



UNSDG SYSTEM-WIDE EVALUATION OFFICE

Value for Money Assessment of the Spotlight Initiative

1. The Spotlight Initiative to End Violence Against Women and Girls

A joint initiative of the United Nations and the European Union, the Spotlight Initiative was launched in December 2017 to end all forms of violence against women and girls and as a model fund for United Nations Development System reform to accelerate progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The Spotlight Initiative's theory of change sets out the framework to support a comprehensive approach to address the drivers of violence against women and girls and harmful practices as well as to provide services and support to mitigate the consequences of violence and harmful practices in order to contribute to ending violence against women and girls. 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 norms;
4. strengthening services, access to justice and referral systems;
5. strengthening data and tracking systems; and
6. supporting civil society and movement building.

A further feature of the theory of change was the identification of cross-cutting principles to be adhered to in all programming: 1) mainstreaming women's empowerment; 2) leaving no one behind (LNOB); and 3) civil society organization engagement and participation.



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

2. Value for money rationale, objectives

In 2023, the United Nations Sustainable Development Group System-Wide Evaluation Office (SWEO) initiated the final evaluation of the Spotlight Initiative to assess overall performance including its contribution to United Nations 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. This VFM assessment responds to observations in the European Court of Auditors’ Special Report on the Spotlight Initiative. Both exercises aim to foster accountability, learning and improvement.

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.

DEFINITION OF VFM

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.

3. Value for money approach and methodology

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 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. 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.

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 is 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?

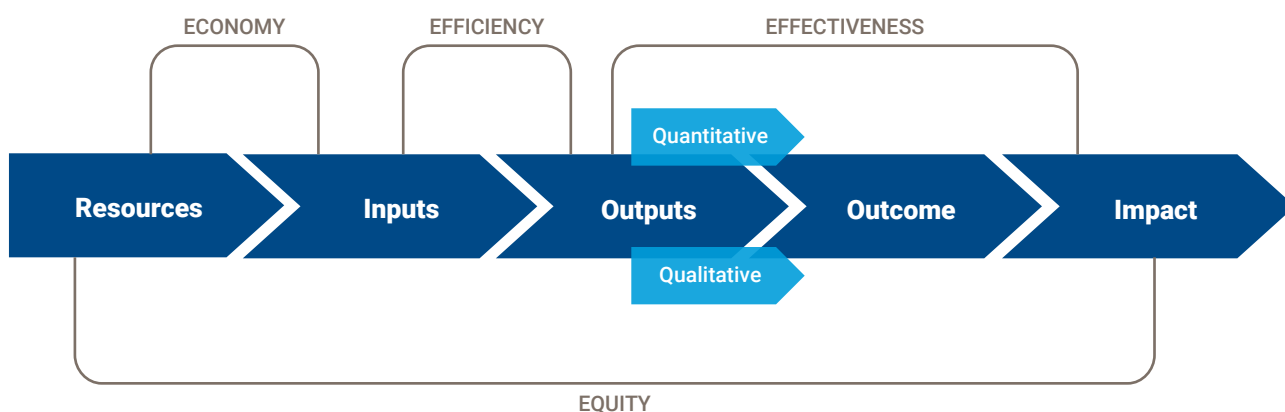
- How could the Spotlight Initiative add more value for the resources invested?

The VFM assessment is informed by the final evaluation of the Spotlight Initiative and draws on primary and secondary documentation 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 ending violence against women and girls.

The process for the design and conduct of the VFM assessment was based on the following sequence of steps.

The assessment is based on value for money criteria of worth, sub criteria, performance standards and indicators aligned to the Spotlight Initiative theory of change. For this exercise four criteria are utilized:

- 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.

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.

4. Findings

The assessment had an overall rating of good. The Spotlight Initiative has generally met the reasonable

expectations and targets and there is an acceptable progress overall, although some improvement is needed for certain dimensions of performance.

The assessment rated 20 indicators under the four criteria. Of the 20 indicators assessed, 12 were rated as good, 7 as adequate and 1 had insufficient evidence. No indicators were assessed as poor. Economy, efficiency and effectiveness were rated as good while equity was rated as adequate.

Overview of the final value for money judgement

The table below provides an overview of the final value for money judgement made for each criterion and sub criterion and their areas of performance.

Criteria and areas of performance	Final VFM judgement
Economy	
#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
Efficiency	
#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
Effectiveness	
#1 Delivery of outcomes and other effects including value created	Good
#2 Positive externalities and catalytic effects	Good
Equity	
#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
Overall value for money assessment	Good

Economy

The overall value for money assessment of the economy criterion was **good**. 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. 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.

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, document 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**. 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 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**. 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.

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. 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.

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.



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The findings, conclusions and recommendations of this evaluation report reflect strictly the opinion of the authors and in no way those of the Spotlight Initiative Secretariat, United Nations entities or other stakeholders. Publication of this document does not imply endorsement by the United Nations of the opinions expressed.

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