



Adaptability of the Spotlight Initiative:

Strengthening the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus to End Violence Against Women and Girls

Photo: Spotlight Initiative

What is the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus and why is it important for the Spotlight Initiative?

The humanitarian–development–peace nexus¹ is a conceptual framework and a way of working that aims to coherently address people’s needs across contexts. The framework aims to drive systemic change by leveraging the comparative expertise and mechanisms from each of these three areas of work to address interconnected challenges through a coordinated approach.

All Spotlight Initiative programmes were impacted by the devastating consequences of COVID-19, and in many countries, this was compounded by humanitarian emergencies, exacerbating violence against women and girls (VAWG)². While the Spotlight Initiative was designed for development contexts, the Initiative has been able to adapt and flexibly respond across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, including in crises contexts in order to meaningfully respond to shifting needs and national priorities. This has been critical to follow through on its principles of supporting local and national ownership and serving the needs of those furthest left behind. Critically, the Initiative’s theory of change - which centres women and girls’ experiences across six interconnected pillars of action - as well as its flexible programme operation principles has allowed the Initiative to be adaptable across contexts and pivot activities and funding to serve those who need it most.

Through sharing its results, challenges, promising practices and lessons learned, the Spotlight Initiative continues to support continuous reflection and adaptation for the advancement of efforts to end violence against women and girls everywhere.

COVID-19 Response

The world saw a spike in violence against women and girls since the outbreak of COVID-19, and the Secretary-General issued a global call for a ‘ceasefire’ in homes.³ This further underscored the need for a coordinated multilateral effort to address violence against women and girls.

The Spotlight Initiative was well placed to drive this effort - by rapidly accelerating and redirecting **more than USD 21 million** across programmes to address VAWG in the context of COVID-19.⁴

Key results include:

- **Critical funding has been channeled to and made flexible for local, grassroots women’s rights organizations to operate effectively and safely while delivering front line services to women and girls.** For example, the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women (UNTF EVAW) and the Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) allocated USD 36.7 million of Spotlight Initiative funds to civil society partners, a significant portion of which went to institutional/operational support.
- **Mobile and remote services were developed and reinforced to address the acute needs of women and girls.** For example, in **Zimbabwe**, the Initiative scaled up mobile one stop center service provision, exceeding **the set target by 300%** and brought women with disabilities and caretakers closer to services with shuttles. In **Mexico**, the Initiative partnered with one of the largest hotel chains **to provide free accommodation to women and girl survivors of violence.**

¹ There is a wealth of knowledge on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus, and its relevance to ending violence against women and girls, that is not covered in this brief. For a more thorough definition, view the [Inter-Agency Standing Committee and UN Working Group on Transitions – Background paper on Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus](#) and [The Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus: What does it mean for multi-mandated organizations?](#) A few resources to learn more are also available [here](#).

² Natural disasters wreaked havoc across several Pacific Island Countries, the Caribbean, and Southern Africa. Sudden onset disasters affected implementation across many programmes, including a tropical cyclone in **Vanuatu**, flooding, landslides, and Ebola outbreaks in **Uganda** and hurricanes in **Honduras**, a deadly measles outbreak in **Samoa**, the eruption of La Soufrière volcano in the **Caribbean**, devastating floods across **Malawi, Uganda, Honduras** and elsewhere, and natural disasters coupled with violent extremism in **Niger** along with violence during electoral processes and by state and non-state actors in certain countries, among others.

³ On 5 April 2020, the UN Secretary-General issued a global call for peace in homes to address the “horrifying global surge in domestic violence”. Learn more [here](#).

⁴ This figure includes 25 programmes across all five regions that were operational as of January 2020. Data from Grenada is not available.

- **Coordination and advocacy were strengthened to integrate EVAWG efforts in national response.** In **Uganda**, the social welfare workforce was classified as essential workers during lockdowns to support the continuity of service provision. In **Papua New Guinea**, the Initiative **leveraged existing coordination mechanisms**, such as the Protection Cluster - including the Gender-Based Violence (GBV), Child Protection, and Persons with Disabilities sub-clusters, as well as the Education Cluster, to rapidly respond to the spike in violence during COVID-19 and concurrent natural disasters.
- **Evidence-based and innovative prevention initiatives were reinforced and adapted.** In **Uganda**, the *SASA!* programme for social norms transformation **created safety circles** to connect regularly via WhatsApp and text, and community activists and leaders checked in with at-risk women via phone or in-person while social distancing. In **Kyrgyzstan**, a bestseller online game, "Spring in Bishkek",⁵ was developed to **drive social norms change, providing real-life referral information and helping girls fend off forced marriage**. The game has been downloaded over **117,000 times across Central Asia** since its launch in June 2020.
- In the **Caribbean**, the Spotlight Initiative Regional Programme advocated for additional funding to combat violence against women and girls while responding to the volcano eruption. The programme coordinated the launch of a **USD 29 million appeal** to support relief efforts, with a social protection pillar geared towards the prevention of and response to family violence and VAWG.
- In **Mozambique**, the Initiative provided **mobile data, remote working equipment and psychosocial assistance** for at-risk women and girls and those experiencing violence during Cyclone Chalane, as safe spaces needed to be found. **WhatsApp groups** were also created for students to **report cases of violence** and call for support.
- In **Uganda**, the Initiative supported the provision of **sexual and reproductive health (SRHR) services in refugee, border and flood-affected districts** and enabled women's civil society organizations (CSOs) to combine resources across programmes on VAWG to respond to the unique needs and abuse of vulnerable groups.⁸ An intersectional analysis was employed to ensure no one was left behind, and in the future, these groups will be **integrated into intervention design to ensure the sustainability of service delivery**.

Weather-related Disasters and Climate Change

Evidence shows that climate change and pressures on the environment and its resources exacerbate violence against women and girls, poverty and displacement, among other devastating effects. Ensuing tension and competition over scarce resources amplifies gender inequalities, creating conditions for violence to be employed as a means of control and reinforces power imbalances.⁶ Sudden onset disasters affected implementation across Spotlight Initiative programmes, such as a tropical cyclone in Vanuatu, Chalane cyclone in Mozambique, devastating floods across Malawi, Uganda, Honduras and elsewhere. As part of a comprehensive approach, the Spotlight Initiative was able to address the interconnections of violence against women and girls and weather-related disasters and climate change.

- For example, in **Vanuatu**, the Spotlight Initiative has worked to ensure VAWG is systematically addressed following weather-related disasters and emergencies in collaboration with the **Ministry of Climate Change Adaptation and National Disaster Management Office (NDMO)**, by strengthening institutional capacities to integrate and institutionalize VAWG risk mitigation, prevention and response in emergencies.⁷ Furthermore, the Initiative has actively engaged with the **sub-cluster on GBV in emergencies** that met regularly throughout the cyclone emergency, laying the foundations for coordinated prevention and response efforts in the future.

Conflict and Post-Conflict Contexts

The Spotlight Initiative operates in countries that regularly experience conflict or are in post-conflict recovery phases, with high levels of violence against women and girls. Increased militarism, the deterioration of the rule of law, reduced access to basic social infrastructure and the breakdown of political, economic and social structures can fuel the normalization of VAWG. Women and girls' access to essential services such as health care, including SRHR, can be disrupted and have a disproportionate impact on those facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. Women and girls are crucial agents of change in formal and informal peacebuilding and recovery processes,⁹ and the Initiative actively works to elevate the influence and decision-making power of grassroots women's organizations to EVAWG across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. **The Initiative channels critical funding to local, grassroots women's rights organizations and supports efforts to strengthen inclusive peace and security for the elimination of violence against women and girls.**

- The partnership between the Spotlight Initiative and WPHF channels funding to CSOs working on EVAWG in conflict-affected and humanitarian settings and **aims to break silos between peace and security, humanitarian response, development, and human rights.**¹⁰

⁵ The game follows the story of a 17-year-old girl who tries to save her friend from 'Ala-Kachuu', a common practice in the region where young women and girls are abducted into forced marriage.

⁶ Gender-based Violence and Environment Linkages: Summary for Policymakers. International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), USAID, June 2021. <https://genderandenvironment.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/2021-IUCN-GBV-summary-policymakers-web-5.pdf>

⁷ This is being done through national disaster management guidance, the development of standard operating procedures, and the use of training manuals.

⁸ Including persons living with HIV, persons with disabilities, sex workers, and women working in markets.

⁹ Women's human rights and gender-related concerns in situations of conflict and instability. OHCHR. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/Issues/Women/WRGS/Pages/PeaceAndSecurity.aspx#:~:text=Conflict%20can%20result%20in%20higher,as%20a%20tactic%20of%20war.>

¹⁰ Spotlight Initiative supports WPHF's work to enhance women's engagement, leadership, and empowerment across all phases of crisis, peace and security, and development and directly addresses structural funding gaps for women's participation in key phases of crisis, peace and security, and development by improving the timeliness, predictability and flexibility of international assistance.

- The Initiative has awarded about **USD 4.4 million** to 48 grantees in Africa, of which **100% were national and grassroots organizations and 97% were women's organizations**. In 2020, a further **USD 6 million** was allocated to three additional countries - Afghanistan, Haiti and Papua New Guinea - to best respond to the needs of local women's organizations and the dire impacts of COVID-19 on their operations through institutional and programmatic funding.
- In **Uganda**, the Initiative supported the launch of the Africa Women Leaders Network (AWLN) Uganda Chapter, which aims to enhance the leadership of women in the region and has been critical to **localizing the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security**.¹¹ The Initiative also works in **refugee contexts**, and through the rollout and scale up of the SASA! programme, supported an increase in reporting on intimate partner violence and child marriage. **100% of reported cases received at least one form of multi-sectoral intervention.**¹² These efforts contribute to **women, peace and security efforts and support refugee communities** through effectively engaging **traditional actors and institutions**.
- In **Niger**, the Initiative supported the Civil Society National Reference Group to advocate for the **importance of a peaceful democratic transition** and collaborated with national coalitions, CSOs and women's movements to develop **common policy recommendations for the prevention of violence during the electoral process in 2020**. The Initiative amplified the advocacy of CSOs that traditionally engage in long-term development to support peace and security processes, **bridging the humanitarian-development-peace divide**.
- In **Kyrgyzstan**, the Initiative quickly responded to the fallout of a border conflict in May 2020 that displaced 50,000 women and children. Through the Initiative's partnership with the Ministry of Justice, **free legal aid was expanded** to support those in the affected province, and **psychosocial support** was provided.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Across Spotlight Initiative programmes, sudden-onset crises have impeded critical steps in the programme cycle. Emergencies **diverted the attention of stakeholders** to focus on responding to immediate needs, and many programmes had to dedicate time and resources to ensure EVAWG efforts were integrated in national response. Crises also made it more difficult to engage **civil society partners**, who had to dedicate limited time and resources to front-line response and struggled to ensure their own institutional survival.

Many in-person activities could not take place or were delayed, from community meetings to in-school interventions, due to health, safety, and security concerns. In addition, disasters regularly caused **disruptions to service delivery** even as violence against women and girls rise and those traditionally **left behind faced even greater vulnerability**.

The Spotlight Initiative has identified **key lessons learned** to increase the adaptability and resilience of the Initiative in unstable contexts:

- **Critically, the surge in violence against women and girls during COVID-19 exposed how systems and institutions around the world are ill-equipped to adequately prevent and respond to VAWG in crises.** Though there were promising examples and innovations, the global spike in violence against women and girls revealed how these systems were not built for quick adaptation and agility in the face of disasters, despite years of programming on EVAWG.
- **Flexible and longer timelines to implement a comprehensive EVAWG programme is critical** to better plan around country- or region-specific expected disasters and political crises and to meaningfully and continuously adapt programming to changing contexts.
- **Flexible programme operation principles** including budget reallocation enables programmes to respond quickly to changes that require new delivery modalities.
- **Providing direct, core, and flexible funding and institutional support to civil society organizations and government partners** (such as providing key technology and equipment) can ensure the continuity of service provision and enable longer-term engagement.
- **Working with community-based structures to quickly refer, adapt and scale up essential services** in response to sudden onset crises is crucial to meeting the needs of survivors of violence.
- **Undertaking innovative remote community mobilization efforts** has been effective in reaching large communities of people to raise awareness on the elevated risks of VAWG during crises.
- **Leveraging available data to identify areas where rights-holders have higher needs** for programming and service delivery can effectively inform targeted adaptations during disasters that enable greater impact.
- **Employing mobile remote and virtual modalities for essential service delivery - such as the use of mobile clinics, tele-counseling, and remote courts** - can ensure women and girls, including the most marginalized, continue to access timely and life-saving services. This also offers new opportunities for wider reach and accessibility.
- **Local and national disaster response can provide an entry point for the Initiative** to comprehensively integrate EVAWG efforts into disaster preparedness and response plans and budgets, leveraging existing partnerships and adapting activities to meet interconnected needs across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

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¹¹ UN Security Council resolution 1325 on women and peace and security (2000). UN Women, 2000. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/docs/2000/10/un-security-council-resolution-1325>

¹² Including psychosocial, legal, medical, livelihood and police support, and/or access to safe houses.