



International Day of the Girl Child

The Spotlight Initiative and the promotion and protection of girl's rights
Results, Promising Practices and Lessons

Photo: UN Women Central Asia

On December 19, 2011, the United Nations General Assembly declared October 11 as the International Day of the Girl Child to recognize girls' rights and the unique challenges girls face around the world. While girls' lives overall are better today than they were 25 years ago since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, these gains are uneven across regions and countries. This is particularly true for adolescent girls. Today, no matter where a girl lives, she is at risk of encountering violence in every space – in the classroom, home and community. And the types of violence have become increasingly complex, exacerbated by COVID-19 due to lockdowns, restrictions on movement, and the closure of physical spaces for outreach, services and support. As a result, various UN reports estimate that 2 million FGM cases that could have been averted may occur over the next decade, and an additional 10 million girls will be at risk of child marriage. Girls are rights holders and equal partners in the fight for gender equality and that is why the Spotlight Initiative is working to address violence against girls in all its programmes, in 25+ countries across five regions around the globe.

Key Results and Promising Practices

Strengthened laws, policies and national action plans to address violence against girls

- Spotlight Initiative programmes, such as those in **Papua New Guinea, Uganda and Nigeria**, worked to promote legislations and policies with a particular focus on violence against young girls and adolescents.

For instance, in Papua New Guinea, the Initiative supported its partners to review the draft National Youth Policy, ensuring youth engagement and approval. It calls for youth-led advocacy for girls' equal education and their participation in its proposed youth governance and decision-making architecture.

- Through the Africa Regional Programme, **Eritrea, Central African Republic, Kenya, Niger, and South Sudan** have costed and launched **evidence-based national action plans to end child marriage**. Furthermore, **Mozambique, Zambia and Burkina Faso** were supported in developing new laws and strengthening existing ones on ending child marriage.

Increased engagement of girls in law and policy making

Aligned with the principle of leave no one behind, an innovative practice from the **Spotlight Initiative in Zimbabwe** supported more than **200 women and girls with disabilities** to engage in law and policy making, **enabling their participation for the first time** in several public consultations, including hearings on the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment No.2 Bill.

Shifting norms and attitudes of young people, non-traditional actors and increased awareness on girl's rights and access to SRHR services

- Programmes worked towards shifting norms and attitudes of young people - girls in particular - through in and out of school education. The Spotlight Initiative reached almost **1 million young people, including 535,935 girls despite school closures**.
- The Initiative demonstrates the importance of empowering the **most vulnerable adolescent girls** through out-of-school interventions in line with the principle of leaving no one behind. Overall, a total of **228,668 girls were reached in 11 countries** through activities that promote gender-equitable norms, attitudes and behaviours and the exercise of their rights, including reproductive rights.

Through the Safe Schools intervention in Malawi, the Initiative equipped more than 212,262 adolescents with skills to detect and report sexual gender-based violence and harmful practices, which led to the identification and referral of 941 child marriage cases, resulting in 71 convictions in court.

- Non-traditional actors** are joining efforts to prevent violence against girls such as in **El Salvador**, where the first diploma on "Pastoral Action against Femicidal Violence and Pregnancies in Girls and Adolescents" was developed. This emphasized the criticality of addressing violence through the faith-based system, which traditionally never did so until now. As of 2020, **360 pastors** graduated from the course, supporting **wider impact for changed attitudes and behaviours on early pregnancies and Violence against Women and Girls**.

Innovative and interactive awareness raising initiatives on EVAWG, and harmful practices for and by girls

- In **Kyrgyzstan**, an interactive online game, ‘**Spring in Bishkek**’, was developed through the involvement of young women and girls to help prevent **Ala Kachuu** or kidnapping for forced marriage. The game, which has been downloaded more than 100,000 times across the region, helps players learn about the rights of women and girls, the real-life impacts of kidnapping for forced marriage and the support services that are available to help. This game promotes alternative behaviour models for girls, boys, and adults.
- In **Mozambique**, over **129 adolescents** aged 14 to 29, 60% of which were girls, were trained to be producers of radio and television programmes and produced **more than 200 interactive programmes** focused on gender equality and GBV.

Greater accessibility of essential and lifesaving services for girls

- An **83% increase** in survivors seeking assistance from support services compared to 2019, meaning an additional 20, 209 girl survivors sought assistance in **12 countries**.
- Over **1,865,476** women and girl survivors of violence have increased knowledge of quality essential services.

Some countries relied on innovative digital technologies to ensure services remained accessible during COVID 19. In Trinidad and Tobago, the Initiative supported the ‘Youth Connect T&T’, a mobile application designed to provide young people access to key information on Sexual and Reproductive Health. The app answers questions about sexual health within a confidential, safe space and provides referral services through the clinic finder. More than 2000 young persons accessed information through the app in 2020.

Strengthened availability of high-quality and disaggregated data on violence against girls and harmful practices

- The **Africa Regional Programme** supported a cost and impact modelling exercise to determine the level of investment required to eliminate female genital mutilation by 2030 in Africa. It was estimated that it would take **USD 3.3 billion** to reach the high-coverage targets by 2030 and avert 25 million cases of FGM. This data has already been used to advocate for increased investment in programmes preventing FGM.
- In **Nigeria**, the Initiative rolled out the use of the **Child Protection Information Management System** - an innovative, practical field-level software that supports effective, **timely and real time data collection** and case management on **different forms of violence against girls** and supports referrals. As a result, this tool has reached over 5,437 girls and contributed to improved government capacity in record keeping, monitoring and referral of services. The data has also provided the evidence-base to advocate for **increased investment in strengthening protection systems**.

Strengthened movement building and leadership of young women and girls

The Initiative recognizes the critical role young girls have as **agents of change to shape a future free from violence** and has driven a range of innovative and promising practices:

- The **Africa Regional Programme** is supporting young women and girls to mobilize for an end to harmful practices, particularly FGM and child marriage. This promising practice, the **Saleema Youth Victorious Ambassadors Programme (SYVA)**, brings together FGM survivors and young women and girl activists, and places them at the heart of legal and political processes to **take ownership, create a new narrative, and generate scalable solutions for the elimination of FGM**. The programme has also supported the creation of a **Youth Reference Group on Child Marriage**, engaging youth at continental, regional and national levels to **support local and grassroots actors connect with policy and other decision-makers to drive an end to child marriage** - another promising practice.

Lessons

Supporting young girls to mobilize for changed beliefs, attitudes and practices around violence is key. Peer-to-peer exchange, movement- and network-building is essential. Where there is limited access to internet and new technologies, the combination of online and offline tools to mobilize youth to speak up on issues of violence, gender equality, and discrimination is crucial to rapidly increase the participation of young people in this dialogue.

Harnessing the innovative use of information and communication technologies for education, building capacities, and communicating messages on violence against girls, harmful practices and gender norms is instrumental for reaching girls in a timely manner, and particularly those that are marginalized during crises.

Engaging girls from ideation to evaluation of programmes is essential: valuing their expertise and knowledge ensures they are meaningfully understood, supported and served by the leave no one behind agenda.

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