

UNPRECEDENTED

A Pathway for Ending Violence against Women and Girls

Impact Report
2017-2023



Spotlight
Initiative

Women's rights and safety today are under attack.

Political unrest, conflict and natural disasters continue to disproportionately impact women and girls globally. An alarming rise in patriarchal authoritarianism is fuelling misogyny and inequality, while climate change amplifies gender inequalities and makes women and girls even more vulnerable to violence.

We are still living with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, when rates of violence against women and girls skyrocketed and many hard-won gains towards equality were lost.

Before COVID, gender-based violence was already disturbingly common, with at least one third of women affected in their lifetime.

The risk of violence is even higher for women and girls who may face structural marginalization, such as those with disabilities, indigenous people, migrants, the elderly and ethnic minorities.

Human rights cannot be realized while violence against women and girls persists.

Spotlight Initiative is the largest, dedicated global effort to address all forms of violence against women and girls.

We work with a wide range of partners because the complexity and scale of gender-based violence require robust cooperation. Applying a comprehensive approach that addresses the root causes of violence – and ensuring that it is aligned with national and local priorities – can be 70 to 90 per cent more effective at reducing violence against women and girls than project-based or siloed approaches.¹

Unprecedented
results in more than

25 countries across
5 regions

The launch of Spotlight Initiative in 2017 signalled a sea change. The European Union provided more than USD 500 million in seed funding because it understood the vast global impact that could be made by eradicating violence against women and girls. The United Nations leveraged its significant expertise and reach across its various agencies to bring more capacity and political commitment to this important work.

Spotlight Initiative has helped strengthen global leadership on this issue and delivered unprecedented results in more than 25 countries across five regions.

70-90%

more effective

at reducing violence against
women and girls than project-
based or siloed approaches

1. Dalberg (2022), "Imperative to invest: how addressing violence against women and girls today reduces violence over time, fosters peace and stability, and enables people to reach their full potential – all of which advances us toward the SDGs".

Novel

Historic

Bold

Visionary

Effective

Spotlight Initiative has reimagined how to work within and beyond the United Nations system. Spotlight Initiative is implemented through 11 UN agencies and in partnership with governments and more than 1,250 civil society organizations around the globe. Together, we are demonstrating how a more integrated and coordinated approach leads to better outcomes, greater local ownership and real sustainability.

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Violence against women and girls may be the world’s longest, deadliest pandemic.

One in three women worldwide has directly experienced violence. Every 11 minutes, a woman is killed by a partner or family member. Often in the place where she should be safest – her own home.

We cannot accept a world in which one half of humanity is at risk in the streets, in their homes or online.

We must end violence against women and girls – now.

”

– António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations



Women's Movements

Spotlight Initiative has partnered meaningfully with civil society organizations, including grassroots and local organizations. Civil society is represented at every phase of Spotlight Initiative programming, from design and implementation to monitoring, decision-making and governance.

Women's movements in particular are key to our work. Research shows that feminist activism is the most important and consistent factor driving domestic policy changes that protect women against violence.²

Engaging with women's movements is also critical to understanding local needs and contexts and effectively addressing violence against women and girls in all their diversity. Furthermore, they play a vital role in helping to ensure the voices of marginalized women are heard and included.

Yet, these important actors remain severely underfunded. Studies show that only 1 per cent of gender-focused aid goes to women's rights organizations.³

To address this gap, Spotlight Initiative has delivered USD 195 million to civil society organizations – nearly half of the Initiative's activity funds.

2. S. Laurel Weldon & Mala Htun (2013), "Feminist mobilisation and progressive policy change: why governments take action to combat violence against women", *Gender & Development*, 21:2, 231-247.

3. The Equality Institute & The Accelerator for GBV Prevention (2023), "What counts: the state of funding for the prevention of gender-based violence against women and girls".



● Activists from Ophenta, a grassroots organization in Mozambique that works to sensitize communities on the rights of women and girls. Photo: UNICEF/Ricardo Franco

USD 195 million

delivered to civil society organizations

49% of activity funds

5,000+

local and grassroots women's rights organizations worldwide reported having greater influence and agency



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Having a diverse body of experts from the women’s movements to advise, monitor and hold a UN initiative accountable for its programming is a huge innovation... To recognize that our criticisms and recommendations are not a threat, nor a risk, but an opportunity for Spotlight Initiative to keep getting better and better.

”

– Shamah Bulangis, Global Civil Society Reference Group member and representative to the Operational Steering Committee



PAPUA NEW GUINEA

In Papua New Guinea, 63.9 per cent of women have experienced physical, sexual or emotional violence by their spouse.⁴ When COVID-19 lockdowns led to a huge spike in the number and severity of domestic violence cases, local organizations held vigils and peaceful marches, calling upon the government to act.

Spotlight Initiative used this momentum to rally activists and support them to gather, plan and advocate. The proactiveness and commitment of local women's rights organizations was instrumental in the creation of a new Parliamentary Committee on Gender-Based Violence, which became a permanent institution in 2023.

In 2022, Papua New Guinea achieved another milestone: the allocation of the first national budget for addressing violence against women and children. This growing national budget includes more grants for local organizations working on this issue. Thanks to the tireless efforts of activists, the Government of Papua New Guinea increased the budget for addressing gender-based violence to USD 2.75 million in 2023.

4. UNFPA Papua New Guinea (2021), "Take action: COVID-19 and gender-based violence".





13x budget increase

National budgets to address gender-based violence increased nearly 13-fold across 13 countries

WITHHER FUND

The [WithHer Fund](#) provides flexible funding to local, high-impact, grassroots, women-led civil society organizations working to end violence against women and girls in their communities. Launched in December 2021 in partnership with the United Nations Foundation, the fund follows feminist grantmaking principles such as flexibility, trust and transparency.



UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed launched Spotlight Initiative in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea on International Women's Day 2020.
Photo: UN/Andrew Hau

Laws and Policies

Supportive policies and legislation are the foundation of any genuine effort to promote women's rights and address violence against women and girls effectively. Spotlight Initiative works with national partners to develop and strengthen gender-responsive policies and legislation and to help ensure proper implementation.

Too often, local communities are not familiar with these important laws. We partner with religious and traditional leaders and cultural influencers to help raise awareness about women's legal rights, as well as advocate for new legislation on violence against women and girls and harmful practices.

We also push to have more women's rights advocates at the table when laws are being developed and work to build the capacity of parliamentarians and activists in promoting and developing gender-equitable laws.

548

laws or policies

were signed or strengthened
to end violence against
women and girls

2x

conviction rate

The overall conviction rate
for gender-based violence
doubled across 13 countries

13,000+

convictions

since the start of the Initiative



ECUADOR

The rate of femicide and other violent deaths of women in Ecuador remains high. Yet, survivors and families of victims still struggle to find justice. Previous laws failed to acknowledge the severity of the damage and distress caused by this form of gender-based violence. There was also limited knowledge and understanding of accessible reparation measures.

Spotlight Initiative worked with the Government of Ecuador to create technical and advocacy tools for the development of the Femicide Reparation Policy, in consultation with women's rights organizations, survivors, families of victims, academia and service providers.

This ongoing, participatory process has laid the groundwork to strengthen the country's criminal investigations of femicide, reform compensation for children orphaned by femicide, and foster an integral understanding of the problem and the need for prevention.

- Indigenous women leaders attend the meeting “Women, Body and Territory” in the city of Puyo, Ecuador on 16 - 17 March 2022. Photo: Spotlight Initiative/Johanna Alarcón



Institutions

Our success hinges on our ability to support and encourage governments to lead efforts to end violence against women and girls by setting national priorities, guiding ministries and other institutions, assisting with fundraising and mobilizing their citizens.

We help to strengthen national institutions to ensure that laws and policies are gender-responsive, adequately implemented and sustainable, and that national resources are allocated to addressing violence against women and girls.

Since survivors of violence often interact first with local authorities and service providers, we also invest time and resources in local governments. Decentralization can ensure accountability at all levels, from officials to perpetrators.





5. UNICEF Malawi (July 2018), “[The child marriage factsheet: towards ending child marriage in Malawi](#)”.

Alice, 19, took part in a Spotlight Initiative-supported mentorship programme to help end child marriage in Malawi. She is back in school, hoping to complete her education. Photo: UNFPA ESARO

MALAWI

Malawi has one of the highest rates of child marriage in the world; approximately 46 per cent of girls marry before the age of 18.⁵

As custodians of culture and customs, the country’s traditional chiefs play a critical role in ending child marriage. Spotlight Initiative has worked closely with the national government as well as the most senior traditional leaders in Malawi to establish Chiefs Forums at the national, district and community levels. Training on gender-based violence, harmful practices and sexual and reproductive health and rights help prepare forum members to act to end child marriage.

Today, more traditional chiefs patrol for gender-based violence and encourage girls to attend school. They also cancelled 1,222 child marriages and re-enrolled girls in schools, which likely contributed to preventing early pregnancies.

50

countries

strengthened their National Action Plans to eliminate violence against women and girls

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Spotlight Initiative came in with a lot of training for the chiefs to know how to work, especially when it comes to issues of gender-based violence. It also helped chiefs to start coordinating with the Community Victim Support Unit, the police, the court and various other community groups like mothers’ groups.

”

– A traditional chief from Machinga district

Prevention



Many beliefs, attitudes and practices that are harmful to women and girls remain widespread.

At Spotlight Initiative, we address the underlying systems and structures that perpetuate violence and reproduce stereotypes, biases and discrimination.

We create curricula and learning tools for a variety of settings, including schools, youth groups, religious spaces, community settings, businesses and government agencies.

We utilize mass media and digital technologies to disseminate locally designed messages about the importance of equality, and how to recognize and respond to violence against women and girls.

We engage entire communities – including men and boys, traditional leaders, parents and peers – in dialogue and behaviour-change activities that focus on shifting harmful gender roles and addressing the underlying drivers of gender-based violence.

We have achieved powerful progress and results.

But today's growing backlash against women's rights is further normalizing violence against women and girls. The causes go far beyond the individuals perpetrating the violence; they are systemic and rooted in power differences and our collective tolerance for these as a society.

We need more global commitment, action and funding to support efforts that finally dismantle the cycles of violence against women and girls.

Close to

6 million men
and boys

were educated on positive masculinity, respectful family relationships and non-violent conflict resolution

Nearly

8 million young
people

participated in in- and out-of-school programmes promoting gender-equitable attitudes and behaviours

Almost

384 million
people

were reached by campaigns to prevent violence against women and girls

HAITI

Efforts to prevent violence against women and girls often fall by the wayside during a humanitarian crisis. In spite of ongoing gang violence in Haiti, Spotlight Initiative leaned on networks built by our civil society partners and public institutions at the decentralized level to bring critical services and support to survivors while championing the importance of prevention. Spotlight Initiative supported local organizations to challenge harmful gender norms and behaviours and foster attitudes that promote women's rights today and in the future.

By working with nearly 130 civil society organizations, we have successfully enrolled approximately 78,000 adolescents and adults in community education programmes that discuss violence, inequitable gender norms and how to change them. Our social marketing campaigns promoting positive social norms and combating stereotypes have reached nearly 277,000 people.

KYRGYZSTAN

Despite child marriage being illegal in Kyrgyzstan, the act of kidnapping young girls and forcing them into marriages remains prevalent.⁶

To better reach young people and ensure that they have the tools to resist this harmful practice, Spotlight Initiative spearheaded the development of a new mobile game called "Spring in Bishkek". Girls and boys alike get to virtually experience different situations based on actual kidnapping cases and practice speaking up and taking action. By the end of 2021, the game had been downloaded more than 160,000 times on Google Play and was also being played in Kazakhstan, Russia, Ukraine and elsewhere in the region.

6. UN News (February 2022), "The ongoing fight against child marriage and 'bride kidnapping' in Kyrgyzstan".

“

A very interesting game with useful advice, which you will remember your whole life. Thank you so much, developers. I learned a lot from this game. I will know my rights now and will know what to do in these situations.

”

– Anonymous reviewer of "Spring in Bishkek"

Services

Timely access to quality, comprehensive, essential services can significantly help break cycles of violence. While these services may be provided by governments and NGOs, in reality, essential services still struggle with funding, staffing, capacity and implementation, leaving many women and girls without access.

We invest in strengthening the capacity of service providers, including in rural areas, where many of the world's most vulnerable women and girls live.

We have prioritized the expansion of “one stop” centres that provide comprehensive care to survivors of violence, including health, legal and psychosocial support.

We also focus on services that help empower women economically, such as vocational and business training and access to education and financing. When women are able to support themselves and their children financially, they are less likely to remain in or return to violent relationships.

Innovation and adaptation have been hallmarks of our work, including during the COVID-19 pandemic, amidst lockdowns, movement restrictions and social distancing policies. We quickly embraced remote and mobile opportunities and began connecting more survivors to hotlines, tele-counselling, mobile health clinics and virtual courts to support their recovery and hold perpetrators accountable.

Almost

3 million women
and girls

**accessed gender-based
violence services, including
long-term recovery services**

MEXICO

Reported cases of violence against women in Mexico surged by 70 per cent during the COVID-19 lockdown.⁷ Shelters could not cope and meet the increased demand for services.

To address the shortage, Spotlight Initiative engaged the local hospitality sector to help. Two large hotel chains provided free accommodation to hundreds of women who were experiencing violence, as well as their children, parents and other older relatives. Spotlight Initiative also provided access to psychosocial support and critical supplies, like food, clothing and hygiene products.

Once a safe space opened, the government ensured women's safe relocation to public shelters and other organizations that could assist in their recovery and help them rebuild their lives.

Today, this public-private model continues and is expanding across Mexico and the region.

7. ONU Mujeres (2020), “Violencia doméstica durante la Covid-19: herramienta de orientación para empleadores, empleadoras y empresas”.

Data

Quality data that is reliable, comparable and disaggregated by gender, type of violence and population is essential for any effective response to violence. Data determines policies, programmes and budgets, and drives our very understanding of violence against women and girls.

Spotlight Initiative works closely with governments and other institutions to better collect and use data in line with international standards to ensure we have the clearest picture of violence possible. This includes the digitization of research and monitoring efforts to better disseminate and use through digital apps and coordinated databases.

TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Violence against children in Trinidad and Tobago is widespread and generally accepted.⁸ Authorities have struggled to manage the high number of registered cases, particularly during the pandemic. In addition to the sheer volume, much of their work was still done manually and did not integrate with other agencies' systems, leading to duplication and difficulties with referrals.

Spotlight Initiative worked to support the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago to migrate their data to an open-source software platform already adopted by more than 60 countries. Using tried-and-true technology has led to better care for children and improved coordination with important partners, like the police, judiciary and social service agencies.

8. UNICEF Eastern Caribbean (June 2022), "[New child protection system launched in Trinidad and Tobago: information management system expected to safeguard children](#)".



We need you to act boldly.

We cannot allow this moral failure to linger, let alone grow.

We can no longer allow this global crisis to fester.

We cannot wait until the next pandemic to act with urgency.

We must not leave the rights and safety of women and girls to chance and political opportunity.

The time is now.



We know what works

Ending violence against women and girls is possible. As our track record proves, Spotlight Initiative has significantly moved the needle.

We know what works and have the tools to do it. Now we need the investment to bring our solutions to scale.

Spotlight Initiative has been recognized as a High-Impact Initiative of the United Nations because of our strong results and our ability to drive progress across all of the Sustainable Development Goals.

That's how transformative our work is; ending violence against women and girls also helps the world achieve its goals in development, peace and security, and in humanitarian settings.

For example, by 2025, Spotlight Initiative is expected to help nearly one million girls stay in school, with the potential for an additional 4 million completing school in the next generation (SDG 4).⁹

Our work in prevention drastically reduces the economic costs of violence against women and girls (SDG 8).

Preventing gender-based violence helps build more peaceful societies for everyone (SDG 16).

9. Dalberg (2022), "Imperative to invest: how addressing violence against women and girls today reduces violence over time, fosters peace and stability, and enables people to reach their full potential – all of which advances us toward the SDGs".



Our next chapter

We have already started building for the future. We have engaged more than 700 civil society representatives from each region where we work to co-design Spotlight Initiative's second generation of programmes.

Together with this diverse group of local actors, we are deepening existing partnerships at all levels – and building new ones.

We will continue to do development differently, by placing communities at the heart of the response, removing barriers to critical funding, and centring local knowledge and expertise.

Through the first-of-its-kind holistic [Spotlight Initiative Learning Centre](#), we are modelling comprehensive and effective gender-based violence programming across the globe.

Through new and innovative partnerships, we are also adding to our programmes that span the

humanitarian-development-peace nexus, and purposefully connecting the dots between the prevention of violence against women and girls and climate action.

To achieve our goals, we need to scale to a USD 1 billion fund. Ending violence against women and girls requires unravelling deeply entrenched gender norms and biases. Today's funding must meet the severity of the crisis and sustain these long-term, life-changing results.

It's estimated that Spotlight Initiative will have conservatively prevented 21 million women and girls from experiencing gender-based violence by 2025.¹⁰ And, with USD 1 billion, we aim to ensure that 100 million women and girls live a life free from violence by 2028 across 60 countries.

10. Dalberg (2022), "Imperative to invest: how addressing violence against women and girls today reduces violence over time, fosters peace and stability, and enables people to reach their full potential – all of which advances us toward the SDGs".



“
Spotlight Initiative's success provides an opportunity for others to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals more broadly. It has showcased a new, more collaborative, inclusive and innovative way of working that maximizes the benefits of our collective capacities.
”

– Amina J. Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations



“

We are seeing the results [of Spotlight Initiative] in institutions but they are fragile because they depend on convincing those responsible of how urgent this initiative is.

”

– Cecilia Suárez, actor and UN Global Advocate for Spotlight Initiative

“

I'm joining Spotlight Initiative in calling on men to stop violence once and for all.

”

– Siya Kolisi, professional rugby union player and UN Global Advocate for Spotlight Initiative



“

Spotlight Initiative has been a beacon of hope for survivors all around the globe. Its unwavering commitment to eradicating violence, ending harmful practices and ensuring access to justice and support services is unprecedented.

”

– Natalie Portman, actor




Spotlight Initiative is implemented through multiple UN agencies, including:

UN Women
 United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
 United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)
 International Labour Organization (ILO)
 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)
 Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO)
 International Organization for Migration (IOM)



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