



Lessons and Promising Practices of the Spotlight Initiative: Engaging with Men and Boys to Transform Patriarchal Masculinities

Photo: Spotlight Initiative/Samoa

Introduction

This knowledge product aims to share lessons learned and promising practices of the Spotlight Initiative in relation to its work in **engaging men and boys to transform patriarchal masculinities** for the elimination of violence against women. This brief draws on insights and analysis from a synthesis of 98 reports from 2019 to 2021 across all Spotlight Initiative country and regional programmes, trust funds, and global conversations. The focus is on identifying strategies that are working across different contexts around engaging men and boys in promoting positive masculinities in their communities as a mechanism for greater gender equality and ending violence against women and girls (VAWG). Ideas and insights from these lessons and examples can be adapted for use in other country contexts and upcoming campaign and awareness work related to the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence and beyond. Spotlight Initiative programmes have taken a holistic approach to addressing patriarchal masculinities, from raising awareness in central institutions such as the home, school and community, to engaging influencers, leaders and role models, mobilizing peer networks for healthy relationships, and raising community and societal awareness about positive norms for gender equality and to stop violent behavior.

Lesson Learned #1

Engaging leaders and role models in the community is a powerful mechanism for changing social norms around toxic masculinities and gender-based violence (GBV)

Behavioral change research has shown that people are more likely to change behaviors when someone they trust makes recommendations to change. Many Spotlight Initiative programmes are engaging with this strategy in diverse ways, with role models, celebrities, and traditional or religious leaders. Spotlight Initiative programmes in **Nigeria** and **Argentina** have engaged sports stars in football to denounce violence against women and girls and promote respectful behaviors.

In **Tajikistan**, the Initiative is engaging celebrities to be gender champions and encourage men and boys to join efforts to end violence against women. These efforts helped to raise awareness that GBV is a problem to be addressed.

Many Spotlight Initiative programmes engage traditional or religious leaders to positively influence communities. When traditional and religious leaders challenge traditional harmful practices, it has particular resonance in challenging dominant patriarchal norms. For example, in **Mozambique**, religious leaders were trained on preventing child marriage and GBV and shared messages in religious services, reaching over 672,000 people. They also were trained in reporting violence to the appropriate authorities. In **El Salvador**, the Spotlight Initiative supported the integration of Christian biblical theological arguments on ending VAWG into a broader curriculum on pastoral action to prevent violence, promoting dialogue and reaching a traditionally excluded community. Similarly in **Tajikistan**, a training module on Islam and Gender was drafted together with the Committee of Religious Affairs and Regulations of Traditions, which is used to train religious leaders in community mosques and imams to help prevent domestic violence.

Lesson Learned #2

Creating peer opportunities for men and boys to have healthy, respectful, and equitable relationships

Spotlight Initiative programmes facilitated the development of positive social norms through creating peer-based connections and spaces where open conversations about masculinities and healthy relationships were shared. In **Jamaica**, safe spaces for engaging men were created, including men across diverse segments of society. The programme helped unpack how negative conceptions of masculinity had impacted men and they explored more gender equitable versions of masculinity. These safe spaces also allowed men to learn how to become advocates, deepening their understanding of their role in creating safe and equal spaces for women and ending VAWG.

In **El Salvador**, a promising practice of peer spaces amongst boys that supported collective discussion around masculinities through AI chat bots was piloted. The Entre Nos Chatbot ("between us", a Salvadoran phrase widely used in relationships of trust and friendship) was launched on Facebook. The chatbot helps users understand what violence looks like, how to prevent it at home and in the public, and how to become an advocate for ending VAWG. The chatbot has had great uptake, with nearly 480,000+ users, including men and women.

In **Mali**, the Model Husbands club is a voluntary space that brings men together to collectively reflect and take action to become a model husband. The clubs are participatory and open spaces for discussion, sharing and decision-making built on the values of active listening, equality and respect. The sessions are led by men in the group and involve reflecting on their own behavior and committing to raise the awareness of others to take positive action and promote women's and children's rights. The Model Husbands have been powerful forces for change in communities where they are operating, raising awareness of women's and children's rights and even preventing domestic violence and child marriage in some communities. A man from one Model Husband Club shared: **"I confess that the actions of this project have already paid off because, in our village every night there is at least one woman who cried under her husband's baton. It's been more than three months since we heard this."**

Lessons Learned #3

Targeting schools as sites to roll out comprehensive and wide-reaching awareness raising activities on Masculinities and VAWG

Schools are prime spots to implement awareness raising activities to end VAWG. The Spotlight Initiative engaged in diverse initiatives, from working with educators to creating awareness raising programs with students. In **Malawi**, university students at orientation were engaged in a dialogue about rape culture, sexual harassment and other forms of GBV, reporting mechanisms and ensuring a culture of consent. As part of these activities, a male dialogue was held on rape, its connections to patriarchal masculinity and how to be an agent of change. In **Nigeria**, school principals, teachers and school counselors were trained on how to become champions within their schools around GBV. They learned concepts related to GBV and how to address and prevent cases of GBV. The champions established school clubs to help raise boys' awareness of GBV and become advocates for gender equality. The clubs helped boys initiate conversations around negative norms associated with masculinity, its connections to VAWG, and directed them to speak up if they see or hear harmful gender stereotypes or witness violence against girls or women.

Lessons Learned #4

Engaging parents on the importance of creating nurturing and loving relationships with their sons, daughters, and partners

The home is a powerful place to debunk gender roles and stereotypes, for example by reinforcing the idea that boys can be emotionally vulnerable or express the full range of human emotions. It can also foster understanding that bullying, intimidation and aggression are not appropriate responses to challenging situations. The family unit is an important place for modeling healthy, equitable and loving adult relationships.

To address this issue, in **Honduras**, the Initiative ran a campaign on Father's Day, called *"The Dad I Want"*, which challenged norms related to men's emotional openness and traditional notions of masculinity. They did this by having children comment and write phrases about the dad they wanted, such as, "a dad who tells me, 'I love you.'" In **Grenada**, an innovative campaign to support positive parenting practices was launched by the National Parenting Programme called "Step up your Parenting Game". The campaign focused on reaching parents and guardians and promoting positive parenting practices designed to end family abuse. The messages were displayed on radio, print and on buses that traveled throughout the country and including to remote villages, and is estimated to have reached 25,000 people.





Lesson Learned #5

Engaging in creative ways to raise awareness, such as media, theater, or campaigns

Spotlight Initiative programmes are supporting boys' and men's critical awareness of gender stereotypes and cultural norms that foster or maintain gender inequalities or violence against women and girls through creative use of media, theatre or campaigning. In **Tajikistan**, the Initiative promoted theater skits for university students to share information on street harassment, dating violence, early and forced marriages, sexual and gender-based violence and bullying. In **Timor-Leste**, the Initiative used the 16 Days to End VAW campaign as an opportunity to share information on the 10th anniversary of the passing of the Law Against Domestic Violence and to reinforce messages around gender equitable relationships. In **Samoa**, the Initiative used traditional dance and storytelling in their 16 Days of Healing campaign and spoke about ending violence through using existing community norms to underscore how ending VAWG has always been in their culture. Another effective strategy has been supporting boys and men to make commitments to not use physical, psychological or emotional violence, and calling out when they see harassing, gender stereotypical, degrading or violent talk or behavior from others.

In **Argentina**, the [#Amigo Date Cuenta](#) ["Friend, Take Notice"] campaign was launched, aimed at encouraging male adolescents to question machismo and end violent forms of masculinity and complicity in maintaining GBV and harassment in their lives. The campaign shared videos and animations starring five men in different positions - football, music, rugby, and social activism - and depicts situations such as friends watching sexual harassment, consent in sexual relations, and men taking part in house cleaning and care duties. The campaign offered a creative and relatable way to tackle these social norms and educate men and boys. The Argentine Football Association was a key supporter of the campaign, airing it on their channels and clubs. Disney/FOX donated a space for broadcasting on their channels

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