



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

Liberia Spotlight Initiative 2.0

Annual Narrative Programme Report

01 January 2025 - 31 December 2025



Programme Title & Programme Number

Programme Title: Liberia Spotlight Initiative 2.0 (LSI 2.0) - Reducing Sexual and Gender-Based Violence to Achieve Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

MPTF Office Project Reference Number: 00141198; 00141199; 00141200; 00141201; 00141202

Programme Start and End Dates

Start Date: 01 June 2025

End Date: 31 May 2029

Priority regions/provinces/areas/localities for the programme

Liberia: Montserrado, Nimba, Lofa, Grand Gedeh, Grand Cape Mount, Bong, Grand Bassa, Maryland

Recipient Organization(s)**Recipient Organization(s)**

Government of Liberia Partners:

Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MGCSP); Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA); Ministry of Health (MOH); Ministry of Justice (MOJ); Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MFDP); Law Reform Commission (LRC); Judiciary/Criminal Court E, National Legislature of Liberia; Liberia National Police (LNP); University of Liberia

Other Partners: Civil Society Organizations

Spotlight Funding and Agency Contribution by Agency (USD):

Name of RUNO	EU Funding	UN Agency Contributions
UNDP	4,568,990	749,679
UNFPA	3,962,058	61,368
UN Women	5,880,818	801,756
Total	14,411,866	1,612,803

The total estimated budget is USD 16,024,669 of which USD 14,411,866 is a contribution from the European Union and USD 1,612,803 contribution from the UN.

This budget includes programme costs and indirect support costs and excludes the Administrative Direct Costs of the MPTFO.

Total budget as per the Spotlight Initiative CPD:
16,024,669 USD

Spotlight Initiative funding:
14,411,866 USD from the European Union

Agency Contribution : 1,612,803 USD

Report Submitted By:

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Acronym List

ARREST Agenda	Agriculture, Roads, Rule of Law, Education, Sanitation and Tourism Agenda
BOS	Business Operations Strategy
CBO	Community-Based Organization
CMR	Clinical Management of Rape
COTLA	Council of Traditional Leaders of Africa
CPD	Country Programme Document
CS NRG / CS-ENRG	Civil Society National Reference Group
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DSA	Daily Subsistence Allowance
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EOI	Expression of Interest
EVAWG	Ending Violence Against Women and Girls
EU	European Union
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GAP III	EU Gender Action Plan III
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GBV-IMS / GBV IMS	Gender-Based Violence Information Management System
GRPB	Gender-responsive Budgeting
IDLO	International Development Law Organization
JFK	John F Kennedy Medical Center
LNOB	Leaving No One Behind
LNP	Liberia National Police
LRC	Law Reform Commission
LSI 2.0	Liberia Spotlight Initiative Phase 2
MGCSP	Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection
MFDP	Ministry of Finance and Development Planning
MIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NSC	National Steering Committee
OSC / OSCs	One-Stop Centre(s)
P-MER	Participatory Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting
PEACE Model	(Trauma-Informed Interviewing Approach) Preparation, Engage, Account, Closure, Evaluate)
PMCU	Programme Management and Coordination Unit
RUNOs	Recipient United Nations Organizations
SASA!	Start, Awareness, Support, Action (Community Mobilization Methodology for Prevention)
SBCC	Social and Behavior Change Communication
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
TORs	Terms of Reference

Acronym List

UN	United Nations
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
VHC / VHCs	Vocational and Heritage Center(s)
WACPS	Women and Children Protection Section (LNP Unit)
WGPA	Women and Girls Protection Act (2025)

Executive Summary

The June–December 2025 period marked the inception phase of the Liberia Spotlight Initiative 2.0, supported by the European Union as the programme's principal donor and strategic partner. During these initial months, the programme concentrated on establishing the technical, institutional, and governance foundations required for a coordinated national response to violence against women and girls (VAWG) and harmful practices. EU engagement was central to ensuring alignment with national priorities and international commitments, fostering coherence across institutions, and enabling a deliberate and structured transition from design to implementation.

Implementation took place amid significant contextual developments. Public attention to harmful practices increased following the President's commitment at the 2025 UN General Assembly to pursue a permanent legal prohibition of female genital mutilation (FGM). At the same time, Liberia continued to face high numbers of sexual and gender-based violence, legislative debates affecting marginalized groups, economic pressures, and fluctuating donor support.

These factors underscored the importance of careful sequencing, strengthened governance, and an integrated approach, areas in which the EU-UN partnership played a key role.

Within this context, the programme achieved several early results that collectively strengthened national readiness. With EU financing, technical and consultative groundwork advanced the Women and Girls Protection Act (2025), Liberia's most comprehensive legislative proposal to date addressing harmful practices. Inclusive engagements with lawmakers, traditional leaders, civil society, and communities helped build shared understanding and created momentum for review and deliberation. These efforts were reinforced by a national petition mobilizing more than 1,000 women and girls, signaling broad-based civic support.



Ma Setta Saah Fofana, a former Head Zoe, and current founder of the Africa Heritage Foundation, advocating for the passage of the W GPA at the legislative consultations with civil society members. October 2025.

Institutional capacity building progressed in parallel. EU-supported assessments of the JFK DNA laboratory and the Liberia National Police forensic unit provided a unified evidence base for strengthening forensic processes essential to SGBV case management. Complementary multisectoral trainings enhanced the competencies of health workers, investigators, and justice actors, reinforcing survivor-centered standards and improving coordination across sectors. These contributions establish the technical baseline needed for future service expansion and more consistent application of national standards.

Prevention efforts also gained traction. Through close collaboration with the Ministry of Internal Affairs, traditional leaders from all fifteen counties reaffirmed their commitment to tackling harmful practices and strengthening community-driven prevention approaches. Joint government assessments of the Vocational and Heritage Centers informed updates to operational procedures and identified opportunities to revitalize these spaces as community platforms for prevention and alternative livelihoods. Preparatory work for the rollout of the SASA! methodology further positioned communities and authorities for more structured norms-change interventions in 2026.

Civil society participation, advanced with the establishment of the Civil Society National Reference Group (CS-NRG). This mechanism ensures structured engagement of women's rights organizations, youth groups, and grassroots actors in programme governance, policy dialogue, and accountability. The Initiative used national advocacy moments, including the 16 Days of Activism, to reinforce community engagement, expand public outreach, and deepen coordination among civil society networks working on VAWG and harmful practices.

Across these contributions, the programme continued to uphold the principle of Leaving No One Behind by ensuring inclusion of groups often overlooked in national protection systems, particularly rural women and girls, persons with disabilities, adolescents, LGBTQI individuals, and survivors in hard-to-reach communities. This informed the design of interventions, the selection of civil society representatives, and the development of early risk-mitigation measures.

The EU-UN partnership strengthened system-wide coherence throughout the inception period. Co-chairing of the National Steering Committee by the EU Ambassador helped reinforce accountability, ensure transparent decision-making, and maintain alignment with Liberia's ARREST (Agriculture, Roads, Rule of Law, Education, Sanitation, and Tourism) Agenda for Inclusive Development (AAID) and the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF). Regular interagency coordination, joint technical planning, and harmonized operational processes supported a unified approach and laid the groundwork for smoother implementation in 2026.

Sustainability considerations were integrated from the outset. National ownership of forensic strengthening, GBV data systems, and multisectoral training initiatives was prioritized, with government institutions leading assessments, validation exercises, and planning processes. Community-anchored structures such as the Council of Traditional Leaders in Africa (COTLA) and the Vocational and Heritage Centers were engaged early to ensure continuity of prevention work beyond the programme period. The formal sustainability plan, to be finalized in early 2026, will build on these foundations.



While anticipated challenges emerged, including prolonged recruitment processes for civil society partners, varying levels of institutional capacity, and political divergence around legislating FGM, mitigating measures ensured continued progress. Joint planning, enhanced clarification of roles, and phased implementation strategies enabled the programme to maintain steady momentum and prepare for full-scale delivery in the year ahead.

The Liberia Spotlight Initiative 2.0 inception phase therefore played a critical role in establishing the systems, partnerships, and enabling conditions that form the backbone of future actions in the process to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence, harmful practices and women's rights, including sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

The progress achieved in 2025 provides a strong and coherent platform for accelerated implementation in 2026, with national institutions, communities, and civil society better positioned to advance a sustained and coordinated response to violence against women and girls and harmful practices.

Contextual Shifts and Implementation Status

The year 2025 was characterized by substantial socio-political, economic, and cultural shifts in Liberia that significantly influenced both the prevalence of violence against women and girls (VAWG) and the operational environment of the Spotlight Initiative 2.0. The broader governance context was shaped by the Government's advancement of the ARREST/AAID Agenda, which renewed emphasis on justice-sector reform, decentralization, and institution-building. These priorities present important long-term opportunities for strengthening accountability systems relevant to gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response.

Public and political attention to GBV intensified throughout the year. National discourse, media reporting, and advocacy led by women's rights organizations and youth movements elevated VAWG as a matter of urgent national concern.

National data for 2025 reflected persistently high records of violence, including 1,735 reported rape cases, 824 physical assaults, and 339 incidents of domestic violence. These figures illustrate both the entrenched nature of GBV and the partial effectiveness of improved reporting pathways. Meanwhile, harmful traditional practices continued to pose a major contextual challenge with an estimated 505 girls and young women subjected to FGM in 2025, underscoring the persistence of the practice across several counties. Key drivers included deeply embedded social norms, the reopening of bush schools, economic incentives for practitioners, and gaps in permanent legal prohibition and enforcement.



Significantly, 2025 also marked a turning point in the national and regional policy environment for addressing harmful practices. During the September UN General Assembly, the President publicly committed to ending FGM and announced the Government's intention to pursue permanent legislative prohibition. This commitment led to the formal transmission of a request to the National Legislature, the introduction of the Women and Girls Protection Act of 2025, and the establishment of a Joint Legislative Committee mandated to conduct consultations in practicing counties.

These efforts were further reinforced through large-scale civic mobilization, including a national petition campaign led by more than 1,000 women and girls advocating for the bill's passage. At the regional level, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Community Court of Justice issued a landmark ruling declaring FGM a form of torture and a violation of fundamental human rights, strengthening the jurisprudential environment for national reform efforts.



H.E. Joseph Nyuma Boakai, Sr. *President of the Republic of Liberia addressing the 80th Session of the UN General Assembly, 23 September 2025. Credit: Liberia Permanent Mission to the UN.*

While these developments unfolded, 2025 also witnessed intensified legislative activity affecting LGBTQI persons. A bill introduced by Representative Momo Siaffa Kpoto sought to further criminalize same-sex practices and heighten penalties, reinforcing an already restrictive legal environment. Additional similar proposals advanced through legislative committees, reflecting continued political momentum toward punitive measures targeting LGBTQI communities.

This contributed to an increasingly challenging climate for LGBTQI persons, who continue to face discrimination, harassment, and violence in Liberia. For the Spotlight Initiative, these developments may constrain safe access to GBV services for LGBTQI survivors, heighten operational and protection risks for implementing partners, complicate alignment with international human rights standards, and potentially hinder progress in social norms transformation efforts.

In response, the Initiative plans to adopt mitigation measures designed to uphold inclusivity and ensure continuity of services, including discreet and survivor-centered referral pathways, strengthened protection protocols for partners, constructive engagement in policy dialogue to promote adherence to human-rights-based principles, and investment in community-level programming that fosters non-discrimination, respect, and social cohesion.

The economic and financing context also shifted markedly. Rising living costs, unemployment pressures, and fiscal constraints across public institutions increased household stress and heightened risks of GBV, particularly in economically insecure settings.

Concurrently, shifts in the donor landscape narrowed funding opportunities for GBV response actors and exacerbated service gaps in different counties. Sweden's announcement in December 2025 of its intention to phase out bilateral development cooperation with Liberia by 2026 further raised concerns about potential resource shortfalls for institutions and civil society partners, necessitating a stronger reliance on multilateral mechanisms and domestic-financing strategies.

Against this backdrop, preparatory actions were undertaken to position the Programme for full implementation, including:

- **Initiating the establishment of management and programme teams:** Recruitment of essential personnel at both the RUNO level and within the central Programme Coordination team was launched. Although the process faced some delays, priority was placed on rapidly putting core structures in place and ensuring that newly recruited staff were fully oriented on the Spotlight Programme, including its technical and operational dimensions.
- **Advancing foundational technical work:** This involved jointly preparing implementation guidance, including work plans, terms of reference, concept notes, joint event planning, and coordinated preparation for policy dialogues and consultations.
- **Strengthening programme coordination:** Major governance and coordination structures were established to support and accelerate different components of the programme and address emerging bottlenecks.
- **Accelerating procurement and implementation planning:** These efforts aimed to shorten activation timelines once partners were ready to engage.
- **Mobilizing technical support for the women's movement:** Development partners were engaged to ensure that issues affecting women and girls did not fall through the cracks during the transition from Spotlight 1.0 to Spotlight 2.0 and throughout the inception period when activities were pending full implementation.
- **Prioritizing the resolution of capacity and information gaps:** During the inception period, key stakeholders in essential service delivery were equipped with necessary skills; gaps in capacity, facilities, and equipment for service delivery and social norms prevention work were assessed; and effective selection of implementing partners was initiated to further advance towards grassroots level implementation.



Overall, implementation of the Liberia Spotlight Initiative in 2025 is assessed as generally on track, considering the programme's June 2025 start date and the contextual delays previously outlined. While a limited number of components experienced minor slippage, mitigation measures ensured that core foundational activities advanced as planned, implementation readiness was maintained, and conditions were established for accelerated delivery in early 2026.

The programme enters 2026 with a strengthened enabling environment for scale-up.

Enhanced coordination mechanisms, combined with increased national ownership, the recruitment of implementing partners, and the establishment of key governance structures provide a robust platform for sustained progress across all outcome areas. These developments position the Initiative to advance more effectively toward its overarching objective of eliminating violence against women and girls in Liberia.

Programme Governance and Coordination

During the inception phase of the Liberia Spotlight Initiative 2.0 (LSI 2.0), a comprehensive governance and coordination architecture was established to guide strategic oversight, strengthen national ownership, reinforce accountability, and facilitate coherent multi-stakeholder implementation. These structures form the institutional backbone through which the programme will deliver results, ensure alignment with national priorities, and uphold the Spotlight Initiative's commitments to Leaving No One Behind and advancing UN Reform.

The established architecture replaces interim mechanisms put in place during the design phase and now provides a harmonized platform that brings together Government, civil society, the United Nations, the European Union, and other key stakeholders in a structured and accountable manner.

a.

National Steering Committee (NSC)

The National Steering Committee (NSC) is the programme's highest decision-making body and is fully operational following its formal establishment during the inception period. Co-chaired by the Minister of Gender, Children and Social Protection, the EU Ambassador, and the UN Resident Coordinator, its membership includes Ministers of Health, Justice, and Internal Affairs; the Heads of Recipient UN Organizations; a member of the Legislature; representatives of EU Member States; and the Chair and Co-chair of the Civil Society National Reference Group.

The first NSC meeting on 28 October 2025 endorsed the programme's first annual work plan and confirmed collaboration modalities among Government institutions, civil society organizations (CSOs), and RUNOs.





With responsibilities that include providing governance and strategic direction, reviewing implementation and financial reports, approving work plans and budget revisions, and monitoring risks, the NSC creates an essential platform for coordinated decision-making. It adds value by institutionalizing shared accountability across partners, ensuring full government ownership, and grounding programme implementation in national strategies related to SGBV, harmful practices, and SRHR. Its co-chairing arrangement exemplifies UN Reform by reinforcing Delivering as One and aligning with the UNSDCF. The inclusion of the CS-NRG ensures that the voices of women and girls, particularly those at risk or facing multiple forms of marginalization, inform decisions at the highest level.

b.

Civil Society National or Regional Reference Group (CSNRG)

The Civil Society National Reference Group (CS-NRG) was established in 2025 as a formal accountability and advisory mechanism to ensure the systematic engagement of women's rights organizations, feminist movements, and grassroots civil society in the governance of Spotlight Initiative 2.0. Its establishment followed a transparent, participatory, and collaborative process involving the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, UNDP, UNFPA, UN Women, the European Union, the Resident Coordinator's Office, the SI Global Team and national civil society networks. Two publicly advertised calls (a Call for Nominations and an Expression of Interest) were issued to guarantee inclusiveness.

Seventeen nominations were reviewed by a multi-stakeholder panel, after which a five-member civil society selection committee assessed eleven Expressions of Interest and recommended four representatives for induction. A woman Chairperson was elected, reinforcing women's leadership. Though multi-stakeholder in design, the civil society-led final selection ensured legitimacy and movement-based accountability. The remaining seven seats will be filled in early 2026 following the recruitment of Spotlight 2.0 CSO implementing partners to ensure broader representation across constituencies.



The CS-NRG comprises four members drawn from a diverse spectrum of women's rights and feminist groups, youth-led advocacy networks, community-based organizations in Spotlight target counties, organizations representing survivors, and groups serving vulnerable populations, including rural women, adolescent girls, and women with disabilities. Members were selected for their demonstrated engagement in civil society advocacy and serve in an individual capacity rather than as representatives of their affiliated CSOs. This inclusive approach strengthens rights-holder representation and ensures the programme remains grounded in lived realities. A phased expansion approach is planned to further enhance diversity and advance the principle of Leaving No One Behind (LNOB) across oversight and delivery.

Following its formation, the CS-NRG convened for an orientation on 10 October 2025, held leadership elections on 16 October, and participated in the National Steering Committee session on 28 October.

These constituted the initial convenings during the reporting period. The approved workplan, budgeted under the programme, sets a quarterly meeting schedule supplemented by ad-hoc advisory engagements aligned with policy windows and Outcome Working Group activities. Until the expanded membership is finalized early in 2026, engagement continued through structured consultations, written submissions to the Programme Management and Coordination Unit (PMCU), and participation in the Technical Working Group. The programme budget supports workplan implementation, including convening costs, county monitoring visits, stipends, and DSA, in line with global Spotlight guidance, with remuneration being rolled out gradually to ensure compliance and meaningful participation.

The CS-NRG workplan strengthens the group's advisory, advocacy, accountability, and movement-building roles. In its first year, the workplan prioritizes contributions to policy dialogues on gender-responsive budgeting and GBV data, as well as participation in advocacy efforts on the proposed FGM prohibition law in partnership with the CSO National Coalition Against Harmful Traditional Practices.

Participatory Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting (P-MER) is embedded through planned county-level monitoring visits to gather community feedback on relevance, accessibility, and effectiveness of services for marginalized women and girls, with findings intended to inform adaptive management via reporting to the PMCU and the NSC. Additional priorities include the development of a civil society scorecard to track Spotlight's performance against commitments, drawing on tools and lessons from Spotlight 1.0 countries.

Meaningful engagement has been planned through clear terms of reference, dedicated resourcing, capacity-building, and structured participation in governance mechanisms. Challenges such as limited initial applications and onboarding delays have been mitigated through phased expansion, strengthened administrative processes, and interim advisory channels. The CS-NRG is already laying foundations for stronger engagement by institutionalizing civil society oversight, reinforcing strategies for national movement leadership, and embedding participatory accountability mechanisms that will help sustain the programme's achievements beyond its lifecycle.

C.

Inter-agency coordination, technical committees, and other mechanisms

Informed by lessons from Spotlight 1.0, the programme refined and operationalized a range of internal mechanisms to strengthen coordination, quality assurance, and system alignment. The Spotlight Initiative strategically leveraged Liberia's existing inter-agency and national coordination platforms to drive technical coherence, strengthen implementation, and reinforce alignment with national priorities and UN Reform. By engaging through platforms such as the UN Gender Theme Group, UNSDCF-aligned youth and gender forums, and broader UN Country Team coordination spaces (which convene monthly or quarterly and bring together UN agencies, government institutions, and civil society), the programme ensured that its priorities were fully embedded within wider national planning and coordination processes.

These mechanisms enabled joint analysis, collective decision-making, and coherent advocacy, while creating inclusive spaces for actors representing women, youth, persons with disabilities, and marginalized communities. Their combined contributions not only helped the programme maintain alignment with national systems, but also strengthened oversight and accountability required for improving the quality and coherence of Spotlight implementation.

Building on this foundation, the programme reinforced national ownership by integrating the Spotlight Initiative into the existing National GBV Taskforce through the establishment of the LSI 2.0 Technical Working Group (TWG).

Meeting quarterly and chaired by the Deputy Minister for Gender, the TWG brings together line ministries, the EU Delegation, UN agencies, and several civil society organizations. At its 23 October 2025 meeting, the TWG reviewed inception-phase progress and issued strategic recommendations aimed at improving effectiveness.

Members called for reduced reliance on international consultants and increased use of national expertise to enhance contextual relevance, strengthen local ownership, and ensure cost-effectiveness. They also highlighted system-alignment challenges linked to direct procurement by RUNOs and recommended conducting structured capacity assessments of relevant ministries to enable future fund transfers consistent with Liberia's public procurement, PFM, and audit laws. By grounding Spotlight coordination in a national mechanism, the TWG deepened sustainability, strengthened institutional capacity, and advanced government leadership, while reinforcing LNOB by ensuring that CSOs (including those representing marginalized group) could directly influence technical decisions. Complementing the TWG, Outcome Working Groups (OWGs) provided targeted thematic coordination across the four outcome areas. Bringing together government ministries, RUNO technical focal points, and specialized CSOs, the OWGs began meeting in October 2025 and were integrated, where possible, into the pillar meetings of the National GBV Taskforce to avoid parallel structures. A core contribution of the OWGs during the reporting period was their role in validating the detailed outcome-level workplans. These workplans were first drafted bilaterally between RUNOs and the designated government institutions responsible for implementation; the OWGs then reviewed and refined them, after which they were validated by the TWG and finalized with inputs from both technical bodies before endorsement by the National Steering Committee. Beyond workplan validation, the OWGs translated strategic guidance into operational plans, drafted technical standards, identified capacity gaps, and monitored progress at the outcome level. Their inclusive composition ensured that women's rights organizations and CSOs working with under-served communities had direct influence over prevention strategies, legal reforms, service delivery protocols, and broader systems-strengthening efforts.



To maintain cohesion across all partners and ensure agile implementation, the programme also established a joint bi-weekly coordination meeting bringing together the PMCU, RUNOs, the EU Delegation, and Government of Liberia lead institutions. Meeting every two weeks throughout the reporting period, this platform became the programme's central mechanism for real-time coordination, facilitating alignment of work-plans, addressing bottlenecks, monitoring progress, and ensuring consistent communication across institutions. Its regularity strengthened collective accountability, enabled rapid course-corrections, and reinforced national leadership while operationalizing Delivering as One across all outcome areas.

These interconnected mechanisms created a coherent and responsive coordination architecture that strengthened technical rigor, improved oversight, and deepened accountability. They ensured that Spotlight implementation remained anchored in national systems, informed by evidence, and driven by inclusive, multi-stakeholder leadership, enhancing the programme's contribution to preventing and eliminating violence against women and girls in Liberia.

d.

Use of UN Reform inter-agency tools

During the reporting period, Spotlight Initiative 2.0 in Liberia made considerable progress in advancing coordinated, efficient, and high-impact implementation aligned with UN Development System Reform. The programme continued to strengthen system-wide coherence and joint accountability through inter-agency governance and operational mechanisms that enabled a unified "One UN" approach. This ensured that delivery remained responsive, efficient, and fully aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF). Joint planning, harmonized administrative processes, and emerging common service modalities supported greater cost-efficiency and reduced fragmentation, building on UN Country Team systems aligned with Business Operations Strategy (BOS) principles.

Key operational efficiencies were achieved through coordinated administrative processes led by UNDP, UNFPA, and UN Women, enabling synchronized start-up activities and shared operational support.

A major milestone was the launch of a joint Expression of Interest (EOI) for implementing partners, which streamlined partner selection, reduced duplication across agencies, strengthened due diligence, and promoted equitable engagement of civil society organizations—directly contributing to transparent and harmonized programme delivery.

To further enhance coherence and reduce operational costs, the Initiative secured a common office space on the sixth floor of the One UN Building for the co-location of all Spotlight personnel. Staff are expected to relocate in January 2026, and this arrangement is anticipated to significantly improve inter-agency coordination, accelerate decision-making, and enhance operational synergies. The Spotlight Coordinator's participation in the Gender Theme Group (GTG) also ensured that Spotlight priorities remained integrated into broader UN gender coordination structures and national policy engagement.



Thematic coordination was strengthened through UN Women's leadership of the national FGM coordination platform, which brings together a wide range of development partners dedicated to protecting women and girls from violence and harmful practices. This platform provided an integrated and evidence-based mechanism for technical guidance, joint advocacy, and harmonized support to national partners - significantly contributing to coherence in the national response to FGM.

The programme leveraged UN inter-agency mechanisms throughout the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence campaign in 2025 to ensure unified messaging, coordinated engagement with government and civil society, and greater visibility for the Initiative. The campaign also marked the official launch of the Liberia Spotlight Initiative 2.0, reinforcing national ownership and aligning the programme with global advocacy momentum. Using UN coordination platforms, the Initiative facilitated joint planning, technical coherence, and inclusive collaboration across UN agencies, government partners, civil society, academia, and the private sector.

This approach was exemplified by the One UN Community Engagement and Digital Empowerment Event at the University of Liberia, which provided shared technical inputs on preventing digital VAWG and engaged youth, students, persons with disabilities, and marginalized groups.

Through pooled resources and harmonized outreach, including the #SafeDigitalLiberia campaign and community dialogues, partners aligned with national priorities and reached over four hundred participants with coordinated advocacy on digital safety, legal rights, and survivor-centered approaches.

Implementation was further supported through UN system-wide Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) on common services, including shared administrative systems, joint procurement modalities, and coordinated operational support. These arrangements contributed to streamlined processes, enhanced accountability, and more efficient use of programme resources.

Looking ahead to 2026, the Initiative will deepen the use of BOS-aligned tools and common services, including joint monitoring and reporting systems, harmonized support to government coordination structures, shared planning for decentralized implementation, and integrated capacity building for frontline service providers. These investments will continue to strengthen value-for-money, reinforce national ownership, and ensure inclusive and accountable delivery that effectively reaches women and girls, particularly those in rural and underserved communities.

Programme Partnerships

The partnership architecture of the Liberia Spotlight Initiative 2.0 continued to underpin the programme's progress throughout 2025. The initiative strategically leveraged the leadership of the Government of Liberia, the technical expertise of UN agencies, the mobilizing power of civil society, and the complementary support of development partners. These actors contributed to strengthening a powerful base for the implementation of the programme interventions at the national and sub-national levels.

This collaborative model will continue to reinforce national ownership, accelerated key legislative and institutional reforms, enhance the availability and quality of survivor-centered services, support the growth of feminist and community-based movements, and position national institutions to sustain gains.



a.**National Government or Regional Bodies**

Building on the experience and government partnerships established under Spotlight 1.0, and leveraging the renewed collaboration opportunities following the 2024 transition, Spotlight Initiative 2.0 worked closely with the Government of Liberia to reinforce political commitment and institutional leadership on eliminating VAWG. The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MGCSP) served as the lead coordinating institution and Co-chaired governance structures with the European Union.

Core government partners included the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), the Law Reform Commission (LRC), the Ministry of Health (MoH), Liberia National Police (LNP), the Judiciary, and the Ministry of Local Government (MLG).

These partnerships will continue to support a whole-of-government approach to strengthening prevention, protection, and accountability systems for sexual and Gender-based violence and harmful practices.

Collaboration focused on advancing legislative reform, enhancing forensic and investigative capacities, institutionalizing survivor-centered justice processes, and supporting the implementation of the GBV Accountability Framework. Engagement with MoH and LNP provided a solid base for the chain of custody and evidence-based investigations, while cooperation with the Ministry of Finance contributed to clear plans for enhancing gender-responsive budgeting and efforts to increase domestic financing for SGBV services.

b.**Civil Society and Women's Rights Movements**

Civil society is central to the newly launched Spotlight Initiative 2.0, with CSOs positioned as key accountability actors, advocates, and prospective implementing partners. Building on the foundations laid by Spotlight 1.0, the programme seeks to deepen partnerships with women's rights organizations, feminist movements, and CSOs representing at-risk and vulnerable populations.

During the reporting period, the programme advanced the selection of CSO implementing partners. The programme anticipates that ongoing engagement with CSO implementing partners will enhance access to justice, increase community awareness of SGBV laws, amplify women's voices, and reinforce survivor-centered service.

In fact, some of these collaborations have already been instrumental in mobilizing the women's movement to submit a formal petition advocating for the ban on FGM through the adoption of the Women and Girls Protection Act of 2025.

Movement-building will continue to be further strengthened through technical support to feminist coalitions and coordinated advocacy, including contributions to the efforts of the National Coalition Against Harmful Practices, which is expected to lead to significant public mobilization around the Women and Girls Protection Act of 2025 in 2026.



C.

Donor(s)

The European Union remained the principal donor and strategic partner of Spotlight Initiative 2.0, providing both political leadership and financial support. Beyond financing, the partnership strengthened alignment with the EU Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in External Relations 2020–2025 (GAP III) and reinforced national accountability to international human rights commitments.

Throughout the year, the EU played a significant role in fostering coherence, visibility, and adherence to global standards through its active participation in governance structures and policy dialogue. Its engagement remains crucial for advancing long-term sustainability by supporting the integration of VAWG prevention and response within national systems.

Dialogue with the EU will continue into 2026 to explore opportunities for resource mobilization and synergies with other programmes within the EU portfolio in Liberia to enhance overall impact and sustainability.

In addition, high-level dialogue between the Gender Donor Coordination Group and various civil society organizations further strengthened coordinated donor and advocacy efforts. This collaboration resulted in concrete commitments, including support for legal analysis of the Bill, unified advocacy messaging, and targeted engagement with legislators on a bill to legislate FGM in Liberia.



From left to right: EU Ambassador to Liberia; UN RC in Liberia; Director for Human Development, Migration, Governance, and Peace, European Commission; Hon. Minister, MFDP, Liberia; Hon. Minister MGCSP Liberia

d. Cooperation with other UN agencies (if applicable)

Cooperation with other UN agencies continued to reinforce Spotlight Initiative 2.0 efforts on FGM prevention. WHO, UNICEF, and OHCHR remained active through the Development Partners Coordination Group on Gender, which is driving coordinated policy dialogue on FGM legislation. UNICEF, formerly a RUNO of LSII.0, made a timely contribution just before Spotlight 2.0 was signed by supporting the primary school at the Vocational and Heritage Center in rural Montserrado, led by former FGM practitioners.

Through the provision of school materials, UNICEF helped strengthen efforts to provide safe learning spaces for girls previously at risk of FGM in bush schools. This joint engagement strengthened policy coherence and community-level prevention efforts.

e. Other Partners

Spotlight Initiative 2.0 further expanded its collaboration with academic institutions, technical experts, consultants, traditional leaders, and specialized organizations to deepen the programme's technical rigor and community impact. UNDP's partnership with the International Development Law Organization (IDLO) supported enhanced engagement with the Liberia National Police and contributed to strengthening evidence-based policymaking, investigative procedures, and justice-sector responsiveness. Collaboration with traditional leaders as "Champions of Change" continued to advance culturally grounded approaches to transforming harmful social norms, including through community-led advocacy and promotion of alternative rites of passage to replace FGM.

In parallel, UN Women initiated formal dialogue with the University of Liberia to support the design and implementation of a nationwide study on violence against women and harmful practices, scheduled for 2026. This partnership aims to generate high-quality national data, fill critical evidence gaps, and strengthen academic engagement in EVAWG research. These diversified partnerships offer a critical pathway to enhance the programme's technical capacity, bolster national expertise, and open new pathways for sustainable resource mobilization and long-term institutional strengthening.



Results: Progress toward Ending Violence Against Women and Girls

Although implementation remained in its early phase, and while it remains too soon to register changes in incidents and prevalence reductions, early indications of progress toward change are emerging across the enabling environment. Positive shifts can already be observed in the legal and policy landscape, social norms readiness, survivor centered service provision, data systems strengthening, and civic accountability mechanisms.

The programme contributed to important shifts in national momentum toward eliminating harmful practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and child marriage, while reinforcing sustainable mechanisms for coordinated EAWG action.

The acknowledgment of legal and institutional reforms as a national priority has spurred legislative momentum through the introduction and structured review of the Women and Girls Protection Act (2025). This Act seeks to amend the Penal Code to criminalize harmful traditional practices, particularly FGM. Public engagement for the Bill grew through multi-stakeholder consultations and petitions from civil society, while traditional leaders committed to abandoning harmful practices. These factors increase the likelihood of effective implementation and enforcement with broad social support once passed.

Significant foundational gains were achieved toward strengthening community-based prevention systems and build readiness for large-scale norm change to prevent SGBV and harmful practices. Spotlight Initiative 2.0 advanced early preparations for the future rollout of the SASA! Approach in forty-eight high-prevalence communities in the eight target counties where the approach will be piloted.

In parallel, Spotlight Initiative 2.0 laid the initial foundations for strengthening national and traditional governance mechanisms essential to eliminating harmful practices. Support to the Ministry of Local Governance at the First National Assembly of Chiefs and Governor Council, enabled the introduction of the Council of Traditional Leaders of Africa (COTLA), where more than 500 traditional leaders from all 15 counties committed to re-establishing the Liberia Chapter as an active, structured platform for cultural leadership and accountability.



Photo of UN Women Country representative in Liberia, addressing the National Assembly of Chiefs and Tribal Governors in Gbarnga, Bong County

Government-led assessments of the Vocational and Heritage Centers (VHCs) in Nimba and Grand Cape Mount counties, identified gaps in governance and livelihood opportunities for women. These findings are expected to inform revisions to standard operating procedures (SOPs) and planning frameworks aimed at repositioning VHCs, as sustainable community platforms for preventing SGBV, eliminating harmful practices, and advancing SRHR.

Progress was also made in strengthening services along the survivor pathway, enhancing the national response to sexual violence. Clinicians improved their skills in the Clinical Management of Rape, and essential post-rape kits were procured to stabilize supply chain. At the same time, 34 Ministry of Health trainers were prepared to provide national clinical training, creating a sustainable capacity-building model that will reduce reliance on external support and enhance lifesaving medical care for survivors.

Further gains were achieved in strengthening institutional capacity to enforce SGBV and harmful practices laws, uphold the rights of women and girls, and deliver coordinated, survivor-centered services. Forty officers from the Women and Children Protection Services and specialized LNP units completed advanced training in trauma-informed interviewing, and investigation techniques improving their readiness to handle complex SGBV cases. System-wide forensic assessments of the JFK DNA laboratory and the Liberia National Police forensic laboratory generated prioritized specifications for infrastructure, equipment, procedural improvements, and upgrade sequencing. These assessments established the technical foundations needed to improve the quality, consistency, and admissibility of forensic evidence. As a result, cross-sector actors are beginning to adopt a shared technical language, reduce gaps in case handling, and move toward more timely care, better documentation, and stronger prospects for prosecution as upgrades are rolled out. In parallel, institutional coherence and national standards for survivor-centered response were strengthened, establishing a clear pathway for building long-term institutional capacity to deliver coordinated, high-quality services.

Initial steps were taken to guide a national policy review, the rollout of the GBV Accountability Framework, and a coordinated forensic-system strengthening process, bringing greater alignment of mandates and operational expectations across the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Health, and the Liberia National Police. As a core element of this systems-building pathway, two multisectoral trainings laid the practice foundations on which institutional capacity will continue to expand: a three-day justice-health training reinforced survivor-centered procedures, medico-legal documentation, and evidence handling, while dedicated LNP training advanced trauma-informed investigation competencies.

Efforts also advanced toward establishing an evidence-based policy environment by moving from fragmented, manual reporting to an integrated digital case-management system for SGBV. Key foundational data-system investments were completed, including procurement of hardware for the national GBV Information Management System (GBV IMS), identification of a national implementation vendor, and the embedding of a data analyst to prepare for routine digital reporting in future years.

Notable strides were made in strengthening the foundations of a strong, coordinated women's movement capable of sustaining accountability and advancing the rights of women and girls. A major milestone was the establishment of the Civil Society National Reference Group, designed to represent civil society organizations and the women's movement within programme governance. This institutionalized oversight mechanism is expected to strengthen movement-wide linkages, embed participatory accountability, and position civil society to sustain momentum beyond the programme's lifecycle, ensuring that EVAWG reforms remain grounded in the lived experiences of women and girls, including those from groups vulnerable to multiple forms of violence and discrimination.



Cross-Cutting Results: Results Across Outcome Areas

In its first year of implementation, the Liberia Spotlight Initiative 2.0 generated system-wide beginning-of-change signals that strengthened the national enabling environment for eliminating violence against women and girls (VAWG) and harmful practices. Although still early in the programme cycle, complementary progress across law and policy reform, social norm change readiness, survivor-centered services, institutional data systems, and civil society leadership has begun to reshape the national response architecture, moving it toward a more coherent, evidence-driven, and nationally owned system.

A key development was the recognition of FGM as a national priority through the Women and Girls Protection Act (2025). This initiative combined formal legal reform with a holistic societal approach, engaging over 1,000 citizen petitions and traditional leaders to build broad support for the ban. By uniting political will and community engagement, the effort aims not only to enact the law but also to ensure its effective implementation.

The period also saw some gains in prevention readiness, enabling future scaled implementation. Through groundwork for planned SASA! Implementation in 48 high-prevalence communities, and increased interest from over five hundred traditional leaders in the COTLA structure, the programme laid the social and institutional foundations for norms change interventions to take root. Prevention visibility expanded through the 16 Days of Activism, with in-person reach exceeding 1,800 people (750 men and 1,050 women) and digital engagement reaching around 155,500 helping shift public perceptions, particularly among youth, toward collective responsibility for ending VAWG. These normative shifts reinforce the legislative pathway and create favorable conditions for survivors to seek services and justice without stigma.

Parallel improvements in service readiness and justice sector capacity provide a strong pathway for strengthened survivor pathways and reinforced the feasibility of legal reforms. Frontline clinicians enhanced competencies for Clinical Management of Rape; supplies were stabilized with approximately 80% of essential post-rape and dignity kits procured; and Ministry of Health trainers were prepared to replicate training nationally, embedding capacity into the health system. In the justice chain, forty officers trained in trauma-informed investigation, while whole-system forensic assessments at the JFK DNA laboratory and Liberia National Police forensic laboratory produced unified upgrade specifications. These developments reduce risks of case attrition and strengthen the chain of custody which are key ingredients for enforcing future laws and securing convictions under strengthened statutory frameworks.

A transformative cross-pillar shift emerged through the transition from fragmented manual GBV reporting to a digital ecosystem, with hardware procured, a national vendor identified, and a data analyst embedded to establish the Gender-based Violence Information Management System (GBV IMS). Once operational, this system will generate ethical, timely, and disaggregated data as a sole source of truth across service providers and users. Critically, the GBV IMS establishes automatic feedback loops that will shape prevention targeting (e.g., SASA! deployment to hotspot communities), prosecution quality (through forensic and case-trafficking data), and policy refinement (via evidence from One Stop Centers and service trends). This shift has implications for all outcome areas as evidence will not merely document impact but will begin to drive it.

Finally, the Initiative's cross-pillar feedback architecture, especially the Cross-pillar One Stop Center evaluation used as a system "stress test," was adopted to demonstrate the Spotlight model's multiplier effect. Evaluation findings are expected to guide legislative refinement, gender-responsive planning and budgeting, targeted prevention, improved prosecution, and community-level accountability.

Participatory Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting (P-MER)

During the reporting period, Spotlight Initiative 2.0 integrated key P-MER principles into inception-phase planning and governance to strengthen transparency, accountability, and rights-holder participation. While full field-level P-MER will begin in 2026, the programme established foundational mechanisms to ensure participatory monitoring becomes a core feature of implementation.

Civil society contributed to programme oversight through participation in governance discussions, including the National Steering Committee held in October 2025. Their feedback helped shape legislative advocacy priorities, prevention planning, and early coordination efforts. Participatory approaches were also applied in several national-level technical exercises, including the planning of the One Stop Centre evaluation to be conducted in 2026, forensic readiness assessments, and preparatory work for SGBV policy review. These consultations enhanced the relevance of assessments and aligned technical work with institutional realities.



Mr. Emmanuel Bashiel Comehn, Co-Chair of the CS-NRG, representing the group at the first LSI 2.0 National Steering Committee meeting, 28 October 2025.

Rights-holder engagement further informed Spotlight's support around the Women and Girls Protection Act (2025). The national petition movement led by women's rights groups to demand the adoption of the WGPA provided important participatory evidence on community priorities, reinforcing the programme's legislative engagement and ensuring alignment with the lived experiences of women and girls.

Key lessons from 2025 highlight the need for structured facilitation, clear engagement channels, and adequate time to ensure meaningful participation during an inception year marked by institutional transitions. Looking ahead, the programme will formalize these efforts through the establishment of a P-MER Working Group in 2026, which will guide participatory monitoring, joint learning, and community feedback processes across all outcome areas.

Feedback shared during participatory engagements underscored the value of these approaches:

"When we are included in monitoring, it shows that women's voices matter, we help shape what the programme focuses on."

"Spotlight created space for people to speak directly to leaders about protection needs."

"Participatory monitoring strengthens trust and ensures decisions reflect real experiences."

These groundwork efforts position Spotlight Initiative 2.0 to expand rights-holder-driven monitoring as implementation accelerates in 2026.

Capturing Change at Outcome Level

Outcome A: *Laws, Policies, Institutions and Data*

The programme contributed to a positive shift in Liberia's legislative landscape by helping advance the country's most significant legal reform effort on harmful practices. Following the President's September 2025 commitment at the United Nations General Assembly to end harmful traditional practices, formal communication was addressed to the House of Representatives requesting the enactment of legislation to eliminate all such practices. This action marked a pivotal national step toward protecting the rights and bodily integrity of women and girls, including those at risk of FGM.

In response, a bill entitled "An Act to Amend Chapter 14, Title 26 of the Penal Code, Liberian Codes Revised, by Creating a New Sub-Chapter 'E' on the Women and Girls Protection Act of 2025" was introduced in the National Legislature. Subsequently, the House Plenary referred the bill to a Joint Committee on Gender and Child Development, Judiciary, Internal Affairs, and Health for review and consultation.



Government ministries, led by MGCSP and the Ministry of internal Affairs, also expressed readiness to advance passage and implementation of the Act.



These assessments, conducted in close collaboration with national counterparts and technical specialists, confirmed significant constraints, including unreliable power supply, non-functional equipment, outdated software, shortages of essential reagents, and gaps in laboratory infrastructure and environmental controls. They also highlighted the need to reinforce evidence-handling practices, chain-of-custody procedures, and the technical skills of personnel across health, policing, and judicial institutions.

Building on this analysis, a detailed roadmap was developed to guide the phased restoration and enhancement of Liberia's forensic capabilities. Priority actions include stabilizing the power supply for continuous operations, rehabilitating, or replacing damaged laboratory equipment, replenishing testing materials, updating essential software, and improving safety and environmental conditions within forensic facilities. The roadmap also includes a strong capacity building pillar, emphasizing refresher training for laboratory staff, improved sample collection practices for frontline responders, and increased support for prosecutors and judges to strengthen the use of scientific evidence in court. These efforts will begin to take shape in 2026, positioning Liberia to establish a more resilient, efficient, and survivor-focused forensic system.

Justice sector readiness advanced through comprehensive, multi-sectoral training that strengthened trauma-informed interviewing, investigative techniques, and case management for forty officers from Women and Children Protection Services (WACPS) and specialized units. Two major trainings deepened knowledge of legal frameworks, survivor-centered procedures, evidence handling, and inter-agency coordination, while a three-day justice-health training paved the way to establishing common standards for case management and medico-legal documentation across police, prosecutors, health workers, and gender coordinators. These investments are expected to contribute to more consistent practice, higher-quality investigations, reduced re-traumatization of survivors, and improved institutional accountability.



Frontline SGBV actors attending a refresher training on legal frameworks guiding SGBV case management

As anticipated earlier, it is important to highlight the noteworthy progress made toward strengthening national GBV data systems. Preparations are advancing to establish a unified GBV Information Management System (GBV IMS). This new system will replace fragmented, paper-based reporting with a single national platform that integrates information from county gender offices, health facilities, police units, and other service providers.

The GBV IMS aims to reduce duplication, protect confidentiality through controlled access, and provide national dashboards to facilitate timely analysis and decision-making.

Once fully operational in 2026, the system will address long-lasting fragmentation in the GBV response and enhance coordinated case management through improved referrals and follow-up.

Anticipated challenges such as limited digital capacity and connectivity will be mitigated through simplified tools, offline entry options, and tailored training. Sustainability will be reinforced through full government ownership, hosting in MGCSP, staff capacity-building, and the recruitment of a dedicated national data analyst.

Further institutional coherence was advanced through collaborative planning among MGCSP, the Ministry of Justice, the Law Reform Commission, the Ministry of Health, the Liberia National Police, and civil society partners. This resulted in preparations for a 2026 stakeholder consultation workshop to review existing SGBV policies, identify gaps and overlaps, and select five national policies for survivor-centered reform. The session will bring together key justice, gender, and law reform institutions to review existing policies and identify gaps, overlaps, and priority areas for reform and will result in the selection of five national policies to be reviewed and aligned with survivor-centered SGBV service delivery standards by a Policy Reform Consultant.

This shared preparatory work created a unified framework for a sequenced policy reform process that is expected to progress efficiently when national consultations are convened in early 2026.

These preliminary achievements positioned Liberia for accelerated progress in 2026 by strengthening the systems, partnerships, and political commitment needed for coherent EVAWG reform. They have also equipped Liberia with a clear roadmap for legislative implementation, institutional strengthening, and long-term progress toward eliminating SGBV and harmful practices.

Outcome B: Prevention

The programme reinforced Liberia's prevention architecture at national and community level, focusing on partnerships for social norms change, traditional leadership engagement and sustainable platforms that will continue to carry prevention at scale. While majority of interventions remained in early or preparatory phases, the programme achieved important foundational shifts that are expected to accelerate prevention outcomes in 2026.

Prevention efforts were reinforced through engagement with traditional governance structures. In collaboration with the Ministry of Internal Affairs, more than 500 traditional leaders from all fifteen counties participated in the First National Assembly of Chiefs and Governor Council in November 2025, where they committed to operationalizing the COTLA Liberia Chapter as a structured platform for peer learning, mutual accountability and coordinated national and local action to prevent SGBV, end FGM and child marriage, and promote SRHR.

This commitment reflects a substantive shift toward cultural leadership and local ownership of prevention efforts. In 2026, COTLA will be fully established, including the creation of a dedicated desk within the National Council of Chiefs.

Prevention platforms were also strengthened through government-led assessments of the Vocational and Heritage Centers in Nimba and Grand Cape Mount, with findings on governance, infrastructure, and sustainability informing revised SOPs and investment plans to reposition the centers as hubs for alternative livelihoods, prevention dialogue, and localized SGBV prevention. The four centers were established under Spotlight 1.0 to provide women, girls, and traditional practitioners with opportunities for skills training and cultural exchange. Although they have faced challenges in management and operations since their transition to MGCSP, their potential remains significant.



Additionally, the draft SOPs developed under Spotlight Initiative 1.0, while not finalized, offer a foundation upon which to build governance and accountability moving forward. The assessment results will facilitate the finalization of the SOPs and enable the centers to be repositioned as effective platforms for alternative livelihoods and community-based SGBV prevention.

Foundations for scale-up of evidence-based norms change were established through the launch of a consultancy to contextualize and roll out SASA! approach, with implementation due in early 2026. During the reporting period, critical groundwork was undertaken, including the development and advertisement of TORs for the consultancy that will adapt and operationalize SASA! For the Liberian context.

This preparatory work will set the stage for a comprehensive social norms-change programme that will equip county authorities, media practitioners, traditional and religious leaders, community leaders, grassroots women's groups, and volunteers with proven tools and methodologies to prevent VAWG and harmful practices through transformative, evidence-driven gender social norm change approaches.

The launch of Spotlight Initiative 2.0 on 25 November 2025, aligned with the National GBV Conference and the 16 Days of Activism, triggered renewed political commitment and accelerated momentum for GBV prevention and social norms change. More than 2,200 people participated in prevention activities during the 16 Days, while seventeen digital influencers reached over 155,500 followers, boosting awareness on digital safety, women's rights, and GBV prevention.

A conference communiqué issued at the conclusion of the GBV Conference set clear next steps, including publishing the GBV Action Matrix within 30 days, launching GBV digital data system design in early 2026, convening the revitalized National GBV Taskforce within 45 days, initiating a national digital-safety awareness campaign, monitoring GRPB allocations, and preparing a mid-year progress report for the Cabinet.

These commitments provide a structured roadmap to sustain momentum and drive coordinated delivery under Spotlight 2.0 in 2026. Results under Outcome B reflect important early progress in building the institutional and social foundations for long-term prevention, positioning Liberia to deliver deeper community-level norm change and reductions in VAWG and harmful practices over time.



*National GBV
Conference
participants.
November 2025.
Credit: MGCSP.*

Outcome C: Response

During the reporting period, substantive progress was made in reinforcing the institutional and operational foundations required for a coordinated, survivor-centered response across Liberia's health, psychosocial, legal, and protection sectors. Early interventions supporting the roll out of standardized, confidential case management tools and strengthen referral pathways laid critical groundwork for reducing delays and improving survivors' access to timely, safe, and consistent care.

Although a remarkable number of response-system interventions are scheduled for full implementation in 2026, notable advances were achieved in institutional preparedness, multisectoral capacity building, and coordination of essential services.

Frontline capacity within the Ministry of Health's Family Health Division (FHD) was strengthened through the training of thirty-four health personnel, including FHD Directors, Coordinators, Officers, and staff from the Ministry's Sexual and Gender-based Violence Unit. The Clinical Management of Rape (CMR) Training of Trainers enhanced providers' competencies to deliver empathetic, confidential, and survivor-centered care in accordance with national CMR guidelines. Participants demonstrated improved skills in trauma-sensitive clinical interactions, forensic evidence collection and preservation, medico-legal documentation, psychosocial first aid, and effective referral procedures which are core elements required for high-quality, integrated GBV service delivery across the health system.

Delivered as part of the Ministry of Health's broader effort to harmonize GBV service standards nationwide, the training is expected to address long-lasting capacity gaps, including chronic understaffing at one-stop centers and inconsistent application of clinical protocols. Ministry leadership affirmed that the initiative has established a foundational cohort of national trainers capable of cascading CMR competencies across primary, secondary, and referral-level health facilities.

Participants strengthened skills in clinical documentation, coordination with psychosocial and justice actors, and accountability practices essential for high-quality survivor care. The knowledge and skills gained through this training are expected to further enhance the Ministry of Health's institutional readiness and position the health sector to provide more timely, safe, and comprehensive services for survivors.

In 2025, substantial progress was achieved in advancing the evaluation of Liberia's One Stop Centers (OSCs), a key component of the country's multi-sectoral response to Gender-based violence. The results of this evaluation will directly inform the establishment and operationalization of One Stop Centers in three new Spotlight Initiative target counties (Bong, Maryland, and Grand Bassa). This expansion will support more equitable access to quality GBV response services across Liberia and further strengthen the national ecosystem for survivor protection, care, and justice.

Outcome D: *Women's Movement and Civil Society*

The programme made significant strides in strengthening civil society leadership and expanding a cohesive, rights-based national movement to end violence against women and girls in Liberia. Through an inclusive civil society-led process, the Civil Society National Reference Group (CS NRG) was established with an initial membership of four representatives from diverse organizations. During the reporting period, the CS NRG finalized its Terms of Reference and developed a costed workplan to guide coordinated advocacy, participatory monitoring, and public engagement efforts for 2026. The group also began engaging in national policy dialogues and Spotlight governance structures, helping to institutionalize a platform for rights-holder oversight, and enhancing civil society's ability to influence programme direction, articulate priorities, and strengthen participatory accountability.

The National Coalition Against Harmful Practices, representing over 300 civil society organizations (CSOs) and more than 5,000 advocates, has played a pivotal role in mobilizing public support for the Women and Girls Protection Act (WGPA). With backing from the Spotlight Initiative, the coalition is leading coordinated petitions and planning media campaigns and community-level education initiatives to sustain pressure for the passage of the bill. The WGPA aims to protect the rights of women and girls by addressing issues such as gender-based violence, harmful practices, and promoting gender equality. It seeks to establish legal frameworks to enhance their safety, empowerment, and access to justice.

As programme implementation expands into remote counties in 2026, strengthened community engagement and oversight mechanisms are expected to further reinforce civil society's leadership in advocacy, policy dialogue, and inclusive movement-building, ensuring sustained momentum for rights-based reforms such as the WGPA and long-term accountability for EAWG commitments. Planned activities include county-based consultations with women's groups, support to women-led coalitions to articulate shared priorities, and the development of locally tailored messaging reflecting rural realities.

Future outreach will also prioritize inclusion of vulnerable populations through community radio and in-person dialogue in rural areas, engagement with traditional leaders to support norm change, and collaboration with organizations working with women and girls with disabilities to inform accessible, survivor-centered messaging.

These approaches aim to ensure that communications and movement-building efforts are inclusive, community-rooted, and responsive to diverse local contexts in the eight target counties.

Challenges and Mitigating Measures

During the reporting period, a record of contextual and institutional challenges affected the pace of implementation. While none posed a substantive risk to overall programme direction, some led to delays or required adjustments to planned timelines. Mitigating measures have been put in place to address each issue, as outlined below and reflected in the risk matrix (Annex B):

1. Alignment of GoL leadership with UN procedures

Efforts to strengthen Government of Liberia (GoL) leadership and national ownership - critical for long-term sustainability - required careful alignment with UN procedures.

At times, differing interpretations of roles and responsibilities resulted in extended discussions on procurement, recruitment, and CSO selection processes, which UN Agencies must conduct in accordance with their internal policies. These exchanges were used constructively to clarify procedures and expectations, and joint planning mechanisms have been strengthened to reduce future bottlenecks. Continued engagement is improving mutual understanding and maintaining national ownership while ensuring compliance with UN standards.

2. Prolonged CSO recruitment processes

The onboarding of civil society partners has taken longer than anticipated, reflecting the time needed to reach a shared understanding of roles and responsibilities between GoL partners and RUNOs in the selection process.

The process remained at the Expression of Interest stage by December 2025 and was expected to be followed by targeted calls for proposals to ensure transparency and compliance. These steps, while essential for accountability, especially in working with local and grassroots groups, have extended implementation timelines. Rapid onboarding procedures were recommended for application once the targeted calls were launched.

3. Limited availability of specialized national expertise

Sourcing national technical specialists, particularly for highly specialized tasks such as establishing the GBV Information Management System (GBV IMS), has been challenging.

A capacity building model has been adopted, pairing national and international consultants to ensure effective delivery while also strengthening national capacities for long-term sustainability.

4. Slow progress in fully establishing the Civil Society National Reference Group (CS-NRG)

As CS-NRG participation is voluntary and members are not allowed to implement Spotlight Initiative activities, recruitment has progressed more slowly than expected. Only four of the planned eleven members have been confirmed to date.

Recruitment will resume once implementing partners are on board, and additional outreach strategies are being explored to encourage broader civil society engagement.

Divergent political views on harmful practices, including FGM.

Despite the President's commitment to abolish harmful practices, including FGM, legislators remain divided on key issues such as including the age of consent to FGM and the use of terminology aligned with international human rights standards (e.g., the term "mutilation," which some consider offensive).

This has affected the pace of legal reform. Legal experts are being engaged to conduct a technical review of the bill and to help navigate the legislative complexities. Additionally, future programme phases will incorporate strengthened awareness-raising at all levels to build consensus on harmful practices and support evidence-based advocacy.

Lessons Learned and New Opportunities

During the reporting period, the programme generated key lessons that have informed both strategic direction and operational practice. These emerged from inter-agency collaboration under the UN Reform framework, engagement with Government and civil society actors, and the programme's adaptation to contextual and technical challenges. These lessons are now contributing to enhancing programme delivery, deeper national ownership, and greater prospects for sustaining results.

The first year of implementation underscored the value of dedicating sufficient time to collaborative work planning. Although the process took longer than initially expected, the joint engagement of UN Agencies, Government counterparts and civil society contributed to clearer implementation pathways, better alignment of priorities and reduced ambiguity in roles and sequencing. This approach has proven essential for promoting national ownership and ensuring that activities are grounded in shared objectives. The programme will maintain this collaborative planning model, while seeking opportunities to streamline processes in future cycles.

The introduction of a standardized concept note template also provided an important lesson in strengthening programme coherence and compliance. Requiring detailed activity proposals before implementation ensured that interventions were technically sound, aligned with UN procedures and linked to clear results. This contributed to improved financial discipline, reduced risks of ineligible expenditure and enhanced the consistency of reporting across agencies and partners. The template will remain a core tool to support transparency and quality standards throughout the programme.

Another important lesson concerned the centrality of national leadership for sustaining programme achievements. Balancing Government leadership with the procedural requirements of UN systems (particularly regarding procurement, recruitment, and CSO engagement) requires ongoing coordination and clarity. The experience highlighted the need for continuous dialogue and reinforced joint planning to ensure that national ownership is upheld while safeguarding compliance with RUNO policies. This will continue to inform adjustments in programme governance and collaboration modalities.

In addition, challenges in identifying qualified national experts for specialized assignments, such as the establishment of the GBV Information Management System, highlighted the importance of investing in long-term national capacity. The programme's approach to pairing national and international consultants continues to facilitate effective knowledge transfer and strengthen institutional capacities. This model is promising and will continue to be applied to ensure sustainability of technical systems.

Lessons were also drawn from efforts to strengthen civil society engagement, particularly in relation to voluntary mechanisms such as the Civil Society National Reference Group. Slower than anticipated recruitment process and the limited pool of eligible organizations underscored the need for flexible engagement strategies that uphold conflict of interest safeguards while enabling meaningful participation. The programme will continue to support grassroots and local organizations, in line with LNOB principles, and will explore opportunities to diversify partnerships, including engagement with non-traditional actors and community-based structures.

a. New Opportunities

Regional human rights developments during the period strengthened momentum for national legal reform and created important entry points for the Spotlight Initiative. The ECOWAS Court of Justice's landmark ruling classifying FGM as torture and obligating member states to prohibit it sets a new regional standard and increased expectations for legal alignment across West Africa. This development reinforces Spotlight's policy engagement under Outcome A and boosts national advocacy for a comprehensive ban on harmful practices. It also heightens demand for survivor-centered protections, directly supporting Spotlight's work to strengthen justice, services, and community-level prevention systems.

Progress in development cooperation also created favorable conditions for the Initiative. Expanded support from the European Union, including increased budget support, financing for gender equality, and investments in governance and youth skills development, offers strategic possibilities for alignment with Spotlight programming. Similarly, evolving U.S. Government engagement in the health sector, despite earlier disruptions, has created openings for strengthened coordination around health system stabilization and renewed efforts to reinforce sexual and reproductive health services that underpin survivor-centered responses.

Further opportunities arose from the World Bank's Liberia Women's Empowerment Project (LWEP), which is expanding community mobilization, women-led livelihoods, and accountability mechanisms across several counties. LWEP's emphasis on social norms transformation, community-based grievance mechanisms, and rural women's economic empowerment aligns strongly with Spotlight's model and offers practical avenues for harmonizing methodologies, strengthening referral pathways, and scaling community-level protection structures.

Momentum in the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) sector also created new openings. Continued investments in skills development, youth employability, and vocational infrastructure, particularly through programmes supporting training centers and national skills competitions, provide opportunities to link economic empowerment and alternative livelihoods with prevention and transformation work under the Initiative.

National digital transformation efforts, including the launch of Liberia's National Digital Strategy and enhanced government focus on digital governance, presents further opportunities to strengthen data systems and interoperability. These developments support the scale-up of the GBV Information Management System and create favorable conditions for more integrated, secure, and sustainable GBV data governance across institutions.

Furthermore, macroeconomic and governance reforms undertaken through the ongoing IMF Extended Credit Facility programme also create openings to advance sustainability objectives.

Commitments to improved fiscal discipline, public fiscal management, and protection of priority social spending increase the prospects for long-term institutionalization of GBV services, data systems, and justice sector capacities that Spotlight seeks to strengthen.



b.

Contributions to Evidence Base and Knowledge Management

During the reporting period, the Spotlight Initiative prioritized building a solid foundation for evidence generation, knowledge management, and collaborative learning as part of its inception phase. Lessons learned were gathered through a series of multi-stakeholder consultations conducted to develop the programme work plan and guide implementation. These engagements involved Government of Liberia (GoL) institutions, RUNOs, and the CS NRG and led to a jointly agreed division of labor across ministries, agencies, commissions, civil society, and UN entities. The process also enabled early identification of capacity gaps, coordination needs, and potential implementation risks which are informing programme planning for 2026.

Knowledge-sharing efforts focused primarily on strengthening joint planning and validation processes, rather than on broad dissemination, as partnership agreements and implementation modalities are expected to be formalized in early 2026. Most consultations were convened at the national level and centered on legislative reform, forensic readiness, and establishing a shared understanding of priorities across prevention, service delivery, and justice sector strengthening. Complementary consultations on alternative livelihood opportunities were conducted at the county level to reflect local realities, validate assessment findings, and inform context-specific approaches to economic empowerment.

All consultations were guided by the Leave No One Behind (LNOB) principle and ensured inclusive participation. The national-level legislative consultation on the WPGA engaged women's rights organizations, rural women, youth groups, traditional actors, and former practitioners of FGM. At the county level, traditional women and chiefs were consulted to inform the development of Standard Operating Procedures for the management and operation of vocational and heritage centers, which will guide further support in 2026.

Key findings from these dialogues and assessments highlighted the need to strengthen community engagement, reinforce county-level coordination mechanisms, enhance survivor-centered standards and practices, improve referral pathways, and establish more systematic engagement with traditional authorities.

As part of the global Spotlight community, LSI 2.0 benefits from dedicated headquarters technical support and an active community of practice of over 1,000 members, leveraging evidence-based expertise to catalyze and sustain impact on ending violence against women and girls. In this context, programme team members accessed targeted capacity-building and practical guidance, including internal review of resources from the Global Spotlight Learning Centre were reviewed internally to support planning and harmonize approaches across RUNOs. Materials were not yet disseminated to partners during the reporting period, as wider sharing is planned for 2026 once partnership agreements are finalized and implementation structures are fully operational. This will support consistent application of survivor-centered principles, prevention approaches, and coordination guidance across all implementing actors. Resources from the [Global Spotlight Learning Centre](#) were reviewed internally to support planning and harmonize approaches across RUNOs. Materials were not yet disseminated to partners during the reporting period, as wider sharing is planned for 2026 once partnership agreements are finalized and implementation structures are fully operational. This will support consistent application of survivor-centered principles, prevention approaches, and coordination guidance across all implementing actors.



The programme produced several foundational knowledge products during 2025 including:

Spotlight 2.0 launch communiqué calling for a more active GBV Taskforce, the rollout of a national digital safety campaign, strengthened tracking of GRPB allocations, and regular reporting to the Cabinet;

The petition from the women's movement advocating for the Women's Protection and Girls' Act;

The draft Women and Girls Protection Act providing for the abolition of FGM;

Gap and needs assessment of vocational and heritage centers conducted to inform planned alternative livelihood options for former FGM practitioners and girls and women at risk, and to guide the development of SOPs for their effective management and operations.

Forensic Capacity Assessment Reports (DNA lab at JFK Medical Center and forensic lab at LNP Headquarters) offering a unified evidence base to strengthen forensic services and improve prosecution outcomes.

These products were developed through consultative processes and technical level missions and will serve as the core evidence base for legislative engagement, justice sector strengthening, and the design of community-level and livelihood interventions under Spotlight Initiative 2.0.

Innovative, Promising or Good Practices

The Spotlight Initiative implementation in Liberia is strengthening efforts to systematically document innovative and promising practices as implementation advances. Initial steps include more deliberate capture of lessons learnt across ongoing interventions, several of which are considered innovative in the national context and show potential for adaptation and scale-up by ERAW practitioners in the region and beyond. As evidence continues to accumulate, the Programme will contribute to global learning platforms, including the Spotlight Initiative Compendium of Innovative and Good Practices and Lessons Learned. This report presents a preliminary identification of selected practices that will be further documented, with additional details provided in Annex D. A notable promising practice emerged through the integration of the PEACE (Preparation and Planning, Engage and Explain, Account, Closure, and Evaluation) trauma-informed interviewing model into capacity building efforts for the Liberia National Police. Officers from WACPS and other specialized units strengthened competencies in survivor-sensitive interviewing, non-leading questioning, and respectful engagement, laying the foundation for more coherent, consistent, and trauma-responsive investigations. Early application of this model will demonstrate strong potential for institutionalization within national police training systems and lead to an important shift toward survivor-centered investigative practice.

Good practice was also observed in the adoption of a whole-system approach to forensic strengthening through complementary assessments of the JFK Medical Center DNA laboratory and the LNP forensic laboratory. This approach generated a unified roadmap for phased upgrades, procedural improvements, cross-agency coordination, and capacity building initiatives. This established a shared evidence base to improve the, quality, timeliness, and admissibility of forensic evidence in SGBV cases.

An innovative practice observed during the reporting period was the programme's complementary support to ongoing national efforts addressing digital safety and technology-facilitated violence. While these initiatives were not introduced by Spotlight, activities such as the #SafeDigitalLiberia campaign and the engagement of seventeen digital influencers during the 16 Days of Activism aligned closely with the programme's prevention objectives and provided a strategic platform to reinforce messaging on emerging forms of violence. Building on these national efforts, the Initiative will continue to contribute to elevating public awareness around digital risks affecting women and girls, particularly youth, and help position digital safety as an increasingly integral component of Liberia's broader GBV prevention architecture. The programme will continue to support and leverage such initiatives as part of its commitment to strengthening prevention systems and adapting to evolving forms of violence.

Good practice was further demonstrated through strengthened engagement with traditional authorities. More than five hundred traditional leaders participated in the National Assembly of Chiefs and the introduction to the COTLA Liberia Chapter, affirming commitments to abandon harmful practices and support prevention efforts in their communities. This will contribute to strengthening culturally grounded prevention systems and facilitated alignment between statutory reforms and traditional leadership structures.

In addition, a government-led assessment of Vocational and Heritage Centers in Nimba and Grand Cape Mount counties constituted a promising practice in community-level systems. The assessment generated detailed evidence base on governance, sustainability, and infrastructure needs which will be used to inform updated SOPs and future investment plans.

Spotlight 2.0 also advanced good practice in UN Reform through strengthened inter-agency coordination. Joint technical reviews, harmonized planning processes, bi-weekly coordination meetings, and shared administrative systems continue to enhance coherence across RUNOs, reduce duplications, and reinforce Delivering as One.

The decision to co-locate Spotlight personnel within a common office space in 2026 will institutionalize these efficiencies further and deepen the unified UN approach.

Finally, the programme demonstrated a promising operational practice by advancing key technical preparations such as detailed TORs, concept notes for activities, outcome-level workplans, and assessment tools, and policy mapping during the programme inception. This initiative-taking approach preserved implementation momentum, reduced future activation timelines, and ensured readiness for accelerated delivery once implementing partners were fully engaged. It reflects the Initiative's adaptive programming model and its capacity to navigate potential risks effectively.

Communications and Visibility

a. Overview

During the reporting period, Spotlight Initiative 2.0 in Liberia implemented a coordinated set of communications and visibility activities aligned with the Programme's strategic objective of raising national awareness on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and strengthening the visibility of the EU-UN partnership. Despite operating with limited communications resources in its first year, the Programme effectively leveraged existing capacities to ensure consistent outreach and meaningful public engagement. These efforts also ensured appropriate recognition of the European Union, the United Nations, and the Government of Liberia.

A major visibility milestone was the official national launch of the Spotlight Initiative 2.0, held in late November 2025 and publicly announced by national authorities. The launch received media attention and reaffirmed Liberia's national commitments to addressing SGBV and harmful practices. The launch coincided with the commencement of the National GBV Conference, enabling coordinated institutional messaging on legal reform, systems strengthening, and community-driven prevention approaches.

Throughout the year, public awareness was further strengthened through widespread coverage of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence, the women's movement's national petition calling for passage of the Women and Girls Protection Act, and the public commitments made by more than 500 traditional leaders during the National Assembly of Chiefs to abandon harmful practices and support prevention systems. These developments provided substantive content for Spotlight-supported communications and shaped public narratives around reform, accountability, and community leadership.

Across both traditional media and social media platforms, communications efforts reached audiences in all fifteen counties. The programme ensured consistent EU-UN visibility through co-branding, speeches, event materials, and institutional messages to strengthen public recognition of the Initiative and reinforce national accountability commitments.



b. Messages and Campaigns

In 2025, the Programme prioritized refining and aligning key messages for priority stakeholders, laying a strong foundation for the development of a formal Communications Plan, which will be prepared in early 2026 using internal resources.

Campaigns Supported During the Reporting Period

Communications during the reporting period centered on two major national advocacy efforts that significantly elevated public attention to EVAWG. The first was the coordinated campaign linking the national launch of Spotlight Initiative 2.0 with the 2025 observance of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence, which provided a high visibility platform for messaging on multisectoral reforms, legislative priorities, including the Women and Girls Protection Act and survivor-centered justice. Outreach was further extended through nationwide advocacy events, digital engagement, and community-level activities.

In parallel, the women's movement led a separate national campaign focused on eliminating FGM through national law, with support from the Spotlight Initiative.

This effort was marked by a large-scale march to the Capitol Building and the submission of a formal petition calling for passage of the Women and Girls Protection Act, generating substantial public visibility and reinforcing calls for strengthened legal protections.

These campaigns broadened national engagement and strengthened public discourse on both survivor protection and the elimination of harmful practices.

c. Media and visibility events:

Several high-profile events contributed to communications and visibility outcomes during the reporting period:

National Launch of Spotlight Initiative 2.0 (November 2025): Visibility materials, co-branding, and speech messaging reinforced national commitments to EVAWG and spotlighted the Government's intention to advance legal reforms, including the Women and Girls Protection Act.

16 Days of Activism Against GBV (November–December 2025): Public statements, digital campaigns, youth-led events, and media coverage across national platforms elevated awareness of SGBV, online violence, and survivor-centered response systems which remain central to the Spotlight Initiative objectives.

Multisectoral Training for Justice and Health Actors in Ganta: Media reports highlighted the importance of coordinated response systems and reinforced communication on institutional readiness to manage SGBV cases.



Liberia National Police Training on SGBV Investigations: Spotlight's support to trauma-informed policing and strengthened case management was widely communicated and contributed to visibility around improved policing practices.

National Assembly of Chiefs: Traditional leaders were introduced to COTLA publicly affirmed commitments to end harmful practices, strengthening visibility around community-driven prevention.

Communications Linked to the Women and Girls Protection Act: national discussion on the Women and Girls Protection Act was enhanced through legislative consultations with stakeholders, emphasizing its role in strengthening legal accountability and addressing harmful practices, particularly FGM.

These high-profile events collectively enhanced public understanding of Spotlight Initiative 2.0's objectives, strengthened engagement of key stakeholders in SGBV prevention, and reinforced national momentum toward coordinated, survivor-centered responses to SGBV



d. Human interest stories:

Story 1: A March for Dignity: Women's Movement Leads National Call to End FGM

On November 18, 2025, hundreds of women and girls marched to the Capitol Building to demand the passage of the Women and Girls Protection Act - a bill seeking to criminalize FGM and other harmful practices.

The women's movement mobilized activists, survivors, youth groups, and community leaders to petition lawmakers. Chanting "Ending FGM is a moral imperative," they delivered a formal petition urging swift action to protect women and girls from longstanding harmful practices.

The peaceful mobilization demonstrated the growing strength and coordination of Liberia's feminist movement and elevated public expectations for legislative reform.



*Liberian Campaigners
presenting petition to the
legislature in Monrovia*

*[photo: James Taina
Karbah/LPR]*

At a petitioning ceremony in Monrovia, activists described FGM as a severe human-rights violation and a direct threat to the health, safety, and dignity of Liberian women and girls.

They emphasized that the Women and Girls Protection Act represents a critical step toward ending practices that have harmed generations of young women, underscoring the urgency of establishing legal protections that reflect national and global commitments to safeguarding women's rights.

The call for reform followed the Government's renewed zero-tolerance stance on Gender-based violence, announced by the President during his 2025 address to the United Nations General Assembly, and reinforced by the subsequent submission of the Women and Girls Protection Act to the Legislature.

Activists framed the moment as a historic opportunity to align national legislation with international human-rights obligations and urged parents, community leaders, civil society, and development partners to unite behind the effort, affirming that ending FGM is both a moral imperative and a shared national responsibility.

The march, supported by UN Women through funding from the European Union funding through the Liberia Spotlight Initiative 2.0 marked a pivotal moment in Liberia's ongoing efforts to protect women and girls, reflecting a unified call for lasting legislative change and reaffirming the growing determination of citizens, activists, and community leaders to secure a future free from harmful practices.

Story 2: A New Standard of Care: Empowering Liberia's Health Workforce



Woseh Gobeh-Weah,
UNFPA Programme
Specialist SRHR Quality of
Care presenting at the
training.

©UNFPA Liberia/George Y.
Sharpe

From November 3 – 7, 2025, a quiet but transformative shift began inside Liberia's health system. For years, frontline health workers had struggled to respond to the physical and emotional consequences of rape, often without the specialized training, tools, or personnel needed to provide survivors with the care they deserved. Recognizing this gap, the Ministry of Health, with support from UNFPA and funding from the European Union through the Liberia Spotlight Initiative 2.0, convened an intensive Training of Trainers (TOT) for thirty-four coordinators and technical staff on the clinical management of rape and other forms of Gender-based violence. The two-week training, held from 3 to 14 November 2025, sought to strengthen the quality, availability, and consistency of survivor-centered health services across Montserrado County.

For many participants, the training marked the first time they had received structured guidance on trauma-informed care, forensic documentation, and integrated service delivery for GBV survivors. Over the course of the sessions, facilitators guided health workers through practical exercises on medical assessment, psychosocial first line support, proper collection and preservation of forensic evidence, and the ethical principles that underpin survivor-centered practice.

As part of the hands-on learning, participants visited the One-Stop Center at the Duport Road Health Center, gaining direct exposure to how coordinated clinical, psychosocial, and legal services can operate within a single facility.

The participants pose for a group photo after learning first-hand how the One-Stop Center at the Duport Road Health Center operates.

©UNFPA Liberia/George Y. Sharpe



The training came at a time when Liberia continues to confront high rates of Gender-based violence, with women and girls disproportionately affected. Strengthening the capacity of health workers is therefore critical to ensuring that survivors receive timely, competent, and compassionate care regardless of where they seek help. At the opening of the training, the UNFPA Deputy Country Representative emphasized this point, stating: "Our priority is to ensure that every survivor who walks into a health facility is met with care that acknowledges their pain, protects their dignity, and strengthens their path to recovery and justice."

Commenting on the importance of this initiative, Dr. Tarmay K. Yekeh-Saa, Programme Lead for Maternal and Reproductive Health within the Family Health Division of the Ministry of Health, emphasized the transformative nature of the support. "This training has demonstrably enhanced the Ministry's capacity to deliver an integrated, cohesive, and holistic response to rape and other forms of GBV," Dr. Yekeh-Saa stated.

She further underscored the critical capacity gaps within the GBV prevention and response system. "Currently, many of our one-stop centers or integrated care facilities around Liberia operate with minimal staffing—often just one or two staff members—to cater to survivors of rape and all other forms of GBV."

Dr. Yekeh-Saa indicated that this UNFPA-supported TOT will serve as a foundational pillar, empowering the Ministry to expand its reach. The goal is to effectively train a sizable proportion of care providers at all levels of the health system, from primary care clinics to referral hospitals, ensuring a swift, adequate, and complete response to any form of GBV, especially rape.

From the Ministry's side, the initiative was recognized as a significant step in addressing gaps in clinical response—particularly in facilities with limited staffing. The Ministry of Health official stated, "This training is helping us move from fragmented response to a unified standard of care. When every clinician is equipped with the right skills, every survivor - no matter where they seek help - can receive the compassionate, comprehensive support they deserve." The Ministry noted that the TOT will serve as a foundation for future nationwide capacity-building, aiming to cascade these competencies from primary health clinics to referral hospitals.

By the end of the training, participants expressed renewed confidence and purpose in their roles as frontline responders. Many described the experience as transformational, giving them the tools and mindset to provide survivor-centered care that promotes healing and strengthens the justice pathway. As Liberia continues to strengthen its GBV response system, this investment in health-worker capacity marks a decisive step toward establishing a national standard of care - one in which every survivor is met with skill, empathy, and unwavering support.

Story 3: Nationwide Consultations Build Momentum for Women and Girls Protection Act

A series of nationwide consultations held at the Capitol Building in Monrovia throughout 2025 brought together traditional leaders, civil society groups, youth representatives, community elders, and survivors to advance the Women and Girls Protection Act of 2025—legislation aimed at protecting women and girls from Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), early and forced marriage, abduction, and other harmful practices.

The discussions, held in both urban centers and remote communities, became one of the most inclusive national dialogues on gender protection in recent years. Participants shared powerful personal testimonies and cultural perspectives to shape a law that responds to real community needs. Survivors described the long-term physical and emotional effects of harmful practices, while health workers highlighted associated health risks, including severe bleeding, infections, childbirth complications, and trauma. Women's rights groups emphasized that temporary measures introduced in the past did not provide sufficient or lasting protection. Traditional authorities played a leading role in the consultations. While some expressed concerns about cultural preservation, others acknowledged the need to safeguard the health and dignity of girls. Several leaders indicated openness to adopting alternative rites of passage and expressed willingness to engage in public education efforts aimed at preventing harm. Their participation marked a significant step in bridging cultural values with modern protection standards.

Youth involvement added even greater momentum. In November 2025, hundreds of young people marched peacefully in Monrovia to voice their support for stronger protections. Their call for a safer future resonated widely across communities and reinforced the urgency of addressing harmful practices that disproportionately affect young girls.

Civil society organizations contributed technical recommendations throughout the process, focusing on enforcement mechanisms, public awareness strategies, community-based prevention efforts, and support systems for survivors. They also highlighted the importance of investing in livelihood programs for individuals and groups who rely economically on practices targeted by the new legislation.

International partners and human-rights organizations, while not driving the process, supported the consultations by emphasizing Liberia's broader commitments to gender equality and the protection of vulnerable populations. Their presence reinforced the national significance of the Act and the country's alignment with global efforts to end harmful practices.

By the close of 2025, the consultations had generated strong public support and elevated the Women and Girls Protection Act to one of the most anticipated reforms in recent years. The exchanges—rooted in openness, reflection, and a shared desire for progress—demonstrated a nationwide commitment to ensuring that every girl in Liberia can grow up safe, healthy, and protected.

As one participant noted at the legislative consultations, "This is about giving our daughters a chance at a better life. It is time for change."



Story 4: Frontline Responders Build a New Era of SGBV Case Coordination in Liberia

In Nimba County, a quiet but powerful shift unfolded as frontline responders from eight Spotlight counties gathered for a three-day training designed to strengthen how Liberia manages sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) cases. For many of the participants—nurses, police officers, county attorneys, gender coordinators, and justice actors—the training marked the first time they had worked together in the same room, examining the full survivor pathway from first disclosure to final case resolution.

The sessions, supported through the European Union in Liberia-funded Spotlight Initiative 2.0 and delivered by UNDP in partnership with the Government of Liberia, offered participants a renewed understanding of their collective role in securing justice for survivors.

Officers from the Liberia National Police's Women and Children Protection Section (WACPS), medical service providers, and justice officials engaged in practical exercises focused on applying national legal frameworks, strengthening report writing across both health and policing levels, improving documentation, and reinforcing evidence-handling procedures.

As participants walked through real case scenarios, it became clear that each institution held a different piece of the survivor's journey—and that when these pieces did not fit together, cases weakened. The training helped bridge these gaps. Nurses learned how their clinical notes guide police investigations. County attorneys gained insight into the importance of timely medical documentation. Police investigators practiced coordinating more closely with health workers and gender officers to prevent delays and confusion during case progression.



Frontline workers from eight Spotlight counties participating in the Nimba County SGBV coordination training.

What emerged was a shared commitment to survivor-centered justice. Participants described how the new coordination practices would help reduce duplication, strengthen communication between sectors, and ensure that survivors are supported at every step of the response chain. The introduction of Spotlight Initiative 2.0 in Nimba County also included a specialized Liberia National Police training on SGBV investigation and legal procedures, reinforcing the Initiative's dedication to equipping frontline actors with the skills needed to manage cases with care and legal precision.

By the end of the three days, a sense of unity had taken root. Participants returned to their counties with practical tools, renewed motivation, and a stronger understanding of how their roles intersect. The training reflected a broader goal of the Spotlight Initiative: building a coordinated, accountable system where survivors receive timely, compassionate, and effective support—no matter where they live.

Story 5: A Nation's Promise Renewed: Inside the Launch of Spotlight 2.0

On 25 November 2025, the grounds of the EJS Ministerial Complex filled with energy rarely felt at national events.

Before the formal programme began, women's rights groups, youth leaders, frontline responders, community advocates, and government officials gathered for a solidarity walk.

Their steps—measured, determined, hopeful—signaled something profound: Liberia was ready to renew its commitment to ending violence against women and girls.

Inside the auditorium, more than three hundred people took their seats for the national launch of the Liberia Spotlight Initiative 2.0. Though the day carried the weight of technical planning and policy ambition, its heart belonged to the people—especially the women and girls whose lives the Initiative seeks to transform. The launch was deliberately timed to coincide with the opening of the National GBV Conference and the first day of the global 16 Days of Activism campaign, creating one unified platform for action.



Participants at the Solidarity walk Prior to the Launch of LSI 2.0



Spotlight Initiative
To eliminate violence against women and girls



One of the most memorable moments came when a young student, Fredericka Kou Cooper, stepped forward to reading the President's proclamation. As she delivered the message—calling for stronger prevention programmes, better support services, and robust legal protection, her voice represented the very generation Spotlight 2.0 aims to protect. Her presence signaled that the fight against gender-based violence belongs not only to leaders but to Liberia's future.

The Minister of Gender, Children and Social Protection spoke candidly about the gravity of the situation.

She shared alarming national statistics: thousands of GBV cases reported each year, hundreds of rape cases in just the first months of 2025, and increasing incidents of digital abuse targeting women and girls.

"These numbers," she said, "are more than statistics. They are the lives of women and children who need us to act." Her words underscored why Spotlight 2.0 is essential: to strengthen prevention, improve services, and transform harmful social norms.



Hon. Gbeme Horace Kollie, Minister of Gender, Children and Social Protection, Liberia

Other voices echoed the same call. The UN Resident Coordinator reaffirmed the UN's commitment to working hand in hand with Liberia, noting the country's bold steps toward banning harmful traditional practices and the urgent need to address the rise of online violence. The European Union Ambassador reminded the audience that digital abuse can be as dangerous as physical violence—and that Spotlight 2.0's focus on safety in both physical and digital spaces reflects the reality Liberian women face today.

Civil society leaders took the stage with a powerful message: ending GBV requires sustained financing. They spoke of safe homes struggling to remain open, health workers using their own resources to support survivors, and the need for prevention programmes in every county, school, and community. They urged government and development partners to treat GBV funding not as an optional line item but as a national priority.

Throughout the event, hope and determination moved through the room. A survivor's voice reminded everyone why this work matters. Cultural performances celebrated unity and resilience. Representatives from traditional and religious institutions, youth groups, and women's organizations reaffirmed their commitment to partnership and accountability.

With the official launch of Spotlight Initiative 2.0, Liberia entered a new phase - one focused on strengthening laws and policies, improving access to justice, expanding life-saving services, promoting women's economic empowerment, and elevating the leadership of grassroots and women-led organizations.

The Initiative's expansion to eight counties signaled a resolve to reach communities where support is needed most.

On that day, Liberia stood together. And Liberia moved forward.

e. Testimonials:



"Spotlight 2.0 provides the framework for action through supporting stronger laws, better services, and community-driven solutions." UN Resident Coordinator – **Christine N. Umutoni**

"This initiative, whose activities are aligned with the ARREST Agenda for Inclusive Development, marks a pivotal step in reducing SGBV and achieving gender equality in Liberia." Minister of Gender, Children and Social Protection – **Gbeme Horace Kollie**

"We will not consciously eliminate our culture... The traditional people have the right to express their feelings about what they want their country to be... And we will work with them on this." President **Joseph N. Boakai**

"Ending FGM is a moral imperative... Harmful practices linked to the Sande Society violate constitutional rights. Liberia can preserve its culture without practices that endanger women and girls." Civil Society Petition Speaker and Women's Rights Campaigner – **Miatta Garmei Darwolor**.

"Every harmful practice that violates the rights and dignity of women and girls is a setback to our nation's progress. Ending them is not just a moral duty - it's a legislative imperative." Former Miss Liberia & Activist – **Wokie Dolo**

"The prevalence of gender-based violence remains a grave concern that requires strong institutions, trained professionals, and a united national response." Deputy Minister of Gender – **Laura Golakeh**



Sustainability

The Liberia Spotlight Initiative 2.0 embedded sustainability throughout its first year of implementation, even though a formal sustainability plan has not yet been developed. This plan will be finalized in early 2026 through consultations with MGCSP, MoJ, MoH, LNP, the Judiciary, county structures, civil society, and traditional leaders, ensuring roles, responsibilities, and long-term commitments are clearly defined and aligned with national priorities, including the ARREST Agenda and the UNSDCF.

During the reporting period, the programme laid strong foundations for sustainable institutional and community systems. Survivor-centered investigation practices, trauma-informed interviewing, improved documentation, clinical management of rape, and evidence-based case-handling competencies were strengthened across justice, policing, and health sectors with the intention of integrating these approaches into national training and operational structures. Preparatory work for the GBV Information Management System and the GBV Accountability Framework advanced national data ownership and established long-term mechanisms for multisectoral coordination and accountability.

Sustainability was further supported through strengthened institutional architecture. Forensic assessments undertaken at JFK and the LNP produced government-owned roadmaps aimed at improving infrastructure, equipment, chain-of-custody procedures, and environmental and security standards. These are essential for long-term forensic reliability and for the enforcement of forthcoming legislative reforms, including the Women and Girls Protection Act.

At community level, sustainability is reinforced through revitalized prevention platforms and community-anchored mechanisms. The introduction of the Liberia Chapter of COTLA and the assessment of Vocational and Heritage Centers have strengthened locally owned structures that will continue supporting social norm change, alternative livelihoods, and community-driven prevention beyond the programme cycle.

Parallel investments in public engagement, including the national petition for the Women and Girls Protection Act and the broad participation in the 16 Days of Activism, strengthened movement-building and expanded the network of actors advocating for EAWG accountability.

Civil society sustainability was embedded through the establishment of the Civil Society National Reference Group, which institutionalizes participatory accountability and ensures that women's rights organizations and grassroots actors remain central to programme governance and monitoring. Emerging P-MER practices, including planned county monitoring missions, will further reinforce rights-holder oversight and strengthen future sustainability tracking.

While no new financial commitments beyond the EU contribution were mobilized during 2025, the programme strengthened the conditions for future resource mobilization. Increased government prioritization of GBV, renewed political attention to harmful practices, and alignment with complementary development programmes have expanded pathways for national budget allocations and blended financing in future years.

Throughout the year, national ownership was reinforced across ministries, county authorities, civil society, traditional leadership, and frontline service providers. These investments, combined with strengthened systems, coordinated national structures, and expanding civic engagement, have positioned Liberia to sustain and deepen progress toward eliminating violence against women and girls as Spotlight Initiative 2.0 moves into its next phase and completes its formal sustainability plan in 2026.

Next Steps

In 2026, the Liberia Spotlight Initiative 2.0 will move decisively from groundwork to accelerated, coordinated delivery across all outcome areas. Building on lessons from the inception phase (especially the need for strengthened sequencing, enhanced government leadership, and earlier technical preparation) the programme will focus on translating the strong institutional, policy, and community foundations laid in 2025 into tangible, measurable progress. The next six months will therefore concentrate on expanding implementation, deepening multisectoral coordination, and advancing nationally owned reforms that position Liberia for long-term sustainability in preventing and responding to violence against women and girls.

A central priority will be the convening of the national policy review consultation, postponed due to institutional transitions during 2025. This consultation will enable MGCSP, MoJ, the Law Reform Commission, sector ministries, and civil society to jointly identify priority laws and policies requiring revision or development, including those related to harmful practices, family law, protection, and survivor-centered justice. This process will also support momentum around the Women and Girls Protection Act and help establish a sequenced and government-led legal reform pathway. In parallel, Spotlight 2.0 will operationalize the GBV Accountability Framework, establishing a coherent national roadmap for coordinated oversight, data-driven decision-making, and strengthened institutional responsibilities at national and county levels.

Strengthening data systems will remain a cornerstone of next-year priorities. The programme will complete the installation and roll-out of the GBV Information Management System, train national and county-level data staff, and embed a data analyst within MGCSP to ensure national ownership and sustained analytical capacity. This system will become a foundational tool for accountability, policy planning, and resource allocation and is expected to significantly improve the quality and timeliness of national GBV reporting.

Justice sector strengthening will advance through the operationalization of forensic and investigative capacity. Spotlight will begin procurement of essential equipment for the JFK DNA unit and LNP forensic laboratory, paired with specialized training for laboratory technicians, investigators, and prosecutors. This work will reinforce the new trauma-informed interviewing and case management skills developed in 2025 and help reduce delays and evidence gaps that impede SGBV prosecutions. The programme will also support the Ministry of Justice to expand the functionality of Criminal Courts E in selected counties, ensuring survivors have greater access to specialized judicial mechanisms.

Under Outcome C, Spotlight will validate findings from the One-Stop Centre (OSC) evaluation and use these to refine the integrated service delivery model. With feasibility assessments planned for Bong, Grand Bassa, and Maryland counties, the programme will work with MoH to decentralize OSC services and improve clinical readiness, referral pathways, and psychosocial support. Advocacy will continue to guarantee the removal of user fees for clinical and diagnostic services for survivors, reinforcing equitable access and national commitments to survivor-centered care. Additionally, safe homes will receive strengthened technical support and sustainability planning, including capacity-building, operational support, and livelihood initiatives to stabilize long-term functioning.

Prevention efforts will expand through structured community-led approaches. The programme will initiate the contextualization and roll-out of the SASA! methodology in selected high-prevalence communities and strengthen coordinated community structures (boys' and girls' clubs, youth networks, local leaders, and CBOs) to lead sustained awareness, peer influence, and social norms transformation. The revitalized Liberia Chapter of COTLA and the updated Standard Operating Procedures for Vocational and Heritage Centers will anchor community-owned platforms that bridge traditional authority and modern rights-based commitments, ensuring prevention efforts endure beyond external support.

Operationally, the programme will consolidate the “new way of working” by enhancing joint planning, technical coordination, and harmonized operational procedures across RUNOs. Co-location of Spotlight personnel at the One UN House will support greater efficiency and coherence. Bi-weekly coordination platforms and harmonized KPI tracking will help streamline decision-making and ensure strategic alignment across agencies and national institutions. Finalizing the CSO Call for Proposals in early 2026 will allow grassroots, women-led, and youth-led organizations to begin implementation in all eight Spotlight counties, strengthening representation and reinforcing the programme’s commitment to localization and movement-building.

At the partnership level, Spotlight Initiative 2.0 will continue strengthening the EU-UN strategic relationship, including through regular technical dialogue, joint field missions, and coordinated visibility efforts, particularly around legal reforms and community mobilization. The programme will also continue exploring complementarities with the EU portfolio, LWEF, and sector-wide initiatives in justice, health, and community empowerment, ensuring coherence, minimizing duplication, and expanding the pathways for long-term sustainability and resource mobilization.



ANNEXES

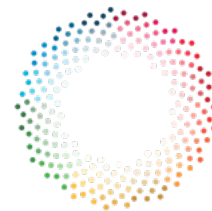
Annex A: Results Framework

Annex B: Risk Matrix

Annex C: CSO Engagement Report

Annex D: Innovative, Promising or Good Practices Report

Annex E: Annual Work Plan



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