



**Spotlight
Initiative**
*To eliminate violence
against women and girls*

EU/UN Spotlight initiative, Afghanistan

Annual Narrative Programme Report

01 January 2022- 31 December 2022

Programme Title & Programme Number

Programme Title: EU/UN SPOTLIGHT INITIATIVE, AFGHANISTAN
MPTF Office Project Reference Number:¹
 00119460

Recipient Organization(s)

UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women

Programme Cost (US\$)

Total Phase I budget, and (where OSC approved) Phase II budget as per the Spotlight CPD/RPD:16,921,384 USD

Phase I and (where OSC approved) Phase II Spotlight funding:² 16,500,000 USD

Agency Contribution: 421,385 USD

Spotlight Funding and Agency Contribution by Agency:

Name of RUNO	Spotlight Phase I (USD)	UN Agency Contributions (USD)
UNICEF	3,084,040	127,992
UNFPA	4,804,967	293,393
UN Women	7,342,196	0
UNDP	1,268,797	0
TOTAL:	16,500,000	421,385

Priority regions/areas/localities for the programme

Kabul, Herat, Kandahar, Paktia

Key Partners**Civil Society Organizations**

Partnership was continued or newly established with a total of nine national and int'l organizations to implement the activities.

Programme Start and End Dates

Start Date: 09.11.2020

End Date: 31.12.2023

Report Submitted By:

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¹The Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) Office Project Reference Number is the same number as the one on the Notification message. It is also referred to as "Project ID" on the project's factsheet page the [MPTF Office GATEWAY](#).

²The Spotlight Contribution refers to the amount transferred to the Recipient UN Organizations, which is available on the [MPTF Office GATEWAY](#).

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Acronym List

AIHRC	Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission
AWEC	Afghan Women’s Educational Centre
AWP	Annual Work Plan
C4D	Communication for Development
CBHC	Community-based Health Care
CHW	Community Health Worker
CoC	Code of Conduct
CPAN	Child Protection Action Network
CSNRG	Civil Society National Reference Group
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CSSF	Comprehensive School Safety Framework
DFA	de facto Authorities
ECM	Early Child Marriage
EVAWG	Elimination of Violence Against Women and Girls
EU	European Union
FGC	Family Guidance Center\
FLE	Family Life Education
FRC	Family Resource Center
GBV	Gender- Based Violence
GiHA	Gender in Humanitarian Action
GoIRA	Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
HPs	Harmful Practices
HRDA	Human Resource Development Agency
IRC	International Rescue Committee
KAPB	Knowledge, Attitudes, Practices and Behaviors
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MAG	Multi-Purpose Adolescent Group
MBN	Men and Boys Network
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoPH	Ministry of Public Health
MOT	Mobile Outreach Team
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding

MoWA	Ministry of Women's Affairs
NAP	National Action Plan
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NSC	National Steering Committee
PCA	Program Cooperation Agreement
PHC	Primary Health Care
PSCC	Psycho-social Counseling Center
PSS	Psycho-social Support
RC/HC	Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator
RCO	Resident Coordinator's Office
RF	Results Framework
RUNO	Recipient UN Organisation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
SI-A	Spotlight Initiative in Afghanistan
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
ToRs	Terms of Reference
UN	United Nations
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
WASSA	Women Activities and Social Services Association
WGSS	Women and Girls Safe Space
WPC	Women Protection Center
WPCTF	Women Protection Center Trust Fund
WPHF	Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund
YFS	Youth Friendly Space
YHC	Youth Health Corners
YHL	Youth Health Line

Executive Summary

The Taliban (hereinafter referred to the De facto Authority or DfA) takeover of the country in 2021 ushered in a new era in Afghanistan, characterized by the end of major hostilities and relatively better overall security situation, but one which faced spiraling economic decline, leading to a complex humanitarian crisis. In 2022, 55% of Afghan people needed humanitarian assistance, with most humanitarian needs stemming from economic hardships, from effects of climate change, natural disasters and structural limitations in limiting their impact. The number of atypical sudden-onset disasters was higher than in previous years, with the trend anticipated to continue.

In 2022, on top of drastically rising poverty levels, the country was also faced with clampdown of the media and civil society sectors, and almost-total exclusion of half the population – women and girls – from public life. Traditional gender norms and patriarchal culture have long reinforced discrimination against women and girls in Afghanistan, which have significantly been made worse since the DfA takeover. With issuance of several consecutive decrees targeting women and girls, DfA curtailment of Afghan women's enjoyment of their rights is uniquely severe, with Women Peace and Security Index³, ranking Afghanistan as the worst country in the world to be a woman or a girl. Previous abolition of key institutions protecting women's rights remained in place, while ambiguity as to the applicable legal frameworks as well as capacity constraints have been key challenges in the justice sector. DfA courts continued to operate in a non-transparent manner with judges refusing to consider women's complaints, and instructions to resolve family law issues through mediation or other traditional dispute resolution mechanisms.

While women's civil society organizations continue to exist in Afghanistan, their operations have been significantly curtailed. There have been reports of significant drops in funding, issues with absorption capacities, and barriers in withdrawing funds from bank accounts inside Afghanistan. Women CSOs, including SI-A implementing partners, faced a difficult administrative environment, in having to suspend activities until official documents were renewed or extended by different De facto Authorities. Research team members, engaged under the SI-A commissioned GBV study, faced arrests and detentions, but were subsequently safely released. Majority of senior leadership and qualified female staff from CSOs continued leaving the country, making it difficult to meet the technical needs of the GBV programme.

Early on in 2022, at the request of the EU and in line with the Joint Operating Principles of the UN Operating in Afghanistan, SI-A has significantly reduced planned interventions in Pillar 1, 2 and 5, which were aimed at strengthening capacities of the national stakeholders (under the previous regime), effectively preventing direct engagement with the DFA.

Against this backdrop, SI-A had to develop flexible approaches to meet increasing demands e.g. currently, urgent requests for healthcare or economic support, which are not controversial with the DfA. SI-A also invested in spaces which can function as one-stop decentralized, community-based hubs to provide a range of services and products, some of which can be used with complementarity between RUNOs. Mentoring and use of current project spaces to deliver tangible benefits were the most practical means of delivering SI-A on time. RUNOs had to launch capacity strengthening and technical support efforts on prevention and other GBV related skill sets to IPs, front line GBV staff and key stakeholders to ensure maintenance of quality programming.

Consequently, most results in 2022 were achieved in relation to provision of services, followed by support to CSO movement and prevention, including beyond three Spotlight priority provinces (Herat, Kandahar, and Paktia).

SI-A Prevention strategy and action plan was initiated, which articulates the specific role and approach that each UN agency is undertaking on prevention for the remainder of the SI-A programme and aims to provide guidance on strategies to prevent VAWG beyond the lifetime of the programme. Work with

³Women Peace and Security Index

men and boys continued, through 47 Men and Boys Networks, with members acting as change agents in accepting women's rights and female agency, and support women's participation in public life and decision-making, promote health-seeking behaviours, and facilitate women's and girls' access to nutrition and other essential services. Teachers were trained on GBV, enabling disclosures of cases and referrals to service providers. Youth facilitators were trained and delivered reproductive health orientation sessions to young people. A Cash for Protection pilot to eliminate Child Marriage in Herat targeted 150 households with the main objective of cash for protection payment to poor and needy households/families to minimize the risk/possibility of vulnerable girls being forced into early marriages.

SI-A managed to re-negotiate running of most of protection centres for women and girls. Through a variety of centres with different titles, designations and operating dynamics at different levels of the community, as well as through capacity building and awareness raising interventions, SI-A provided critical support to 220,929 women and girls, including psycho-social support, basic health services, life-skills education, economic or livelihoods support.

SI-A also supported young people through creation and strengthening of various networks for adolescents, delivery of life skills education and provision of counselling services reaching 131,290 young people in total.

While the Programme envisaged several separate GBV studies, SI-A opted for a joint approach in conducting several pieces of research under one umbrella, to avoid overlaps, targeting the same stakeholders across provinces, and generally ensure better information management. The overall objective of this study was to capture baseline and cross-sectional information to support the implementation of the Spotlight Initiative (SI). More specifically the study is focused on understanding current knowledge, attitudes, practices (KAP) about gender-based-violence (GBV) in Afghanistan and mapping key stakeholders for local level interventions on GBV.

The SI-A has finalised a partnership with an organisation that will develop a Grant-Making mechanism for CSOs in Afghanistan working on women's issues. This includes the provision of grants to continue operations and deliver programming. A key component of this partnership is to build the organisational and technical capacity of grantees. Whilst women led organisations will be prioritised, grantees will also include CSOs working in the women's rights space that are working to retain their female staff. This kind of support is vital for the well-being of women's rights organizations and activists and aims to i) to strength their organisational capacity and resilience, ii) to persevere in the face of DfA decrees and increasing restrictions, and iii) to be able respond to women and girls' most pressing needs in the current context. Grants are expected to be disbursed in 2023.

RUNOs faced many of the same challenges as their CSO partners in terms of human resources with additional problems faced with UN's administrative procedures related to fielding staff in times of heightened security risk. Staff turnover and hiring new personnel contributed to delays in delivery of the programme. Some RUNOs have been impacted by security restrictions where their work has been deemed non-essential, limiting their ability to support partners and monitor implementation of interventions. Programme syntax, activities and services had to be redesigned for viability to reflect the realities and respond to the sensibilities of DFA rule in order to protect CSO partners and beneficiaries.

Delivery of development programme in mostly humanitarian context faces unprecedented re-programming and implementation challenges and in view of supporting women and girls in the worsening situation, requires a lot more flexibility for supporting interventions under development-peace-humanitarian nexus. In such a landscape, long-term sustainability planning is not feasible. SI-A has struggled to expand the resources as planned, in view of so many restrictions and changes, and would benefit from additional time for implementation, beyond the global deadline. It will become near impossible to plan development interventions, as they relate to women and girls, in the humanitarian context, with the deteriorating security situation, which is set to continue.

Contextual Shifts and Implementation Status

The DfA takeover of the country in 2021, ended their 20-year conflict with Afghan National Security and Defense Forces. Beyond pockets of armed clashes and violent confrontations in Panjshir (90 per cent), Samangan (43 per cent), and Sar-e-Pul (41 per cent) provinces, the overall security situation improved in 2022 with the end of major hostilities. With the arrival of the DfA, economic sanctions and the freezing of banking processes ushered in an era with near economic collapse leading to a complex crisis, seemingly of a humanitarian nature, which saw a rapid increase in those below the poverty line. The country has been affected by several natural disasters which have affected a significant large number of people. The combined effect of livelihood loss, food insecurity, inflation, and extraordinary price rise in commodities, has put pressure on already hard-pressed families. With the collapse of the previous government, direct international development assistance, which previously accounted for 75 per cent of public expenditure, was suspended bringing the health sector to a near-collapse. In the absence of development activity, the great majority of the Afghan people are experiencing a backwards slide evidenced with 55% of the population in need of humanitarian assistance in 2022.

While drivers of humanitarian needs stemmed mostly from conflict and Covid-19 in 2021, in 2022 they were other multi-dimensional drivers: climate change, natural disasters and economic shocks, protection threats, mostly for women and girls. Afghanistan is also highly prone to natural hazards, whose frequency and intensity are exacerbated by the effects of climate change, with structural limitations in mitigating disaster impact. The number of atypical sudden-onset disasters, such as floods and earthquakes, was higher in 2022 than preceding years and the scenario anticipates that these patterns may be the norm moving ahead⁴.

In 2022, on top of spiraling economic decline, drastically rising poverty levels, the country was also faced with clampdown of the media and civil society sectors, and almost-total exclusion of half the population – women and girls – from public life. Existing traditional gender norms and patriarchal culture have long reinforced discrimination against women and girls in Afghanistan, which have significantly been made worse since the DfA takeover. DfA curtailment of Afghan women’s enjoyment of their rights is uniquely severe, with Women Peace and Security Index ranking Afghanistan as the worst country in the world to be a woman or a girl.

Further to two directives by the DFA issued in 2021, additional decrees issued in 2022 targeting women and girls have severely impacted their freedom of movement, access to essential services and livelihoods, with negative economic, social, physical and psychological consequences:

1. Suspension of secondary education for girls beyond grade six (September 2021)
2. Requiring women to be accompanied by a male relative (Mahram) for travel 78 km or further from their home (December 2021)
3. Announcement of separate days for men and women to visit recreational parks (March 2022)
4. Requiring women to be accompanied by mahram during domestic or international flights (March 2022)
5. Requiring women to wear prescribed forms of hijab and to cover their faces when in public (May 2022)
6. Ordering Afghan women appearing on TV to cover their faces while on air (May 2022)
7. Banning women from entering parks and amusement parks, as well as accessing public bath houses and gyms (November 2022)

Disallowing women to attend universities (December 2022)

⁴Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs Overview 2023

Banning women from working for national and international non-governmental organizations (December 2022).

While the issuance and application of the decrees remained inconsistent and unpredictable, from one province to another, they also validated existing suppressive norms, and increased family and community-imposed restrictions on women and girls, contributing to an increase of already high levels of violence against them. Amid reduced services and with a shortage of female staff, women and girls have vastly reduced access to essential health care, including sexual and reproductive health care. This is again compounded by restrictions of their freedom of movement, which has seen some women remaining at home even when critically sick, rather than facing the challenges of trying to reach emergency health care.

Ambiguity as to the applicable legal frameworks as well as capacity constraints have been key challenges in the justice sector. DfA courts continued to operate in a non-transparent manner with judges refusing to consider women's complaints, and instructions to resolve family law issues through mediation or other traditional dispute resolution mechanisms⁵. Province by province, there is a different scenario for the justice sector depending on what was available previously as some areas were under DfA control and reliant on DfA mobile judges. In the application of the Sharia Law, the DfA resumed the practices of public executions and floggings.

Against this backdrop, the SI-A faced numerous challenges and delays in programme implementation throughout 2022. Fear of retaliation and stigmatization for handling a taboo topic, together with the subordinate status of women in Afghan society has resulted in a difficult landscape (with research team members engaged by the SI-A programme facing arrests), and in which to ascertain the scale of GBV issues and to begin the discourses necessary for women to seek assistance. As agreed at the start of the year 2022 with the EU, most planned interventions under Pillars 1, 2 and 5 were canceled or postponed for 2023 due to requirements of Joint Operating Principles of UN Operating in Afghanistan, effectively preventing direct engagement with the DFA in the programme delivery. With the aim of reviewing progress and identifying measures for acceleration of programme delivery, SI-A organised the joint retreat of all RUNOs and partners in September 2022, proposing possible ways forward. While CSOs remained the main vehicles for channeling aid into communities, with the arrival of the DFA, many women's CSO leaders went into exile, hiding or self-censoring due to concerns around safety and being targeted. The modest number of female professionals available to provide services across the country has been reduced by an unprecedented brain drain and current restrictions on education and ban of women working for I/NGOs (except in health and education sectors) may create further reductions in future. SI-A has developed flexible approaches to meet client demands e.g., currently, urgent requests for healthcare or economic support. SI-A also invested in spaces which can function as one-stop decentralized, community-based hubs to provide a range of services and products, some of which could eventually be used with complementarity between RUNOs. SI-A has shown responsiveness to the needs of IPs, usually CSO partners, and beneficiaries on the ground as far as possible within technical and operational constraints presented by the extraordinary situation which arose in Afghanistan. Some RUNOs and IPs have lost critical staff at an unprecedented rate, leaving them operating with little or no institutional memory and reduced capacity. The process of adjustment at so many levels has been time consuming, causing continuous delays. Time and effort were heavily invested through various negotiations at the provincial level, in particular to allow female frontline workers to return to work, or even just to obtain licenses for projects supported by SI-A.

Hence, in 2022 majority of interventions were in relation to service provision to women and girls, followed by data collection, limited prevention work and preparations for strengthening women's civil society movement, including across development-peace-humanitarian nexus, which are now all looking dubious in view of tightening space for civil society actors, especially as they relate to support to women and girls. The approach also included delivery of some intervention in additional locations, beyond Spotlight target provinces.

⁵The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security Report of the Secretary-General, 14 September 2022

With numerous and increasing challenges in the country and reduced operational space, the SI-A programme is focused on ensuring knowledge management and good practices in provision of services to women and girls, which could be further built upon beyond SI-A timeline. Most notably, a comprehensive GBV assessment was completed which provides substantial analysis to be taken into account for further GBV programming, as well as various models for supporting women and girls, and how they could be adjusted in the ever changing and more restrictive circumstances. Contextual constraints of a drastic and rapidly evolving nature, and before resolution of an impasse arising from the hard stance policies of DfA on women and girls, regular environment scanning is ongoing, focused on shortened timeframes of implementation to ensure flexibility in adapting interventions in ever changing and unpredictable context.

Implementation progress by outcome area:

Spotlight Initiative - Outcome areas	Implementation progress as of 31 Dec 2022				Total Exp.	% Impl. Rate
	UNDP	UNWOMEN	UNFPA	UNICEF		
Outcome 1: Legal and Policy Framework	40,000	0	0	0	40,000	%20
Outcome 2: Institutions	20,000	0	9,548	0	29,548	%3
Outcome 3: Prevention and Norm Change	0	62,658	80,000	824,981	967,639	%31
Outcome 4: Quality Services	0	219,116	723,087	712,010	1,654,213	%35
Outcome 5: Data	0	0	33,129	0	33,129	%5
Outcome 6: Women's Movement	0	9,888	78,150	413,954	501,857	%21
TOTAL	60,000	291,662	923,914	1,950,945	3,226,386	%27

Programme Governance and Coordination

National Steering Committee

After the collapse of the Afghanistan legitimate government in August 2021 and the takeover of the county by the DfA, the SI-A did not establish the NSC. However, in the absence of the NSC, a joint Spotlight Initiative Afghanistan UN Country Team (SI-A UNCT) was formed, chaired by the RC and composed of the Country Representatives of the four RUNOs. This team discusses strategic issues and general oversight, while also enhancing communications between the RUNOs at the representative level. It ensures commitment to the programme at the highest level of all the UN agencies and promotes effective coordination and troubleshooting, including for security and political challenge. This team met two times in 2022 where they reviewed and approved the 2022 AWP and discussed strategic priorities for 2023.

Civil Society National or Regional Reference Group (CSRG)

The nomination process of members of the National Reference Group (NRG) was implemented in 2021 but not finalized. As a result of this process, 15 representatives of Civil Society Organizations were nominated to be part of this oversight structure. The group was scheduled to be confirmed in August 2021, during the launch of the Spotlight Programme for Afghanistan. Following the takeover by the DfA in August 2021,

GBV activities were suspended by the DfA, both the launch of the programme and the confirmation of the NRG members was postponed.

In 2022, efforts to have the NRG established resumed and discussions undertaken by the programme technical team resulted in a few options that could be implemented to achieve this result without jeopardizing the safety of programme partners and beneficiaries. A few options were considered which included i) leveraging existing agency platforms; ii) establishing a new and smaller platform/group with selected representatives of programme CSO partners, and also, the option to capitalize on UNICEF's existing CSO platform. In November 2022, the Spotlight Technical Team held a retreat and agreed that the situation of the country was not favorable to have such a platform, as the risks that would bring would outweigh the benefits posed to programme, partners and CSO representatives. Based on experiences registered by partners, where their facilities were subjected to regular monitoring and they themselves had been subjected to questioning by the DFA, their role as NRG members would have exposed them as individuals working on GBV, which is not allowed by the DFA.

As RUNOs proceed with the implementation of the programme, plans to continue to collectively engage with CSO partners, for consultations and discussions on the progress programme have been strengthened, and this will be pursued through regular bilateral meetings between agencies and their partners and RUNOs and partners' retreats to be held throughout the year. In addition, representatives from Afghanistan are taking part in the Regional Civil Society Reference Group and contribute to the work on both Regional and Afghanistan Spotlight Programmes.

Inter-agency coordination, technical committees and other governance mechanisms

a. Spotlight Initiative Technical Team: To ensure continued information sharing and coordination, the SI-A technical team, chaired by the Head of the RCO and composed of the RUNOs' technical leads and EU delegation representatives, continued its function throughout 2022. The technical team meets bi-weekly and constitutes a strong platform for collaboration, consultations and consensus building on key issues in the implementation of the programme, and it is expected to continue through the life of the programme as a technical level mechanism for addressing and elevating emergent issues swiftly, and for raising to the principals those issues that require a policy decision.

b. Use of UN Reform inter-agency tools

Role of the Resident Coordinator (RC): The UN Resident Coordinator (RC), supported by the RCO, is the final decision-making authority within the UN and is responsible for the overall strategic direction and oversight of the SI-A Programme, including its planning, implementation, communication, monitoring, reporting and review, as well as facilitation of collaboration amongst all stakeholders. Leveraging a "one UN interface" for partnerships, the RC engages with a broad range of partners including the de facto authorities, EU Delegation, civil society, development and humanitarian partners and other stakeholders.

The Value Added by UN Reform: Under direct leadership by the RC, and support of the RCO, the Spotlight Initiative has strengthened collaboration of RUNOs on gender equality and VAWG, facilitating other current and future collaborations on EVAWG, in the spirit of ONE UN, which is significant in the current context of Afghanistan.

Delivery Under UN Reform: In line with the UN Reform principles, all RUNOs have worked closely under the leadership of the Resident Coordinator and the RCO, to plan the joint implementation of the SI-A, building on each other's technical expertise and partnerships. The Joint Annual Work Plan (AWP), execution of a comprehensive joint survey, joint monitoring, programme retreats, have provided opportunities for RUNOs to come together and discuss synergies and opportunities to collaborate and support each other across activities for successful coordination and implementation of the SI-A.

Programme Partnerships

a. Government

Following the takeover of the government by the DfA in 2021, there has been no structural cooperation between SI-A programme and De facto Authorities, in line with the Joint Operating Principles of UN Operating in Afghanistan, except for engagements with the ministries' second-tier personnel, governors and technical staff. The SI-A Steering Committee is consequently composed of the RC and RUNOs, and regularly consults with the EU representatives. UN agencies in collaboration with their respective partners have engaged with DFA at provincial level, for advocacy for the reopening of GBV survivor centers.

b. Civil Society

While women's civil society organizations continue to exist in Afghanistan, their operations have been significantly curtailed. There have been reports of significant drops in funding, issues with absorption capacities, and barriers in withdrawing funds from bank accounts inside Afghanistan. The shrinking operational space for women CSOs is mostly attributed to the new restrictions (most well-known relating to the requirements to wear the hijab and to be escorted by a Mahram, or a chaperone, when moving outside a certain perimeter of their home). There was however confusion and frustration about the lack of clear guidance by the DFA, as this not only affected women and their families, but also organisations employing them.

Intimidation and bureaucratic constraints persisted in 2022. Women CSOs, including SI-A implementing partners, faced a difficult administrative environment, in having to suspend activities until official documents were renewed or extended by different De facto Authorities. There have also been additional economic costs of the Mahram for travel and the difficulty for some women who do not have a member of the family to provide the mandatory escort, which needed to be factored in by the programme.

A first ever retreat of all SI-A RUNOs, all its implementing partners and EU was organised in September 2022, as a stock taking exercise and an opportunity for strategic reflections. Partners openly discussed administrative, programmatic and security challenges and feasibility of their interventions in the worsening context. The findings from the retreat, as well as additional consultations on the ground, were captured in the report highlighting key obstacles to implementation and recommendations for measures to be taken going forward. An independent consultant was engaged to facilitate the retreat and consultations with the RUNOs, SI-A implementation partners and other stakeholders, see Annex F for the detailed report.

RUNOs have developed flexible approaches to meet client demands e.g., currently, urgent requests for healthcare or economic support. As far as possible they have tried to remain true to the GBV minimum standards of the programme but have been pushed by safety concerns for staff, partners and beneficiaries into 'safer' options, at times having to fall back on 'traditional' activities such as child protection as well as implementing activities under the health umbrella which is accepted by the DFA. RUNOs are also wisely investing in spaces which can function as one-stop decentralized, community-based hubs to provide a range of services and products, some of which can be used with complementarity between RUNOs. Mentoring and use of current project spaces to deliver tangible benefits are the most practical means of delivering SI-A on time. RUNOs had to launch capacity strengthening and technical support efforts on prevention and other GBV related skill sets to IPs, front line GBV staff and key stakeholders to ensure maintenance of quality programming.

In view of many limitations and general safety concerns for female staff, SI-A Technical Team has decided not to repeat the process, previously completed under the former government, of establishing the National Civil Society Reference Group. Instead, SI-A used the Civil Society Reference Group established under the Regional Programme, which includes members from Afghanistan (both from within and outside the country, including a male member).

Preparatory work for grant-making mechanisms for women led CSOs was completed before the end of the year, however due to rapidly worsening situation arising from the ban on women employed in I/NGOs, this was put on hold until 2023. Due to this ban, exempting female health workers and teachers, all RUNOs except UNFPA had to suspend their service provision interventions at the end of December 2022.

c. European Union Delegation

SI-A ensured ongoing consultations with the EU Focal Points through regular bi-weekly Technical Team meetings, continuously strengthening the partnership through which the EU is acknowledged not only as a donor but also as an important partner in the implementation of the programme. In 2022, the scope of cooperation was limited to the online participation of EU colleagues. Nonetheless, the EU Acting Head of Delegation and the UN Resident Coordinator took part in person in the two-day SI-A retreat with partners, expressing continued support to the implementation of the programme.

The European Union in Brussels and the Afghanistan Delegation were actively engaging in the rethinking of the SI-A following the fall of Kabul, and several joint meetings were held with the EU and the Spotlight Initiative Secretariat, mainly to mutually update on the status of the SI-A implementation and seek joint solutions in implementing a development programme in a humanitarian context.

d. Cooperation with other (non-RUNO) UN agencies (if applicable)

Various SI-A technical members participated extensively in the work of the other UN actors, most notably through bilateral engagements, and the work of **Gender Theme Group, GBV Sub-Cluster, GIHA, UN Communications Group, PMT, M&EWG, and PSEA TF**. Through the work of these bodies, the SI-A programme personnel were regularly informed of the developments and contributed technical expertise in GBV related interventions and discussions. To ensure synergies across these various bodies and SI-A, the programme provided technical advisory support to the RC/HC on gender issues.

In addition, RUNOs engaged with other agencies on strategic discussion on possible areas of synergies and coordination. Conversations with UNODC resulted in the conclusion that there is a significant number of women in prisons around the country and many might have been convicted of crimes related to GBV. There is no data in the country on the crimes committed by women prisoners, but these are mostly related to the implementation of Islamic principles and the Sharia law, and in many cases and in different contexts where the basic rights of women are acknowledged, such crimes would not be criminalized. As part of RUNOs efforts to respond to the needs of women prisoners, in late 2022 programme partners are engaged with prison authorities, about the possibility to implement interventions in prisons, to identify women survivors of violence who could benefit from the programme, through the provision of services, including psychosocial support.

e. Other Partners and resource mobilization (if applicable)

In April 2022, SI-A organised a technical mission on VAW, composed of Ms. Reem Alsalam, UN Special Rapporteur on VAW and Ms. Bandana Rana, CEDAW Committee member and Chair of the Working Group on Afghanistan. The technical mission met with the DFA, religious leaders, UN Country Team, Civil Society, first and foremost Afghan women human rights defenders and women-led organizations, and other key actors in Afghanistan to discuss issues faced by women and explore opportunities to design a programme on values-based dialogue.

As a follow up to the technical visit, mission members participated in several high-level discussions and exchanges to present the key findings and identify opportunities for further engagements around values-based dialogue, most notably donors meeting in Doha, and a joint briefing of Deputy Secretary General, UNFPA Executive Director, and UN Women Deputy Executive Director. The cooperation and coordination with the Organisation of Islamic Countries, initiated through the SI-A is continuing on exploring opportunities for further engagements around Sharia law and values-based dialogue on women's rights.

SI-A maintained regular contacts with the Spotlight Regional Programme, in taking part in their annual retreat, presenting the context and challenges faced in Afghanistan and proposed measures for joint interventions. In addition, through regular online meetings, possibilities for cooperation were identified. SI-A took part in the Regional CSO Forum in October 2022, in Kazakhstan, which brought together civil society from Central Asian countries and Afghanistan, to engage with the Spotlight Initiative Regional Programme and the Central Asian Alliance meaningfully and strategically on ending Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) and Harmful Practices. The training covered inter alia the topics relating to sensitive reporting on GBV, appropriate and gender-transformative language, definition of relevant terminology as well as an offline session providing participants with the ability to work in small groups and discuss the issues in the country context.

While SI-A did not engage in further resource mobilisation efforts directly, the SI-A teams were providing relevant information and contributed through technical expertise in development of other fund-raising proposals as they relate to various GBV initiatives.

Results

Capturing Broader Transformations Across Outcomes

In 2022, following tightening operational space under the governance of the De facto Authorities, and restrictions on operational engagements with them, rapidly worsening humanitarian crisis, there was limited scope for broader transformation across outcomes. Moreover, with consequent, in principle agreement with the EU, to reduce interventions under Pillars 1, 2 and 5, the focus of SI-A was mostly on limited prevention interventions, provision of services, data collection and plans for mechanisms to support women's CSOs at the community level.

Capturing Change at Outcome Level

Reporting on the implementation of Participatory Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting (P-MER)

Due to operationally constrained context, arising from lack of engagements with DFA, limited movements for women, sensitivity of the topic, and general lack of safety, there was no meaningful opportunity to engage with the communities in participatory M&E and reporting. Nonetheless, beyond RUNOs regular ongoing monitoring activities, SI-A has employed several modalities, which synergistically ensured continuous assessment of the operational environment and implementation of the programme.

SI-A field monitoring visits: The Spotlight Technical Team conducted two joint visits to Kandahar (June) and Paktia (September). During these visits, meetings were held with RUNOs, IPs, service providers, women receiving assistance, and local governors. On the basis of discussions and site visits, concrete recommendations were made on how to strengthen cooperation amongst various actors, including RUNOs and IPs, and how to ensure better complementarity in delivery of services. District governor in Paktia province made specific requests for assistance from the UN for support to women (mostly widows) and young people (recreational facilities). Poor health facilities on the district level were observed, which cannot serve even the most basic level of healthcare for communities, particularly women and girls. Elsewhere, DfA have made explicit requests to individual RUNOs for support with women widows (female heads of households), destitute women and women in prisons. Engagement on women's issues, particularly prevention from GBV, requires greater involvement of the local community leaders. The needs on the ground in the Spotlight provinces are enormous, and with flexibility in executing some community level interventions, there would be greater scope in further assisting women and girls.

RUNOs' monitoring visits: RUNOs have separately ensured several advocacy missions, including senior management, to the provinces of Herat, Paktia and Kandahar. Most of the visits aimed at engaging with the DFA, to discuss the needs of women and girls in the provinces, reopening of service provision facilities and further support of the Spotlight programme. The missions also included visits to various

UN partners' sites and learning about additional opportunities for cooperation and complementarity for referral of women and girls.

In Kandahar, a number of challenges were identified with SI-A IP, including the limited availability of female staff and lack of regular operating hours of the partner, which prevented clients from accessing the center. These challenges were discussed with the partners who explained that for security reason they could not keep the WPC open in regular hours as it was not approved by the DFA yet. Bilateral meetings were discussed with the partner, to discuss strategies to hire female staff, a process that was concluded just before the DFA passed a decree banning women from working.

Monitoring visits by Implementing Partners: During the reporting period eight field-monitoring visits were conducted to the provinces (two to Kandahar, four to Paktia and two to Herat) by one of the IPs Spotlight Coordinator and M&E Officer. During the visits, strong motivation by the service provision personnel was noted. As a result of these visits, a number of recommendations were made such as how to better apply the principles of confidentiality, management of files, resolving technical/administrative issues, and the need for greater focus on community outreach programmes.

SI-A national level retreat: As part of the preparation for the retreat, an International Consultant was hired to make an Internal review of SI_A programme implementation, document the findings and lessons learnt from the retreat as well as from additional discussions with various stakeholders. Review also aimed at documenting the challenges faced by RUNO in the current context of Afghanistan and proposing ways forward. Copy of the Review Report can be found as part of the list of Knowledge Products, in Annex F. SI-A retreat in September 2022 was also an opportunity to discuss SI-A M&E requirements, realities on the ground and to feed them back into the Results Framework.

SI-A Technical Team retreat: In November 2022, SI-A Technical Team initiated the planning process for 2023. The strategic planning event took stock of various interventions and knowledge gained during the year, and prepared plans based on various challenges identified and risk management strategies. The RUNOs technical team, EU representative, Spotlight Regional Programme for Central Asia and Afghanistan, and all SI-A implementing partners participated in the two days retreat.

Monthly Progress Tracking: Monthly progress tool developed in 2021, continued to be regularly used by the RUNOs for reporting on progress made, both in relation to internal processes as well as activities implemented by partners.

Comprehensive GBV Study and Baseline: While the Programme envisaged several separate GBV studies, SI-A has made an early decision to undertake the joint approach in conducting several pieces of research under one umbrella, to avoid overlaps, targeting the same stakeholders across provinces, and generally ensure better information management. The overall objective of this study was to capture baseline and cross-sectional information to support the implementation of the Spotlight Initiative (SI). More specifically the study is focused on understanding current knowledge, attitudes, practices (KAP) about gender-based-violence (GBV) in Afghanistan. This includes, but not limited to Sexual Gender Based Violence (SGBV), Violence against Women (VAW), Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), and harmful practices (HP). The report is split into five components:

Component 1: National Inquiry SGBV/HP

Component 2: Stakeholder Mapping

Component 3: Prevention - Root causes of violence, opportunities to prevent VAWG

Component 4: Services – Women's access to SGBV, perceptions and barriers

Component 5: Baseline study

See annex F for the detailed report.

Outcome 1: Legal and Policy Framework

The main institutional partners for the SI-A, the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) and Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) had been dissolved in 2021, as have all gender directorates across ministries. The status of the justice and legal system is unclear at present, with an assortment of arrangements at play at subnational level. Before August 2021, law enforcement was weak and the number of women receiving justice in GBV cases was very modest. Access to legal services was neither fast nor easy and further complicated by geographical coverage which made it patchy. The DfA has barred female professionals and the status of male professionals varies across the provinces. There is still confusion around the re-emergence of the justice sector. Province by province, there is a different scenario for the justice sector depending on what was available previously as some areas were under DfA control and reliant on DfA mobile judges. Justice systems were also influenced by local warlords and armed lobbies linked to members of parliament and other public figures. The system has more or less collapsed and what remains is performative DfA courts with summary punishments.

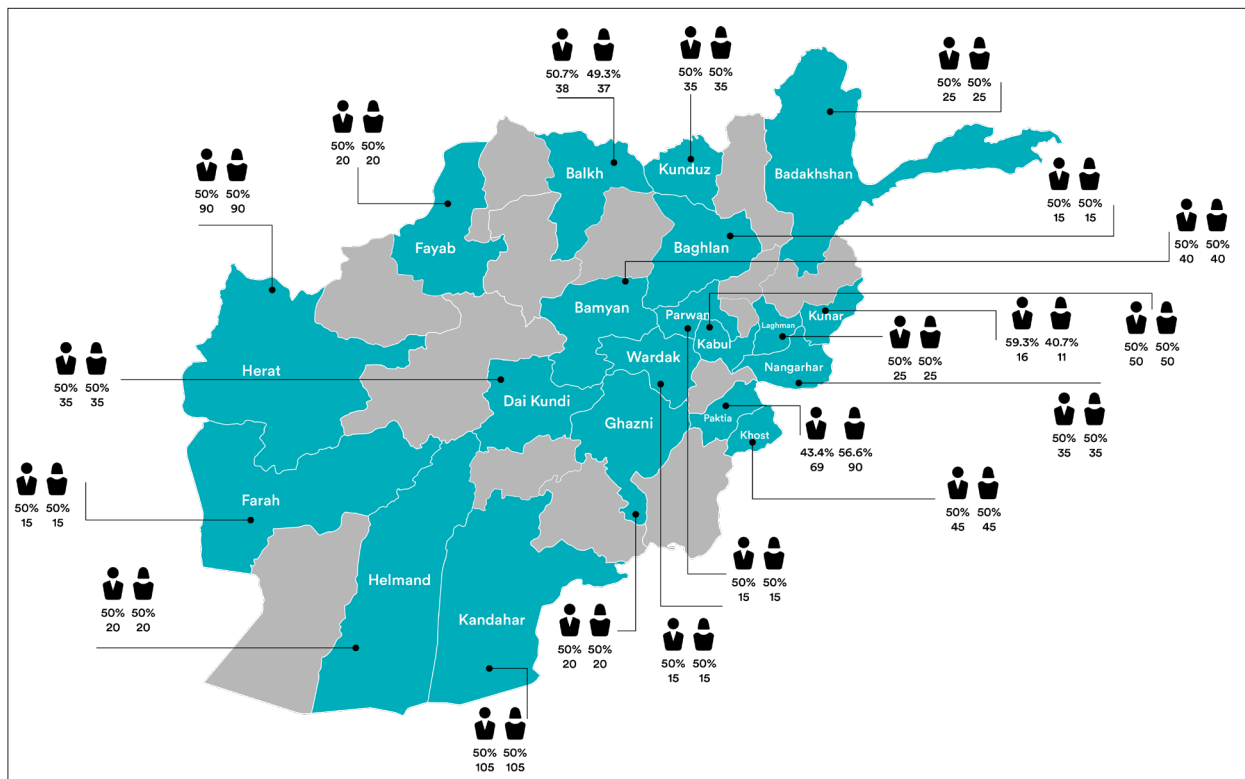
The findings of the SI-A comprehensive GBV study further substantiated the limited spaces for institutional policies and framework. However, the study findings are intended to support conducting policy dialogues in the eight regions on how to address the root causes of gender-based violence, especially the factors and issues that affect power differential between women and men in the family, community, and structural level. 98% of the Afghan people, for example, believe women should obey their husbands. This indicates already the intra-household power differentials between women and men, where the position of women is like a second-class member. Therefore, a normative shift is critical to make any changes that will enable women and GBV survivors get benefits through informal institutional frameworks because this is a precursor for any changes, such as to influence the policy makers, and shift in attitudes and thoughts would require the readiness to create enabling conditions for women. The recommended actions following the study findings clearly suggest a normative shift in values and attitudes of the policy makers, influential and powerful people in the community. Currently, the plan is for SI-A to conduct policy advocacy; through workshops involving those community powerful actors who are duty bearers to tackle harmful practice in the community, such as elderly, Shuras and Community Groups (informal community structure functional at this moment) to find the safe and meaningful participation in community civic and development activities, including finding the ways that can facilitate women to get support in the community in case of domestic violence, women's rights to get education etc.. The activities will be piloting to explore the buy-in from the community to support women to live safe lives in the current context. This policy advocacy will also come up with recommendations on how women's safety and protection can be ensured through community existing structures.

The study has ensured the representation of women's voices and their concerns from different levels. The study applied a mixed method (quantitative and qualitative approach). A total of n=1501 surveys were completed and analysed as part of the final report. A total of 49.5% (743) were male and 50.5% (758) were women. A total of 69 Focus Group Discussions, 57 Key Informant Interviews and 20 In-depth Interviews were conducted. Preliminary study findings are presented in the form of a table with data by rural and urban:

Figure 1: Geographic coverage and distribution of the study participants by gender:

Source: It has taken from the draft report of SI survey, done by Salma Consulting Firm

Outcome 2: Institutions



With the dissolution of key government partners under the previous regime, SI-A currently has limited possibilities for engaging with the institutions at various levels, without any funds being transferred to the DfA directly or indirectly. As part of the SI-A GBV comprehensive study, a stakeholder mapping and beneficiary analysis is ongoing. This qualitative assessment, has the main objectives to:

1. Define vulnerable groups especially women who are facing multiple forms of discrimination (illiterate women, girls with a low level of education, and girls not attending school, women's human rights defenders, at-risk women, activists, and lawyers; adolescent girls and girls under 15; women and girls living in rural areas; married girls under 18 years of age; women and girls with disabilities; widows and divorced women) in targeted provinces/communities (including types of vulnerability and geographical locations)
2. Map the existing responsible institutions/Institutional arrangements as well as institutional gaps/requirements and recommendations.

Within the preliminary findings, the general understanding is that the local leaders are not helpful to women, as they do not enable women to pursue work, and prefer family resolution or mediation in GBV cases. During the in-depth interviews, one of the respondents expressed the following sentiment:

"[...] because our local leaders are not supporting women in this community, and it is hard for women, but I am capable of giving them proper advice for supporting women in this community because I have enough experience in this case, the only thing I could do is provide advice. They wouldn't allow me to be involved in any justice proceedings" (former woman police, Paktia)

The above statement also highlights the importance of normative shift before engaging policy makers or influential persons who sustain harmful gender norms. Although Afghan society is patriarchal, and not supportive to gender equality, the efforts to bring normative shift at the community level will be prioritized in 2023 (within possibilities) through development of community level action plans, training and capacity building of community actors, and will be monitored to see the progress. These activities will contribute

towards sustainable shift over the years because community institutions and people who operate these institutions will be targeted for transformative changes.

Outcome 3: Prevention and Norm Change

- A joint comprehensive study has been undertaken which provides an independent and in-depth assessment on the status of Sexual and Gender Based Violence and Harmful Practices in Afghanistan. Evidence has been gathered on the context-specific causes of GBV and harmful practices, risk factors and situational triggers, as well as the social norms, attitudes and practices related to SGBV/HPs, and child marriage. Forward looking and actionable recommendations provided by the study will inform the SI-A UN Agencies and other stakeholders strategic priorities in 2023 to guide evidence-based programming in Afghanistan, and tailor community interventions and advocacy initiatives to address harmful social norms and practices to the local context.
- A national media company has been engaged to carry out a media assessment to look at how women and girls have been portrayed in the media and to identify, analyse the challenges, opportunities, and produce recommendations for advocacy, media, and communications programming on VAWG. The media assessment will commence in 2023 and focus on the portrayal and reporting of women and girls' issues in traditional media and social media, including coverage of issues such as harmful social norms, violence against women and girls, child marriage etc, as well as identifying key media organisations and social media influencers who can be engaged as allies, including those outside of Afghanistan. Social media, Facebook, and Twitter - including Twitter Space are becoming increasingly popular in Afghanistan and serving as an alternative, safe platform for women to share information, express views and engage in discussions whilst avoiding censorship. The media assessment will also outline strategic opportunities for advocacy, media and communications programming on women's issues, engagement with key target groups, and channels through which the messages can be disseminated in Afghanistan. In collaboration with the SI regional programme, a small pilot training of male and female journalists was also carried out in 2022 to increase knowledge and capacity on the standards of ethical and gender-sensitive reporting. Further, strategic capacity building initiatives with journalists will be rolled out in 2023, informed by the results of the media assessment.
- The process of development of a SI-A Prevention strategy and action plan was initiated, which articulates the specific role and approach that each UN agency is undertaking on prevention for the remainder of the SI-A programme until December 2023, and aims to provide guidance on strategies to prevent VAWG beyond the lifetime of the programme as part of its comprehensive approach to addressing gender inequality and VAWG more broadly.
- Due to the specialized nature of prevention, SI-A implemented multiple efforts to build and strengthen the knowledge, skills, and capacity of CSO partners, service providers, and key community stakeholders to ensure prevention activities are implemented safely and effectively and connected to response efforts. Capacity building and strengthening initiatives include the development and delivery of targeted training and materials, toolkits, and guidelines adapted to Afghan context focused on best practice on prevention, social norm change, GBV case management and survivor centered and Do No Harm approaches. This is being supported by technical accompaniment to CSOs to address the unprecedented and crippling brain drain of partner staff and key personnel in organizations, and efforts to rebuild an expert workforce on prevention and response. The process of development of the EVAWG training manual is ongoing and the tools include both prevention and service components and in 2023, institutional capacity strengthening initiatives will be implemented and support activities to increase awareness, prevention and effective response services.
- Planned activities to finalize and roll out the Code of Conduct for teachers, principals, and students, in public schools, in coordination with the Minister of Education were suspended after August 15, 2021. Although the CoC was never approved by the former MoE, SI-A and IPs used it in the context of the Community Based Education program. In this context SI-A trained **1,298 (Women: 911; Men: 387) community education teachers** in Kandahar, Herat, and Paktia on sexual and gender-based

violence (SGBV), gender equality, and GBV case management. These trainings proved to be useful in handling disclosures of GBV survivors and facilitating safe and confidential referrals of cases to specialized services.

SI-A partners invested in the development of various platforms to engage communities in the fight against VAWG and child marriage. The following achievements have been made:

- **Partnership with men and boys for gender equality.** Through local implementing partners in the project provinces, **47 Men and Boys Networks (MBN)** were established. Monthly meetings were regularly attended by 1,116 members (578 men and 538 boys ages 15 to 24 years). The MBNs helped facilitate women's and girls' access to vital services to critical life-saving services and promote parenting and positive masculinities. Men are being encouraged to understand health issues of children, mothers, adolescent girls and female family members. They also discuss negative gender norms, and the importance of both parents taking active roles in caring for their children and attending to their nutrition, health, development, and education needs. MBN participants act as change agents in accepting women's rights and female agency. They become advocates and champions for equality and support women's participation in public life and decision-making, promote health-seeking behaviors, and facilitate women's and girls' access to nutrition and other essential services. Through discussion and dialogue, negative gender norms are challenged, and positive developments are shared to promote the empowerment of women and girls in targeted locations.
- **Through community dialogues, 58,037 community members, including community leaders, community Shuras, parents, women, and adolescents,** were sensitized to the consequences of child marriage, women's and children's rights, and gender equality. **1,440 religious leaders** were trained on VAWG and early marriage, including their role in addressing these issues in their communities. **Seven provincial-level advocacy meetings** were held with 180 influencers in the project provinces. A total of **138 radio episodes and 2 roundtable discussions** were broadcast by local radio stations in Kandahar, Herat, and Paktia-most of which were discussions by trained scholars and key influencers.
- **A two-day co-creation workshop was held in Kabul in December 2022.** It enabled SI-A to promote meaningful, community-led social and behavioral change through its GBV prevention, response, and referral system awareness campaign. A diverse group of 23 participants from the Recipient UN Organizations (RUNOs) and IPs analyzed the content of the campaign and came up with ideas, risks, approaches, indicators, and clarity that can lead to better outcomes. Key message terminology, key drivers, possible solutions and approaches for addressing GBV through mass media, social media, and the community were discussed. Referral, response and support mechanisms were also discussed. The GBV activities were renamed as Protection and Empowerment of Vulnerable Groups (PEVG), while RespectMe will be used as the slogan for social and mass campaigns.
- **U-Report Platform:** Community-based provisions of education that include life skills education as well as catch up opportunities and preparations for Konkor exams for adolescent girls becomes critical after the DfA announced an indefinite ban on secondary schools for girls. A U-Report poll was launched in September 2022 (<https://afghanistan.ureport.in/opinion/6029/>) on life skills education for adolescent girls in Kandahar, one of the Spotlight provinces, to which 1,933 U-Reporters (13% female) responded. The responses offered significant insight into their situation, particularly the issue of girls' education. The platforms allowed the respondents to participate and engage with the Multipurpose Adolescent Group (MAG), Women and Girls Safe Spaces (WGSS), and Youth Networks. The results will continue to inform programme planning, interventions, and advocacy for adolescent education and participation. The same poll will be sent to all 34 provinces in Afghanistan in 2023.

SI-A built capacities of 35 project staff (12 female and 23 male) and 240 youth facilitators (120 in Kabul and 120 in Nangarhar with 50% female) on SRHR through peer education, youth-to-youth methodology, tools, six step with focus on reproductive health issues. The 'six steps' in the youth-to-youth approach is an educational process that links young people to learn by taking action to promote the health, wellbeing and development of themselves, their families and their communities. The steps cover selection and

understanding of the RH issue of concern, obtaining more information on the selected issue, planning and reporting youth led initiative, Implementation, evaluation, then re-design based on evaluation outcomes.

The project team with the support of youth facilitators conducted orientation sessions for male and female youths and adolescents in their local communities, with 1,500 youths attending sessions on reproductive health issues (700 in Kabul and 800 in Nangarhar), and 150 student council members (50 male in Kabul, 50 male in Nangarhar and 50 female in Nangarhar) attending orientation session on reproductive health issues.

SI-A supported a cash for protection pilot to eliminate Child Marriage in Herat that targeted 150 households who have received cash for protection in Herat. From each household adolescent girls received 141 USD and her parent also received 141 USD to prevent child marriage. The main objective of cash for protection payment to poor and needy households/families is to minimize the risk/possibility of vulnerable Young Girls Early Marriage in the targeted communities. Presence of young girls currently residing with the same home/family was an integral and unavoidable selection criterion during mapping/survey of listing vulnerable target individuals/families. The cash was combined with culturally appropriate messaging around Child Marriage, due to the sensitivity of the topic. Also beneficiaries shared written and verbal commitments - they will try their best to minimize child marriage after receiving the cash. The messaging used health arguments, and indirect approach.

At the district level, support for the active participation and engagement of adolescents and youth was maintained through the establishment and scaling-up of platforms such as Multipurpose Adolescent Groups (MAGs), Adolescent and Youth Networks (AYNs), and Women and Girls' Safe Spaces (WGSS). A total of 115 MAGs and 36 AYNs were established with **2,600 members (Women: 2,455; Men: 145)**. In addition, **8,518 adolescents and youth (Girls: 8,174; Boys: 344) were trained on life skills** in their communities, and in turn, these peer educators were able to pass on information about child marriage, GBV, and life skills to their peers. More than **20,160 adolescents and youth** were reached through peer-to-peer mentoring sessions on life skills and GBV prevention.

SI-A partners organized **International Youth Day (IYD)** with adolescents and youth at the provincial and district levels. Through focus group discussions, around 2,000 young people who are members of MAG and AYN identified key challenges affecting them and explored possible approaches to change. They spoke out and emphasized the importance of their own participation and empowerment in dialogues with their community leaders, and advocacy messages were prepared and sent to decision makers to continue to support education, employment, and protection.

Outcome 4: Quality Services

- SI_A has successfully advocated with the DFA for the re-opening of Family Resource Centers in Paktia and Kandahar provinces. This was the result of joint UN and CSOs' advocacy and a re-affirmation of partners' commitment to continue operating in such a challenging environment and to respond to the needs of women and girl's survivors of violence. As a result, the FRC in Paktia and FRC in Kandahar re-opened in mid-2022, and were operational until December 2022, providing essential and life-saving services to women and girls survivors of violence, providing support to CSOs to deliver coordinated, comprehensive support to women and girl survivors of violence, with some elements of awareness raising integrated in programming. At least 1,673 people (f-860; m-813) accessed services provided in FRCs. This was done primarily through funding support, institutional capacity development, as well as work to develop standard operation procedures (SOPs), guidelines, guidance for VAWG services, in line with international standards developed and/or updated with the support of UN Women.
- A Knowledge, Attitude, Practice and Behaviors KAPB study included a component on services which produced data on women and girls' perception of GBV and will be a key resource tool to inform GBV programming. Findings from the study indicate that both men and women accepted that violence occurs in their households; violence is a private issue, and it is not appropriate for women to talk about it.
- SI-A supported establishment of six PSCCs (Psychosocial Counseling Centers), two in each of the targeted provinces and activation of three PSS MOTs (Psychosocial Mobile Outreach Teams), one in

each targeted province. In the reporting period a **total of 17,591 women and girls (2,035 in Kandahar, 6,638 in Herat, and 8,918 in Paktia)** received services from the PSCCs and MOTs. PSCCs are female staffed one-stop centers located at district-level hospitals or health facilities to be easily accessible. Staff include one medical doctor as in-charge, psychosocial counselor and data collector, PSCCs provide a range of free, confidential services for vulnerable women and girls including psychosocial counseling and basic healthcare services. PSS mobile outreach teams are reaching out to the communities which are not able to access static facilities. MOTs provides psychosocial counseling, awareness and referral services.

- SI-A continued to support the Youth Health line (YHL). During the reporting period, a total of **175,951 young people were provided services through YHL**. Out of the total calls received **51.3% (90,197) of callers were women/girls and 48.7% (85,754) were men/boys** callers from 34 provinces of Afghanistan. Furthermore, 51% of clients (78,227) received counseling services, **27 % of young people (47,346) were provided information on different adolescent health issues including ASRH, and 50,348 (28.6 %) young people were referred to the different service delivery points in Afghanistan**. The YHL is a nation-wide toll-free advice phone line which is accessible from all over the country. YHL provides telephone counseling service for young people especially girls, information, and counseling on SRHR (Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health) and GBV services and informs young callers of the local services available and provides referrals to the existing health services on SGBV. The counselors at YHL are medical doctors, specifically trained in Youth Friendly Services (YFS), which are based on an understanding of the lived realities of young people, their needs, and how to deliver information in the most accessible means to this younger audience.
- During 2022, **SI-A supported 25 Youth Health Corners in 8 provinces** (Kabul, Kunar, Laghman, Nangarhar, Badakhshan, Bamyan, Samangan, Kandahar, and Balkh) to provide youth friendly services to young people. **A total of 41,328 young people received services via YHCs out of which 54% are female (22,317) and 46% are male (19,011)**. It is also important to mention that from the total young people assisted, **7,763 received pre-marriage counseling** in these youth health corners. YHCs are youth-friendly spaces, specifically designed to make the young people (and specifically young women and girls) visiting the health facility feel comfortable and welcomed thus reducing the barriers that young people often face when having been referred/are seeking health information in person. The Youth Health Corners are managed by existing staff of the relevant health facility who are trained on youth friendly services to ensure sustainability of the program.
- During the reporting period, **727 frontline workers (Women: 342; Men: 385)** were trained on GBV core concepts and in managing disclosures of GBV survivors, including safe and confidential referrals to specialized services. In addition, 110 individuals (Female: 47; Male: 6) were trained in GBV case management to improve their capacity to manage GBV cases in a survivor-centered approach and in the best interest of the child in the case of a child survivor.
- During the reporting period, a total of **38,839 women and girls safely accessed the 24 Women and Girls Safe Spaces (WGSS)** in three principal Spotlight provinces. Within the WGSS various awareness raising sessions on health, nutrition, girls' education, women's rights, GBV prevention, risk mitigation were provided and trained social workers and counselors provided psycho-social support and counseling, to address the specific needs of women and girls. In 2022, **1,763 cases** including GBV survivors of physical, domestic and economic violence were provided with services including referrals to health facilities, and other NGOs for cash and food among other services provided. The WGSS, which are also known as the Learning Center, are often the only places where women can meet safely, learn, gain skills or get legal and psychological support.
- **30 Child Protection Action Networks (CPANs) with 900 members, 33% of whom are female**, have been established and strengthened at the provincial and district levels in Herat, Kandahar and Paktia provinces. Members include NGO technical staff (women and men) and Department of Labour and Social Affairs (DOLSA) focal points. Members were oriented on GBV core concepts, prevention, risk

mitigation, and referral to specialized services. These were instrumental in providing information on GBV prevention, risk mitigation and available response services.

- **Health professionals and health workers**, including 100 Family Health House (FHH) midwives, 20 community health supervisors and 50 provincial trainers, 68 provincial primary health care (PHCs) officers and community-based health care officers (CBHC) from 3 project provinces were trained on Mental Health and Mental health Psychosocial Support (PMHS), which were integrated into their ongoing training. The human resource database for community health workers was updated, the CHW terms of reference were simplified, and the concept note and tools were finalized for the CHW competency assessment.
- **SI-A actively participated in the development of GBV referral pathways** to facilitate safe and coordinated referrals of GBV survivors, and those at risk, to specialized services, including health, psychosocial support, case management, security, legal, non-food items and cash services, to meet their specific needs. The province-oriented referral pathways were developed following a mapping of GBV services across the country. In order to guide partners on safe referrals, a package including inter-agency referral Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), Information Sharing Protocol (ISP) as well as training materials were developed and approved at the GBV Area of Responsibility (AoR) level, a ToT was organized and followed by trainings in the field in order to cascade the referral pathway mechanisms.

Outcome 5: Data

The focus of this outcome centers around two dimensions; namely, building the capacity of key government statistical departments and service providers on gathering VAWG-related data, and provision of data on the prevalence of VAWG to help monitoring and evidence-based programming.

Since the regime change in August 2021, the process of collecting, storing and using SGBV/GBV/HP data has become considerably more challenging.

As a result of this and due to the restrictions on undertaking the capacity building of DfA actors, except the baseline study, which was completed, all the remaining planned interventions under this pillar were cancelled, and funds were re-allocated to increase the scope of the Program's services under Pillar 4.

Prevalence of VAWG has, nevertheless, been approached partially, cautiously and indirectly, i.e., through assessing community's attitudes and perception in relation to GBV/IP, its acceptance and tolerance. As reported in the earlier sections above, this has been investigated as part of the National Inquiry (Component 1 of the Study). As an example, the study findings show that around 20% of the population think it is acceptable for a man to physically respond to something they don't like.

As for the baseline, values of some few indicators were established. As most of the other indicators were either irrelevant, non-existing or at zero value, the Baseline Study managed to establish values for 6 indicators: one at the impact level, another at outcome level and four at the output level. Such baseline measurement will serve as a national-level threshold for monitoring programmatic progress even outside the immediate scope of SI_A interventions.

Outcome 6: Women's Movement

- Under this outcome, the selection process of a Responsible Party Agreement with a potential IP was concluded. This partner is expected to undertake Grant-Making Work to Women's CSOs through the provision of core and programming grants and delivery of technical and capacity development and support to CSOs up to the grass root level, with focus on women's organizations and groups suffering from intersecting forms of discrimination. This grant making mechanism is also expected to contribute to the rebuilding of the CSO movement building and the functioning of women's rights and women led, small and grassroots CSOs through core, flexible and programmatic funding. Acknowledging the capacity challenges faced by CSOs at different levels, the organization selected

to engage as a Responsible Party will contextualize the mechanism by localizing the grant-making and simplifying the application process for women’s organizations and provide opportunities and technical support to smaller and less established grassroots organizations and groups in Afghanistan. This kind of support is vital for the well-being of women’s rights organizations and activists and aims to i) to strength their organisational capacity and resilience, ii) to persevere in the face of DfA decrees and increasing restrictions, and iii) to be able respond to women and girls most pressing needs in the current context. The grant making approach is innately connected with community level interventions under Outcome 3, as without the rebuilding and functioning of the women’s civil society prevention programming will be limited. It is anticipated that the grant making mechanism will be initiated in 2023.

- As a result of the existing fruitful partnership between the Spotlight Regional Programme and the Spotlight Afghanistan programme, the programme supported the participation of 3 CSO representatives to the Regional CSO forum held in Kazakhstan in November 2022, where they had the opportunity to network, engage with other CSOs, learn and share their experiences on advocacy for women and girls’ rights.
- With the support of SI-A, technical assistance provided to Youth Civil Societies organizations including Peer Network to advocate for the elimination of Gender Based Violence including the elimination of early and child marriage, an introductory meeting was conducted with the CSOs alliance in Kabul and Nangarhar provinces, where representatives from 38 civil society organizations attended the meetings (18 from Kabul and 20 from Nangarhar). CSO representatives were briefed about youth empowerment and developed an action plan on engaging the Youth CSOs on advocacy with a focus on elimination of Gender Based Violence including elimination of early and child marriage. The project team also conducted 3 days of training on advocacy in Kabul and Nangarhar for CSOs representatives (25 people in Kabul and 15 people attended in Nangarhar). For successful implementation of their projects, 20 CSOs which were awarded small grants.

Rights Holders (Spotlight programme “beneficiaries”)

Indicative numbers	Direct for 2022	Type of benefit	Comments / Explanations
Women (18 yrs. and above)	4628	Capacity building	Those who received training and/or capacity building on life skills, various VAW/GBV topics, concepts, and case management, as well as facilitating youth peer-education and mentoring
	56430	Services	Those who were provided with PSCC/PSS services and GBV information and awareness raising individually and in person
	25,070	Awareness raising	Those who were sensitized on child marriage, GBV, and VAWG, and/or participated in community dialogues on these issues.
Girls (5-17)	8174	Capacity building/ peer education	Those young girls who were trained on life skills and on how to provide youth peer education and mentoring.
	22,317	Services	Those young girls who received services through Youth Health Corners
	104,310	Awareness raising	Those who were sensitized on child marriage, GBV, and VAWG, and/or participated in community dialogues on these issues. It also includes those youth who received tele-counseling and information on SRHR and GBV.

Men (18 yrs. and above)	3468	Capacity building	Those who received training and/or capacity building sessions on various VAW/GBV topics, concepts, and management, as well as those who were trained to act as advocates and champions for equality and support women's participation in public life and decision-making, promote health-seeking behaviours.
	15,546	Awareness raising	Those who were sensitized (in groups) on child marriage, GBV, and VAWG, and/or participated in community dialogues on these issues. It also includes those youth who received tele-counseling and information on SRHR and GBV.
Boys (5-17 yrs.)	1082	Capacity building	Those who received training and/or capacity building sessions on how to facilitate youth peer education and mentoring. Also those who were trained to act as advocates and champions for equality and support women's participation in public life and decision-making, promote health-seeking behaviours.
	19,011	Services	Those received health-related services through Youth Health Corners.
	92,183	Awareness raising	Those who were sensitized (in groups) on child marriage, GBV, and VAWG, and/or participated in community dialogues on these issues. It also includes those youth who received tele-counseling and information on SRHR and GBV.
TOTAL	301,451		This may include double counting of last year's reached beneficiaries.

Challenges and Mitigating Measures

- The country continues to be managed by the DfA regime who have passed a series of measures that have had a significant impact on women and girls basic human rights, restricting women and girls' movements, violating their rights to freedom, and which have had a heavier impact on the women who have no related male family members within their household nor a social network able to support. In response to this measure requiring women to be accompanied by the Mahram (a male chaperone), the SI-A followed the UN Country Team approved Mahram policy allowing UN agencies to cover the costs of Maharam in all programme activities.
- Another policy approved by the DFA, that can be noted as an assassination of women's rights to access livelihoods and economic development, was the DFA's policy prohibiting women and girls from working in non-governmental organizations. This has had a massive impact in the lives of the Afghan population and will reverse the economic, social and political gains achieved by the country over the past decades. This measure has resulted in many non-government entities suspending their operations in the country, especially those whose work force were mostly women, leaving part of the population with no access to basic needs. The dimension to what such measure will affect the implementation of the Spotlight programme is still under analysis, but considering that the programme follows a feminist approach and prioritizes the availability of women as service providers, such measures will likely result in the suspension of some programme activities.
- The process for approval of the opening of Women Protection Centers was challenging. The Women Protection Centers allow for GBV survivors overnight stay, a reason that might have motivated the DFA not to approve. Partners persistent and regular engagement with the DFA, finally showed positive results in late 2022 when they successfully received the approval to open two centers in Spotlight priority provinces (Kandahar and Paktia).

- RUNOs faced many of the same challenges as their CSO partners in terms of human resources with additional problems faced with UN's administrative procedures related to fielding staff in times of heightened security risk. Staff turnover and hiring new personnel contributed to delays in delivery of the programme. Some RUNOs have been impacted by security restrictions where their work has been deemed non-essential, limiting their ability to support partners and monitor implementation of interventions. Programme syntax, activities and services had to be redesigned for viability to reflect the realities and respond to the sensibilities of DFA rule in order to protect CSO partners and beneficiaries.
- Delivery of development programme in mostly humanitarian context faces unprecedented programming challenges and in view of supporting women and girls in the worsening situation, requires a lot more flexibility for supporting interventions under development-peace-humanitarian nexus. As the situation in the country remains in the constant state of flux, despite continuous burden on the technical staff to adjust SI-A approaches, the Technical Team has demonstrated continuous willingness and flexibility to re-programme activities aimed at supporting women and girls, on an ongoing basis.
- Women and girls have no unified platform for raising their voices, nor mechanisms for collecting main challenges faced per provinces. A concept note was prepared for creation of the women;s platform, through regular consultations with women at both rural and urban settings, but this intervention was paused at the end of 2022, in view of most recent restrictions for women working in I/NGOs.

Lessons Learned and New Opportunities

- The Spotlight Initiative is a development programme being implemented in a humanitarian context. It can only be successful if there is flexibility to ensure complementarities of development-peace-humanitarian nexus.
- Although the DfA has not been recognized as a legitimate government, UN agencies still need to engage with them for advocacy and approval of programme interventions as they have control of the country and of the state institutions. Increased coordination with provincial, local government authorities and community elders is required prior to implementing any project activity on the ground. It should also be noted that the engagement with the DfA does not involve any transfer of funds directly or indirectly.
- The DFA welcomes the proposal to open women's centers under the Sharia Law/Islamic principles and aligned to what they consider to be priorities/needs of the country (vulnerable women, women deported from neighboring countries, women addicted to drugs, homeless, etc.). The programme is exploring feasibility of supporting such requests, which would also include survivors of GBV.
- Partnership with local NGOs enabled quick adaptation and continued implementation of the program amidst the changing environment.

Securing alternative pathways such as Women and Girls' Safe Spaces (WGSS), community dialogues, Men and Boys Networks (MBN), adolescent and youth group and networks were very useful in reaching women, adolescents and young people in the communities which also facilitates access and community ownership.

Establishment and engagement with men through Men and Boys Network to deconstruct harmful masculinities and initiate gender transformative parenting programmes, were useful platforms in improving the safety and wellbeing of women and girls in the communities.

New Opportunities

- The difficult context has created many restrictions. However, some opportunities for strengthening cooperation between RUNOs emerged as a result. The teams have decided on conducting a joint comprehensive GBV study, with different segments of researched information. In addition, some

RUNOs are implementing similar but also complementary interventions. Technical Team is exploring scenarios on how to best align the service model to be delivered to GBV survivors, with components to be implemented by agencies based on their mandate and technical comparative advantages.

- The programme is supporting the development of a prevention strategy for and an action plan for the Spotlight programme. Initially, the programme planned to support the government with the development of a National Prevention strategy for the country. With the collapse of the Republican government, the programme shifted its priorities but decided to still develop a prevention tool to guide the work of RUNOs, but with a focus on identifying and building synergies between the RUNOs.
- The Spotlight prevention strategy and action plan, will provide more comprehensive information about the ongoing initiatives for GBV prevention within the programme, planned or being implemented by RUNOs. It will also identify opportunities for collaboration between RUNOs and other ongoing/planned GBV programmes in the country. The first draft of the strategy is available and both tools, the strategy and the action plan are expected to be finalized in the second quarter of 2023.
- Activities aimed at reaching women and girls continued wherever possible - the development of GBV materials is continuing based on consultations and agreements reached at the co-creation workshop in 2022, training of facilitators will follow the finalization of the materials development. SI-A is also exploring other locations for the WGSS in health facilities, CBEs and transit points. Ongoing interventions to build the capacity of health workers and teachers to respond to and support GBV, including GBV services, will continue.

Innovative, Promising or Good Practices

Programming in a humanitarian context allows for a very limited scope for innovative interventions. In 2022, the focus has been mainly of finding ways to ensure running of the programme interventions in the restrictive environment.

Programme partners' regular engagement with the DFA, for information sharing and project approval have shown to bring positive results. The DFA requires all non-government entities to seek approval of their project, a process that if not done in an interactive way might not succeed. One practice that brought positive results, was to meet with the DFA to present their project before submission to their institutions. This resulted in having the approval for the opening of the Women Protection Centers in Kandahar and Paktia.

- Women-run CSOs were few in numbers and involved in small-scale service delivery of a narrow range of services, mostly working on donor-directed, GEWE focused projects with variable impact. Under the previous government, CSOs and particularly women led CSOs were coming under a great deal of criticism for corruption and spending a significant proportion of their funding on administrative and staff costs, especially when they are effectively family businesses. A societal negative backlash against GEWE programming was building up and the DfA simply made it easier for hostile community members to not only express but to act on their misgivings. CSOs are currently the only functioning vehicles for channeling funding into communities, especially for women, and there is a possibility to focus capacity building efforts on the efforts of the past, in order to have a greater impact. In order to foster more effective programming in the future, it will be necessary to reflect on the measures which would strengthen programming with the communities, in parallel to delivering assistance to the population in crisis.
- With the support of SI-A Psychosocial counseling mobile outreach teams are activated in the targeted provinces of Herat, Kandahar and Paktia which is providing psychosocial counseling and awareness services to target beneficiaries who cannot visit the static facilities (Psychosocial counseling centers),

these mobile teams are also very helpful in providing referral services to those beneficiaries who require further health and psychosocial services.

- Within the project communities, SI-A established Men and Boys Networks (MBN) which is an important platform to promote gender equality, respect towards women, positive and healthy relationships as well as opportunities for women to learn and work in Afghanistan. Groups of men and boys meet to on regular basis to discuss ways to better protect women in their community from gender-based violence risks, learn about prevention of violence, appropriate response and rereferral mechanisms and pathways for victims. The MBN members become advocates and champions for equality and support women's participation in public life and decision-making, promote health-seeking behaviors, and facilitate women's and girls' access to nutrition and other essential services.

Communications and Visibility

a. Overview

SI-A has initially developed an elaborate Communications Plan, which was further revised and reduced in scope in 2022. In a nutshell, the key elements of the plan include:

- Raising awareness on GBV prevalence in the country
- Promoting results and impact of the SI-A programme
- Provide communications for development support to strengthen Spotlight Initiative's programme design and implementation
- Ensure visibility for the Spotlight Initiative, its donors and partners

However, with the growing fears of retaliation and stigmatization for handling a taboo topic against programme partners, including safety concerns for women and girls at community level within the atmosphere of the subordinate status of women in Afghan society has resulted in a difficult landscape in which to craft messaging, highlighting issues concerning GBV. Furthermore, DfA has clamped down severely on media reporting on many issues, particularly as it relates to women and girls. As a result, the space for messaging on Spotlight interventions, was limited to a few social media posts, often disguising the actual intentions of the programme under the health, life-skills, or economic empowerment support, and collection of human-interest stories.

b. Messages

- As noted above, messaging on SI-A was limited and focused mostly on technical or monitoring visits, including with partners. Efforts were made to ensure safety of programme partners, mostly highlighting support to women and girls in accessing basic basic services through various SI-A supported centres. In addition, social media posts included key highlights from the meetings within the technical mission of the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women. There are currently no possibilities of measuring the effectiveness of messaging with the audiences, as part of Spotlight or other programmes.

c. Media and visibility events

- In line with the operation modalities on supporting GBV interventions, there were no visibility events organized in 2022. Nevertheless, modest efforts to keep some visibility on the programme also included the social media posts by the Head of EU Delegation meeting with all the programme partners during the first-ever SI-A retreat in September 2022.

d. Campaigns

- Within the 16 Days of Activism against Violence Against Women, the programme launched a film competition on women's rights. As part of this contest, men, boys, women and girls are invited to participate and submit a short video on their views about the situation of women and girls' rights in the country. The contest is rolling from November 2022 and will end in March 2023, as part of the International Women's Day celebrations.

In addition, the training of journalists organized in coordination with the Spotlight Regional programme was also part of the 16th days campaign and a platform where participation had the opportunity to engage and learn from other countries of the region.

- For 16 Days of Activism in 2022 (25 November – 10 December 2022), Spotlight Initiative Partners ran a social media campaign aimed at showcasing the status of women and girls in Afghanistan with a particular focus on gender-based violence. The campaign was focused on giving digital space in Afghanistan social media channels to Spotlight Initiative civil society partners to share with the world one message they have for 16 Days of Activism against gender-based violence. The campaign has been developed based on the idea that the civic space is shrinking particularly for women-led/focused civil society organizations like the Spotlight partners and channels can be used to ensure their voices and messages reach the world. Spotlight partners curated 18 messages from women survivors in Afghanistan and women led/focused civil society partners. The messages were shared on social media channels in English, Dari and Pashto, and featured on the Christian Amanpour CNN's show at the beginning of the 16 Days of Activism campaign. The social media campaign was matched with a story featuring an Afghan woman activist and her fight for gender equality and her role in working for an Afghanistan free of violence against women and girls before and after the DfA.
- As part of the efforts to promote CSO and raise women's voices, during the 16 days of activism, the programme launched a film competition on women's rights. As part of this contest, men, boys, women and girls are invited to participate and submit a short video on their views about the situation of women and girls' rights in the country. The contest is rolling from November and will end in March 2023, as part of the International Women's Day celebrations.
- 16 days of action against gender-based violence was commemorated in 6 districts of Herat (Injil, Karukh, Robat Sangi, Pashtun Zarghun, Ghoorian, Shindand). It started with the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. The training was held for 16 days from 25th Nov to 10th Dec 2022, and it took one hour each day in 6 districts to perform all the activities and make an impact through this program in terms of "Activism to end violence against women and girls".

A calendar of activities were planned for each day with the objective to:

- Educate people about gender-based violence.
- Share real stories of village women in their language.
- Strengthen the needy women's emotional sense by providing help and gifts to them.
- Listen and believe in the women.
- Create an opportunity to develop the art hidden in women's existence.
- Create focus group discussions with men about what role they played in reducing violence
- Capacity building of women in the villages to discuss violence with their family members.
- Create unity, coordination, and a communication network among women who want to play an active and effective role in reducing violence.
- Spread the reading culture.
- Thank the women who have played an active role to eliminate violence.

Good feedback was received from the participants and these programs have had a good impact on them as they said “in these black days women are under pressure from several aspects and the limitation to them is getting increased day by day, such activities are like a bright window to a dark house, and we consider it a hopeful way to a better future. These programs gave us motivation for further efforts to eliminate the violence against women in our country.”

Meanwhile, this campaign was also commemorated in Paktia province in an event in two separate sessions for 50 females and 25 Male participants. Female participants were from MAG and AYN Groups, school’s teacher, housewives and girls and students. Girls and women shared their stories of Gender based violence which they witnessed in their society, poems were sung during the celebration, and also, they said they will stand united for their basic rights which is education, job and also selecting their life partner Actually female participants were very pleased and thankful for such opportunities.

Sustainability

The operational context in Afghanistan is becoming more difficult and in such a landscape, long-term sustainability planning is not feasible. SI-A is focused on knowledge management, so as to ensure relevant information is readily available for other programmatic interventions to take the developed models and practices forward, even if they require further adaptations. SI-A has struggled to expand the resources as planned, in view of so many restrictions and changes, and would benefit from additional time for implementation, beyond the global deadline. It will become near impossible to plan development interventions, as they relate to women and girls, in the humanitarian context, which is set to continue.

Next Steps

The year 2023 will be the final year for the implementation of the programme and to achieve planned results. As RUNOs proceed with the implementation of interventions, they will capitalize on the milestones already achieved to contribute to change and improve the lives of women and girls of Afghanistan.

In 2023, the programme will continue to work with the same partners, to build their capacity to influence change of existing harmful gender norms, to respond to the needs of GBV survivors in the country and promote CSO and their representatives rights to socialization and participation.

The programme will build capacity of CSOs on GBV response, through the operationalization of the EVAWG manual being developed and the grant making mechanism being established. As the situation in the country continues to evolve, the programme will reinforce its advocacy efforts, adjust programming as relevant and feasible, continue to collaborate with other UN entities to raise the voice of Spotlight partners, ensure continuation of GBV service delivery and CSO access to financial and technical resources. Knowledge gained and models developed under SI-A will be built into planned interventions of other partners’ initiatives.

ANNEXES

Annex A: Results Framework

Annex B: Risk Matrix

Annex C: CSO Engagement Report (already submitted online)

Annex D: Innovative, Promising or Good Practices Reporting Template

Annex E: Annual Work Plan

Annex F: SI-A Strategic Review

Annex G: SI-A Comprehensive Survey Report



**Spotlight
Initiative**
*To eliminate violence
against women and girls*

