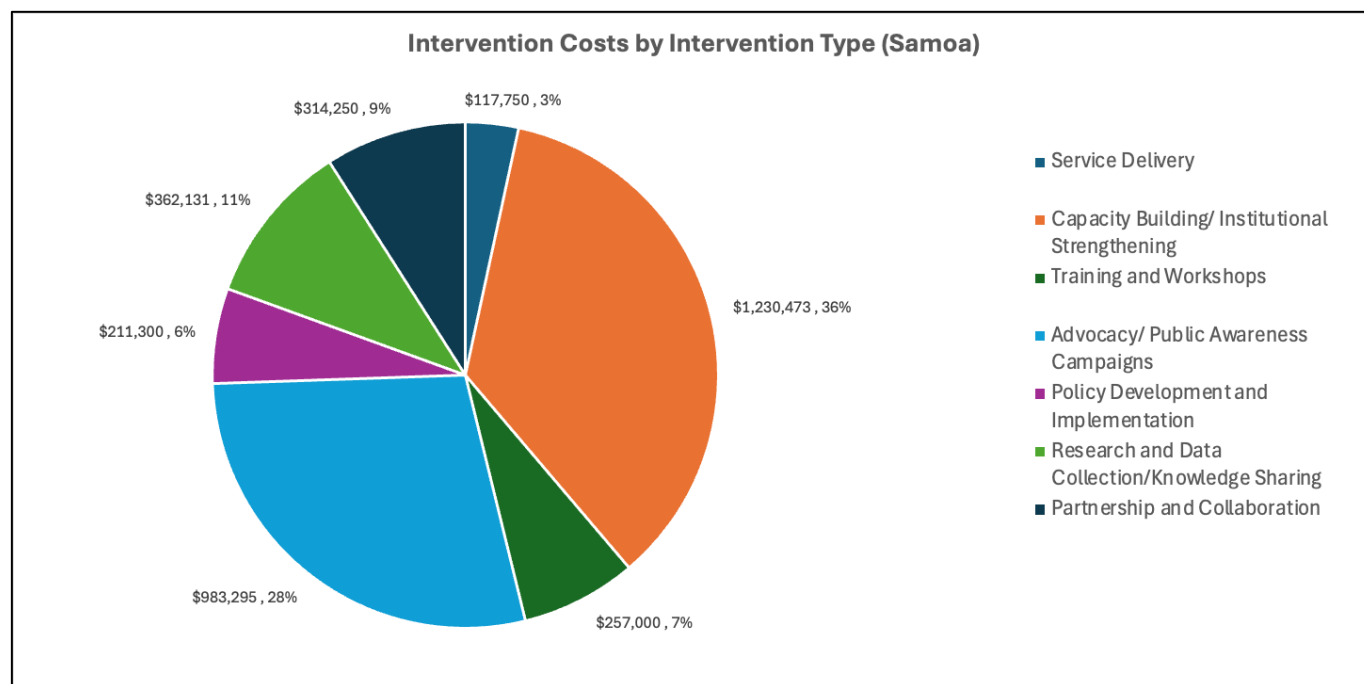
Sources: Spotlight Initiative country programme documents, OSC approved budgets provided by the Global Spotlight Initiative Secretariat, May 2024.

Figure 10: Intervention costs by type: Kyrgyzstan Spotlight Initiative country programme



Sources: Spotlight Initiative country programme documents, OSC approved budgets provided by the Global Spotlight Initiative Secretariat.

Figure 11: Intervention costs by intervention type: Samoa Spotlight Initiative country programme



Sources: Spotlight Initiative country programme documents, OSC approved budgets provided by the Global Spotlight Initiative Secretariat.

35. Evidence of cost effectiveness is increasingly sought to support investment decisions in order to help identify the best value for money interventions and distribute resources according to their highest use possible. A recent 2024<sup>47</sup> study on the costs of interventions to reduce VAWG found that, while some evidence of cost effectiveness is emerging for interventions in specific contexts, overall, recent evidence on the costs and cost effectiveness of VAWG prevention interventions remains limited. The study concluded that four types of interventions were cost-effective in more than one setting or study, providing some evidence of the value for money for these programmes in specific contexts. These were parenting programmes, women’s empowerment programmes, community activism and programmes wherein couples and individuals focused on gender, violence, or substance abuse. Similar evidence emerged from a 2022 cost effectiveness report commissioned by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).<sup>48</sup> Evidence gathered on the cost effectiveness of various interventions (“best-buys”) to combat VAWG in low- and middle-income countries highlighted that community activism, gender-transformative economic and social empowerment and participatory school-based interventions are highly effective in reducing VAWG.

| Area of Performance # 4   | Final Evaluative Judgement |
|---|----------------------------|
| Human resource management including number and skill set of staff and management of human resources   | <b>Adequate</b>            |
| <p>The Spotlight Initiative UN staff and personnel costs were the third highest expense category (14 per cent), but the actual figure was most likely higher since non-staff personnel expenses are often classified as “contractual services”. The Spotlight Initiative Secretariat was perceived as adequately staffed to harmonize programmes and provide technical assistance. The number of personnel fluctuated with workload demands. RUNO contributions averaged 34 per cent of total programme management costs, demonstrating strong support for the Initiative, although there were significant variations across regions, with Africa showing lower contributions. Despite substantial financial and human resource inputs from</p> |                            |

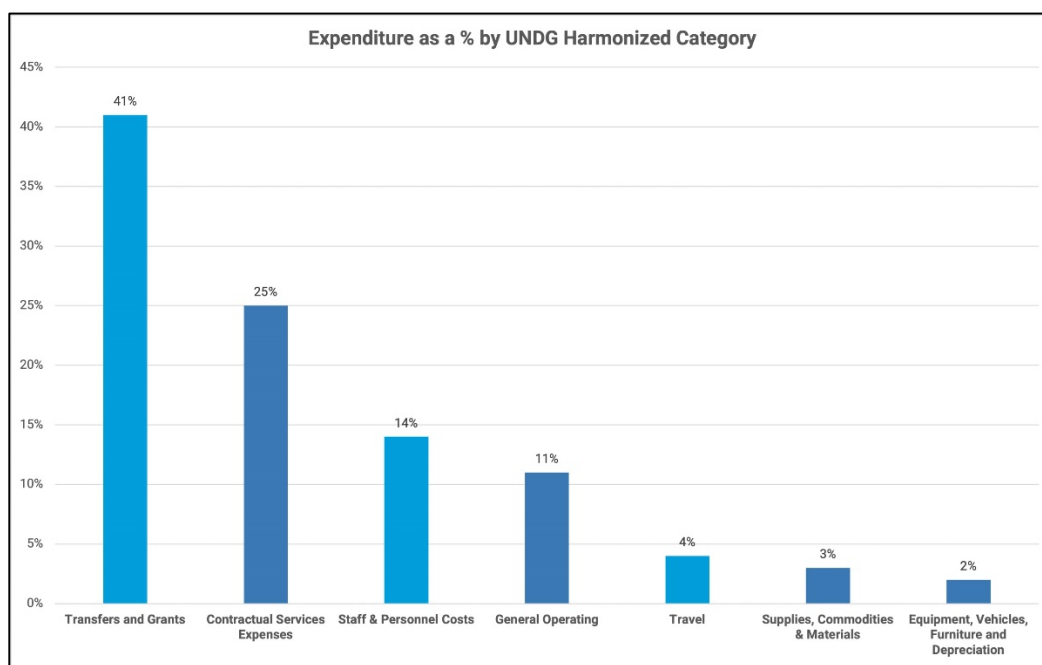
<sup>47</sup> Sheppard, L., Alsubhi, M., Brown, V. et al. What Interventions are Cost Effective in Reducing Violence Against Women? A Scoping Review. Appl Health Econ Health Policy 22, 283–296 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40258-023-00870-0>.

<sup>48</sup> FCDO. Economics & Evaluation Directorate, Education, Gender and Equality Directorate and Research and Evidence Directorate. Emily Esplen, George Mitchell. Best Buys in Preventing Violence Against Women and Girls. 15 Nov 2022.

RUNOs, there was a broad consensus that the human resources needed were underestimated, leading to operational challenges, particularly in regions with smaller budgets and high workloads, such as Latin America, the Caribbean, the Pacific and Central Asia. The complexity of recruitment processes and high workloads led to critical staffing gaps, especially for key positions like the Spotlight Initiative coordinator and monitoring and evaluation officer, affecting programme implementation and continuity. The UN MPTFO was perceived as adequately resourced to perform its role as an administrative agent, with personnel who were qualified and possessed a good knowledge of pooled funds.

36. According to the latest financial figures,<sup>49</sup> UN staff and personnel costs were the third highest expense category (14 per cent), but the actual figure was most likely higher since non-staff personnel expenses are often classified as contractual services (currently at 24.6 per cent). Figure 12 presents Spotlight Initiative expenditure by United Nations Development Group harmonized category. UN staff and personnel costs for the Spotlight Initiative appear to be within the norm and in line with other global joint programmes, such as the Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage, which allocated 13 per cent of its budget to human resources in Phase 1 and 18 per cent in Phase 2.<sup>50</sup>

Figure 12: Spotlight Initiative expenditure by harmonized category



Source: UN MPTFO Consolidated Financial Report May 2024.

37. At the global level, the Spotlight Initiative Secretariat was perceived as adequately staffed and resourced to operationalize its role in harmonizing Spotlight Initiative programmes and in providing technical assistance and support to communications, monitoring and evaluation and knowledge management.<sup>51</sup> In terms of staff numbers and profiles, at the beginning of the programme, the Secretariat included two teams (Management and Technical Unit) with nine staff positions.<sup>52</sup> Three more staff positions were added for a total of 12 staff members as seen in Figure 13. The Secretariat was also supported by several consultants, fluctuating with the workload and timing of reporting cycles.

<sup>49</sup> UN MPTFO, Consolidated Financial Report, May 2024.

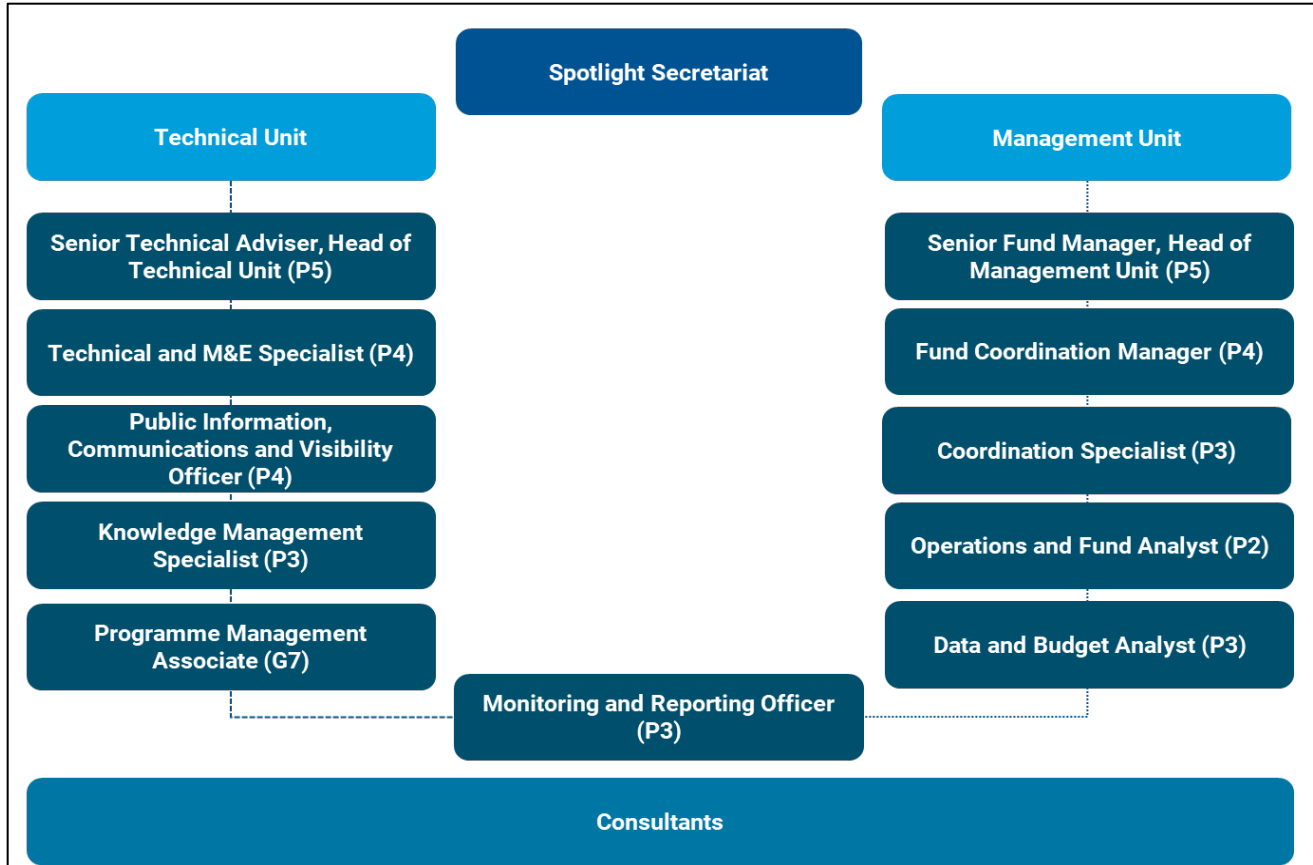
<sup>50</sup> GPECM annual reports 2021 and 2022.

<sup>51</sup> Meta-Review (Hera), 2022 & 2023; Final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024.

<sup>52</sup> Technical Unit (TU): Senior Technical Adviser, Head of Technical Unit (P5), Technical and M&E Specialist (P4), Public Information, Communications and Visibility Officer (P4), Knowledge Management Specialist (P3), Programme Management Associate (G7). Management Unit (MU): Senior Fund Manager, Head of the Management Unit (P5), Fund Coordination Manager (P4), Coordination Specialist (P3), Programme Management Associate (G6).

38. The UN MPTFO was perceived as adequately resourced to perform its role as an administrative agent, with personnel who were qualified and possessed a good knowledge of pooled funds. Respondents perceived the expertise of MPTFO to be instrumental in the early months of the programme when the Spotlight Initiative Fund needed to be operationalized at a fast pace.<sup>53</sup>

Figure 13: Spotlight secretariat organizational structure



Source: Global Spotlight Initiative Secretariat.

39. Available data shows that RUNOs had varied levels of costs for personnel assigned to country and regional programmes,<sup>54</sup> although the data available do not allow for a comprehensive view of UN expenditures on human resources under the Spotlight Initiative for all Spotlight Initiative programmes.<sup>55</sup> In the review of the selected eight case studies of the final evaluation, it was found that the majority of RUNO contributions were allocated to support the programme management of the Spotlight Initiative with additional staff, travel or office costs, demonstrating a strong commitment to bolstering programme management costs for the Spotlight Initiative. RUNO contributions relative to the total staff budget varied, with some providing between 13 per cent to 58 per cent more funding to supplement staffing for the Spotlight Initiative (see Annex 3 for detailed information on Spotlight Initiative staffing).
40. Examining the number of staff at the national level for the eight case studies of the evaluation of the Spotlight Initiative, the average number of staff (all contractual modalities including non-staff) was 46<sup>56</sup> (See Annex 3).

<sup>53</sup> Final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024.

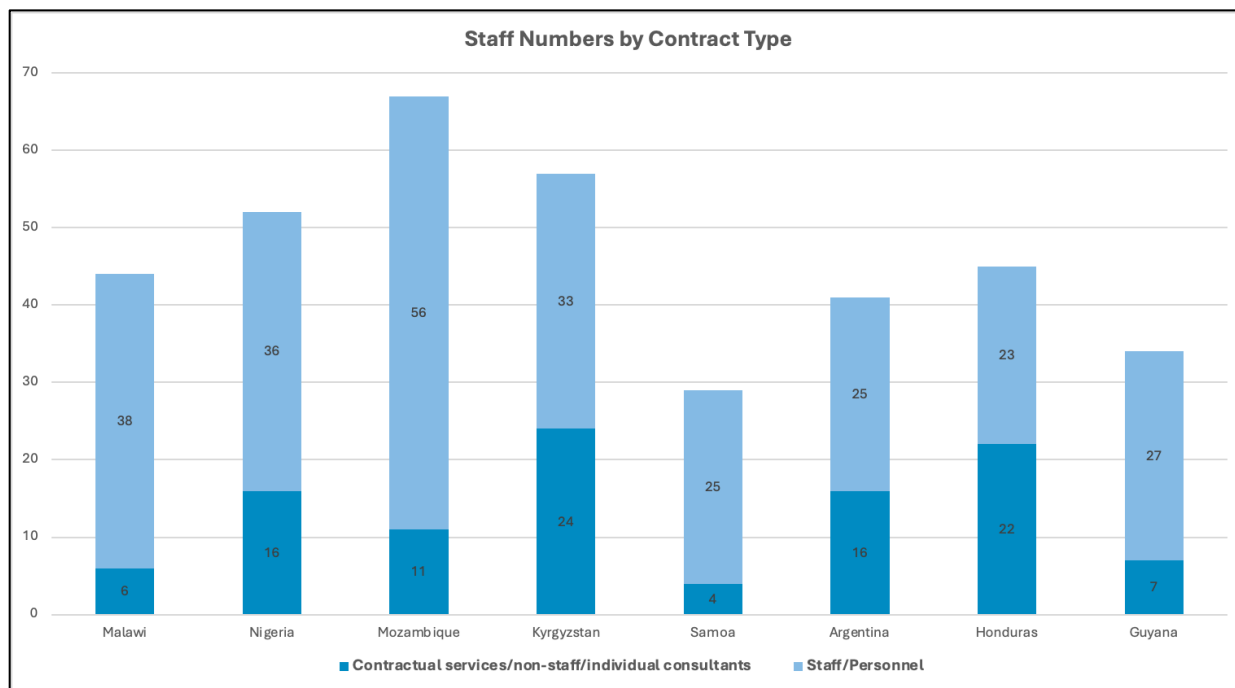
<sup>54</sup> This included staff as well as non-staff personnel such as consultants and individual contractors.

<sup>55</sup> MPTFO data – UNDG Harmonized Budget Categories. Human resource costs associated with Spotlight Initiative programmes are reflected across multiple UNDG Harmonized Budget Categories (i.e., both ‘staff and other personnel costs’ and ‘contractual services’) so that it is not possible to delineate.

<sup>56</sup> Data approved by the OSC from the Programme Management Costs from the evaluation case study countries.

Of these, an average of 28 per cent were on non-staff contracts, with the lowest percentage being 14 per cent in Malawi and the highest 49 per cent in Honduras. In half of the cases, the percentage for personnel on non-staff contracts included key Spotlight Initiative functions, such as the Spotlight Initiative Secretariat and the Programme Management Unit (Spotlight coordinator and monitoring and evaluation personnel). Figure 14 presents the total number of staff and types of contractual arrangements for eight country programmes.

Figure 14: Number of staff and contractual arrangements in eight Spotlight Initiative programmes

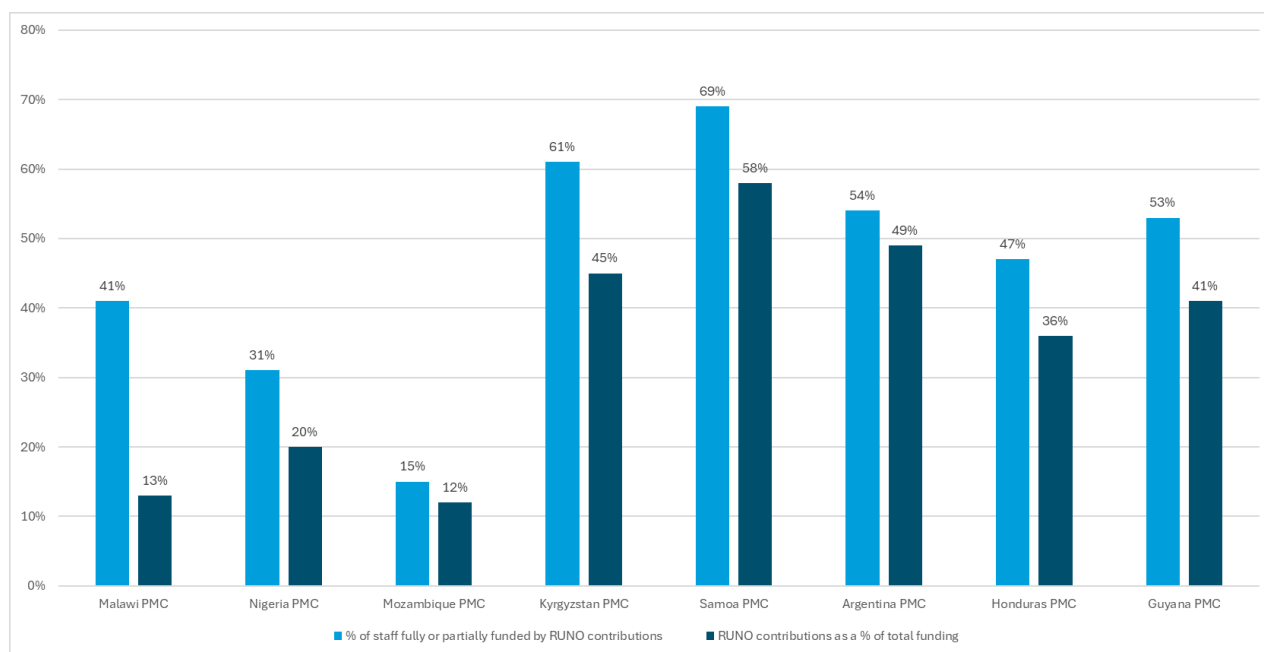


Sources: Spotlight Initiative country programme documents, OSC approved budgets provided by the Global Spotlight Initiative Secretariat.

41. RUNOs contributed an average of 34 per cent to the total programme management costs (staff and contractual services only) at an average of USD 763,399. In Mozambique, Nigeria, and Malawi (all in the Africa region), RUNO contributions to total staff costs were significantly lower, averaging 15 per cent, compared to an average of 45 per cent in the other five case studies. Overall, the RUNOs provided substantial financial support to the Spotlight Initiative by utilizing their existing staff. On average, 46 per cent of staff members have been partially or fully supported by RUNO contributions. Figure 15 presents RUNO contributions as a percentage of total staff and contractual services and the percentage of staff partially or fully funded by RUNOs.



Figure 15: RUNO contributions to staffing and management costs



Sources: Spotlight Initiative country programme documents, OSC approved budgets provided by the Global Spotlight Initiative Secretariat.

42. Despite availability of funding to cover programme management costs<sup>57</sup> and the additional human resource contributions of RUNOs<sup>58</sup> and resident coordinators’ offices (RCOs), evidence from evaluations and audit reports noted that there was broad consensus across stakeholder groups at all levels 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>59</sup>
43. Analysis of the mid-term assessment reports of all country and regional programmes highlights that gaps among RUNOs in technical or operational capacity and an insufficient number of personnel posed challenges to operational effectiveness in most countries,<sup>60</sup> independent of the country programme’s performance level at the time of the review.<sup>61</sup> Challenges were most acute in country programmes operating on smaller budgets in Latin America, the Caribbean and the Pacific and Central Asia where RUNO and Programme Management Unit (PMU) personnel reported particularly high workloads.<sup>62</sup> Gaps in capacity and an inadequate workforce presented operational challenges for regional programmes as well.<sup>63</sup> Challenges were heightened in small island developing states (SIDS) contexts where country and regional programmes

<sup>57</sup> Under the delegation agreement between the EU Commission and the UN, programme costs at the level of the country and regional programmes were capped at between 18 and 22 per cent. In this context, the EU noted that addressing gender-based violence required multi-disciplinary expert human resources to drive results. These encompassed 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. Source: European Commission. 2023. Replies of the European Commission and of the European External Action Service to the European Court of Auditors’ Special Report: The Spotlight Initiative to end violence against women and girls: Ambitious but so far with limited impact.

<sup>58</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. The manual states contributions should be fully dedicated to the Spotlight Initiative and could include human resource contributions.

<sup>59</sup> Key informant interviews (KIIs) cited in Spotlight Initiative mid-term assessments, 2022 and Meta-Review (Hera), 2022 & 2023 and Final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024; Office of Audit and Investigation Services Audit of The UNFPA Spotlight Initiative Final Report No IA/2023-3 18 May 2023.

<sup>60</sup> Independent mid-term assessments (Spotlight Initiative mid-term assessments) were conducted by Hera, an evaluation and research company based in Brussels, Belgium. The Spotlight Initiative mid-term assessments 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>61</sup> Meta-Review (Hera), 2022 & 2023; Spotlight Initiative mid-term assessments– all were reviewed by the evaluation team for the 25 countries (excluding Afghanistan) and the 5 regional programmes; 8 case studies; Final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024 online survey (qualitative responses).

<sup>62</sup> Meta-Review (Hera), 2022 & 2023; Final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024.

<sup>63</sup> Final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024; Spotlight Initiative mid-term assessments (Africa, Caribbean, Pacific).

found themselves competing to recruit from a relatively small pool of local gender experts.<sup>64</sup> The meta-reviews<sup>65</sup> pointed out that a number of RUNOs had to provide additional training to their staff to build capacity in VAWG programming and financial management. This included training government and civil society organization partners on essential services delivery and project management (Malawi, Mozambique, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste). The UNFPA audit report on Spotlight Initiative noted that newly hired and existing junior staff members often lacked experience and faced a steep learning curve to understand the contractual obligations under the Spotlight Initiative as stipulated in the Special and General Conditions of the Grant Agreement for Pillar Assisted Organizations or Delegation Agreement (PAGODA-2).<sup>66</sup> In the case of the position of Spotlight Initiative coordinator, this required a mix of leadership, management and thematic skills to overcome operational and programmatic barriers and navigate complex coordination structures, yet programme countries faced challenges in attracting candidates with the right profile and skill set, further delaying the onboarding of essential personnel.<sup>67</sup>

44. The scale and complexity of the Spotlight Initiative required an adequately staffed Programme Management Unit to help ensure a coherent and collaborative system response, including facilitating coordinated planning and communication, joint monitoring and reporting, and knowledge management.<sup>68</sup> Short-term contracts, known as temporary appointments, were often offered to programme personnel, leading to frequent staff turnover and placing additional pressure on existing team members to maintain the continuity of programme activities. As a result, junior staff members were often required to attend high-level meetings, such as pillar technical working group sessions, in place of the more experienced programmatic or technical leads. Recruitment of highly qualified candidates was challenging while managing the constraints of short-term staffing arrangements.<sup>69</sup> In the eight case studies for the evaluation of the Spotlight Initiative, which comprised Argentina, Guyana, Honduras, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria and Samoa, half of the Programme Management Unit staff were under staff contracts, and the other half were non-staff (consultants or service contracts). In the majority of cases, the monitoring and evaluation personnel were on non-staff contracts. Gaps in staffing for key personnel in the Programme Management Unit, particularly the two positions of coordinator and monitoring and evaluation officer, created critical capacity gaps for programmes that were not easily overcome, leading to setbacks or delays in areas of monitoring and results reporting, operational support to governance structures and stakeholder engagement.<sup>70,71</sup> Factors that influenced the departure of key Programme Management Unit personnel during programme implementation included high workloads and insecure contract conditions,<sup>72</sup> exacerbated by the multi-layered process for fund disbursement.<sup>73</sup>
45. Replacement of Programme Management Unit personnel was further complicated by the operational set-up of these units, which were usually co-located in the resident coordinator's office. Since the resident coordinator's office was not the recipient of the funds for Programme Management Unit-related funds, recruitment depended on the cooperation and responsiveness of the agency serving as RUNO for these

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<sup>64</sup> Spotlight Initiative mid-term assessments, Meta-Review (Hera), 2022 & 2023; case studies; Final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024 KII (country, regional); Final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024 online survey (qualitative responses).

<sup>65</sup> Meta-Review (Hera), 2022 & 2023.

<sup>66</sup> Office of Audit and Investigation Services: Audit of the UNFPA Spotlight Initiative Final Report No IA/2023-3 18 May 2023.

<sup>67</sup> Meta-Review (Hera), 2022 & 2023.

<sup>68</sup> Final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024.

<sup>69</sup> Office of Audit and Investigation Services: Audit of the UNFPA Spotlight Initiative Final Report No IA/2023-3 18 May 2023.

<sup>70</sup> Final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024 KII (country, regional); Meta-Review (Hera), 2022 & 2023; Final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024 online survey (qualitative responses).

<sup>71</sup> Final Evaluation of the Spotlight Initiative, 2024 (Central Asia, Pacific).

<sup>72</sup> Final Evaluation of the Spotlight Initiative, 2024 KII (country, regional); Meta-Review (Hera), 2022 & 2023. RUNOs at country and regional level were not able to extend contracts for many of their programme personnel before the approval of Phase II. In some cases, this led to repeated monthly contract extensions for key personnel.

<sup>73</sup> Final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024; Meta-Review (Hera), 2022 & 2023; Final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024 online survey (qualitative responses).

management components of the programme. This, combined with lengthy UN recruitment processes, resulted in common patterns of continuity gaps in the final years of programme implementation.

| Area of Performance # 5   | Final Evaluative Judgement |
|---|----------------------------|
| Leveraging support from partner contributions (monetary and in-kind)  | <b>Adequate</b>            |
| <p>The Spotlight Initiative faced challenges in securing additional financial backing beyond the initial EU funding, with notable exceptions in Central Asia, Ecuador and Uganda. Contributions from RUNO and private sector partners provided additional support and resources. Despite limited success in broader resource mobilization, the Initiative effectively leveraged in-kind government and partner support to enhance policy implementation and grassroots advocacy for VAWG prevention and response. The Initiative also influenced EVAWG strategies among several multilateral and bilateral partners, indicating a sustained interest in building upon Spotlight-initiated activities.</p> |                            |

46. The European Union’s funding was intended as “seed funding” to attract additional donors, however, further financial backing has been limited, with other contributions received from Portugal (USD 68,474) and Albania (USD 5,000). At the country and regional levels, attempts to secure additional programme funds under the Spotlight Initiative brand were met with limited success.<sup>74</sup> Notable exceptions include 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 sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and harmful practices, which was established with Spotlight Initiative support) and programmes in Uganda and Ecuador, which secured additional funding commitments of USD 22 million and USD 1.1 million respectively by the end of December 2023 for Spotlight Initiative continuation. Several factors were identified by evaluations and assessments as contributing to limited resource mobilization at the global level including a high threshold requirement for donors to be part of the Operational Steering Committee and Governing Body of the Spotlight Initiative (USD 100 million), strong branding and visibility requirements of the Initiative as a UN-EU partnership acting as a disincentive to other donors, the lack of a resource mobilization strategy for Spotlight Initiative supported by all implementing entities, the lack of a staff in charge of resource mobilization in the Spotlight Initiative Secretariat, and external factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>75</sup>
47. RUNO contributions added an additional USD 38 million<sup>76</sup> to the EU funding that the Spotlight Initiative leveraged, particularly to support programme management costs and to utilize the specialized expertise of senior UN staff. RUNO contributions were notably higher in specific countries: Grenada at 50 per cent, Belize at 24 per cent, Trinidad and Tobago at 23 per cent, Samoa at 21 per cent and Mexico at 19 per cent (Figure 16).
48. The Spotlight Initiative leveraged government support by partnering with key ministries and local authorities to enhance policy implementation, coordination, and service delivery for VAWG prevention and response<sup>77</sup> (see also the effectiveness section). It also engaged civil society organizations to amplify grassroots advocacy, provide essential services and ensure community-based interventions were effectively designed and implemented.

<sup>74</sup> Final Spotlight Initiative evaluation; 2024; UN MPTFO Gateway.

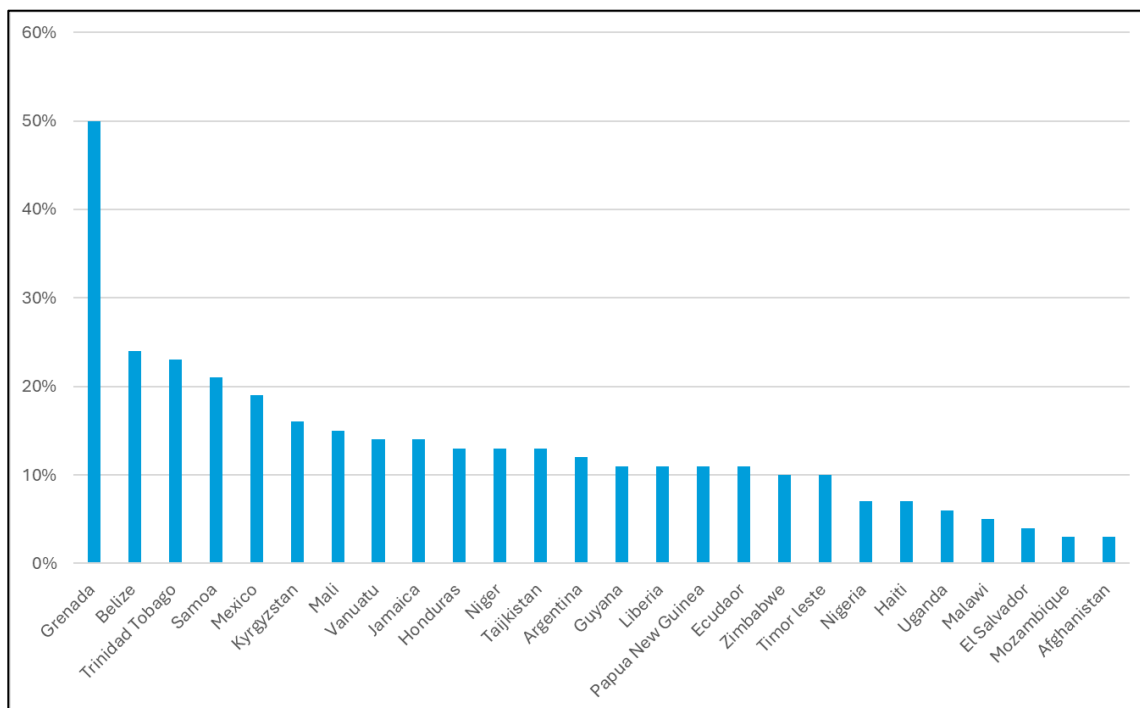
<sup>75</sup> Final evaluation of the Spotlight Initiative, Meta-review of the Spotlight Initiative.

<sup>76</sup> CPDs of all SI programme countries.

<sup>77</sup> SI final cumulative reports 2024, Argentina, Belize, Ecuador, Grenada, Haiti, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Malawi, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tajikistan, Timor-Leste, Trinidad and Tobago, Uganda, Vanuatu, Zimbabwe.

49. The final evaluation of the Spotlight Initiative found evidence of interest among development partners to sustain or build on approaches to EVAWG that were supported and championed through the programme. The Initiative influenced or informed VAWG programming strategies and approaches of several multilateral and bilateral partners.<sup>78</sup> In Spotlight Initiative programme countries and regions (for example, Caribbean, Guyana, Kyrgyzstan and Mozambique) bilateral partners (Global Affairs Canada, United States Agency for International Development (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.<sup>79</sup> The Spotlight Initiative programme in Papua New Guinea leveraged support from the Australian Government, which provided technical and contextual inputs. The Initiative also collaborated with UNAIDS to support marginalized communities and build a movement inclusive of these groups.
50. The engagement with other partners such as the United States Embassy and the New Zealand Government has helped to complement and sustain interventions. Within the Central Asia and Afghanistan Regional Programme, a multimedia campaign, which included film, TV and social media, was made possible through USD 1.3 million of in-kind contributions.<sup>80</sup> In several Spotlight Initiative country programmes, there has been successful engagement with the private sector as an agent of change, securing in-kind contributions in the form of materials, support and facilities.<sup>81</sup>
51. At the time of this report, the global Secretariat has been able to secure USD 100 million for Spotlight Initiative 2.0, and more than 15 United Nations country teams (UNCTs) are working on new programmes.

Figure 16: Percentage of RUNO contributions to total EU funding in programme countries



Sources: *Spotlight Initiative country programme documents, OSC approved budgets provided by the Global Spotlight Initiative Secretariat.*

<sup>78</sup> Final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024.

<sup>79</sup> Final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024; World Bank. 2022. Malawi GBV Assessment. March 2022; World Bank. March 2022 Malawi Gender Assessment. March 2022.

<sup>80</sup> Spotlight Initiative- 2023 Global Annual Report /Interim Global Final Report 2017-2023.

<sup>81</sup> Si Annual Global Report, 2020, 2021.

## 2.2 Efficiency

### Sub criteria: Delivery of outputs, ways of working and programme adaptation

| Area of Performance #1  | Final Evaluative Judgement |
|---|----------------------------|
| Programme has a clear, relevant, evidence-based theory of change to guide programme implementation  | <b>Good</b>                |
| <p>The Spotlight Initiative's evidence-based theory of change, structured around six interdependent pillars and three cross-cutting issues, was relevant and a strong asset for addressing violence against women and girls comprehensively and holistically. The focus on civil society organizations' engagement and participation as a cross-cutting and pillar-specific strategy was identified as a strength and an innovative aspect of the design. The theory of change was based on evidence of root and underlying causes, drivers and effective approaches to address VAWG, as well as knowledge and lessons learned from past programmes. The Spotlight Initiative encompassed a complex mix of components under a global umbrella and stakeholders perceived the design of the Initiative as complex and ambitious in light of the programme's funding and short timeframe. Evidence from the final evaluation of the Spotlight Initiative identified challenges to local adaptability of the theory of change, as well as the need for contextualization and clearer guidance for integrating regional and country programmes. The theory of change was predicated on stable operational environments, but the model could be adapted to navigate complex and dynamic environments to deliver results.</p> |                            |

52. The Spotlight Initiative has an evidence-based theory of change structured around six interdependent pillars aimed at addressing violence against women and girls through a comprehensive, integrated and gender-transformative approach. The theory of change was based on evidence of root and underlying causes, drivers and effective approaches to address VAWG, from within and outside the United Nations, as well as knowledge and lessons learned from past programmes. Furthermore, the theory of change offered a clear rationale for the selection of the areas of focus, based on a review of planning documents.<sup>82</sup> The design was recognized across stakeholder groups at all levels as an essential framework for addressing VAWG comprehensively and holistically<sup>83</sup> and 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 UN and other stakeholders for greater coherence, including fostering interactions among stakeholders that may not have traditionally collaborated on eliminating VAWG. In particular, the focus on civil society organizations as a cross-cutting principle and pillar-specific strategy was identified as a strength and an innovative aspect of the design.<sup>84</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 during implementation of the programme in response to lessons learned.<sup>85</sup>
53. At the outset of the Spotlight Initiative, the theory of change was meant to apply to development contexts with stable operational environments, however, several country programmes were faced with crisis situations and substantial changes in context and had to adapt implementation.
54. The Spotlight Initiative theory of change does not clearly identify interactions across pillars, which impeded the development of strategies to intentionally foster synergies between activities.<sup>86</sup> This

<sup>82</sup> Spotlight Initiative, Annex 1: Description of the Action.

<sup>83</sup> A total of 91 per cent of global survey respondents of the final Spotlight Initiative evaluation 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.

<sup>84</sup> Final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024; ECA Report; Spotlight Initiative mid-term assessments.

<sup>85</sup> Final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024; SI Global Annual Reports.

<sup>86</sup> Scoping and evaluability assessment of Spotlight, 2023; Final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024, Terms of reference Spotlight Initiative.

represented a missed opportunity to take a strategic approach in considering how activities could be staged over the programme's life to leverage progress in one pillar for results in another.<sup>87</sup>

55. Spotlight Initiative country and regional programmes were developed based on the global theory of change. In some instances, the global theory of change was not adequately adapted to local contexts at the country level, highlighting a need for greater flexibility to ensure relevance and effectiveness. The final Spotlight Initiative evaluation noted that although the six-pillar design provided a comprehensive approach, the mandatory requirement for country programmes to address all six pillars presented challenges in some contexts. For example, political challenges and disruptions in Afghanistan and Mali resulted in a narrowed focus on three of the six pillars in the second phase, while Argentina's strong legislative grounding led to the exclusion of Pillar 1 in Phase II.<sup>88</sup> Stakeholders involved in designing regional programmes faced difficulties adapting a theory of change originally developed for country-level programmes to regional contexts.<sup>89</sup> However, the ability to selectively focus on only some of the pillars provided flexibility at regional level to narrow the focus and prioritize areas in line with operational contexts and budget allocations. There was a lack of clarity and global directives on establishing linkages between country and regional programmes, which resulted in poor integration of synergies between global and country programmes within the programme designs.<sup>90</sup>
56. 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 and the Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund. Coherence was not well articulated across the various components and stakeholders perceived the design of the Initiative as complex and ambitious in light of the programme's funding and short timeframe.<sup>91</sup>

| Area of Performance #2  | Final Judgement | Evaluative |
|---|-----------------|------------|
| Delivery of outputs: budget allocation is clear and transparent and based on data and evidence, allocation of resources to the right mix of interventions linked to intended outcomes, delivery of programme as planned   | <b>Adequate</b> |            |
| Diverse technical and secondary criteria were utilized for selecting countries for Spotlight Initiative, but the rationale for the final country selection, which included operational and political considerations as well as EU funding restrictions, lacked clarity and was not well documented. At the end of 2023, the Spotlight Initiative implementation rate by UN recipient organization was at 94 per cent on average with a slight variation by UN recipient organization, after a slower than expected pace of implementation until 2021. The Spotlight Initiative delivered outputs despite the impact on implementation caused by external factors such as COVID-19, political instability and natural disasters. The Spotlight Initiative faced delays at the start of the Initiative caused in several countries by a lack of an inception phase and the complex multi-stage fund disbursement process. The lack of an inception phase affected the ability of diverse stakeholders involved in country and regional programmes to build relationships and establish systems to create the cohesive operational processes necessary for effective programme delivery. |                 |            |

<sup>87</sup> Final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024; CPDs; ARs.

<sup>88</sup> Final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024; Argentina AR 2022; Mali AR 2022; ECA Report, para 57.

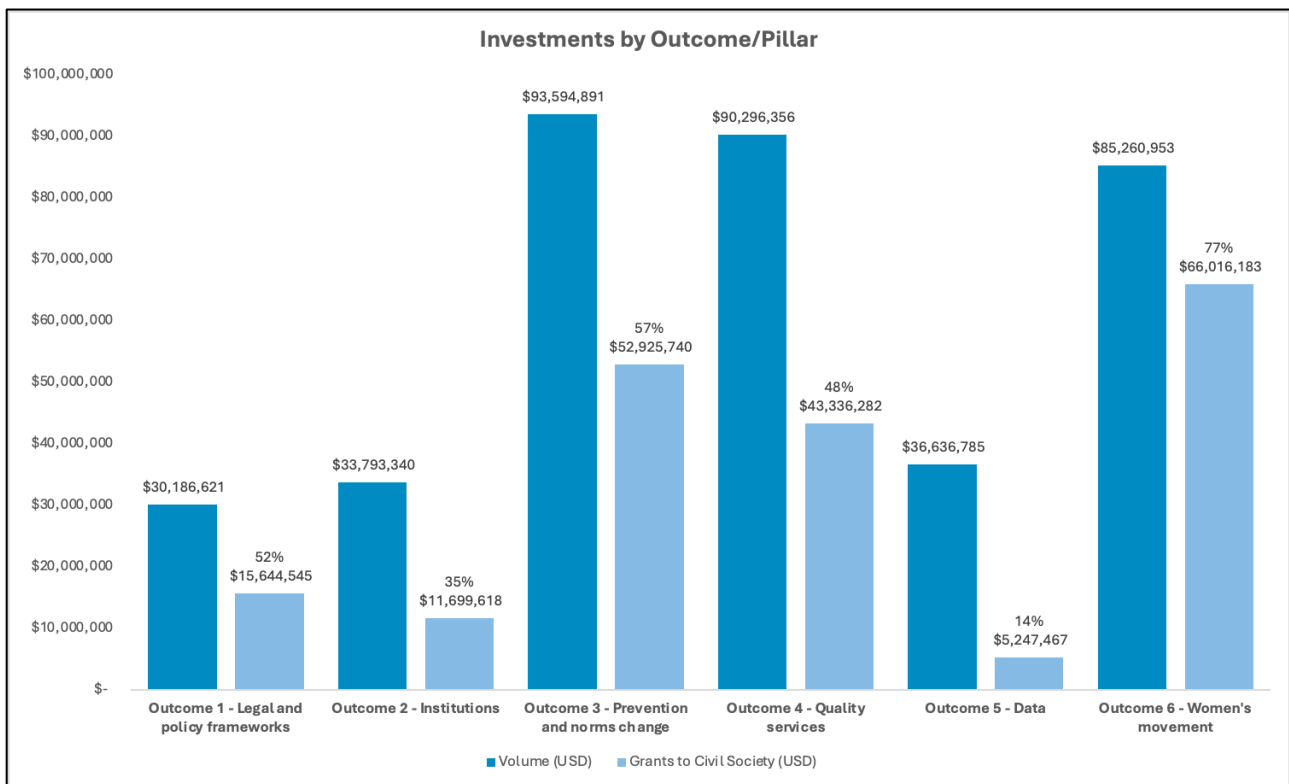
<sup>89</sup> Final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024.

<sup>90</sup> Regional Programme Documents; RIPs; Final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024; ECA Report, para 34.

<sup>91</sup> Final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024.

57. Resource allocation at the country and regional levels was elaborated by an investment plan for each of the five geographical regions that laid out the funding allocation and programming framework as well as governance structures.<sup>92</sup> Diverse criteria were utilized for selecting countries for Spotlight Initiative, such as primary criteria (prevalence of violence and the gender inequality index) and secondary criteria (for example, type of context, government commitment, civic space, absorption capacity). The rationale for the final country selection, which included operational and political considerations as well as EU funding restrictions, lacked clarity and was not well documented.<sup>93</sup>
58. Countries were allocated specified amounts between USD 2 and 35 million. Most investments were directed towards interventions within pillars 3, 4, and 6 (Figure 17). Analysis of the initial planned investments by outcome revealed a strategic and varied funding allocation across different pillars. Prevention and norms change (Outcome 3) and quality services (Outcome 4) received the highest investments, both in absolute terms and as a percentage of total outcome investment. Conversely, outcomes 1, 2 and 3 received the least funding. Substantial investment in the women’s movement (Outcome 6) highlighted a strong focus on empowering women-led initiatives.<sup>94</sup>

Figure 17: Investments by outcome or pillar by volume and percentage of grants to civil society



Source: Spotlight Initiative Financial Report May 2024.

59. Efforts were made to allocate budgets based on planned actions and outcomes, but challenges, such as political instability, discrepancies in spending and the adequacy of allocations in response to on-ground realities, affected the transparency and evidence-based nature of budget management within the Spotlight Initiative. Mid-term review reports<sup>95</sup> indicated that there was mixed clarity, alignment and evidence-based planning across various countries. Some Spotlight Initiative programmes overspent in some UNSDG

<sup>92</sup> Final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024.

<sup>93</sup> Dahberg. Tracing the Institutional History of Spotlight Initiative to eliminate violence against women and girls JUNE 2023. Evaluation of the Spotlight Initiative.

<sup>94</sup> SI Secretariat, April 2024.

<sup>95</sup> Spotlight Initiative mid-term assessments.

harmonized criteria while others underspent considerably, suggesting challenges in aligning budget allocations with actual needs and changing circumstances. Some pillars were affected by political and security instability, pointing to the complexity of budget management in volatile environments and raising questions about the adequacy of budget allocations in meeting the programme's diverse needs under challenging conditions.<sup>96</sup>

60. 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>97</sup> Across both phases, there were challenges with expenditure and financial delivery rates caused in part by an implementation timeframe that was widely perceived across stakeholder groups to be unrealistic given the complexity of the topic, breadth of stakeholders involved, ambition to demonstrate UNDS reform, and the impact of contextual factors including the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters and conflicts.<sup>98</sup> Furthermore, the timelines for fund disbursement at various levels, the “70 per cent rule” (requiring 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) and the complex multi-step approval processes presented challenges to overall programme delivery. These affected country and regional programmes to varying degrees<sup>99</sup> and were consistently cited as major causes of operational issues at both levels.<sup>100</sup>
61. At the end of 2023, the Spotlight Initiative implementation rate (expenditure against approved budget) by UN recipient organization was at 94 per cent on average with a slight variation by UN recipient organization. Implementation of the Initiative was impacted by external factors such as COVID-19, natural disasters and political instability.<sup>101</sup> At the design stage, the lack of, or a limited inception phase for the development of programmes affected the ability of diverse stakeholders involved in country and regional programmes to build relationships and establish systems to create the cohesive operational processes necessary for effective programme delivery.<sup>102</sup> By the end of Phase I,<sup>103</sup> country and regional programmes in Latin America and Africa were significantly behind on expected implementation rates, while programmes in the Caribbean, Central Asia and the Pacific faced even tighter timelines for delivery, with later start-ups.<sup>104</sup> Global programme implementation rates stood at 19 per cent by the end of 2020, gaining momentum between 2021 and 2023. 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 the realities on the ground and the requirements to work in an inclusive and holistic manner.<sup>105</sup> Figure 18 presents budget and expenditure by United Nations recipient organization by December 2023 and Figure 19 presents final implementation rates by United Nations recipient organization.

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<sup>96</sup> MTR reports of SI programmes.

<sup>97</sup> Spotlight Initiative. 2018. Spotlight Initiative to eliminate violence against women and girls. Annex I Description of the Action. November 2018. Page 58.

<sup>98</sup> Programme documentation, 2022 and Meta-Review (Hera), 2022 & 2023, global goals consulting report; case studies.

<sup>99</sup> Global Goals report; 2022 and Meta-Review (Hera), 2022 & 2023s; case studies; KII – global, regional, country; final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024 online survey (qualitative responses).

<sup>100</sup> 2021 – Spotlight Initiative mid-term assessments; 2022 – Spotlight Initiative mid-term assessments and Global Goals Consulting Report; 2023 – Final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024.

<sup>101</sup> Meta-Review (Hera), 2022 & 2023.

<sup>102</sup> Final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024.

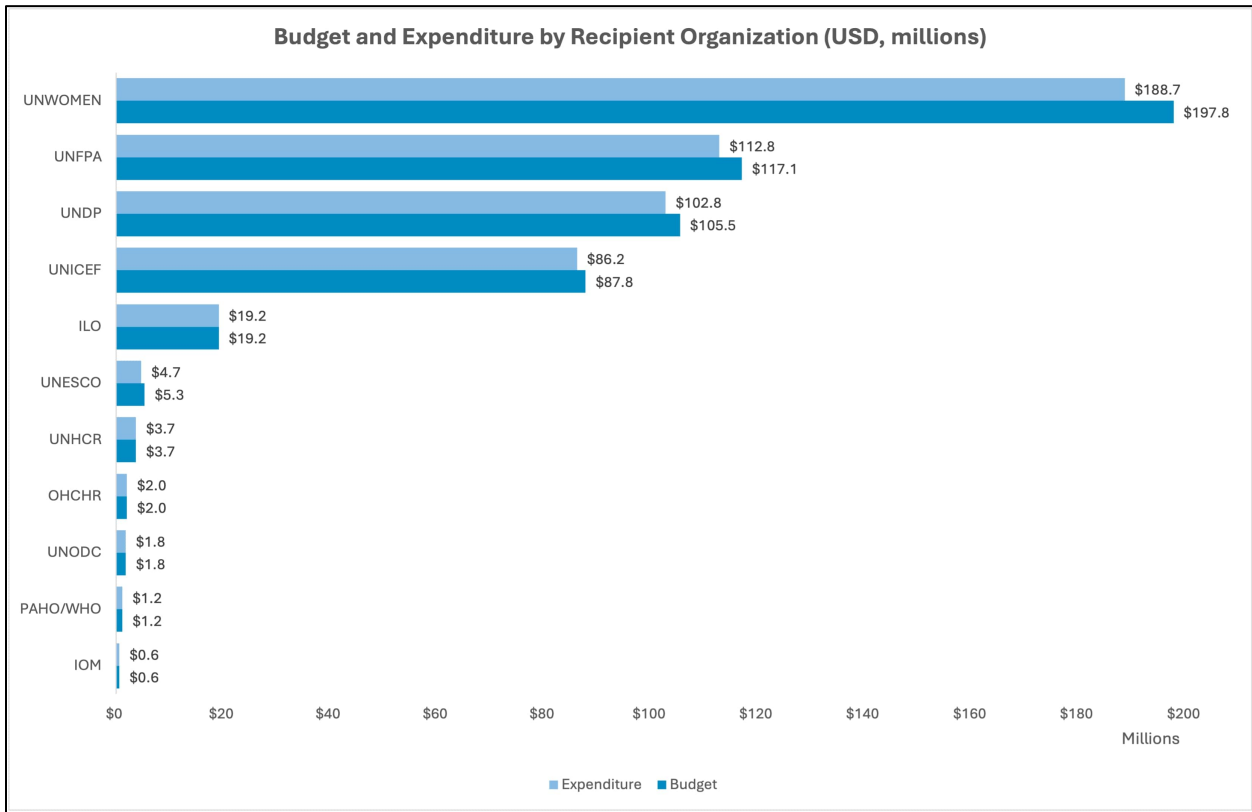
<sup>103</sup> In 2021, all country programmes in Africa and Latin America (except for Ecuador, which began later) transitioned to Phase II, while programmes in Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific focused on accelerating implementation to complete Phase I and move into Phase II in 2022.

<sup>104</sup> 2022 Meta-Review; SIS documentation; MPTFO gateway expenditures and real time approved budgets.

<sup>105</sup> OSC, GB and HOA meeting minutes, 2022 Meta-Review; Final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024.

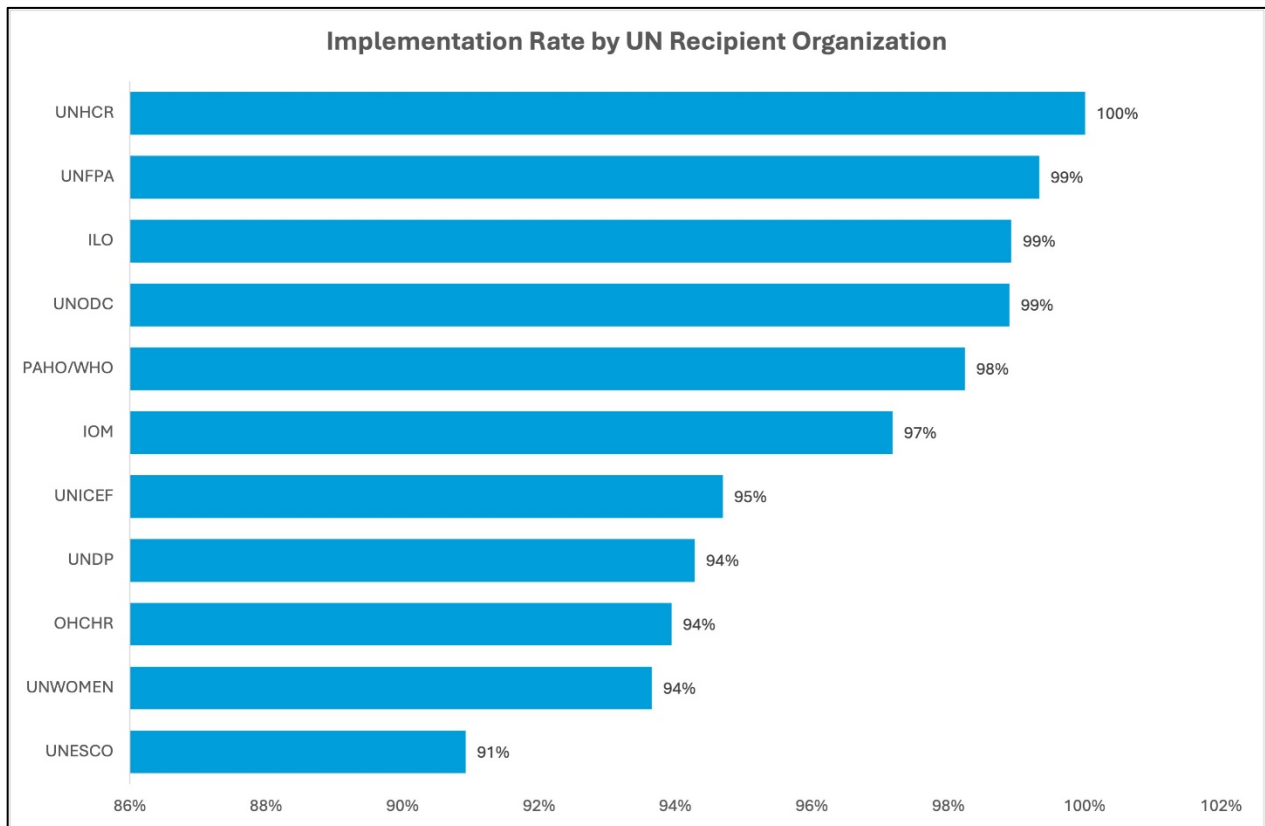


Figure 18: Budget and expenditure by recipient organization



Source: Spotlight Initiative Financial Report May 2024.

Figure 19: Implementation rate by United Nations recipient organization



Source: Spotlight Initiative Financial Report May 2024.

| Area of Performance #3   | Final Evaluative Judgement |
|--|----------------------------|
| Implementing partners are effectively selected and partnerships are monitored  | <b>Good</b>                |
| <p>Country programmes used different approaches for identifying and selecting implementing partners, ensuring a good fit to programme outcomes and capacities. The emphasis on engaging constituency-led civil society organizations as partners was a key strategy in ensuring that structurally marginalized groups were meaningfully involved in the implementation of the Initiative. In some countries, local, grassroots and community-based organizations that wanted to partner with the Spotlight Initiative faced challenges in terms of their capacity to sign agreements and deliver the programme. The use of small grant schemes enabled local and grassroots organizations, which may not have met traditional UN funding requirements, to access support and participate in programme activities. The Initiative also put in place mechanisms to monitor the involvement and performance of its implementing partners, although for some programmes, the mechanisms were not robust and systematic enough. There were some challenges in coordinating numerous small-scale implementing partners, which affected the generation of synergies and complementarity among programme activities.</p> |                            |

62. Country programmes created mechanisms and processes and used different approaches for identifying and selecting implementing partners, ensuring a good fit to programme outcomes and capacities.<sup>106</sup> Implementing partners were selected through a participatory process involving multiple stakeholders.<sup>107</sup> Some programmes had a limited number of implementing partners with experience working with the United Nations, whereas others worked with a large number of implementing partners, most of them first-time partners of the UN.<sup>108</sup>
63. The emphasis on engaging constituency-led civil society organizations as partners was a key strategy in ensuring that structurally marginalized groups were meaningfully involved in the implementation of the Initiative. In some cases, the UN procedures and requirements for recruiting partners were too demanding for civil society organizations, particularly local, grassroots and community-based organizations. Country programmes partnered with small organizations directly or, when this was not possible, through larger organizations that subcontracted local, grassroots organizations. In some countries, local, grassroots and community-based organizations that wanted to partner with the Spotlight Initiative faced challenges in terms of their capacity to deliver the programme (human resources, absorption capacity, financial reporting). The use of small grant schemes enabled local and grassroots organizations, which may not have met traditional UN funding requirements, to access support and participate in programme activities. This approach not only broadened the reach of the Initiative but also ensured that the interventions were culturally and contextually relevant.
64. The Initiative put in place mechanisms to monitor the involvement and performance of its implementing partners. Tools such as civil society scorecards and annual surveys were used to assess the extent to which civil society organizations were engaged and to gather feedback on their experiences and challenges.<sup>109</sup> These monitoring tools provided valuable insights that informed necessary adjustments in the programme, ensuring continuous improvement and responsiveness to the needs of both the implementing partners and the target communities. For instance, joint monitoring visits involving civil society national reference group members were conducted in some countries, offering opportunities for real-time feedback and direct engagement with the implementing partners. Yet, secondary documentation noted cases where mechanisms for monitoring and assessing implementing partner performance were not always robust

<sup>106</sup> Thematic Assessment on Assessing Spotlight Initiative’s Contribution to the Engagement of Civil Society, the Implementation of ‘Leave No One Behind’, and Movement Building, 2024.

<sup>107</sup> Final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024.

<sup>108</sup> Meta-Review (Hera), 2022 & 2023.

<sup>109</sup> Thematic Assessment on Assessing Spotlight Initiative’s Contribution to the Engagement of Civil Society, the Implementation of ‘Leave No One Behind’, and Movement Building, 2024.

enough in some programmes.<sup>110</sup> There were challenges in coordinating the numerous small-scale implementing partners, which affected the generation of synergy and complementarity among programme activities.

| Area of Performance #4   | Final Evaluative Judgement |
|--|----------------------------|
| Adaptability and responsiveness to external factors  | <b>Good</b>                |
| <p>The Spotlight Initiative demonstrated responsiveness and adaptability across different country contexts when faced with several external challenges and changes in context during implementation, including political instability, natural disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic. Acceleration plans to mitigate against time lost due to COVID-19 or other crises had an overall positive impact on the implementation pace. Some countries showed robust responsiveness in adjusting strategies and activities to meet changing circumstances, while others encountered challenges that highlight areas for improvement in flexibility and crisis management. The Spotlight Initiative could have benefited from integrating more flexible and responsive strategies into its operational framework to better anticipate and mitigate the impacts of significant external changes in context.</p> |                            |

65. Overall, the Spotlight Initiative demonstrated responsiveness and adaptability across different country contexts when faced with external challenges and substantial changes in context. During implementation, 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 to meaningfully respond to shifting needs and national priorities.<sup>111</sup> A review of selected secondary documentation<sup>112</sup> provided insights into how programmes have adapted to and managed changes in context, with some countries showing robust responsiveness in adjusting strategies and activities to meet changing circumstances, and others encountering challenges that highlight areas for improvement in flexibility and crisis management.<sup>113</sup>
66. 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>114</sup> Mitigation measures identified in programme documentation, including country acceleration plans, focused on operational agility (shifts to online modalities, accelerated procurement processes) or putting in place safety and protection measures (for example, provision of personal protective equipment, measures to address increased incidences in VAWG, striving to “do no harm” or to minimize potential harm when implementing activities). During the COVID-19 pandemic, programmes made adjustments, such as shifting to virtual platforms and modifying some activity timelines (especially in humanitarian and development settings).<sup>115</sup> Acceleration plans to mitigate against time lost due to COVID-19 or other crises had an overall positive impact on implementation rates and included: streamlined procurement processes and trainings for civil society partners; increased coordination and communication with implementing partners; and scaling up work with existing civil society partners and larger non-governmental organizations to accelerate programme delivery.<sup>116</sup>

<sup>110</sup> Thematic Assessment on Assessing Spotlight Initiative’s Contribution to the Engagement of Civil Society, the Implementation of ‘Leave No One Behind’, and Movement Building, 2024.

<sup>111</sup> Final Evaluation of the Spotlight Initiative, 2024.

<sup>112</sup> Thematic Assessment on Assessing Spotlight Initiative’s Contribution to the Engagement Of Civil Society, the Implementation Of ‘Leave No One Behind’, And Movement Building 2024; Spotlight Initiative mid-term assessments; ARs; final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024; Hera 2022 and 2023.

<sup>113</sup> These included climate shocks, natural disasters, humanitarian crises, government collapse, protracted election processes and public health emergencies other than COVID-19.

<sup>114</sup> Spotlight Initiative mid-term assessments; ARs; Thematic Assessment on Assessing Spotlight Initiative’s Contribution to the Engagement of Civil Society, the Implementation of ‘Leave No One Behind’, and Movement Building 2024; final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024.

<sup>115</sup> Spotlight Initiative mid-term assessments; Thematic Assessment on Assessing Spotlight Initiative’s Contribution to the Engagement of Civil Society, the Implementation of ‘Leave No One Behind’, and Movement Building 2024; final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024.

<sup>116</sup> Final Evaluation of the Spotlight Initiative, 2024.

67. The Initiative also adapted to changes in government administrations and to political instability by adjusting strategies and workplans. This included efforts to build government support and ownership despite challenges such as lengthy bureaucratic processes and conservative attitudes towards gender equality.<sup>117</sup>
68. There was recognition by various assessments and reviews<sup>118</sup> that the Initiative could have benefited from integrating more flexible and responsive strategies into its operational framework to better anticipate and mitigate the impacts of significant external changes in context, for example, political instability and natural disasters.

| Area of Performance #5   | Final Evaluative Judgement |
|--|----------------------------|
| Use of innovation in programme delivery  | Good                       |
| <p>The Spotlight Initiative introduced several innovative approaches that enhanced its effectiveness, such as the introduction of harmonized or joint calls for expressions of interest, which were translated into local languages and facilitated the inclusion of smaller grassroots organizations that might otherwise have been excluded. The use of small grants and sub-granting was another innovative strategy that proved effective in engaging a diverse range of organizations, including those led by, and for, structurally marginalized groups. The Spotlight Initiative leveraged technology and virtual platforms to maintain engagement and service delivery, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> |                            |

69. The Thematic Assessment on Assessing Spotlight Initiative’s Contribution to the Engagement of Civil Society, the Implementation of ‘Leave No One Behind’, and Movement Building, and the final evaluation of the Spotlight Initiative noted several innovative approaches in the Spotlight Initiative’s programme delivery that enhanced its effectiveness. One notable innovation was the introduction of harmonized or joint calls for expressions of interest, which were translated into local languages<sup>119</sup> and facilitated the inclusion of smaller grassroots organizations that might otherwise have been excluded due to language barriers or unfamiliarity with UN procedures. These harmonized expressions of interest also promoted a more collaborative environment by encouraging consortia arrangements and sub-granting mechanisms, thus enabling unregistered and smaller groups to access funding and participate in the programme.
70. Additionally, the use of small grants and sub-granting was another innovative strategy that proved effective in engaging a diverse range of organizations, including those led by, and for, structurally marginalized groups. This approach allowed the Spotlight Initiative to support a broader spectrum of civil society actors, ensuring that even the most marginalized voices were included in the fight against violence. The small grants not only provided financial resources but also included capacity-building components that helped these organizations enhance their operational capabilities and sustainability. This innovative funding model was particularly praised for its ability to adapt to the specific needs and contexts of local organizations, further amplifying the impact of the Initiative.<sup>120</sup>
71. The Spotlight Initiative leveraged technology and virtual platforms to maintain engagement and service delivery, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, several programmes transitioned to online platforms for training, workshops and even some service provisions. This not only ensured the

<sup>117</sup> Meta-Review (Hera), 2022 & 2023.

<sup>118</sup> ECA, 2023; Meta-Review (Hera), 2022 & 2023; final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024.

<sup>119</sup> Thematic Assessment on Assessing Spotlight Initiative’s Contribution to the Engagement of Civil Society, the Implementation of ‘Leave No One Behind’, and Movement Building, 2024.

<sup>120</sup> Meta-Review (Hera), 2022 & 2023; Thematic Assessment on Assessing Spotlight Initiative’s Contribution to the Engagement Of Civil Society, the Implementation of ‘Leave No One Behind’, and Movement Building, 2024.

continuity of the programme but also expanded its reach to remote areas where physical access might have been challenging.<sup>121</sup>

72. The final evaluation of Spotlight Initiative noted that global and programme narrative annual reports utilized known and widely accepted catalytical EVAWG approaches and summarized innovation practices and a Good Practices and Lesson Learned Compendium.<sup>122</sup> The Spotlight Initiative employed creative approaches to EVAWG, as evidenced by numerous examples across country and regional programmes where interventions were creatively adapted and operationalized to maximize catalytic potential.

| Area of Performance #6   | Final Evaluative Judgement |
|--|----------------------------|
| Leveraging support and interventions from other programmes to increase efficiency.   | Good                       |
| The Spotlight Initiative effectively leveraged existing global and country programmes focused on gender-based violence and women’s empowerment to enhance impact and efficiency. This leveraging included building on well-established joint UN programmes and integrating efforts with local structures and relationships. Several RUNOs leveraged existing VAWG programmes, enhancing their reach and expanding activities with Spotlight Initiative funding, facilitating the scaling up of VAWG interventions in some countries. However, in some instances, leveraging existing programmes proved to be challenging due to siloed working approaches by RUNOs, missing opportunities for better coordination and synergy. |                            |

73. The Spotlight Initiative leveraged complementarities, synergies and support from existing global programmes, particularly those focused on women’s empowerment and on ending gender-based violence to ensure greater reach, coverage and efficiency. In several countries including Mozambique, Niger and Uganda, the Spotlight Initiative leveraged the good practices and working relationships established during the implementation of the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage and the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation. In Mozambique, synergies with the Global Programme to End Child Marriage included capacity-building of adolescents and their engagement in the prevention of violence against children, gender-based violence and child marriage and the engagement of community and religious leaders.<sup>123</sup> Furthermore, the Africa Regional Programme integrated these joint programmes into their Spotlight Initiative regional programme and complemented this stream of work at the regional level, with support to the African Union and Saleema Initiative as well as the engagement of several civil society regional organizations to support regional advocacy and policy work.<sup>124</sup> The evaluation of the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage found that the Spotlight Initiative contributed to the developed the African Union accountability framework for harmful practices, a mechanism holding governments accountable for their actions or commitments towards ending child marriage.<sup>125</sup> The Spotlight Initiative also integrated the well-established UN trust funds, the Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund and the Trust Fund to End Violence against Women, in order to reach grassroots organizations more effectively.

74. Several RUNOs leveraged existing VAWG programmes,<sup>126</sup> enhancing their reach and expanding activities with Spotlight Initiative funding. Notably, for some RUNOs, the Spotlight Initiative facilitated the scaling up of VAWG interventions in some countries. For example, in Mozambique, Spotlight interventions complemented the Joint UN programme, *Rapariga Biz*, by ensuring standards for referral for VAWG were

<sup>121</sup> Meta-Review (Hera), 2022 & 2023; Thematic Assessment on Assessing Spotlight Initiative’s Contribution to the Engagement Of Civil Society, the Implementation of ‘Leave No One Behind’, and Movement Building 2024; final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024.

<sup>122</sup> SI programme annual reports; 2024 Compendium of Innovative and Good Practices and Lessons Learned.

<sup>123</sup> UNICEF 2023. Joint Evaluation of Phase II of the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage.

<sup>124</sup> Joint Evaluation of the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation: Accelerating Change Phase III (2018-2021) 2021 Evaluation.

<sup>125</sup> UNICEF 2023. Joint Evaluation of Phase II of the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage.

<sup>126</sup> Final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024; Country programme evaluations UNFPA, UNDP, UN Women.

implemented beyond Spotlight Initiative districts of intervention.<sup>127</sup> In Liberia, the Spotlight Initiative built on the previous Joint UN Programme on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence and Harmful Traditional Practices led by UN Women, allowing the Initiative to utilize existing structures and relationships to amplify and sustain its interventions.<sup>128</sup>

75. The Meta-Review<sup>129</sup> noted Spotlight Initiative’s ability to leverage existing programmes to enhance efficiency and impact. For instance, in Malawi, the Spotlight Initiative built on UNDP’s existing relationships and experiences with the judiciary and police to set up mobile courts in remote districts. This approach strengthened partnerships and enhanced access to justice for survivors of violence. In Uganda,<sup>130</sup> the Spotlight Initiative drew on existing initiatives such as the evidence-based programme model SASA!, which has shown a substantial impact in reducing intimate partner violence. UNICEF and UNFPA regional offices mapped out areas of complementarity and areas that each agency could lead on to facilitate greater synergies at the country level. This has reportedly led to a stronger relationship and collaborative work in adolescent pregnancies, child marriage and early unions, gender-based violence, and comprehensive sexuality education, which contributed to joint planning within the Spotlight Initiative.<sup>131</sup>
76. There were instances where leveraging existing programmes proved to be challenging due to siloed working approaches for RUNOs. This was observed when RUNOs continued to implement their own interventions from previous programmes without sufficiently coordinating their actions under the Spotlight Initiative, leading to missed opportunities for creating synergetic effects.<sup>132</sup> Missed opportunities for greater synergy and efficiency gains indicated a need for more proactive efforts to integrate support from existing programmes.

| Area of Performance #7  | Final Evaluative Judgement |
|---|----------------------------|
| There are processes in place for identifying and managing risk  | Adequate                   |
| Overall, The Spotlight Initiative demonstrated a proactive stance towards risk management and duplication avoidance, albeit with varying degrees of integration success across different country contexts. The key findings from various independent reviews undertaken on the Spotlight Initiative highlighted both strengths and areas for improvement in its risk management processes. Spotlight Initiative adopted common procurement practices across different UN agencies to enhance operational efficiency and reduce costs, but also to ensure consistency in procurement processes, contributing to a more unified approach across the Initiative. Most programmes either underestimated or failed to anticipate the potential impact of operational issues linked to internal UN system processes on programme functioning in the first phase of the programme. |                            |

77. The Spotlight Initiative risk management framework included processes for identifying and managing risks related to duplication and integration, ensuring that interventions were well-coordinated and aligned with existing programmes.<sup>133</sup> Spotlight Initiative adopted common procurement practices across different UN agencies to enhance operational efficiency and reduce costs, but also to ensure consistency in procurement processes, contributing to a more unified approach across the Initiative.<sup>134</sup>
78. The risk management strategy was updated regularly to reflect external and internal factors.<sup>135</sup> Analysis of risk management matrices demonstrated increased attention over time to operational risk management.

<sup>127</sup> UNFPA. Formative evaluation of UNFPA support to adolescents and youth. 2019-2022.

<sup>128</sup> Meta-Review (Hera), 2022 & 2023; final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024.

<sup>129</sup> Meta-Review (Hera), 2022 & 2023.

<sup>130</sup> Meta-Review (Hera), 2022 & 2023; Spotlight Initiative mid-term assessments.

<sup>131</sup> UNFPA. Evaluation of UNFPA support to gender equality and women's empowerment (2012-2020).

<sup>132</sup> Meta-Review (Hera), 2022 & 2023; MTAs; final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024.

<sup>133</sup> Meta-Review, 2022, 2023.

<sup>134</sup> Meta-Review (Hera), 2022 & 2023; final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024.

<sup>135</sup> Final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024.

However, most programmes either underestimated or failed to anticipate the potential impact of operational issues linked to internal UN system processes on programme functioning in the first phase of the programme. The switch to a new enterprise resource planning (ERP) system affected the global operations of UNDP, UNFPA and UN Women in the first quarter of 2023. This had a significant impact on Spotlight operations globally, resulting in delays, in some cases by up to three months, in funds transfer to implementing partners, payments to essential staff, including Spotlight Initiative coordinators, and cessation or delay of activities.

79. Various independent assessments and reviews<sup>136</sup> on the Spotlight Initiative across various countries revealed a concerted effort to implement structured risk management practices in order to reduce duplication through unified actions such as common procurement and joint calls for proposals. The Initiative employed common frameworks for calls for proposals and procurement to harmonize efforts across various agencies, however, the actual application of these frameworks sometimes fell short in preventing overlap and ensuring cohesive programme delivery.<sup>137</sup> Evidence from independent reviews and assessments noted that the effectiveness of common procurement practices could have been improved, especially in integrating efforts across different implementing partners and stakeholders. Operations could have been more streamlined, and the implementation and monitoring enhanced as inconsistencies in execution sometimes led to duplication and reduced impact.<sup>138</sup>

| Area of Performance #8   | Final Evaluative Judgement |
|--|----------------------------|
| Programme management, governance and quality assurance arrangements are working well   | <b>Good</b>                |
| <p>Leadership by resident coordinators (RCs) and empowered Spotlight Initiative coordinators were critical for effective programme management, coordination and successful delivery of the Spotlight Initiative, fostering collaboration and clarity in roles among UN agencies and partners. Flexible management and working arrangements allowed for timely and effective responses to external factors, such as funding delays, personnel turnover and public health emergencies. However, the pressure to accelerate delivery sometimes led to compromised quality and reduced participatory processes. The Spotlight Initiative established global, regional and national governance structures, but the effectiveness and efficiency of these differed. The global governance structures, including the Governing Body and Operational Steering Committee, provided strategic direction and alignment with global priorities but faced delays and inefficiencies due to the coordination of multiple UN agencies and stakeholders. Regional governance structures enabled localized approaches but struggled with complex administrative processes, while the national steering committees and civil society national reference groups showed potential in enhancing governance but were often faced by structural and operational challenges.</p> |                            |

80. Independent assessments highlighted the critical role of strategic leadership by the resident coordinator in the effective management and coordination of the Spotlight Initiative.<sup>139</sup> For example, in El Salvador, the strategic leadership brought together different UN agencies and partners, creating a collaborative environment where roles and responsibilities were clearly defined, enabling efficient implementation and avoiding overlaps. The ability to engage stakeholders, support the Spotlight Initiative coordinator, and ensure alignment among different UN agencies and partners was important to successful delivery, fostering a collaborative environment where roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, enabling efficient implementation and avoiding overlaps.<sup>140</sup>

<sup>136</sup> Spotlight Initiative mid-term assessments; ECA, 2023; Meta-Review (Hera), 2022 & 2023 and 2023.

<sup>137</sup> Spotlight Initiative mid-term assessments; ECA, 2023; Meta-Review (Hera), 2022 & 2023 and 2023; LNOB, 2024.

<sup>138</sup> Independent Review of Management, 2022.

<sup>139</sup> Meta-Review (Hera), 2022 & 2023; Spotlight Initiative mid-term assessments; final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024.

<sup>140</sup> Final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2014; Meta-Review (Hera), 2022 & 2023.

81. Empowered Spotlight Initiative coordinators played a pivotal role in the programme's success. Their ability to engage with RUNO and government stakeholders often depended on the resident coordinator's management style and the level of support provided. Effective inter-agency collaboration and the integration of different UN agencies' expertise were crucial for achieving common goals. For example, in Argentina,<sup>141</sup> the Spotlight Initiative coordinator's ability to engage with RUNO and government stakeholders was crucial for the programme's effectiveness. In Uganda, effective inter-agency collaboration and the integration of different UN agencies' expertise were key for achieving common goals, which not only enhanced the programme's overall effectiveness but also ensured that interventions were contextually appropriate and impactful.<sup>142</sup>
82. Clear accountability mechanisms within the UNCTs proved essential, with some countries (for example, Malawi) developing joint working strategies and coordination spaces at various decision-making levels to enhance coordination and effectiveness.<sup>143</sup> In contrast, in other country contexts, there were challenges due to competition and a lack of clear accountability between RUNOs, which led to implementation delays and inefficiencies.<sup>144</sup>
83. Adaptive programme management faced significant challenges. While flexible management and working arrangements allowed for timely and effective responses to external factors such as funding delays, personnel turnover, and public health emergencies, the pressure to accelerate delivery sometimes led to compromised quality and reduced participatory processes. In some instances,<sup>145</sup> the complex coordination among multiple UN agencies and partners led to inefficiencies.
84. The Spotlight Initiative demonstrated strengths and faced challenges in governance and quality assurance arrangements at global, regional and national levels. The governance structure was designed to ensure effective oversight and strategic direction at multiple levels, including global, regional and national. At the global level, the Spotlight Initiative Secretariat and high-level steering committees provided overall guidance and maintained alignment with global priorities. Regional governance structures offered technical support and facilitated the sharing of best practices across countries. At the national level, local ownership and coordination was ensured by national steering committees, integrating efforts to address violence against women and girls within the context of national priorities. While the structures provided clear strategic direction, standardized monitoring, regional coordination and strong national steering, there were challenges, which included complex coordination, inconsistent application, resource constraints and variability in capacity.<sup>146</sup>
85. The global governance structures, particularly the Governing Body and the Operational Steering Committee, showcased strong commitments at a high level and, despite encountering some functionality challenges, provided strategic direction and helped in maintaining a unified approach and ensuring that the programme's goals were aligned with global priorities.<sup>147</sup> Challenges arose from managing and coordinating multiple UN agencies and stakeholders, which at times led to delays and inefficiencies, sometimes slowing down decision-making processes.
86. Regional governance structures were meant to play a crucial role in providing technical support and ensuring that country programmes were aligned with regional priorities. Governance structures at the regional level facilitated more localized approaches but often led to complex and time-consuming

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<sup>141</sup> Meta-Review (Hera), 2022 & 2023; Spotlight Initiative mid-term assessments.

<sup>142</sup> Final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2014; Meta-Review (Hera), 2022 & 2023.

<sup>143</sup> Final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2014; Meta-Review (Hera), 2022 & 2023.

<sup>144</sup> Meta-Review (Hera), 2022 & 2023; Spotlight Initiative mid-term assessments.

<sup>145</sup> Meta-Review (Hera), 2022 & 2023; Spotlight Initiative mid-term assessments.

<sup>146</sup> Independent Review of Management, 2022; Meta-Review (Hera), 2022 & 2023; final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024.

<sup>147</sup> Meta-Review (Hera), 2022 & 2023.



processes, which made it difficult to engage stakeholders effectively. The inclusion of civil society regional reference groups in regional programmes demonstrated an innovative method for incorporating regional civil society expertise, although their effectiveness varied across regions.

87. National steering committees demonstrated the potential to improve multi-stakeholder governance and operational coherence within the Spotlight Initiative. Their effectiveness depended on factors such as their composition, the frequency of their engagements and the clarity of roles among the participating entities. Civil society national reference groups significantly contributed to the Spotlight programmes by enhancing civil society engagement and offering crucial insights into programme governance. Despite this, their full potential was hindered by structural and operational challenges, including ambiguous role definitions, insufficient compensation mechanisms and a lack of operational support.<sup>148</sup>

| Area of Performance #9  | Final Evaluative Judgement |
|---|----------------------------|
| The results of the programme are being consistently and effectively measured and monitored  | <b>Adequate</b>            |
| <p>The Spotlight Initiative results framework offered a harmonized approach for standardized reporting and aggregation of results but was perceived to be overly ambitious, and the large volume and complex framing of indicators posed challenges to operationalize the framework. Programme countries tended to over-select from the menu of indicators, leading to difficulties in establishing baselines and targets and monitoring progress. There were not enough data reliability checks, nor was there a comprehensive consolidation of data across countries, which limited effective monitoring. The established monitoring and evaluation system was insufficient to adequately capture results, with gaps identified in tracking progress towards outcomes. While results were actively measured and monitored at the country, regional and global levels, there were inconsistencies in how data were understood and reported at each level, as well as how data were aggregated at higher levels. Participatory monitoring and evaluation ensured alignment of monitoring and evaluation processes with the principle of leaving no one behind as well as opportunities for capturing unplanned changes 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.</p> |                            |

88. The process of developing the results framework at the global level was consultative,<sup>149</sup> drawing on models and experiences from other global joint programmes, such as those addressing female genital mutilation and early child marriage. The results framework is based on results-based management principles and includes multiple indicators for impact, outcome and output levels, with targets set against these to track progress. The results framework includes a broad scope of indicators to ensure a holistic assessment, with a total of 18 outcome-level and 72 (119 with disaggregation) output-level indicators.<sup>150</sup> Programme countries were allowed to choose the number of output indicators and there was substantial variability on the number selected, with some programmes selecting 88 per cent and others selecting 57 per cent of possible indicators. While this offered a harmonized approach for standardized reporting and aggregation of results, the large volume and complex framing of indicators had the unintended consequence of complicating the design and operationalization of the framework. Programme countries tended to over-select from the menu of indicators, leading to difficulties in establishing baselines and targets and monitoring progress.

<sup>148</sup> Thematic assessment of Spotlight Initiative’s contribution to the engagement of civil society (LNOB).

<sup>149</sup> Final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024 SI, 2024; Meta-Review (Hera), 2022 & 2023.

<sup>150</sup> By comparison the FGM and ECM global frameworks have seven and eight outcome indicators respectively. The FGM global programme monitors 22 outputs; the ECM programme monitors 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. August 2023.

89. Country programmes faced challenges with the reliability of baseline studies and the timing of their execution, which undermined the credibility of target setting and the overall assessment of programme effectiveness. Additionally, there was a notable lack of data reliability checks and comprehensive consolidation of data across countries, which limited effective monitoring and evaluation on a broader scale.<sup>151</sup> Two independent assessments, as well as the final evaluation, identified issues with the quality of the data in Annex 1 and therefore did not make use of the results frameworks.
90. Contextualization of the framework at the regional level proved challenging, as 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 suitable outcome-level indicators for regional units of analysis.<sup>152</sup> The final evaluation of the Spotlight Initiative noted various difficulties and limitations in interpreting and applying the standardized indicators<sup>153</sup> including concerns that indicators were too high-level and did not effectively show incremental progress and that indicators were not well adapted to the local context and had limited relevance in the context of the regional programmes.
91. The mid-term assessment reports reviewed found that the Spotlight Initiative put systems in place to measure and monitor results, although the effectiveness and consistency of these systems varied across different countries and contexts. Gaps were identified in tracking and monitoring progress towards outcomes, providing a mixed assessment regarding the consistency and effectiveness of data monitoring and results measurement. Stakeholders described the monitoring process as burdensome, and delays in feedback dissemination impeded timely corrective actions. Between 2018 and 2023, the Secretariat undertook multiple initiatives to support operationalizing the results framework at country and regional levels. This included the development and dissemination of comprehensive methodological and guidance notes, monitoring and evaluation training to personnel, and the establishment of a quality assurance system.<sup>154</sup> Despite these efforts, issues and inconsistencies were identified by the various independent evaluations and reviews in how data were understood and reported at each level, as well as how data were aggregated at higher levels, ultimately raising data reliability concerns.<sup>155</sup>
92. There was significant variability in the quality of results reporting, despite efforts by the Secretariat to provide technical support and guidance to programmes. This variability was attributed to changes in monitoring platforms, staffing and capacity gaps among monitoring and evaluation personnel. Country and regional programmes provided annual reports through systematic and extensive information collection. Although essential for transparency and accountability, a review of the country annual reports revealed a disconnect between the global results framework reporting and broader programme monitoring and reporting. Participatory monitoring and evaluation helped to mitigate the perceived disconnect between centralized Spotlight Initiative monitoring and reporting processes and local realities and was also viewed by key informants as important to ensuring alignment of Spotlight Initiative monitoring and evaluation processes with the principle of leaving no one behind. Additionally, participatory monitoring and evaluation approaches provided important opportunities for capturing unplanned changes and for cross-learning and replication, for example, through bringing implementing partners together within and across programme

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<sup>151</sup> ECA, 2023; Meta-Review (Hera), 2022 & 2023; final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024.

<sup>152</sup> RPDs Caribbean and Central Asia; final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2014; ultimately, two of the five RPDs (Caribbean and Central Asia) were finalized with incomplete results frameworks.

<sup>153</sup> 2022 Meta-Review (Hera); Final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024.

<sup>154</sup> The four layers were defined as: SI M&E personnel, RUNO M&E personnel, global Secretariat M&E QA, and the RC.

<sup>155</sup> ECA, 2023; Meta-Review (Hera), 2022 & 2023.

districts and communities and engaging government and civil society representatives in joint monitoring missions.

| Area of Performance #10  | Final Evaluative Judgement |
|--|----------------------------|
| Learning and knowledge management is efficient and integrated into decision-making and programming.  | <b>Adequate</b>            |
| <p>The Spotlight Initiative created substantial resources and learning as an evidence base for future programming to end violence against women and girls. The Initiative put in place structures and systems to facilitate the sharing of knowledge across Spotlight Initiative country programmes and regions. However, there were gaps as well as missed opportunities for leveraging knowledge and sharing successful practices among countries and regions and for informing relevant interventions in non-programme countries for a wider impact. There are opportunities to develop better strategies to leverage and utilize all the knowledge and learning generated, to better communicate the results of the Initiative and to improve accessibility to knowledge created. Comprehensive and detailed evaluations, assessments and reviews were conducted on different aspects and across all regions of the Initiative, the results of which were integrated into decision-making and programming.</p> |                            |

93. The Spotlight Initiative invested considerable efforts and funding into creating knowledge and learning. It produced a wealth of resources to inform and strengthen the evidence base for future programming on ending violence against women and girls, including guidance notes, tools, research, training modules and curricula. Since the Initiative’s inception, webinars and exchanges have been organized to facilitate the sharing of knowledge across Spotlight Initiative country programmes and regions, interactions have been facilitated through the Community of the Spotlight Initiative (COSI) and a knowledge management focal point network has been set up to promote and share knowledge products generated by the Initiative.
94. Knowledge management and learning were seen as crucial for maintaining the Initiative’s achievements, however, there were gaps and missed opportunities for leveraging knowledge and sharing practices among countries and regions. Gaps included the lack of a link<sup>156</sup> to access the Community of the Spotlight Initiative extranet and the central repository of resources, making the central repository only accessible<sup>157</sup> to those familiar with the Spotlight Initiative and its knowledge management deliverables,<sup>158</sup> which may have hindered the broader dissemination and sharing of knowledge among various stakeholders.<sup>159</sup> The Shine Hub was linked on the global website but not easily found. The final evaluation of the Spotlight Initiative found that Spotlight Initiative knowledge products were largely unknown by United Nations, government and civil society organization stakeholders working on EVAWG in non-programme countries,<sup>160</sup> evidencing a missed opportunity for the Initiative’s knowledge products to inform initiatives in non-programme countries for a wider impact. The final evaluation also noted an insufficient focus on developing strategies for cross-learning and replication of programme experiences in targeted geographical regions of country programmes, leading to missed opportunities to facilitate scale-up or foster potential catalytic impacts through cross-fertilization of strategies.
95. During the lifetime of the Spotlight Initiative, comprehensive and detailed evaluations, assessments and reviews were conducted across different regions and aspects of the Initiative.<sup>161</sup> These provided a thorough

<sup>156</sup> KII; global SI website.

<sup>157</sup> KIIs global, regional, country. Sustainability plans case study countries.

<sup>158</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 and Hera. 2022. Meta-Review of the Spotlight Initiative: Latin America and Africa. KIIs global level. KP analysis document.

<sup>159</sup> Hera, 2022.

<sup>160</sup> Chile, Suriname, Tonga, Zambia.

<sup>161</sup> Mid-term assessments on all programmes, except for Afghanistan, and the two trust funds; two meta-reviews (one in 2022 encompassing Latin America and Africa only, and an updated meta-review in December 2023 that included all regions), one independent review of the management & governance; one thematic assessment of LNOB; independent Audit by the Court of Auditors.

understanding of the programme’s progress and results, governance and management. They highlighted both regional and thematic insights, with particular attention to the implementation of the leave no one behind principle and the overall management structure. The mid-term assessments conducted during implementation helped to inform decision-making and refine interventions and strategies and provided an opportunity to conduct global-level meta-reviews to guide Phase II programming.<sup>162</sup>

## 2.3 Effectiveness

### Sub criterion: Achievement of desired outcomes from outputs and levels of impact

| Area of Performance #1   | Final Evaluative Judgement |
|--|----------------------------|
| Delivery of outcomes and other effects including value created   | Good                       |
| <p>The Spotlight Initiative created value by implementing an evidence-based model for addressing violence against women and girls incorporating a multi-disciplinary, whole-of-government, comprehensive, rights-based approach, which also integrates civil society organizations as key partners. It raised visibility and focus on VAWG at country and regional levels and demonstrated the need for a broad range of actors including civil society to work collaboratively to address VAWG. The Spotlight Initiative contributed to results at output and outcome levels across all six pillars and to higher order changes at national and regional levels. It contributed to stronger legislative foundations and national capacities to draft and implement effective VAWG policies, fostering coordinated responses at national and community levels. The Initiative also contributed to the enhancement of institutional mechanisms for delivering comprehensive support services to survivors, improved gender-responsive budgeting in some countries, and promoted gender-equitable norms and attitudes through community engagement and empowerment programmes. Additionally, Spotlight Initiative contributed to strengthening data collection and utilization for EVAWG, ensuring evidence-based decision-making and more targeted interventions.</p> |                            |

96. The Spotlight Initiative created value by implementing an evidence-based model for addressing violence against women and girls, incorporating a multi-disciplinary, whole-of-government, comprehensive, rights-based approach. The model integrates civil society organizations with the objective of strengthening the civic space, giving them a voice and placing civil society in a position of influence and as key partners. This is a novel approach that is effective as a model for the implementation of interventions to end violence against women and girls. Evidence from the final evaluation of the Spotlight Initiative and cumulative reports demonstrate important results across all six pillars and contributions to higher order changes at national and regional levels.
97. The Spotlight Initiative contributed to building a conducive environment and a stronger legislative foundation at the country level. Contributions to outcome-level changes included strengthening partners' capacities to assess gaps, draft new or strengthen existing legislation and develop action plans on EVAWG, gender equality, and non-discrimination. This has led to more effective implementation and enforcement of laws, fostering a stronger, more coordinated response to VAWG at national and community levels.<sup>163</sup>
98. The Spotlight Initiative contributed to strengthening national institutions to deliver programmes to end VAWG. Evidence from the final evaluation indicated that the Initiative played a crucial role in equipping government officials and civil society organization implementing partners with knowledge and skills, creating an environment conducive to developing and implementing effective service programmes. It also

<sup>162</sup> Meta-Review (Hera), 2022 & 2023.

<sup>163</sup> Final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024.

contributed to strengthened mechanisms for preventing and responding to VAWG and better-coordinated services for survivors. Spotlight Initiative supported better integrated and coordinated services to meet community needs, the institutionalization of approaches and increased outreach to remote areas. Spotlight Initiative also strengthened the multisectoral and multi-stakeholder coordination mechanisms, enhancing the overall effectiveness and coherence of the national response to gender-based violence.<sup>164</sup>

99. Evidence that Spotlight Initiative support led to an increase in dedicated national VAWG budgets was mixed but with some promising signs. The final evaluation of the Spotlight Initiative<sup>165</sup> revealed that Samoa showed positive signals of increased budget allocations for civil society organizations working to EAWG. Evidence of increases in dedicated national budgets to EAWG in the other seven evaluation case 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 EAWG. In Malawi, specific data on EAWG allocation was unavailable, hindering the assessment of the impact and effectiveness of enhanced capacity efforts on budget allocation to EAWG by the Spotlight Initiative. Honduras has developed a National Plan of Action and partnered with various institutions to enhance gender-responsive budgeting and policymaking, yet a distinct budget has not materialized.
100. Evidence from 18 final cumulative programme reports<sup>166</sup> showed that some programmes were able to leverage government investments into EAWG. The government of Belize demonstrated commitment to the national VAWG response by supporting the Initiative through various actions including the endorsement of the Domestic Violence Motion by the entire Cabinet in 2022, calling for additional resources to further strengthen interventions, safeguards and public awareness to address domestic violence. In Grenada, the Government adopted gender-responsive budgeting and sought to mainstream this throughout the Government for the 2024 National Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure. The Government of Papua New Guinea increased its budget allocation for programming to EAWG from USD 1.9 million in 2022 to 2.3 million in 2023. This increase was a significant milestone, demonstrating the Government's commitment to supporting efforts to end VAWG. The Ugandan Government demonstrated commitment to sustainability by integrating the issues of VAWG and violence against children into government plans and budgets, and by allocating resources to support VAWG centres and shelters. However, specific budget allocation percentages were not detailed. The Government of Timor-Leste increased its financial allocations for gender equality and social inclusion programmes, with the 2023 fiscal year budget allocating USD 259 million, representing 8.2 per cent of the total budget, an increase from USD 233 million in 2022.
101. The Spotlight Initiative 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 contribution varied across countries, and limitations in data reliability and availability on beneficiary reach hindered a comprehensive analysis. The “most significant change” method identified that the Initiative had substantial success in raising community awareness and supporting mindset changes regarding gender-based violence in five countries. Although changing social norms, attitudes and behaviours requires more time than the programme's implementation period, there was significant progress in some targeted geographical areas. The Spotlight Initiative was able to play a role in influencing attitudes and behaviours towards VAWG, fostering a supportive environment for VAWG prevention and response. Spotlight Initiative was effective in engaging local populations through national and grassroots organizations to address cultural norms to promote gender equality and reduce

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<sup>164</sup> Final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024.

<sup>165</sup> Final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024.

<sup>166</sup> SI final cumulative reports 2024, Argentina, Belize, Ecuador, Grenada, Haiti, Liberia, Malawi, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Timor-Leste, Trinidad and Tobago, Uganda, Vanuatu, Zimbabwe.

violence against women and girls. Spotlight Initiative contributed to empowering young women to become “agents of change” within their communities in order to reduce harmful norms and practices. The contribution to engaging men and boys as agents of change was mixed.

102. The 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 women and girl survivors of violence. Several Spotlight Initiative programmes demonstrated positive examples of women's economic empowerment activities, showing potential for scaling up. Spotlight Initiative contributed to strengthening legal assistance for victims and survivors of VAWG. There is some evidence of contribution to long-term recovery of survivors by supporting economic empowerment of women in some countries.
103. The Spotlight Initiative contributed to the collecting, and increased usage, of qualitative and disaggregated data on VAWG. The final evaluation found that the Spotlight Initiative contributed to improving standardization, accessibility and accuracy of publicly available data and VAWG statistical data in a number of countries. The creation of targeted VAWG data, which showed substantial increases in VAWG reporting in the targeted states, was effectively utilized to support targeted national responses to EAWG. In four of the evaluation’s case study countries, the Spotlight Initiative contributed to improved systems and capacities for generating data-driven inputs to guide policies and programmes.
104. The Spotlight Initiative contributed to strengthening civil society organizations by building technical capacities, developing stronger networks, enhancing collective advocacy and expanding engagement, particularly among small, grassroots organizations. The strengthening of civil society organizations was one of the most significant changes identified in five case study countries. The Spotlight Initiative contributed to the improved capacity of civil society organizations to share knowledge, network and advocate for EAWG with relevant stakeholders. Evidence demonstrated that effective capacity building under the Spotlight Initiative has enabled certain civil society organizations to successfully mobilize resources from new donors. There were challenges for meaningful and active engagement of grassroots civil society organizations in the Spotlight Initiative due to administrative barriers to meet funding criteria and other UN procedural requirements.
105. Evidence from the final evaluation of the Spotlight Initiative<sup>167</sup> identified contributions to tangible and intangible higher-order changes at national, community and regional levels as perceived by diverse stakeholders. At the national level these included: raising the visibility of EAWG on the national agenda (“put it on the agenda”); bringing together diverse stakeholders for stronger collaborative partnerships to address VAWG coherently; strengthening capacities of civil society organizations to develop stronger networks and advocate more collectively with greater engagement with United Nations and governments (especially small, grassroots organizations); and increased government ownership and leadership of a comprehensive EAWG approach. At the community level, stakeholders perceived: contributions to raised awareness among communities and changes in mindsets; strengthened response systems and improvement of referral networks and integrated services for EAWG; and empowerment of women and girls to understand their rights and have a stronger voice to create better lives for themselves, their families and their communities.
106. At the regional level, stakeholders identified Spotlight Initiative contributions to: raising the visibility of the issue of VAWG among intergovernmental institutions and enhancing collective understanding that

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<sup>167</sup> Final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024. The final evaluation used the most significant change methodology to explore high-level results and contributions to transformative change.

responses require a multisectoral approach; strengthening civil society organizations to work in a more strategic, networked and collaborative way to exert influence; improving data availability of VAWG in the region; enhancing capacities of stakeholders in the collection and analysis of data to monitor violence against women and girls; strengthening capacities within key intergovernmental institutions within the region; establishing networks and multisectoral alliances and expanded dialogue and connectivity across countries and stakeholder groups; and increasing the availability of tools, methods, standards and other practice-oriented resources to support the elimination of VAWG.

| Area of Performance #2  | Final Evaluative Judgement |
|---|----------------------------|
| Positive externalities and catalytic effects: influence of the Initiative goes beyond Initiative resources, geographical areas of implementation and partners. Model utilized by other non-programme countries  | Good                       |
| The Spotlight Initiative has demonstrated positive externalities and a catalytic effect, with its model being utilized by non-programme countries and informing and influencing EAWG programming strategies of several multilateral and bilateral partners, thus demonstrating an influence beyond the Initiative’s resources, geographical areas of implementation and partners. Elements taken up from the Spotlight Initiative model included a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach for a multisectoral response involving all relevant stakeholders, the pillar approach and the involvement of civil society organizations and diverse women's rights organizations. The Spotlight Initiative has had a catalytic effect in mobilizing funds for Spotlight Initiative 2.0. |                            |

107. Evidence of positive externalities and a catalytic effect can be seen in southern Africa, where countries such as Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa and Zambia have explicitly built on the experiences and multi-pillar approach of the Spotlight Initiative. Elements incorporated from the Spotlight Initiative model included: a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach for a multisectoral response that involves all relevant stakeholders; ensuring national and local government engagement; the pillar approach; involvement of civil society organizations and particularly diverse women's rights organizations in all aspects of programme design, decision-making, programming and implementation; and alignment with international standards for EAWG programming.
108. The Spotlight Initiative expanded its reach by informing and influencing the EAWG programming strategies of several multilateral and bilateral partners in the Caribbean, Guyana, Kyrgyzstan and Mozambique. Partners like Global Affairs Canada, USAID, France, and multilateral financing institutions, such as the World Bank, have shown interest in continuing or building on Spotlight-initiated activities.
109. The Spotlight Initiative has had a catalytic effect in mobilizing funds for Spotlight Initiative 2.0. Discussions on Spotlight Initiative 2.0 or a similar model involved representatives from the United Nations, governments, civil society and development partners. This collaboration has led to the expectation of a United Nations joint EAWG programme in Sierra Leone as part of the Spotlight Initiative 2.0, supported by financial backing from the European Union and involving multiple UN entities. As of September 2024, Spotlight Initiative has received global contributions from the European Union and Belgium, while additional signed contributions have been received in Ecuador and Uganda from both the European Union and USAID. Other countries and regions with firm commitments include the Africa Regional Programme, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Zambia. Spotlight Initiative 2.0 has approximately USD 106.2 million in received and committed funds, while discussions are ongoing to expand the Initiative in more than 60 countries and reach a resource mobilization target of USD 1 billion by the end of 2028. The Initiative is also expanding partnerships with a wide range of actors, including the World Bank, other international financial institutions, corporate and foundation partners and individual donors.

## 2.4 Equity

**Sub criteria: Integration of human rights-based approaches at the design phase, integration of human rights- based approaches and LNOB in implementation, and reaching groups identified under the leaving no one behind principle.**

| Area of Performance #1  | Final Evaluative Judgement |
|---|----------------------------|
| Integration of human rights-based approaches at the design phase (needs assessments were undertaken and LNOB groups were identified, and strategies developed to reach them).   | <b>Good</b>                |
| The Spotlight Initiative employed participatory approaches in its assessments to ensure LNOB groups were included in programme design, directly engaging marginalized communities and stakeholders to identify and address their specific needs and tailoring strategies for improving service access and quality for those facing intersecting discrimination. Despite successes in creating inclusive spaces and providing necessary accommodations, the engagement of men and boys was not generally well articulated during the initial design of the programmes, and the limited geographical focus meant that not all marginalized communities could be served, highlighting areas for improvement. |                            |

110. The Spotlight Initiative utilized participatory approaches in its needs assessments to ensure that LNOB groups were identified and included in the programme design. These assessments involved a wide range of stakeholders, including civil society actors and service providers, to identify gaps and capacity needs in services for marginalized groups. There was direct engagement with marginalized communities to understand their specific needs and adequately address those in programme design. Evidence was used to tailor strategies to improve access and quality of services for those facing intersecting forms of discrimination.<sup>168</sup> Responses from the global survey (77 per cent of respondents) conducted by the final evaluation of the Spotlight Initiative showed that LNOB was incorporated from the design phase and the Initiative was able to reach some of the most vulnerable segments of society.<sup>169</sup> This was also acknowledged by independent reviews and assessments,<sup>170</sup> which noted that Spotlight Initiative included comprehensive, relevant and coherent objectives and actions that addressed beneficiaries’ needs at the design stage,<sup>171</sup> although the extent and degree of involvement varied across the Spotlight Initiative programmes.<sup>172</sup> The mid-term reviews assessed<sup>173</sup> also found that the Spotlight Initiative emphasized inclusive programming from the design phase, involving marginalized groups to the greatest extent possible. However, engagement of men and boys was not generally well articulated during the initial design of the programmes, requiring many countries to make adjustments after the mid-term review findings.<sup>174</sup>
111. The evaluation and other assessments found Spotlight Initiative programme’s design was informed by the specific needs of marginalized groups, ensuring they were not left behind. Furthermore, the Thematic Assessment on Assessing Spotlight Initiative’s Contribution to the Engagement of Civil Society, the Implementation of Leave No One Behind, and Movement Building noted that some programmes provided reasonable accommodations to enable participation from structurally marginalized groups. This included providing assistive devices, transport and lodging for women with disabilities or those from remote areas.

<sup>168</sup> SI annual reports 2020, 2021, 2022.

<sup>169</sup> Final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024.

<sup>170</sup> Thematic Assessment on Assessing Spotlight Initiative’s Contribution to the Engagement of Civil Society, the Implementation of ‘Leave No One Behind’, and Movement Building, draft April 2024; ECA, 2023; Meta-Review (Hera), 2022 & 2023; Final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024.

<sup>171</sup> LNOB, 2024, draft 1.

<sup>172</sup> Thematic Assessment on Assessing Spotlight Initiative’s Contribution to the Engagement of Civil Society, the Implementation of ‘Leave No One Behind’, and Movement Building, 2014, draft 1.

<sup>173</sup> A sample of MTRs was chosen which included: Argentina, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Malawi, Mozambique, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste.

<sup>174</sup> Final Evaluation of the Spotlight Initiative: KII at country and regional levels, Spotlight Initiative mid-term assessments, Meta-Review 2023; Thematic Review 2024.



These accommodations were crucial in creating inclusive spaces where all women could participate meaningfully in programme activities, highlighting a strategic approach in the programme design to reach and support LNOB groups effectively.

112. The limited geographical focus of the Spotlight Initiative on certain states and regions meant that not all marginalized communities could be adequately served or addressed. Limitations were noted in terms of encompassing the full breadth of stakeholders in initial consultations including, for example, representatives from remote areas and some marginalized groups.<sup>175</sup>

| Area of Performance #2   | Final Evaluative Judgement |
|--|----------------------------|
| Integration of human rights- based approaches and LNOB in implementation   | <b>Adequate</b>            |
| The Spotlight Initiative embedded the principle of leaving no one behind by allocating over 30 per cent of total funding to civil society organizations, of which a significant proportion went to local and grassroots civil society organizations, ensuring marginalized groups influenced EVAWG priorities. However, the integration of LNOB principles varied across contexts, with some programmes effectively partnering with civil society organizations to reach marginalized women and girls, while others faced challenges due to insufficient guidance and support. |                            |

113. The principle of LNOB was a foundational aspect of the Spotlight Initiative.<sup>176</sup> Over 30 per cent of the total funding was allocated to civil society organizations, with 19 per cent (USD 37 million) disbursed to national and local and grassroots organizations. Consultation and involvement of structurally marginalized individuals and constituency-led groups in decision-making processes were evident across programme countries,<sup>177</sup> although the extent of their involvement in implementation varied due to the restricted geographical scope of the Initiative and the limited grants available.
114. The integration of a human rights-based approach including LNOB principles during the implementation phase varied across different contexts and partners. Some programmes successfully partnered with constituency-led civil society organizations, which proved more effective in reaching marginalized women and girls, due to their expertise, trust and networks.<sup>178</sup> Training and capacity building for service providers were key components of implementing an LNOB-focused human rights-based approach. For example, police, health personnel and judiciary mobile courts received training to enhance their capacity to respond to the needs of structurally marginalized women, girls and gender-diverse people.<sup>179</sup> These efforts ensured that mainstream EVAWG services became more inclusive and accessible. In the Pacific Regional Programme, a civil society organization with a strong focus on intersectionality established the Pacific Feminist Community of Practice, which provided capacity support and training to regional civil society organization partners. In Malawi, the Spotlight Initiative developed a gender and disability analysis tool to guide contextual analysis, programme planning and monitoring and evaluation, ensuring that the needs of women with disabilities were considered throughout the implementation process.<sup>180</sup>
115. Guidance on LNOB was available, but not sufficiently contextualized for EVAWG programming, which limited the LNOB analysis at the start of some programmes and, subsequently, the focus on LNOB across

<sup>175</sup> Final Evaluation of the Spotlight Initiative: KII at country and regional levels, Spotlight Initiative mid-term assessments.

<sup>176</sup> Meta-Review (Hera), 2022 & 2023.

<sup>177</sup> Thematic Assessment on Assessing Spotlight Initiative’s Contribution to the Engagement of Civil Society, the Implementation of ‘Leave No One Behind’, and Movement Building, 2014, draft 1; Final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024, Spotlight Initiative mid-term assessments.

<sup>178</sup> Thematic Assessment on Assessing Spotlight Initiative’s Contribution to the Engagement of Civil Society, the Implementation of ‘Leave No One Behind’, and Movement Building, 2014, draft 1.

<sup>179</sup> Thematic Assessment on Assessing Spotlight Initiative’s Contribution to the Engagement of Civil Society, the Implementation of ‘Leave No One Behind’, and Movement Building, 2014, draft 1.

<sup>180</sup> Thematic Assessment on Assessing Spotlight Initiative’s Contribution to the Engagement of Civil Society, the Implementation of ‘Leave No One Behind’, and Movement Building, 2014, draft 1.

programmes and non-constituency-led civil society organizations faced challenges in effectively mainstreaming LNOB principles without sufficient support and guidance.<sup>181</sup> While some programmes provided the necessary support, others did not, leading to inconsistencies in how LNOB principles were implemented.

| Area of Performance #3   | Final Evaluative Judgement |
|--|----------------------------|
| The programme reached groups identified under the leaving no one behind principle  | <b>Adequate</b>            |
| <p>The Spotlight Initiative programmes integrated the needs and priorities of marginalized groups into mainstream EAWG services and reaching and serving marginalized women and girls. Partnering with constituency-led civil society organizations, in particular, emerged as an effective approach for reaching marginalized populations. Marginalized groups were reached through programme activities, however, there were gaps in inclusivity and consistency throughout the programme lifecycle. Country programmes demonstrated varying levels of success in engaging men and boys. The Spotlight Initiative lacked robust mechanisms to fully capture how marginalized groups are being effectively reached, making it difficult to assess the effectiveness of the implementation of the LNOB commitment.</p> |                            |

116. The Spotlight programmes integrated the needs and priorities of marginalized groups into mainstream EAWG services and reaching and serving marginalized women and girls. Partnering with constituency-led civil society organizations, in particular, emerged as an effective approach for reaching marginalized populations. Evidence<sup>182</sup> indicated that marginalized groups were reached through programme activities, however, there were gaps throughout the programme lifecycle. The variability in reaching marginalized groups underscored both successful innovative strategies and the need for clearer guidance, particularly in navigating restrictive contexts. Unmet needs among persons with disabilities, indigenous, migrant and refugee populations, or those in remote areas were identified as bottlenecks to fully implement the LNOB principle. Reaching smaller, non-traditional civil society organizations faced challenges due to UN administrative systems, highlighting the imperative for improving funding access for grassroots organizations.
117. Evidence<sup>183</sup> highlighted that partnerships with constituency-led civil society organizations were instrumental in extending reach to diverse marginalized groups often left behind by mainstream services. This approach was particularly effective in contexts where accessing public services posed risks for certain populations, demonstrating the programme's adaptability and commitment to LNOB principles. The Initiative was able to expand coverage to remote areas and enhance local services for marginalized groups through support to integrated service centres, mobile clinics, grassroots involvement and targeted training.<sup>184</sup> In Malawi, LNOB was central to service provisions, engaging national and grassroots organizations to reach marginalized groups. In Argentina, LNOB was supported through enhancement of local services, particularly for groups facing intersectional discrimination, such as indigenous women and key populations. In Honduras, a review of treatment protocols across healthcare, social, legal and policing sectors and the introduction of a mobile unit extended comprehensive care to remote areas. In Mozambique, operating regulations were developed for integrated centres, with significant civil society involvement and strengthened capacities and multisectoral coordination among service providers. Despite

<sup>181</sup>Thematic Assessment on Assessing Spotlight Initiative's Contribution to the Engagement of Civil Society, the Implementation of 'Leave No One Behind', and Movement Building, 2014, draft 1; final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024, draft 1.

<sup>182</sup> Thematic Assessment on Assessing Spotlight Initiative's contribution to the engagement of civil society, the implementation of 'leave no one behind', and movement building, 2024, draft 1; final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024.

<sup>183</sup>Thematic Assessment on Assessing Spotlight Initiative's Contribution to the Engagement of Civil Society, the Implementation of 'Leave No One Behind', and Movement Building, 2024, draft 1.

<sup>184</sup>Final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024.

the limited geographic scope, these initiatives showcased the potential for meaningful service provision and coordination improvements.

118. Programmes demonstrated varying levels of success in engaging men and boys.<sup>185</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 reoffending. 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. Activities 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 (Guyana, Honduras, Mozambique). While the importance of increased male engagement was widely acknowledged, respondents to the global survey<sup>186</sup> highlighted the need for greater inclusivity and earlier integration of male engagement strategies within the programmes.
119. The final evaluation of the Spotlight Initiative,<sup>187</sup> mid-term reviews,<sup>188</sup> and the thematic assessment<sup>189</sup> noted that while the programme design incorporated holistic strategies for reaching marginalized groups, it lacked a robust mechanism to capture how these groups were being effectively reached. There was no specific indicator in the Spotlight Initiative results framework that tracked progress on realizing the LNOB commitment, undermining a complete assessment of progress in reaching LNOB groups. There were gaps in data aggregation across the Spotlight Initiative programmes. While some annual narrative reports mentioned how LNOBs groups were targeted and benefited from interventions, data often lacked the granularity to understand the outcomes for LNOB groups and could not be triangulated with the results framework and other secondary documentation.

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<sup>185</sup> Global Survey; case studies, annual narrative reports, Thematic Assessment on Assessing Spotlight Initiative's Contribution to the Engagement of Civil Society, the Implementation of 'Leave No One Behind', and Movement Building.

<sup>186</sup> Global SI survey, 2024; final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024.

<sup>187</sup> Final Spotlight Initiative evaluation, 2024.

<sup>188</sup> A sample of MTRs was chosen which included: Argentina, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Malawi, Mozambique, Papua New Guinea, Timor-Leste.

<sup>189</sup> Thematic Assessment on Assessing Spotlight Initiative's Contribution to the Engagement of Civil Society, the Implementation of 'Leave No One Behind', and Movement Building, 2024, draft 1.

### 3. Value for Money Judgements and Areas for Development

120. The value for money assessment rated 20 indicators under the four criteria of economy, efficiency, effectiveness and equity. For one of the indicators there was insufficient evidence to make a judgement. Of the 20 indicators that were assessed, 12 were rated as good and 7 as adequate. No indicators were assessed as poor. The value for money assessment for the Spotlight Initiative was overall rated as good. Economy, efficiency and effectiveness were rated as good overall while equity was rated as adequate. The Spotlight Initiative has generally met the reasonable expectations and targets and there is an acceptable progress overall, although some improvement is needed for some dimensions of performance. Table 5 provides an overview of the final value for money judgement made for each criterion and sub criterion and their areas of performance.

Table 5: Overview of the value for money judgement by area of performance

| Criteria and area of performance   | Final VFM judgement   |
|--|-----------------------|
| <b>Economy</b>   |                       |
| #1 Indirect average costs of the programme   | Good                  |
| #2 Direct average costs of the programme   | Good                  |
| #3 Costs of interventions (activities)   | Insufficient evidence |
| #4 Human resource management including number and skill set of staff and management of human resources   | Adequate              |
| #5 Leveraging support from partner contributions (monetary and in-kind)  | Good                  |
| <b>Efficiency</b>  |                       |
| #1 Programme has a clear, relevant, evidence-based theory of change to guide programme implementation  | Good                  |
| #2 Delivery of outputs: budget allocation is clear and transparent and based on data and evidence, allocation of resources to the right mix of interventions linked to intended outcomes, delivery of programme as planned | Adequate              |
| #3 Implementing partners are effectively selected and partnerships are monitored   | Good                  |
| #4 Adaptability and responsiveness to external factors   | Good                  |
| #5 Use of innovation in programme delivery   | Good                  |
| #6 Leveraging support and interventions from other programmes to increase efficiency   | Good                  |
| #7 There are processes in place for identifying and managing risk  | Adequate              |
| #8 Programme management, governance and quality assurance arrangements are working well  | Good                  |
| #9 The results of the programme are being consistently and effectively measured and monitored  | Adequate              |
| #10 Learning and knowledge management is efficient and integrated into decision-making and programming   | Adequate              |
| <b>Effectiveness</b>   |                       |
| #1 Delivery of outcomes and other effects including value created  | Good                  |
| #2 Positive externalities and catalytic effects  | Good                  |
| <b>Equity</b>  |                       |
| #1 Integration of human rights-based approaches at the design phase (needs assessments were undertaken and LNOB groups were identified, and strategies developed to reach them)  | Good                  |
| #2 Integration of human rights-based approaches and LNOB in implementation   | Adequate              |
| #3 The programme reached groups identified under the leaving no one behind principle   | Adequate              |

## Economy

121. The overall value for money assessment of the economy criterion was **good**. Under this criterion five areas of performance were assessed, comprising: indirect costs, direct costs, costs of interventions, human resource management and leveraging of partner contributions. One area of performance, “costs of interventions”, could not be fully assessed due to insufficient evidence although interventions implemented by country programmes under several outcomes align with the "best-buys" and cost-effective interventions identified by independent studies. The Spotlight Initiative demonstrated strengths, such as: aligning its indirect costs with standard agreements; maintaining reasonable programme management costs; and effectively leveraging government and partner support to enhance policy implementation and grassroots advocacy for VAWG prevention and response. However, it faced challenges, including: a lack of specific guidelines for costing interventions; underestimated human resource needs leading to staffing gaps; and difficulties in securing additional financial backing beyond the initial EU funding.
122. The Spotlight Initiative indirect fee of 7 per cent is within the standard range, is reasonable and is coherent with established decisions by Executive Boards and European Commission Contribution Agreements as well as being lower than that charged by non-UN entities. Direct costs for the Spotlight Initiative programme countries (excluding regional programmes) accounted for the majority of funding. The average programme management cost was lower, at 16.7 per cent than the established range of 18-22 per cent. A total of 3 per cent of direct costs were allocated to monitoring and evaluation, aligning with recommended UN joint programme and entity standards. While the introduction of the programme management costs of 18-22 per cent is unique to this trust fund and a comparison was not feasible, this cost capping mechanism for specific expenses facilitated comparisons across different countries and highlighted a novel approach to addressing VAWG. The fee of less than 1 per cent of direct costs retained by the MPTFO as administrative agent fees is a standard charge and in line with UNDG standards and the memorandum of understanding. There were no specific guidelines for costing interventions in the Spotlight Initiative, leaving the process to the discretion of individual RUNOs and their experience with EAWG activities and similar programming. The costs of interventions varied significantly across regions and types of EAWG activities, reflecting design and regional programmatic focus. The largest Spotlight Initiative investments were in prevention and norms change (Outcome 3) and quality services (Outcome 4), aligning with the "best-buys" and cost-effective interventions identified by independent studies.
123. The Spotlight Initiative Secretariat was perceived as adequately staffed to harmonize programmes and provide technical assistance, although the actual number of personnel fluctuated with workload demands. The UN MPTFO was perceived as adequately resourced to perform its role as an administrative agent, with personnel who were qualified and possessed a good knowledge of pooled funds. RUNO contributions, averaging 24 per cent of total programme management costs, demonstrated strong support for the Initiative, although there were significant variations across regions, with Africa showing lower contributions. At the country level, despite substantial financial and human resource inputs from RUNOs, there was a broad consensus that the human resources needed had been underestimated, leading to operational challenges, particularly in regions with smaller budgets and high workloads, such as the Caribbean, Central Asia, Latin America and the Pacific. The complexity of recruitment processes and high workloads led to critical staffing gaps, especially for key positions like the Spotlight Initiative coordinator and monitoring and evaluation officer, affecting programme implementation and continuity.
124. The Spotlight Initiative faced challenges in securing additional financial backing beyond the initial EU funding, with notable exceptions in Central Asia, Ecuador and Uganda. Despite limited success in broader resource mobilization, the Initiative effectively leveraged government and partner support to enhance policy

implementation and grassroots advocacy for VAWG prevention and response. The Initiative also influenced EAWG strategies among several multilateral and bilateral partners, indicating a sustained interest in building upon Spotlight-initiated activities. Small contributions from RUNO and private sector partners provided additional support and resources, bolstering the Initiative's impact and sustainability.

125. **Main areas for development:**

- For Spotlight Initiative 2.0, and building on the valuable knowledge on EAWG costs, consider undertaking an assessment to build the critical evidence needed to inform policy and resource allocation decisions based on the value for money of interventions and to better understand the societal impacts of programmes at scale.
- Enhance human resource planning and improve the estimation of human resource needs, particularly in regions with smaller budgets and high workloads. Streamline recruitment processes and ensure staffing for key positions, such as the Spotlight Initiative coordinator and monitoring and evaluation officer, through more predictable contracts to enhance programme implementation and continuity.
- Increase efforts to broaden the base of financial support by engaging more multilateral and bilateral partners, private sector partners, and local governments to ensure the sustainability and expansion of VAWG prevention and response initiatives.

## Efficiency

126. The overall value for money assessment of the efficiency criterion was **good**. Under this criterion 10 areas of performance were assessed, comprising: adequacy of the theory of change; delivery of outputs and work plans; partner selection; adaptability and responsiveness; innovation in programming; leveraging other programmes; risk management; programme management, governance and quality assurance; results measurement and monitoring; and learning and knowledge management. The Spotlight Initiative's evidence-based theory of change was relevant, innovative and a strong asset for addressing violence against women and girls comprehensively and holistically. The Spotlight Initiative demonstrated strong responsiveness and adaptability to external factors including political instability, natural disasters, and the COVID-19 pandemic, employing creative approaches to adapt implementation. It leveraged existing global programmes to enhance its impact and efficiency and engaged constituency-led civil society organizations as partners ensuring marginalized groups were meaningfully involved in implementation. However, it faced challenges including: an ambitious and complex results framework, which proved challenging to operationalize; an unclear rationale for country selection and budget allocation; initial slow operationalization and implementation rates; complex fund replenishment processes that affected the pace of implementation; inefficiencies in coordination among multiple UN agencies; gaps in monitoring progress; underestimation of risks and the impact of operational issues linked to internal UN system processes; and insufficient integration of learning and knowledge management.
127. The evidence-based theory of change and innovative focus on civil society organizations' engagement and participation as a cross-cutting and pillar-specific strategy was a strong asset to address violence against women and girls comprehensively. However, the Initiative encompassed a complex mix of components under a global umbrella and stakeholders perceived the design to be complex and ambitious and requiring greater flexibility for contextualization and clearer guidance for adapting it at the regional and country levels. Stakeholders interviewed in various independent evaluations and reviews highlighted the need for flexibility to ensure relevance and effectiveness. The theory of change was predicated on stable operational environments, but the model could be adapted to navigate complex and dynamic environments to deliver results.

128. Diverse technical and secondary criteria were utilized for selecting countries for Spotlight Initiative, but the rationale for the final country selection, which included operational and political considerations as well as EU funding restrictions, lacked clarity and was not well documented. At the end of 2023, the Spotlight Initiative implementation rate by recipient UN organization was at 94 per cent on average, with a slight variation by recipient UN organization, after a slower than expected pace of implementation until 2021. The Spotlight Initiative faced delays at the start of the Initiative caused in several countries by a lack of an inception phase and the complex multi-stage fund disbursement process. The lack of an inception phase affected the ability of diverse stakeholders involved in country and regional programmes to build relationships and establish systems to create the cohesive operational processes necessary for effective programme delivery.
129. Implementing partners were selected through a participatory process ensuring a good fit to programme outcomes and capacities. The emphasis on engaging constituency-led civil society organizations as partners was a key strategy in ensuring that structurally marginalized groups were meaningfully involved in the implementation of the Initiative. In some countries, local, grassroots and community-based organizations faced challenges in terms of their capacity to deliver the programme. Creating solutions in contracting and mechanisms such as the use of small grant schemes enabled organizations that may not have met traditional UN funding requirements to access support and participate in programme activities. The mechanisms for monitoring and assessing partner performance were not robust enough and there were challenges in coordinating numerous small-scale implementing partners, which at times affected the generation of synergies and complementarity among programme activities.
130. The Spotlight Initiative delivered activities despite the impact on implementation caused by external factors such as COVID-19, political instability and natural disasters. Several programme countries shifted into crisis situations, significantly altering the operating context for RUNOs and their partners. Overall, the Spotlight Initiative demonstrated responsiveness and adaptability across different country contexts when faced with several external challenges and changes in context during implementation. Acceleration plans to mitigate against time lost due to COVID-19 or other crises had an overall positive impact on the implementation pace. Some countries showed robust responsiveness in adjusting strategies and activities, while others encountered challenges that highlighted areas for improvement in flexibility and crisis management. The Initiative introduced several creative approaches in programme delivery to enhance operational efficiency, such as common procurement practices and virtual platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic. These innovations engaged diverse groups, including marginalized ones, and ensured both programme continuity and an expanded reach.
131. Programme management, including working arrangements, showed strengths in leadership and coordination, but faced challenges due to the pressure to accelerate delivery, sometimes compromising quality and participatory processes. Complex coordination among multiple UN agencies and partners led to inefficiencies. Risk management processes were in place, but their implementation varied across different country contexts. Governance and quality assurance arrangements demonstrated strengths, but faced challenges at global, regional and national levels. Regional governance structures facilitated localized approaches but struggled with complex administrative processes, while national steering committees and civil society national reference groups showed potential but faced structural and operational challenges.
132. The Initiative's results framework was comprehensive and offered a harmonized approach for standardized reporting and aggregation of results, however, it was perceived as overly ambitious and complex in its framing, posing challenges for operationalization at country and regional levels. Gaps in tracking and monitoring progress towards results were identified by independent assessments and reviews. Participatory

monitoring and evaluation ensured alignment of monitoring and evaluation processes with the principle of leaving no one behind as well as opportunities for capturing unplanned changes and for cross-learning and replication.

133. The Spotlight Initiative created substantial resources and learning as an evidence base for programming to end violence against women and girls and put in place structures and systems to facilitate the sharing of knowledge across Spotlight Initiative country programmes and regions. Learning and knowledge management was not sufficiently integrated or accessible to key stakeholders and there were missed opportunities for sharing successful practices, for informing interventions in non-programme countries for a wider impact and to better communicate the results of the Initiative. Comprehensive and detailed evaluations, assessments and reviews were conducted on different aspects and across all regions of the Initiative, the results of which were integrated into decision-making and programming.
134. The Initiative effectively leveraged existing global and country programmes focused on gender-based violence and women's empowerment to enhance impact and efficiency. Several RUNOs leveraged existing VAWG programmes enhancing their reach and expanding activities with Spotlight Initiative funding, facilitating the scaling up of VAWG interventions in some countries. However, in some instances, leveraging existing programmes proved to be challenging due to siloed working approaches by RUNOs, missing opportunities for better coordination and synergy.
135. **Main areas for development:**
- Review the theory of change to maintain the comprehensive model and principles but identify and reflect interactions across pillars and programme levels as well as flexibility to contextualize it to different contexts including non-development contexts
  - Design and incorporate an inception phase to ensure stakeholder engagement and systems development to facilitate smoother implementation and avoid delays (human resources, baseline studies etc)
  - Document rationale for country selection and budget allocation decisions to ensure clarity and accountability
  - Review mechanisms and processes to facilitate engagement of local, grassroots and constituency-led organizations as partners. Further develop monitoring tools for measuring partner engagement and performance based on lessons learned from Spotlight Initiative 1.0.
  - Streamline the multi-stage fund approval and disbursement processes to avoid delays and improve delivery. Review operationalization and disbursement rules such as the "70 per cent delivery rate rule"
  - Re-design and simplify the results framework to ensure adaptability to local contexts for better operationalization
  - Strengthen results-based measurement and improve data reliability and quality assurance systems
  - Develop strategies to: leverage and utilize all the knowledge and learning generated; improve communication of the results of the Initiative; and improve accessibility to knowledge created. Develop clear guidelines for cross-learning and replication, supported by a centralized knowledge-sharing platform (where Shine and COSI are clearly mentioned and linked), to facilitate the dissemination of successful strategies and promote scalability
  - Build on the gains made and strengthen national steering committees and civil society national reference groups with clear definitions, adequate compensation and operational support to enhance multi-stakeholder governance
  - Ensure increased coordination and complementarity with existing programmes on gender-based violence and women's empowerment to increase reach and impact based on successful experiences during Spotlight Initiative 1.0



- Integrate more flexible and responsive strategies into the operational framework to better anticipate and mitigate the impacts of significant external changes in context.

## Effectiveness

136. The overall value for money assessment of the effectiveness criterion was **good**. Under this criterion two areas of performance were assessed, comprising: delivery of outcomes; and positive externalities and catalytic effects. The Spotlight Initiative created value by implementing an evidence-based model for addressing violence against women and girls and incorporating a multi-disciplinary, whole-of-government, comprehensive, rights-based approach, which also integrated civil society organizations (CSOs) as key partners. It raised the visibility of, and focus on, VAWG at country and regional levels and demonstrated the need for a broad range of actors including civil society to work collaboratively to address VAWG. It contributed to results at output and outcome levels across all six pillars and to higher order changes at national and regional levels. The Spotlight Initiative has demonstrated positive externalities and a catalytic effect, influencing EVAWG programming strategies and demonstrating an influence beyond the Initiative's resources, geographical areas of implementation and partners.
137. The Spotlight Initiative contributed to building a stronger legislative environment and institutional capacities, ensuring better-coordinated responses to VAWG. The Initiative also promoted gender-equitable norms, engaged local populations and empowered women and young people as agents of change. In Pillar 1, Spotlight Initiative contributed to legislative reforms and stronger national responses to VAWG, while under Pillar 2, Spotlight Initiative contributed to strengthening national institutions to deliver programmes on EVAWG. Despite mixed results in increasing dedicated national gender-based violence budgets, there were promising signs in countries like Papua New Guinea and Samoa. Under Pillar 3, Spotlight Initiative 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 contribution varied across countries, and limitations in data reliability and availability on beneficiary reach hindered a comprehensive analysis. Under Pillar 4, Spotlight Initiative contributed to an improved access to integrated services and economic empowerment for survivors, with notable successes in various countries. Spotlight Initiative's approach fostered positive changes, including increased government ownership and enhanced civil society capacities. At the regional level, Spotlight Initiative raised the visibility of gender-based violence issues and strengthened intergovernmental institutions' capacities.
138. The Spotlight Initiative has demonstrated positive externalities and a catalytic effect, with its model being utilized by non-programme countries and informing and influencing EVAWG programming strategies of several multilateral and bilateral partners, thus demonstrating an influence beyond the Initiative's resources and geographical areas of implementation. Elements replicated from the Spotlight Initiative model included a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach for a multisectoral response involving all relevant stakeholders, the pillar approach and the involvement of civil society organizations and diverse women's rights organizations. The Spotlight Initiative has had a catalytic effect in mobilizing funds for Spotlight Initiative 2.0., highlighting the potential for continued and broader impact.
139. **Main areas for development:**
- Improve the reliability and availability of outcome and output data, as well as data on beneficiary reach, to enable comprehensive analysis and assessment of the Initiative's effects

- Leverage and share best practices and lessons learned from implementation of Spotlight Initiative and proof of concept for greater reach and impact with non-programme countries and other stakeholders implementing interventions to address VAWG
- Foster collaboration with multilateral and bilateral partners to continue and expand under Spotlight Initiative 2.0.

## Equity

140. The overall value for money assessment of the effectiveness criterion was **adequate**. Under this criterion, three areas of performance were assessed, comprising: integration of human rights-based approaches at the design phase, integration of human rights-based approach including LNOB during implementation and programme reach of LNOB groups. The Spotlight Initiative ensured equity by targeting the most marginalized groups and addressing their specific needs. It utilized participatory approaches in needs assessments and in the initial design to include marginalized communities, tailoring strategies to improve service access and quality. Partnering with constituency-led civil society organizations emerged as an effective approach for reaching marginalized populations. The Initiative faced challenges, such as: a limited geographical focus; gaps in reaching all groups; and the lack of a robust mechanism to track the impact on marginalized groups, despite efforts to include LNOB principles and substantial funding to national and grassroots organizations.
141. A notable effort was undertaken to provide substantial funding to national and grassroots organizations to implement activities across the pillars, particularly Pillar 6. Out of the USD 195 million for civil society organizations overall, USD 153 million went to national, local and grassroots civil society organizations, with USD 37 million to local and grassroots organizations, demonstrating the Spotlight Initiative's ability to integrate LNOB principles into implementation. However, the extent of grassroots organizations' involvement varied due to bureaucratic hurdles to comply with administrative UN regulations to receive grants.
142. Partnerships with constituency-led civil society organizations were instrumental in extending reach to diverse marginalized groups often left behind by mainstream services, demonstrating the programme's adaptability and commitment to LNOB principles. The Initiative was able to expand coverage to remote areas and enhanced local services for marginalized groups through support to integrated service centres, mobile clinics, grassroots involvement and targeted training. The variability and gaps in reaching marginalized groups underscored both successful innovative strategies and the need for clearer guidance, particularly in navigating restrictive contexts. The success in engaging men and boys also varied. A robust mechanism to track the impact on marginalized groups was lacking, making it difficult to evaluate the success of the LNOB commitment fully.
143. **Main areas for development:**
- Consider strategies for expanding geographical scope to include and reach a broader range of LNOB groups
  - Ensure comprehensive and systematic engagement with all relevant stakeholders, including men and boys, and ensure that this is reflected in the design and inception phase
  - Provide more robust, contextualized guidance on LNOB and resources tailored to specific local contexts and challenges
  - Ensure consistent and equitable support for all civil society organizations, including smaller grassroots organizations, to mainstream LNOB principles effectively and balance financial support and strengthen grassroots organizations, with a focus on long-term sustainability and impact
  - Develop and implement specific indicators and robust data collection methods to comprehensively track and capture the reach and outcomes for LNOB groups.

## Integration of value for money dimensions

144. In addition to developing a theory of change for the Spotlight Initiative 2.0 that captures resources and inputs, assumptions and the intended process of change, the Spotlight Initiative could consider developing a theory of value creation at the inception phase of the Initiative to identify and define the value that will be created by the Initiative. This extension of the theory of change would contribute to a better understanding of how the Initiative will utilize and convert resources and inputs (for example funding, expertise, relationships) into new or superior value<sup>190</sup>. The development of a value proposition would entail exploring: how people will benefit from the programme; what kinds of resources are invested in the programme and by whom; what kinds of value the programme will create; from whose perspective does this constitute value; and what the mechanisms are by which the programme will use resources efficiently, effectively and equitably. A value proposition would also explore creating sufficient value to justify the investment and what factors influence the extent to which resources are transformed into worthwhile value. Having an explicit value proposition would facilitate evaluative judgements on value for money about value creation and effects.
145. In addition, the integration of a value for money framework designed with a participatory approach at the inception of the Initiative would guide data collection and monitoring during implementation and serve as a key input and framework for value for money assessments.

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<sup>190</sup> While a theory of change explains how the actions of a program are expected to lead to intended outcomes, it typically does not specify the value the program will generate (i.e., it's worth to stakeholders). A theory of value creation augments a theory of change by making the value proposition explicit. King, J. (2021). Expanding theory-based evaluation: incorporating value creation in a theory of change. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, Volume 89, December 2021.

# Annexes

## Annexes

### Annex 1: Value For Money Framework

| Value for money criteria          | Sub criteria/ dimensions | Standard  | Indicators   | Sources of evidence   | Methods to collect evidence                          |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|---|--|---|--|
| Economy: stewardship of resources | Management of resources  | <p><b>Excellent:</b><br/>           Indirect average costs are lower than other indirect fees charged by UN and non-UN organizations for similar interventions<br/>           Direct average costs are lower in comparison to costs for similar initiatives<br/>           Cost of interventions at activity level are lower than cost of similar activities implemented by single entities<br/>           Adequate staffing (number of staff) and skill set at all levels of the Initiative required to implement. There are no staffing gaps or challenges in terms of management of resources<br/>           The Initiative leverages substantial support from resource mobilization including monetary and in-kind support from stakeholders</p> <p><b>Good:</b><br/>           Indirect average costs are comparable to other indirect fees charged by UN and non-UN organizations for similar interventions<br/>           Direct average costs are similar in comparison to similar initiatives<br/>           Cost of interventions at activity level are similar to cost of similar activities implemented by single entities<br/>           There are some gaps in staffing (number of staff) and in skill set at all levels of the Initiative required to implement. There are minor staffing gaps or challenges in terms of management of resources<br/>           The Initiative leverages some support from resource mobilization including monetary and in-kind support from stakeholders</p> <p><b>Adequate:</b><br/>           Indirect average costs do not consistently or materially exceed other indirect fees charged</p> | Indirect average costs of the programme<br>Direct average costs of the programme including management and M&E<br>Costs of interventions (activities)<br>Human resource management: number and skill set of staff<br>Leveraging support from partner contributions (monetary and in-kind) | SI data including financial data, human resources, monitoring and evaluation data, reports<br>MPTF reports<br>UN entity data<br>Non-UN entity data<br>Evaluations and assessments<br>Joint-programme data<br>Evaluation of Spotlight Initiative | Documentary review<br>Interviews<br>Group interviews |

|  |   |   |  |   |   |
|--|---|---|--|---|---|
|  |   | <p>by UN and non-UN organizations for similar interventions</p> <p>Direct average costs do not consistently or materially exceed comparable costs for similar initiatives</p> <p>Cost of interventions at activity level do not consistently or materially exceed similar activities implemented by single entities</p> <p>There are several gaps in staffing (number of staff) and in skill set at all levels of the Initiative required to implement. There are challenges in terms of management of resources</p> <p>The Initiative does not consistently leverage support from resource mobilization including monetary and in-kind support from stakeholders. There are challenges in leveraging support from partner contributions</p> <p><b>Poor:</b></p> <p>Costs for significant inputs exceed comparable costs for similar structures/ interventions</p> <p>Indirect average costs exceed other indirect fees charged by UN and non-UN organizations for similar interventions</p> <p>Direct average costs are substantially higher in comparison to similar initiatives</p> <p>Cost of interventions at activity level are substantially higher cost of similar activities implemented by single entities</p> <p>There are substantial gaps in staffing (number of staff) and skill set at all levels of the Initiative required to implement</p> <p>There are substantial challenges in terms of management of resources</p> <p>No leverage of monetary and in-kind support from stakeholders</p> |  |   |   |
| <p>Efficiency: productivity of organizational actions including delivery and ways of working</p> | <p>Delivery of outputs</p> <p>Ways of working</p> <p>Programme adaptation</p> | <p><b>Excellent:</b></p> <p>There is an evidence-based theory of change to guide programme implementation in place</p> <p>clear and transparent budget allocation, timely delivery of outputs, effective adaptability to external factors, strong use of innovative approaches in programme delivery, effective partner selection and</p>   | <p>The Initiative has a clear, relevant, evidence-based theory of change to guide implementation</p> <p>Delivery of outputs: budget allocation is clear and transparent and based on data and evidence, allocation</p> | <p>SI data including financial data, human resources, monitoring and evaluation data, reports</p> <p>MPTF reports</p> <p>UN entity data</p> <p>Non-UN entity data</p> | <p>Documentary review</p> <p>Interviews</p> <p>Group interviews</p> |

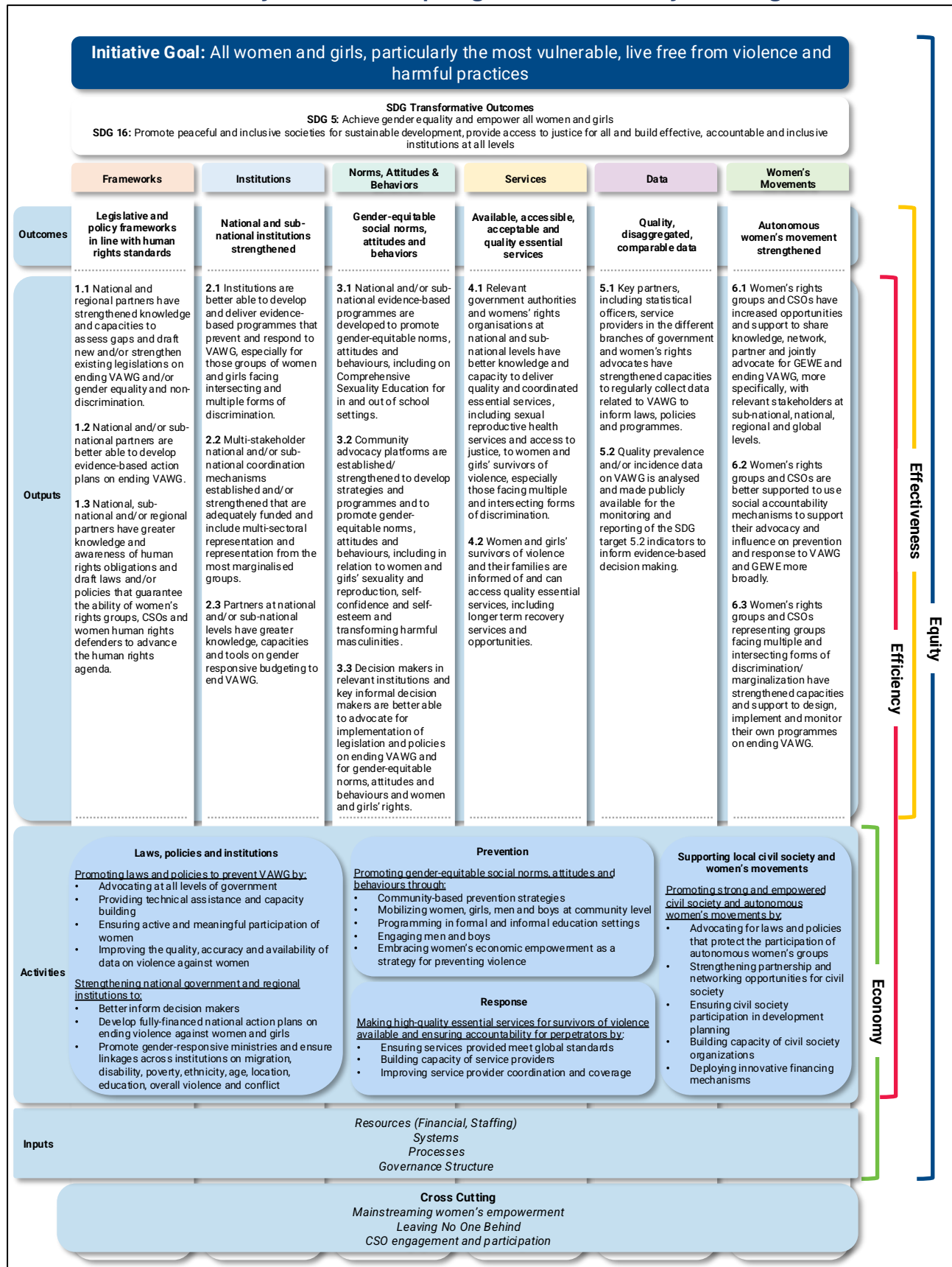
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|--|--|---|---|--|--|
|  |  | <p>monitoring, efficient resource leveraging, comprehensive risk management and mitigation strategies, robust programme management and strong governance and quality assurance, consistent and effective monitoring and measurement of results, learning and knowledge management integrated into decision-making and programming</p> <p><b>Good:</b> An evidence-based theory of change to guide programme implementation, clear budget allocation and timely delivery of most outputs, good adaptability to external factors, some use of innovation in programme delivery, effective partner selection and monitoring, acceptable programme management, some resource leveraging, basic risk management processes, functional governance and quality assurance, generally effective monitoring and measurement of results but with some gaps, learning and knowledge management integrated into decision-making and programming frequently</p> <p><b>Adequate:</b> partially evidence-based theory of change, basic budget allocation and delivery of key outputs, limited adaptability to external factors, some use of innovation in programme delivery, adequate partner selection and monitoring, limited resource leveraging, rudimentary risk management processes, programme management, governance and quality assurance face challenges in several areas, substantive gaps in monitoring and measurement of results, learning and knowledge management are not systematically integrated into decision-making and programming</p> <p><b>Poor:</b> lacks an evidence-based theory of change, lacks clear budget allocation and outputs are not delivered in a timely manner, shows poor adaptability to external factors, little to no innovation, ineffective partner selection and monitoring, no resource</p> | <p>of resources to the right mix of interventions linked to intended outcomes, delivery of programme as planned (timely delivery and implementation rates)</p> <p>Adaptability and responsiveness to external factors</p> <p>Use of innovation in programme delivery</p> <p>Implementing partners are effectively selected and partnerships are monitored</p> <p>Leveraging support/ interventions from other programmes to increase efficiency</p> <p>There are processes in place for identifying and managing risk</p> <p>Programme management, governance and quality assurance arrangements are working well</p> <p>The results of the programme are being consistently and effectively measured and monitored</p> <p>Learning and knowledge management is efficient and integrated into decision-making and programming</p> | <p>Evaluations and assessments</p> <p>Joint-programme data</p> <p>Evaluation of Spotlight Initiative</p> <p>Studies and research on evidence of best buys in preventing VAWG</p> |  |
|--|--|---|---|--|--|

|  |  |   |   |   |  |
|--|--|---|---|---|--|
|  |  | leveraging, inadequate risk management processes, poor programme management, weak governance and quality assurance, inconsistent or ineffective measurement of results, learning and knowledge management are seldom integrated into decision-making and programming  |   |   |  |
| Effectiveness: achievement of outputs and impacts (short- and medium-term changes to create value) | Delivery of outcomes and other effects       | <p><b>Excellent:</b> strong contribution to outcomes, high tangible and intangible value creation</p> <p><b>Good:</b> good programme contribution to outcomes, considerable value creation</p> <p><b>Adequate:</b> Acceptable programme contribution to outcomes, some value creation</p> <p><b>Poor:</b> Inadequate programme contribution to outcomes, minimal value creation</p> | Programme contribution to outcomes and impact<br>Value created of the programme (tangible and intangible effects) | SI data monitoring and evaluation data, reports<br>Evaluations and assessments of UN entities<br>Joint-programme data<br>Evaluation of Spotlight Initiative | Documentary review<br>Interviews<br>Group interviews |
|  | Positive externalities and catalytic effects | <p><b>Excellent:</b> Substantive positive externalities and catalytic effects</p> <p><b>Good:</b> some positive externalities and catalytic effects</p> <p><b>Adequate:</b> limited positive externalities and catalytic effects</p> <p><b>Poor:</b> no positive externalities or catalytic effects</p>   | Positive externalities and catalytic effects are identified   |   | Documentary review<br>Interviews<br>Group interviews |



|        |   |   |  |  |  |
|--------|---|---|--|--|--|
| Equity | <p>Equity of design</p> <p>Equity of delivery</p> <p>Equity of outcomes</p> | <p><b>Excellent:</b> Needs assessments were undertaken and utilized to inform programme design effectively identifying LNOB groups and strategies to reach them, full integration of LNOB-HR approaches in implementation, and interventions reached LNOB groups</p> <p><b>Good:</b> Overall, needs assessments were undertaken and utilized to inform programme design effectively identifying LNOB groups and strategies to reach them, integrated LNOB-HR approaches in most aspects of implementation, and generally reaching LNOB groups with interventions</p> <p><b>Adequate:</b> Needs assessments not always undertaken and utilized to inform programme design and effectively identifying LNOB groups and strategies to reach them, partial integration of LNOB-HR approaches in implementation, and reaching some LNOB groups</p> <p><b>Poor:</b> No needs assessments undertaken or utilized to inform programme design and effectively identifying LNOB groups and strategies to reach them, little to no integration of LNOB-HR approaches in implementation, and failing to reach LNOB groups</p> | <p>Needs assessments and programme design identify LNOB groups and strategies to reach them.</p> <p>Integration of LNOB – HR approach in implementation</p> <p>The programme reached LNOB groups</p> | <p>SI data monitoring and evaluation data, reports</p> <p>Evaluations and assessments of UN entities</p> <p>Joint-programme data</p> <p>Evaluation of Spotlight Initiative</p> |  |
|--------|---|---|--|--|--|

## Annex 2: Value for Money Criteria and Spotlight Initiative Theory of Change



## Annex 3: Data Tables

**Table 1: Agency waivers for indirect costs**

| Agency   | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | Total |
|----------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| UNDP     | 6    | 5    | 3    | 1    | 0    | 3    | 63    |
| UNFPA    | 7    | 10   | 3    | 3    | 3    | 3    | 41    |
| UNICEF   | 2    | 5    | 8    | 9    | 3    | 4    | 41    |
| UN-Women | 1    | 0    | 1    | 3    | 1    | 1    | 15    |

Sources: Joint comprehensive proposal on the cost-recovery policy. Joint briefing on cost recovery with UNICEF, UNFPA, UN Women and UNDP. 30 November 2023.

**Table 2: Overview of direct and indirect costs for Spotlight Initiative programme countries**

| Spotlight Initiative programme | Approved budget (only EU) <sup>1</sup> (in USD) | A. Total programme management costs (18-22%) <sup>2</sup> (in USD) | B. Direct costs (activities) (in USD) | Total direct costs (A+B) (attributed, either wholly or in part to an operation, programme or project) (in USD) | Indirect costs <sup>3</sup> (in USD) |
|--------------------------------|---|--|---------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|
| Argentina                      | \$7,714,286                                     | \$1,362,245  | \$5,847,368                           | \$7,209,613  | \$504,673                            |
| Guyana                         | \$5,285,714                                     | \$1,059,485  | \$3,880,435                           | \$4,939,920  | \$345,794                            |
| Honduras                       | \$10,285,714                                    | \$1,773,309  | \$7,839,508                           | \$9,612,817  | \$672,897                            |
| Nigeria                        | \$35,714,285                                    | \$5,906,437  | \$27,471,400                          | \$33,377,837   | \$2,336,449                          |
| Malawi                         | \$28,571,430                                    | \$4,665,198  | \$22,037,072                          | \$26,702,270   | \$1,869,159                          |
| Mozambique                     | \$28,571,429                                    | \$5,145,050  | \$21,557,220                          | \$26,702,270   | \$1,869,159                          |
| Samoa                          | \$4,142,857                                     | \$604,630  | \$3,267,199                           | \$3,871,829  | \$271,028                            |
| Kyrgyzstan                     | \$6,714,286                                     | \$1,312,217  | \$4,962,816                           | \$6,275,033  | \$439,253                            |
| Mexico                         | \$9,000,000                                     | \$1,658,535  | \$6,752,680                           | \$8,411,215  | \$588,785                            |
| Mali                           | \$25,714,286                                    | \$3,700,606  | \$20,331,437                          | \$24,032,043   | \$1,682,243                          |
| Niger                          | \$24,285,715                                    | \$3,736,221  | \$18,960,709                          | \$22,696,930   | \$1,588,785                          |
| Uganda                         | \$31,428,571                                    | \$5,414,400  | \$23,958,096                          | \$29,372,496   | \$2,056,075                          |
| Zimbabwe                       | \$30,000,000                                    | \$5,054,186  | \$28,037,383                          | \$33,091,569   | \$1,962,617                          |
| El Salvador                    | \$10,285,713                                    | \$1,748,813  | \$7,864,003                           | \$9,612,816  | \$672,987                            |
| Liberia                        | \$22,634,286                                    | \$3,386,335  | \$17,767,203                          | \$21,153,538   | \$1,480,748                          |
| Timor-Leste                    | \$14,142,857                                    | \$2,288,184  | \$10,929,440                          | \$13,217,624   | \$925,234                            |
| Vanuatu                        | \$3,535,714                                     | \$597,100  | \$2,707,306                           | \$3,304,406  | \$231,308                            |
| Papua New Guinea               | \$22,400,000                                    | \$3,919,783  | \$17,014,797                          | \$20,934,580   | \$1,465,421                          |
| Belize                         | \$3,535,714                                     | \$669,426  | \$2,634,980                           | \$3,304,406  | \$231,308                            |
| Grenada                        | \$2,357,143                                     | \$441,413  | \$1,761,525                           | \$2,202,938  | \$154,206                            |
| Haiti                          | \$14,142,857                                    | \$2,858,554  | \$10,359,070                          | \$13,217,624   | \$925,234                            |
| Jamaica                        | \$9,428,571                                     | \$1,575,221  | \$7,236,528                           | \$8,811,749  | \$616,822                            |

|                     |                      |              |               |              |              |
|---------------------|----------------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|
| Trinidad and Tobago | \$ 5,285,714         |              |               | -            |              |
| Afghanistan         | \$16,500,000         | \$3,498,765  | \$11,921,795  | \$15,420,560 | \$1,076,439  |
| Tajikistan          | \$7,000,000          | \$1,356,413  | \$5,186,085   | \$6,542,498  | \$ 457,975   |
| Ecuador             | \$2,900,000          | \$768,614    | \$1,941,667   | \$2,710,281  | \$ 189,720   |
| Guatemala           | \$5,400,000          | closed       |               |              |              |
| <b>Total</b>        | <b>\$386,977,142</b> | \$64,501,140 | \$292,227,722 | \$356,728,86 | \$24,614,319 |

<sup>1</sup> all approved OSC budgets, except for El Salvador, Guyana, Liberia, Mozambique, Papua New Guinea, Tajikistan, Timor-Leste,

<sup>2</sup> includes Spotlight Initiative Project Management Unit, staff, technical assistance and support, operational costs.

<sup>3</sup> indirect costs are calculated against expenditure. For every OSC budget, 7 per cent was approved.

Source: OSC approved CPDs for Phase I and II of SI programmes, consolidated financial reports, UN MPTFO and CPDs.

**Table 3: Recipient UN organization contributions to Spotlight Initiative programme countries**

| Spotlight Initiative programme | Total EU funding (in USD) | Total RUNO contributions (in USD) | % of RUNO contributions |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Argentina                      | \$7,714,286               | \$921,966                         | 12%                     |
| Guyana                         | \$5,285,714               | \$601,370                         | 11%                     |
| Honduras                       | \$10,285,714              | \$1,353,089                       | 13%                     |
| Nigeria                        | \$35,714,285              | \$2,648,226                       | 7%                      |
| Malawi                         | \$28,571,430              | \$1,544,312                       | 5%                      |
| Mozambique                     | \$28,571,429              | \$994,505                         | 3%                      |
| Samoa                          | \$4,142,857               | \$878,046                         | 21%                     |
| Kyrgyzstan                     | \$6,714,286               | \$1,080,224                       | 16%                     |
| Mexico                         | \$9,000,000               | \$1,673,292                       | 19%                     |
| Mali                           | \$25,714,286              | \$3,921,313                       | 15%                     |
| Niger                          | \$24,285,715              | \$3,149,448                       | 13%                     |
| Uganda                         | \$31,428,571              | \$1,777,234                       | 6%                      |
| Zimbabwe                       | \$30,000,000              | \$3,029,279                       | 10%                     |
| El Salvador                    | \$10,285,713              | \$442,048                         | 4%                      |
| Liberia                        | \$22,634,286              | \$2,586,637                       | 11%                     |
| Timor Leste                    | \$14,142,857              | \$1,453,189                       | 10%                     |
| Vanuatu                        | \$3,535,714               | \$482,032                         | 14%                     |
| Papua New Guinea               | \$22,400,000              | \$2,431,673                       | 11%                     |
| Belize                         | \$3,535,714               | \$833,838                         | 24%                     |
| Grenada                        | \$2,357,143               | \$1,173,462                       | 50%                     |
| Haiti                          | \$14,142,857              | \$971,786                         | 7%                      |
| Jamaica                        | \$9,428,571               | \$1,287,793                       | 14%                     |
| Trinidad and Tobago            | \$5,285,714               | \$1,194,942                       | 23%                     |
| Afghanistan                    | \$16,500,000              | \$421,385                         | 3%                      |
| Tajikistan                     | \$7,000,000               | \$915,376                         | 13%                     |
| Ecuador                        | \$2,900,000               | \$320,680                         | 11%                     |
| Guatemala                      | \$5,400,000               | Discontinued                      | -                       |
|                                | <b>\$386,977,142</b>      | <b>\$38,087,145</b>               | <b>13%</b>              |

Sources: OSC approved CPDs for Phase I and II of SI programmes, consolidated financial reports, UN MPTFO and CPDs.

**Table 4: Investments by outcomes/pillars**

| Outcome/Pillar                          | Volume (USD) | Grants to civil society (USD) | Grants percentage |
|---|--------------|-------------------------------|-------------------|
| Outcome 1 – Legal and policy frameworks | \$30,186,621 | \$15,644,545                  | 52%               |
| Outcome 2 – Institutions                | \$33,793,340 | \$11,699,618                  | 35%               |
| Outcome 3 – Prevention and norms change | \$93,594,891 | \$52,925,740                  | 57%               |
| Outcome 4 – Quality services            | \$90,296,356 | \$43,336,282                  | 48%               |
| Outcome 5 – Data                        | \$36,636,785 | \$5,247,467                   | 14%               |
| Outcome 6 – Women’s movement            | \$85,260,953 | \$66,016,183                  | 77%               |

Source: Spotlight Initiative Financial Report, May 2024.

**Table 5: Overview of costs of interventions for three Spotlight Initiative programmes by type of interventions**

|  | Malawi (in USD)     | Kyrgyzstan (in USD) | Samoa (in USD)     |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| Total approved budget                          | \$ 28,152,923       | \$6,660,117         | \$4,142,857        |
| <b>Costs of Intervention by type</b>           |                     |                     |                    |
| Service delivery                               | \$7,207,613         | \$589,102           | \$117,750          |
| Capacity building/ institutional strengthening | \$4,973,756         | \$1,382,570         | \$1,230,473        |
| Training and workshops                         | \$4,162,744         | \$394,356           | \$247,000          |
| Advocacy/ public awareness campaigns           | \$3,592,640         | \$1,019,015         | \$983,295          |
| Policy development and implementation          | \$1,490,426         | \$702,460           | \$211,300          |
| Research and data collection/knowledge sharing | \$1,343,909         | \$900,310           | \$362,131          |
| Partnership and collaboration                  | \$242,874           | -                   | \$214,249          |
| <b>Total</b>                                   | <b>\$23,013,964</b> | <b>\$4,987,815</b>  | <b>\$3,366,199</b> |

Source: Spotlight Initiative Financial Report, May 2024.

**Table 6: Overview of staff for eight Spotlight Initiative programmes**

|  | Malawi PMC<br>(in USD) | Nigeria PMC<br>(in USD) | Mozambique<br>PMC (in<br>USD) | Kyrgyzstan<br>PMC (in<br>USD) | Samoa PMC<br>(in USD) | Argentina<br>PMC (in<br>USD) | Honduras<br>PMC (in<br>USD) | Guyana PMC<br>(in USD) |
|--|------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| <b>Volume by type</b>  |                        |                         |                               |                               |                       |                              |                             |                        |
| Contractual services/non-staff/individual consultants          | \$1,619,715            | \$1,877,770             | \$1,236,547                   | \$590,795                     | \$100,642             | \$668,179                    | \$1,101,872                 | \$163,862              |
| Staff/personnel  | \$2,773,431            | \$4,601,413             | \$3,970,743                   | \$1,545,028                   | \$987,597             | \$847,853                    | \$1,266,875                 | \$918,442              |
| Total staff  | \$4,393,147            | \$6,479,183             | \$5,207,290                   | \$2,135,823                   | \$1,088,239           | \$1,516,033                  | \$2,368,747                 | \$1,082,304            |
| Contractual/staff in %   | 37%                    | 29%                     | 24%                           | 28%                           | 9%                    | 44%                          | 47%                         | 15%                    |
| <b>Number of staff</b>   |                        |                         |                               |                               |                       |                              |                             |                        |
| Contractual services/non-staff/individual consultants          | 6                      | 16                      | 11                            | 24                            | 4                     | 16                           | 22                          | 7                      |
| Staff/personnel  | 38                     | 36                      | 56                            | 33                            | 25                    | 25                           | 23                          | 27                     |
| Total staff  | 44                     | 52                      | 67                            | 57                            | 29                    | 41                           | 45                          | 34                     |
| Contractual/staff  | 14%                    | 31%                     | 16%                           | 42%                           | 14%                   | 39%                          | 49%                         | 21%                    |
| <b>Staff fully or partially funded by RUNO contributions</b>   |                        |                         |                               |                               |                       |                              |                             |                        |
| Contractual services/non-staff/individual consultants          |                        |                         |                               | 12                            | 1                     | 1                            | 4                           |                        |
| Staff/personnel  | 18                     | 16                      | 10                            | 23                            | 19                    | 21                           | 17                          | 18                     |
| Total staff funded by RUNO contributions as a % of total staff | 41%                    | 31%                     | 15%                           | 61%                           | 69%                   | 54%                          | 47%                         | 53%                    |
| <b>Volume by funding type</b>                                  |                        |                         |                               |                               |                       |                              |                             |                        |
| RUNO contribution  | \$558,901              | \$1,265,368             | \$646,172                     | \$970,184                     | \$636,423             | \$740,056                    | \$847,563                   | \$442,527              |
| EU funding   | \$3,834,245            | \$5,213,815             | \$4,561,118                   | \$1,165,639                   | \$451,816             | \$775,976                    | \$1,521,184                 | \$639,776              |
| Total (contractual & staff only)                               | \$4,393,147            | \$6,479,183             | \$5,207,290                   | \$2,135,823                   | \$1,088,239           | \$1,516,032                  | \$2,368,747                 | \$1,082,304            |
| RUNO contributions as a % of total funding                     | 12.7%                  | 19.5%                   | 12.4%                         | 45.4%                         | 58.5%                 | 48.8%                        | 35.8%                       | 40.9%                  |

Source: OSC approved CPDs for Phase I and II of SI programmes.

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