

# LESSONS LEARNED, PROMISING PRACTICES, & CHALLENGES TO OVERCOME

Annual Continental  
Coordination Platform  
2021



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Spotlight Initiative Africa Regional Programme (SIARP) knowledge product, is a joint UN Women and African Union Commission, Women, Gender and Youth Directorate (WGYD) publication. The publishers would like to thank all those who contributed to the development of content, design, formatting, and final production of this knowledge product including Victoria Lehau Maloka (AUC-WGYD), Jeanne Flora Kayitesi (AUC-WGYD), Belinda Hlatshwayo (AUC-WGYD), Godwin Hlatshwayo and Azmera Kassahun (UN Women Ethiopia), Tosin Akibu (UN Women Nigeria), Evelyn Selle Letiyo and Beatrice Mulindwa (UN Women Uganda), Oumou Bella Bore (UN Women Mali), Maimouna Seyni Yaye (UN Women Niger), Fernanda Bernardo (UN Women Mozambique), Pamela Mkwamba (UN Women Malawi), Molline Marume (UN Women Zimbabwe), Pearl Atuhairi (UN Women Liberia), Sunita Caminha (UN Women ESARO), and Arlette Bikoko Belinga Epse Mvondo (UN Women WCARO).

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# Executive Summary

The Spotlight Initiative Africa Regional Programme (SIARP) focuses on eliminating violence against women, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and harmful practices (HP), and it further addresses links to sexual and reproductive health, and reproductive rights (SRH&RR). SIARP prioritizes strengthening existing policies and strategies, such as the AU Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (2018-2028), Agenda 2030, Agenda 2063, the Maputo Plan of Action on the Operationalization of the Continental Policy Framework for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (2016-2030), the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the AU Roadmap on Harnessing the Demographic Dividend, the African Youth Charter (2006); and the Common Position on Ending Child Marriage in Africa (2015) and others.

**SINCE 2020, SIARP HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED IN 8 COUNTRIES NAMELY - LIBERIA, MALAWI, MALI, MOZAMBIQUE, NIGER, NIGERIA, UGANDA, AND ZIMBABWE, AND FURTHER INCLUDES A REGIONAL COMPONENT FOR JOINT-ACTION**

Based on the experiences of the past two years, the inaugural Annual Continental Coordination Platform was convened to create an opportunity among the Spotlight Initiative National Programs and the Spotlight Initiative Africa Regional Program to collaboratively share and learn from good practices, identify emerging trends, operational challenges, and implementing strategies that can inform future programming. The learning event had practical lessons that can impact Spotlight Initiative (SI) countries and bring positive and measurable change to the scourge of all forms of violence against women and girls (VAWG), including gender-based violence (GBV), harmful practices (HP), and female genital mutilation (FGM); and achieve step changes in the adoption of sexual and reproductive health, and reproductive rights (SRH&RR).

Moving into phase two of SIARP, key lessons harvested can facilitate effective implementation of SI activities to fight violence against women and girls. A key outcome of the Learning Event was the recognition that SI countries need to work together in adopting multistakeholder interventions and multisectoral approaches which bring their interventions closer to sectors like education, health, security, and social protection. The leveraging of shared goals in these sectors, is a key entry point to comprehensively eliminate gender-based violence against women and girls, early child marriages and FGM. Across the 8 countries participants learned that to address the health, cultural, socio-economic, and political dimensions of GBV/HP/FGM and SRH&RR, the SI Program should work seamlessly around social behaviour change at individual, community, and societal levels.

# Executive Summary



Credit: United Nations Foundation, Liberia

**ACROSS THE 8 COUNTRIES PARTICIPANTS LEARNED THAT TO ADDRESS THE HEALTH, CULTURAL, SOCIO-ECONOMIC, AND POLITICAL DIMENSIONS OF GBV/HP/FGM AND SRH&RR, THE SI PROGRAM SHOULD WORK SEAMLESSLY AROUND SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR CHANGE AT INDIVIDUAL, COMMUNITY, AND SOCIETAL LEVELS.**

Advocacy, communication, awareness building, and capacity development should accompany the programming value chain at all levels - ensuring that laws, policies, and frameworks on GBV/HP/FGM and SRH&RR are adopted and enforced in consistent and sustained manners. Case stories from the 8 countries proved that the success of the Spotlight Initiative largely depends on effective partnerships with sub-national and national institutions; continuous engagement with local authorities, traditional and religious leadership, youth, men, and local communities; and robust advocacy program to hold Governments accountable for enforcing relevant laws. Accelerating efforts in harnessing data, new technologies and innovative media platforms will help SI programming and implementation to remain accessible, relevant, flexible, and effective in addressing GBV/HP/FGM and promotion of SRH&RR in Africa.

# SECTION 1: BACKGROUND & PURPOSE

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a persistent global pandemic which manifests itself in ugly ways including - gender-based violence (GBV), harmful practices (HP), female genital mutilation (FGM) and Child marriages across Africa.

Global statistics on gender-based violence estimates show that one in every three women has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime. At least 30 to 60 percent of ever-partnered women report physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner, and between 7 and 48 percent of young women and girls aged 10 to 24 years have experienced their first sexual encounter as coerced, with the associated risks of contracting sexually transmitted diseases. In Africa, more than one in three women - 36%, have experienced some form of physical, and/or sexual violence.

The overall goal of this learning product is to document and disseminate knowledge, lessons, and evidence arising from the 8 Spotlight countries



## PROGRAMMING LESSONS

The Spotlight countries learned from each other's experiences, practical lessons, challenges, mitigation strategies, innovations, opportunities, and synergies to improve on their future programmes.



## SHARE WITH ALL AU MEMBER STATES

This knowledge product is meant to inform programming in other AU member states, spur advocacy efforts, and to strengthen coherence and complementarity between the national and the regional programs.



## BUILDING EVIDENCE-BASE

Sharing evidence should help transform the daily realities of women and girls for the better.



## SUPPORT PHASE II OF SIARP

Additionally, documented evidence will also contribute to Phase II of the national level programmes under the Spotlight Initiative and the ongoing activities under the wider SIARP.

**CHILD MARRIAGES ARE ALSO PREVALENT ACROSS AFRICA, WITH ONE IN THREE GIRLS MARRIED AT CHILDHOOD. ACROSS AFRICA, 125 MILLION GIRLS AND WOMEN ALIVE TODAY WERE MARRIED BEFORE THEIR 18TH BIRTHDAY; WITH ONE IN THREE YOUNG WOMEN IN AFRICA MARRIED IN CHILDHOOD, AND ONE IN TEN BEFORE THEIR 15TH BIRTHDAY.**

For example, West and Central Africa regions have 6 of the 10 countries with the highest child marriage prevalence levels in the world. Niger records a child marriage prevalence rate of 76%. Child marriage below the age of 15 years is also very high in Africa with Chad, Central Africa Republic (CAR) and Niger all with prevalence rates of over 25%. FGM has lasting consequences, not only to the personal health and well-being of women and girls, but also impacts their maternal health. Approximately, 200 million girls and women alive today are believed to have been subjected to the practice. UNFPA estimates that about 68 million girls will be at risk of FGM by 2030, if the level of current interventions remains unchanged. That represents 50 million girls at risk in Africa. Maternal health is still a major challenge in Africa. In 2015 alone, Sub-Saharan Africa recorded 66% of all maternal deaths and currently 85,637 women still die of maternal causes every year.

## **SECTION 1: BACKGROUND & PURPOSE**

To eliminate sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and harmful practices and address their links to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights (SRH&RR), the Spotlight Initiative Africa Regional Programme (SIARP) was implemented in 2020. The programme was implemented in 8 countries namely - Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. The Spotlight Initiative is an investment case for SDG 5 with an overall allocation of EUR250 million, while the African Regional Programme is supporting the 8 Spotlight country programmes with a substantive allocation of EUR30 million by focusing on three pillars: legislation and policies; quality and reliable data; and strengthening women's movements and relevant civil society organizations. In essence, SIARP aims at bringing better laws to protect women and girls as well as more responsive institutions; supporting the collection of disaggregated gender data to facilitate better-informed decision-making; raising awareness and preventing violence by joining forces with communities, traditional and religious leaders, teachers, and civil society organisations.

### **TO EXPLORE PROGRESS MADE THUS FAR AND SHARE PRACTICAL EXPERIENCES, LESSONS LEARNED AND PROMISING PRACTICES IN TACKLING THE AFOREMENTIONED CHALLENGES - UN WOMEN STREAM 1 LEAD, IN COLLABORATION WITH THE AU COMMISSION'S WOMEN, GENDER AND YOUTH DIRECTORATE (WGYD) CONVENED THE FIRST ANNUAL CONTINENTAL COORDINATION PLATFORM.**

The aim was to provide an opportunity to glean first-hand experiences from the 8 countries implementing the Spotlight Initiative and ascertain good practices that can be taken forward and implemented throughout Africa and beyond. It is in this context that this knowledge product seeks to provide documentation of practical experiences from the Spotlight countries - focusing particularly on promising practices, lessons learnt, challenges and mitigation strategies as well as relevant recommendations for future programming.

The event was held via the zoom platform over a period of 2 days on the 1st and 2nd of June 2021. Across the 2 days, 113 people attended this inaugural event. The participating institutions included representatives of Spotlight countries [Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Uganda, and Zimbabwe]; representatives of Governments, CSOs, donors and other relevant stakeholders; technical experts and officials from the AUC, UNECA, SIARP and RUNOs; CSOs and NGO partners and Representatives of the EU and UN system. The Annual Continental Coordination Platform was delivered in English, French, and Portuguese, with translation services available.



# SECTION 2: Innovative Collaborations with State Actors

Informed by the evidence from the Inaugural Coordination Platform this section discusses the practical experience shared from 8 Spotlight countries, grouped under similar thematic focus.



## INNOVATIVE COLLABORATIONS

Nigeria, Mozambique, and Liberia programs focused on and pursued collaborative efforts with state actors, civil society, and the community levels in delivering the program. Focus of their programming, lessons learnt, challenges and mitigation strategies that emerged from these countries are discussed in this section and recommendations are proffered.



## PROMISING PRACTICES

The success of the Nigeria, Mozambique and Liberia Spotlight program share similar promising practices including elevating the place and role of capacity building, social media, educational awareness, multi-stakeholder engagements and community engagement



## LESSONS-LEARNED

Several generalized lessons can be drawn from the Nigeria, Mozambique and Liberia Spotlight Initiative programs including how to leverage and nurture collaborations



## CHALLENGES AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Nigeria, Mozambique and Liberia Spotlight Initiative programs encountered several hurdles such as mistrust and lack of capacity. Much can be learned from the mitigation measures employed.

## NIGERIA: VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN CONTEXT

Nigeria is the most populous African country with over 200 million inhabitants. Women constitute about 50% of the total population. Nigeria has the largest economy in Africa, however, 51% of the population are multidimensionally poor and 46% are income poor. In Nigeria poverty disproportionately affects women due, in part, to low levels of financial and economic inclusion of women across sectors. In addition, Nigeria faces multiple internal conflicts and large-scale protracted humanitarian crises. Women and children are the hardest hit by these conflicts. Women also face a multiplicity of challenges that include cultural/social issues surrounding GBV/HP and SRH&RR, economic issues coupled with political issues. Despite the presence of policies and dedicated institutions to promote women's rights, enforcement of these laws remains low due to intersecting hurdles such as prevailing norms and stereotypes on gender-based violence, lack of effective training on SGBV and EAWG overall, and most recently inability to reach survivors of the violence due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Credit: UN Women Nigeria





Gender Gaps have been further widened by COVID 19 as it has been coupled with the absence of central GBV data collection systems; absence of gendered policy for emergencies such as COVID19; absence of social safety nets for women and women run businesses; and poor access to water and sanitation challenges that women and girls face. Lack of gender sensitive emergency health systems, burden of caring for the sick is borne by women and girls and broken/strained relationships have disproportionately hit women due to the pandemic.

## NIGERIA: PROGRAM FOCUS

In Nigeria the Spotlight Initiative is impressively implemented through 34 partners including 8 Federal and States Ministries of Women Affairs supported by Presidential committee including the National Government's Forum. Other partners include 12 women led grassroots organizations, 3 male engagement focused organizations, 10 women-led and focused small grants (disability led and focused, youth, rural women) organizations and private sector engagement organizations.

The Nigeria Spotlight Program focused on several issues to deliver its outcomes. Mobilization of partners, especially grassroots organizations, was a major priority to effectively deliver on the program. In addition to collaboration with state actors, the Liberia program engaged traditional leaders in addressing FGM, which was a central organizing strategy. Building a culture of trust increased buy-in and commitment of the National Traditional Council of Chiefs and Elders (NACCEL) through several consultative dialogues on the FGM strategy in 2018.



Credit: UN Women Nigeria

The program enhanced alternative economic empowerment for traditional leaders for them to debunk FGM and as a means of livelihood. That led to the development of simple rites of passage, without FGM. The program also succeeded in supporting the closure of Bush Schools.

## **MOZAMBIQUE: VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN CONTEXT**

In Mozambique, progress in reducing gender imbalances remains uneven despite efforts by Government and non-state actors. There is widespread acceptance of violence against women and high prevalence of HIV among women and these are sure signs of deeply rooted gender inequalities. There is still limited disaggregated data sources that demonstrate the extent of VAWG and to facilitate better-informed decision-making; raising awareness and crafting more robust advocacy messages. The figure below provides a summary of Mozambique's gender inequality context.

Remarkably, 37.2% - one in three women has experienced physical or sexual violence at some point in her life, with higher rates (42.8%) found among young people aged 20 to 24 years. The estimated HIV prevalence among young women is three times higher than among young men. Mozambique has the 10th highest rate of early marriages in the world, with 48% of women aged 20-24 married before the age of 18, with 55.7% in rural areas and 36.1% in urban areas. The percentage of the 15-19 years old who have already become pregnant is 46%, with a fertility rate of 194/1000. The 2017 Census estimates that 39% of the Mozambican population aged 15 years and above, cannot read or write, with 49.4% for females and 27.2% for males. Participation in politics by women has greatly improved although women's representation in parliament is 39.4%, still below 50%. Mozambique, unfortunately, has suffered intersecting crises in recent years, with the rise of conflict and violent extremism, and natural disasters, all of which disproportionately affect women and further lead to increases in gender-based violence. The conflict centred in Cabo Delgado, which started in 2017, has led to the displacement of over 700,000 people and death of more than 2,000 people, while women and girls are reported to be kidnapped, raped, or forced into marriage or prostitution.

**ALSO, THE DEVASTATING MIX CLIMATE-RELATED  
DISASTERS OF CYCLONES IDAI AND KENNETH WREAKED  
HAVOC IN 2019. AT THE BEGINNING OF 2021 THE PEOPLE OF  
MOZAMBIQUE WERE HIT ONCE MORE BY TROPICAL STORM  
CHALANE, WITH CYCLONE ELOISE RIDING ON THE DAMAGE  
JUST THREE WEEKS LATER.**

**MOZAMBIQUE: VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN CONTEXT**

As a result of the prevailing context, the plight of women, who typically form the frontline of such crises as first responders, caregivers to their communities, and rebuilders of livelihoods is made worse. Women and girls are also at greatest risk of gender-based violence (GBV), and experience poorer health outcomes due to a lack of access to sexual and reproductive health services, - leading to compounded negative health and economic consequences of gender inequality.

The COVID-19 pandemic negative impacts on the lives of women and girls is exponentially greater, with restrictions on movement. For instance, the limitation of public transport has led to the loss of daily income, high rates of unemployment, closure of schools and confinement of families restricted at home. Economic empowerment remains a challenge for the women of Mozambique, who account for 87.3% of the labour force in agriculture but constitute only 25% of the landowners holding official user rights.

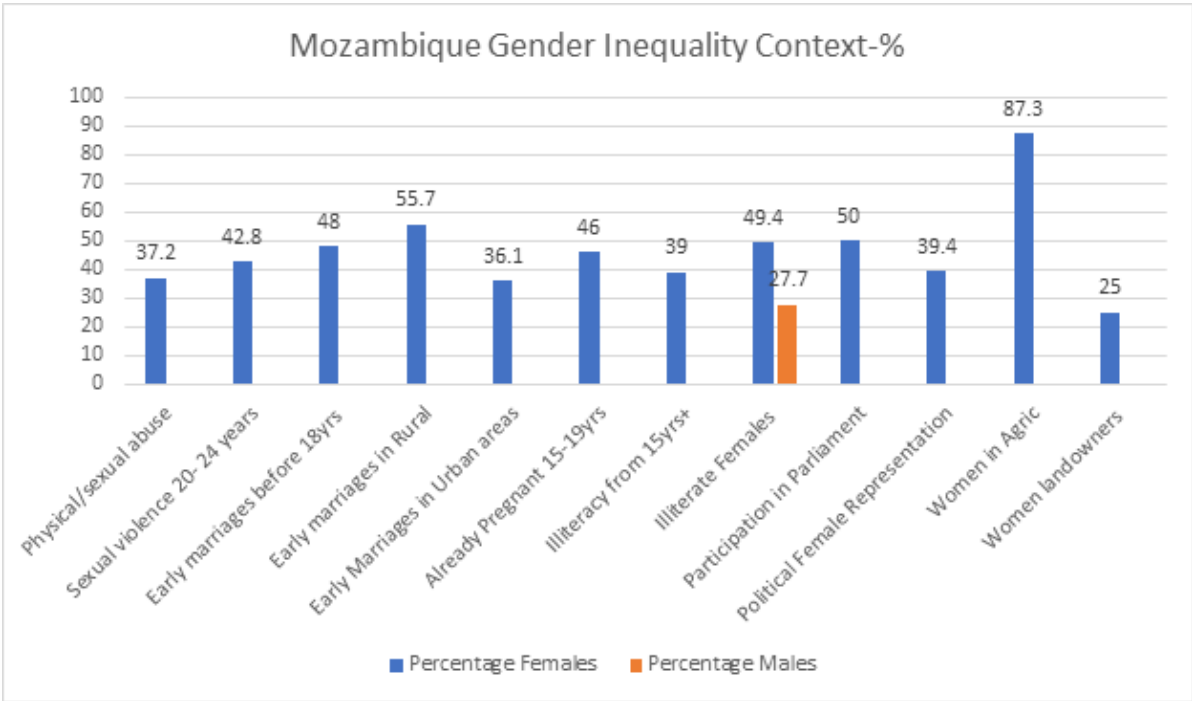


Figure 2: Gender Inequality Context

**MOZAMBIQUE: PROGRAM FOCUS**

The Mozambique Spotlight Program has mobilized an impressive array of Government and sub-national institutions to collaborate on activities to holistically address the multi-layered concerns around EVAWG as shown in Figure 3.

Spotlight Mozambique successfully partnered with state actors and achieved high levels of buy-in to end VAWG. The program focused on supporting review and development of legislative frameworks that promote gender empowerment. Operationally the program is very actively working with partners in community-based initiatives to end VAWG.



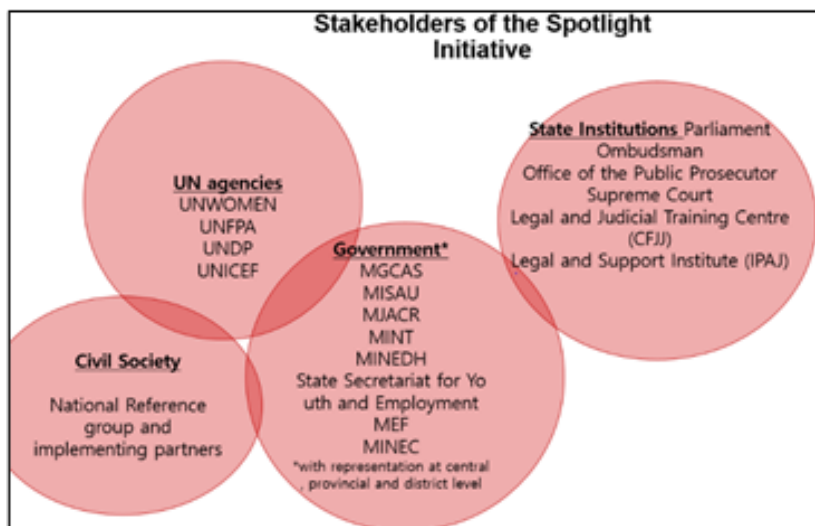


Figure 3: Stakeholders of the SI in Mozambique

To mitigate sexual violence and premature unions and other harmful practices that harm women and girls, the Mozambique program implemented activities including- 'Speak My Sister', 'Quinta da Malta'(translation), Chapa das manas (sister's bus), and 'Around the fire' which have been very popular and effective at both sub-national and national levels. Commendably, the beauty of the work done is that these initiatives are moulded on traditional and cultural platforms and are re-interpreted using contemporary realities and real-life experiences. For instance, Around the Fire initiative gathers girls and young women around the fire, creating a platform of discussing SGBV issues in a bid to mitigate sexual violence and premature unions and other harmful practices that harm girls.

## MOZAMBIQUE: PROGRAM FOCUS

The work carried out shows a greater involvement of the leaders in the activities, especially on reporting cases of violence at all levels, to minimize the situation and ensure that the offenders are convicted. As part of the program in Mozambique the following were performed:

- Capacity building of CBOs in Women's Human Rights and gender transformative leadership, with a focus on prevention of Sexual Violence and GBV;
- Holding reflection, experience exchange and coordination meetings at District level;
- Joint planning of activities at District level, with the involvement of the Government and other actors at all levels;
- Involvement of activists from community-based organizations in consortium organizations;
- Capacity building of members of the Platform of Community Based Organizations on GBV and Human Rights issues with a focus on sexual and reproductive rights and gender transformative approach and combating sexual violence and harmful practices to the health of girls and women;
- Awareness raising for leaders at sub-national and national levels on importance of their involvement;
- Capacity-building of different local partners, including community and religious leaders and community courts on human rights and the need to report cases of violence that occur within the family and community;
- Involvement of partners, CSOs, including local leaders and government (Health, Education, IPAJ, Court and Police - PRM), in community activities and capacity building of local CBOs.

These are promising practices with a potential for scaling up and can be taken as lessons for other countries, members states and the regional program.

# **LIBERIA: VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN CONTEXT**

In Liberia patriarchal social norms are deeply entrenched and violence against women and girls is broadly accepted. General acceptance of the most common forms of SGBV that include child marriages, teenage pregnancies, domestic violence, female genital mutilation, and denial of resources is reflected in reports from the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MGCSP). Survivors of rape below 18 years constitute 43% (42.6% are girls while boys constitute 0.4%). FGM is actively practiced in 11 out of the 15 counties. The COVID-19 pandemic has also exacerbated SGBV/HPs. Gender inequality is echoed in the Gender Inequality Index (2018), where Liberia is ranked 176th out of 189 countries.

Drivers of GBV include poverty, high illiteracy rates and weak state preventive and response mechanisms to address these challenges. Most of these contributing factors can be traced to Liberia's conflict history; for example, prevailing acceptance of rape as a cultural remnant of the civil conflict and resulting impunity for these actions.



Credit: UN Women Liberia

During the war (1989 – 1997) rape was used as a weapon of war and as a result Liberia is grappling with high incidence of rape and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls. To address rape, an Anti-rape Bill was developed recently. There is no FGM law but there is a draft Bill awaiting approval by legislature. In an economy dominated by agricultural and informal work, women carry the heaviest burden in these sectors and men greatly outnumber women in all other sectors of Liberia's economy.

## **LIBERIA: PROGRAM FOCUS**

To eliminate violence against women and girls the program supported development of legal frameworks and policies including the Female Genital Mutilation Bill, the Executive Order No.92 on Domestic Violence including FGM and Seven Count Policy suspending Sande interventions. Engagement of traditional leaders in addressing FGM also formed part of the SI activities. It strengthened capacities of community gatekeepers to create awareness on the prevention of these negative practices against women and girls. At least 300 traditional practitioners debunked the practice of FGM and are now acting as change agents. The program also supported closure of Bush Schools, development of a simple rites of passage without FGM and empowerment of traditional zoes. These are traditional leaders/practitioners among the Sande and Poro communities in Liberia who hold leadership positions within their respective societies.

The term is not generally used in south-eastern Liberia, where these societies are largely absent. A chief Poro zoe and a chief Sande zoe exercise authority and supervision over these societies nationally.



# PROMISING PRACTICES

The success of the Nigeria, Mozambique and Liberia Spotlight programs is based on promising practices including elevating the place and role of capacity building, social media, educational awareness, multi-stakeholder engagements and community engagement - in delivering the SI program objectives, as shown in the figure below:



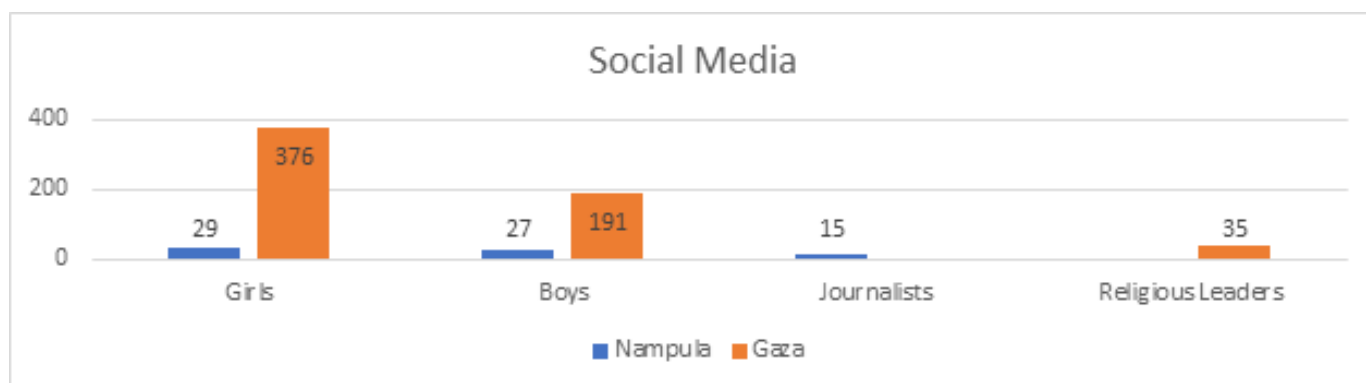
Figure 5: Promising Practices in Nigeria, Mozambique, and Liberia

Distinctive and shared promising practices across Nigeria, Mozambique, and Liberia include:

- Community engagement, especially traditional leadership and grassroots women organizations to accelerate the gains of the Spotlight programs;
- Multi-stakeholder approach adopted to ensure participation by different organizations including CSOs, CBOs and sub-national government actors to implement the program;
- Capacity-building of different local partners, including community and religious leaders in ending violence against women and girls;
- Delivering educational lessons and interaction between teachers and students constitutes an innovative alternative in the context of COVID-19.
- Use of social media including WhatsApp group platforms for interaction during times of crises emerged to be useful during COVID 19. When people cannot meet physically, initiatives to address VAWG could still be conducted via these platforms.

For, example, Mozambican statistics on use of WhatsApp group platforms represented graphically in the figure below are instructional:

The Gaza statistics are based on 14 WhatsApp groups while the Nampula are based on various unspecified media platforms. For example, in Nampula the program reached 56 secondary school students including 29 girls, 27 boys and 15 journalists from different media houses. In Gaza-14 WhatsApp groups had 35 religious leaders, 567 students of which 376 were girls and young women, and 25 girls who went through initiation rites.







## LESSONS-LEARNED

Several generalized lessons can be drawn from the Nigeria, Mozambique, and Liberia Spotlight Initiative programs. The lessons include the following:

**Joint advocacy to Federal and State governments, leveraging on national initiatives such as the inter-ministerial committee and National Government Federals (NGF), formation of national steering committee overseeing the Spotlight programme at the national level (Nigeria)**

**Establishing lasting partnerships and engagement at community level are critical in ending GBV/HP/FGM. A generalized lesson across the countries is that success is substantially anchored on effective and sustained partnerships.**

**Raising awareness and engaging community leaders and influential people in community outreach & consultative dialogues proved to be one of the best strategies to combat harmful practices..**

**Multi-stakeholder and multisectoral intervention approaches to ending violence against women and girls are critical. All countries emphasized the importance of delivering as one; boys and men involvement in the mobilization process; local community involvement; local leadership, and government leadership engagement at all levels of the program as guarantees for success and sustainability.**

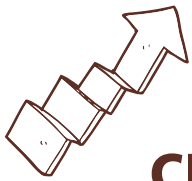
**Across the three countries, to eliminate the VAWG, SGBV/HP, and promote SRH&RR, it was important to address the deep rooted traditional and patriarchal behaviour from men and traditional leadership. Programs aimed at influencing social behaviour change from individuals, community, and society at large**

**Engagement with media and government institutions is a sustainable strategy that has resulted in improved care for survivors of violence referred by local communities and CBOs. For instance, Journalists produce informationals and regular stories about the situation of GBV (Mozambique).**

**To end VAWG, SGBV/HP, and promote SRH&RR - advocacy and communications were required at all levels – to combat slow ratification of, and lack of awareness of human rights instruments; insufficient enforcement of national legislations and the rule of law; insufficient resource allocation; and lack of action plans, national planning frameworks that bring significant change in the lives of women and girls.**

**Across the countries, disbursement of funds for the program through women organisations is an important innovation. Funds were directly provided to women led grassroots organizations to strengthen capacity and increase agency of women. In Liberia, economic empowerment of traditional zoes proved to be key as an alternative source of income..**

**In Mozambique, the GBV mobile clinic model has been an innovative concept developed to reach out to women and girls in remote, hard to reach communities. Upon the request of the Government of Mozambique this model will be replicated to additional districts.**



## CHALLENGES AND MITIGATION MEASURES

1

Initially the program suffered from poor cooperation from Government and traditional leaders. Largely, this was as a result of mistrust or lack of capacities and skills. To overcome this challenge, massive awareness raising workshops in communities - focusing on laws, human rights and GBV were carried out during program implementation. For example, in Mozambique radio debates with a focus on GBV and women's human rights were used and proved to be an effective approach. Additionally, Mozambique adopted a social mobilization strategy in the streets, markets, and communities with megaphones to reach large numbers of people, especially during COVID-19. This became part of the mitigation strategies. Involvement of leadership, families, influential people, men, and boys in information activities was done to influence behaviour change amongst community members in Mozambique.

2

Other challenges that threatened program implementation are lack of institutionalized mechanisms such as gender responsive budgeting, weak private sector engagement, election violence (including GBV) and the COVID-19 pandemic. Successful mitigation strategies to these challenges have included institutionalizing gender responsive budgeting, coming up with strategies addressing electoral violence in national institute of legislative studies and incorporation of COVID-19 specific programming into the Spotlight workplan. By adopting these the SI project still managed to reach its intended beneficiaries.

3

Initially, Liberia experienced lack of commitment from traditional leaders as well as limited capacities and inadequate will by traditional leaders in reporting. Mitigation measures involved continued dialogues and working through NACCEL as the umbrella organization and economic empowerment to gain buy-in. Enhancing capacities of traditional leaders through learning exchange sessions and training on monitoring progress was key.

4

GBV occurs within families, communities and in society at large and inequalities between boys and girls are experienced, largely due to socialization and norms entrenched during childhood, which can be difficult to uproot. Mitigation strategies in Nigeria, Liberia and Mozambique include capacity building of the members of platforms of community-based organizations on GBV and human rights with a focus on sexual and reproductive rights and a gender transformative approach and combating sexual violence and harmful practices on girls' and women's health.

5

Apart from CSO engagement, to achieve success - all the three SI countries also leveraged the involvement of Government at various levels, to jointly implement the program to fight against GBV, and the dissemination of laws that protect women and girls from harmful practices such as bride price and forced unions. Again, joint activity planning with the non-state Spotlight Initiative stakeholders played a critical role in influencing acceptance of the program.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on background research and presentations from Spotlight countries at the learning event, the following actions could be considered to improve and strengthen the SIARP implementation:

- Traditional and religious leadership engagement, as both partners and leaders of communities, instead of spectators or only targets of advocacy. They should be engaged in dignity and respect and be given the platform to tell their stories, speak and act on violence against women and girls for the program to be impactful. They should be involved from the planning phase through to monitoring and evaluation.
- To improve results-based performance of the Spotlight Program, Phase II programming should place emphasis on institutionalizing gender responsive budgeting, engagements with parliamentarians, and institute strategies to address electoral violence.
- To avoid future disruption, there is need to have COVID-19 specific programming incorporated into the Spotlight Initiative work plan. Spotlight countries should also develop sectoral plans on GBV as well as costed monitoring and evaluation plans.
- The private sector needs to be engaged towards response and prevention of GBV. Though not well practiced, it was said to be a good innovation that needs to be developed.
- To win the fight against VAWG, all SI programs should emphasize formation of partnerships with women grassroots organisations that are motivated and involved in program design, implementation, and evaluation.



## SECTION 3: Partnering on Legal and Policy Reforms in the Justice System

Both Uganda and Zimbabwe Spotlight programming exhibit similar innovative partnerships and creative engagements with Governments and local authorities in tackling legal frameworks and policy reforms that can bring new lessons for phase II of Spotlight Initiative programming.



### INNOVATIVE COLLABORATIONS

Uganda and Zimbabwe programs both highlighted partnerships with various policy makers across the access to justice chain.



### PROMISING PRACTICES

The success of the Uganda and Zimbabwe Spotlight programs is the similar promising practices including outlining enabling environments to meet strategic needs



### LESSONS-LEARNED

Several generalized lessons can be drawn from the Uganda and Zimbabwe Spotlight Initiative programs including how to leverage and nurture judicial partnerships, and implementation of relevant policies



### CHALLENGES AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Uganda and Zimbabwe Spotlight Initiative programs encountered several hurdles such as the COVID-19 pandemic affecting justice service-delivery. The social innovation employed provides useful inspiration for mitigation measures others can employ.

## UGANDA: VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN CONTEXT

Gender based violence remains endemic in Uganda, and men are viewed as perpetrators of violence against women. About 28% women aged 15-49 have experienced sexual violence compared to 9% of men in the same age group, and 56% of women have experienced physical violence. Uganda loses about USD21 million to domestic violence cases, despite a strong constitution that protects women's human rights. The Government of Uganda has made significant progress in developing legal frameworks, policies, and programs to protect women's human rights and advance gender equality. The constitution for example, prohibits laws, customs or traditions that are against the dignity, welfare, and interest of women. It protects an affirmative action policy that has enabled major progress in women's representation in government, with women occupying over a third of senior ministerial positions. These initiatives are aimed, in part, to address the ecosystems that allow the prevalence of gender discrimination including those contributing to VAWG/GBV/HP. Despite these efforts, violence against women remains a major obstacle in Uganda. Women still face discrimination and marginalization because of slow change in attitudes about women. The 2017 Uganda's National Male Involvement Strategy for the Prevention and Response to Gender Based Violence in Uganda consolidates the Government of Uganda's efforts to try and address attitudinal change around SGBV.

In addition, several key legal reform efforts have been pending for decades, including family laws and those practices relating to sexual offences against women and children. There are deep-rooted cultural and traditional practices that discriminate against women and girls in the name of customary practices. In many cases these traditional practices discriminate in cases of succession and inheritance - limiting women's access to land, finances, and property. Poverty has reduced greatly in Uganda with economic growth of 7% per annum and poverty notably reduced over the last twenty years. However, Uganda still faces gender inequalities and regional economic disparities and gender marginalization.

## UGANDA: PROGRAM FOCUS

To address violence against women and girls, the Uganda SI program focused on legal and policy reforms and exemplified it through the following activities:

- Institutional support for the development of a 'Multisectoral Handbook for Prosecutors', and the Police standard operating procedures (SOPs) for addressing VAWG to guide the investigation and prosecution of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) crimes in Uganda from a victim-centred, trauma informed perspective;
- Conducted capacity building activities - three (3) trainings for 105 actors were conducted for targeted judicial officers, police officers, prosecutors, and social workers to equip them with practical skills and knowledge that they would use in handling cases of GBV and SGBV;
- Case review exercise was carried out in four (4) regions which generated disaggregated data on the magnitude and nature of GBV cases, weeded out the old cases where victims have lost interest or where witnesses cannot be traced;
- A total of 1,045 files – over 70% were SGBV cases. Case file review findings informed the decision to conduct SGBV sessions in selected districts across the country which resulted in an overall increase in the conviction rate of SGBV cases to 60% from a previous 45% conviction rate;
- Provision of legal aid by partners including the Uganda Law Society, Refuge Law Project, and Justice Centers;
- Providing legal and psychosocial support to survivors of VAWG including in humanitarian settings in 16 GBV Shelters.



In Uganda, coordination of the Spotlight programming is strong at national and provincial level but needs to be strengthened at the district level.

## **ZIMBABWE: VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN CONTEXT**

High prevalence of violence against women and girls in Zimbabwe is a serious challenge to the advancement of women and girls' human rights. About 47% of women have experienced either physical or sexual violence at some point in their life and 1 in 3 girls suffer sexual violence before they turn the age of 18 and less than 3% of these girls received professional help. Zimbabwe has developed critical legal and policy frameworks to prevent Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in the public and the private sphere and these include the Domestic Violence Act, the Criminal Law and Codification Act, the Criminal Evidence and Procedure Act and the Children's Act. In addition, programs and strategies such as the 4Ps (Prevention, Protection, Participation and Programme) campaign on zero tolerance to GBV and the National GBV Strategy (2012 – 2015) have been developed.



Credit: Spotlight Initiative, Zimbabwe

However, Zimbabwe still suffers from lack of a well-resourced legal aid infrastructure, weak referral system between the police, legal aid providers and justice delivery structures and low legal literacy among women and communities as well as deep rooted patriarchal values. Women and girls suffer high levels of domestic violence and Zimbabwe scores high in child marriages. Socio-economic risk factors include harmful gender norms that uphold male privilege, high levels of poverty and unemployment, high levels of inequality in relationships - predominantly male-controlled relationships, high levels of child marriage that perpetuate power imbalance in relationships, lack of knowledge and information, poverty, and the unequal gender power relations within intimate partner relationships.



## ZIMBABWE: PROGRAM FOCUS

In Zimbabwe the thematic focus for the Spotlight program was on “Sub-national community involvement and implementation by partners working on SGBV/HP and access to SRH&RR. The program focused on contributing towards eradication of all forms of gender-based violence, early marriages, and promotion of sexual and reproductive health, and reproductive rights (SRH&RR) of women and girls. Some of the key activities carried out by the program aimed to support the review of criminal legislation that deals with sexual offences against girls and boys to guarantee effective prosecution and sentencing of offenders such as advocacy for the Mandatory Sentencing for Rape. The Zimbabwe program also participated in the development of the 2019 Draft Harmonized Marriages Bill to align the marriage laws to Section 78 of the Constitution on Marriage Rights and collaborated with Judicial Services Commission to ‘Orange’ the Harare Magistrates Court (the court that handles the majority of GBV and SGBV cases in the country). Spotlight RUNOs went on to develop a joint action plan to support the JSC through a series of actions in 2020. Additionally, SI supported analysis of GBV, SGBV and SRHR in the social sector ministries in the 2019 National Budget and established a baseline of 6.9% allocated to GBV, SGBV and SRHR. Efforts are underway in 2021 to enable the National Disability Board to have a strategic document to guide its operations. The accelerated promulgation of laws and policies is due in part to cross-portfolio and ministerial partnerships - in collaboration with multilateral organizations and CSOs.



Credit: Spotlight Initiative, Zimbabwe



## **PROMISING PRACTICES**

Tremendous results towards EVAWG have been recorded in Uganda and Zimbabwe. Documented models in justice reform to deliver quality and integrated services against EVAWG have been developed to reach those left behind – especially women and girls. Systems to collect disaggregated data on GBV to improve services and inform policy making have been developed. For instance, Uganda successfully partnered with the justice sector to effectively collect disaggregated data, manage case load, and address violence against women and girls. Success of the Innovators Against GBV (IAGs) program as an innovation within the Zimbabwe SI has paved the way for the expansion of this program.

The High-Level Political Compact in Zimbabwe offers the strategic opportunity for the SI in the country to put GBV on the national agenda. Political will towards gender equality and women's rights in Zimbabwe still needs to be strengthened despite progress made - as evidenced by the absence of a gendered analysis and gender responsive National COVID-19 Response and Recovery Plans and the absence of the Ministry responsible for Women Affairs on the National Task Force for COVID-19.

GBV awareness raising using technological innovations including leveraging on social media platforms during times of crises to reach the victims and the community at large have become commonplace in Uganda and Zimbabwe. In Zimbabwe, the innovative mobile One-Stop-Centre has been developed to provide mobile multi-sectoral GBV services. The Mobile One Stop Centres used since December 2019 - in response to COVID have enabled 749 survivors (644 females, 105 males) to access services.

Strengthening of legal institutions to handle cases on violence against women and girls proved efficacious for Zimbabwe and Uganda. In Uganda a cross-sectoral handbook to guide the investigation and prosecution of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) crimes from a victim-centred, trauma informed perspective was developed and is being promoted across the public and private sectors.

Both Uganda and Zimbabwe have also effectively used multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral engagement to deliver legal and policy initiatives to ending violence against women. For example, both country programs collaborated with grassroots CSOs to fight GBV by affording survivors access to quality essential legal and social services. Trained individuals cascaded training on GBV responses. Trained legal and policy analysts advanced legal and policy advocacy approaches to district levels, including to agricultural extension workers on livelihood assessments and food security training for local communities.



## LESSONS-LEARNED

The strategic positions of the Uganda and Zimbabwe programs were enhanced by the fact that they are participating in ongoing legal and policy reforms that have positively impacted various laws and policies in the respective countries. Political will is now high and the women's lobby is engaged at the highest level of Governmental structures and the legal fraternity. Awareness campaigns at subnational levels are multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder oriented. Zimbabwe and Uganda learnt the following from the implementation of the Spotlight program:

**An ongoing lesson is that the slow pace and non-linear movement of law and policy making can lead to delays in immediate results.**

**Coordinated, collaborative, cohesive, and cooperative ways of working amongst the community, their local structures and local leadership results in positive impact at national levels.**

**One of the most strategic programmatic lesson learnt in 2020 was that flexible programming works. This was occasioned by the untimely, unpredictable, and disruptive COVID-19.**

**The transformative nature of the SI program can result in permanent changes within the country and communities. Similarly, the activists and gender champions who are change agents and are members of the community can use community structures to influence and institutionalize change within the community, including at national and local government structures.**

**Using participatory, consultative and co-creation methods to break through existing attitudes by making communities take responsibility for promoting the rights of women and girls and other marginalized groups fosters a sense of responsibility and ownership and accountability to the program.**

**Improving the capacity of police, health, and justice personnel to collect, analyse and present forensic evidence in SGBV cases by supporting DNA Testing is a game changer for women and girls as it can be used in SGBV cases as a silent witness to accurately identify and convict a perpetrator.**

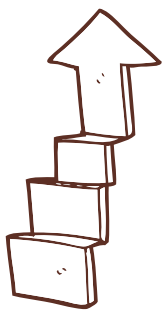
**Legal and policy reform partnerships that work together within Spotlight Provinces and Districts to jointly deliver interventions have a **wider reach and impact**.**

**In Uganda: The innovation was (1) an understanding by Government institutions that there is a need for behavioural change to move the needle on SGBV; and**

**(2) SI partnering with radio stations, Government bodies, male influencers, and the judicial service delivery system to address the behaviours that drive SGBV and increase accountability.**

**What makes these partnerships innovative is that they are centred around legal and policy reforms and changing behavioural norms across the nation.**

**In Zimbabwe: The innovative aspect of the legal and policy partnerships lay in – (1) the coming together of civil society and multi-lateral organizations to provide baseline assessments on the impact of SGBV and EVAWG in several different sectors; and (2) the coming together of several government institutions and ministries to draft laws and policies based on evidence generated from government and non-government sources. This is a model that is often described as difficult, but it is possible.**



# CHALLENGES AND MITIGATION MEASURES

The Uganda and Zimbabwe case studies are worth further analysis. Working with and through Government structures is generally slow, time consuming and bureaucratic. Engaging with Governments in legal and policy reform is sometimes contentious. However, both countries registered notable successes in both areas. The following challenges were experienced in Uganda and Zimbabwe, and mitigation measures were taken to ensure program continuity, especially during COVID-19 lockdowns:

1

The programs collaborated with Government ministries and departments at the national level although activities were slowed down due to the impact of the lockdown on the operations of ministries and departments. Some offices closed for periods of time, while other Government entities operated at reduced capacity to reduce the human footprint. To mitigate the challenge the programs worked closely with the identified focal persons in Government who continued to enable work to continue.

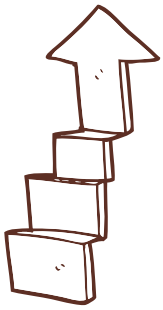
2

Virtual communication modalities remain unfamiliar ways of working for Government. Planning meetings with Government have not been as effective due to many key officials not having access to internet connectivity at home; the rising cost of data charges; and officials' capacity gaps in using Zoom and other virtual meeting platforms for consultations, presentations, and planning. To alleviate the disruption, technical support in the forms of data allocation, on-line support to use Zoom functions during meetings, and support to develop and share presentations in virtual platforms was provided to both Government and non-state partners of the program. Specific attention was given to enable women to participate in cases where they had challenges with connectivity

3

UN Women and other RUNOs continue to experience delays in the movement of funds to IPs and stakeholders (e.g., data for participation in virtual meetings) due to transfer delays in the external banking sector and mobile money platforms. As a mitigation strategy RUNOs' operations teams remain in constant communications with IPs and the various banking platforms to identify the bottlenecks and find solutions to transfer the funds to partners.





## CHALLENGES AND MITIGATION MEASURES

4

There was substantial resistance from some cultural and religious sections on sexuality education and key bills and policy reform debates. A systematic engagement with cultural and religious leaders using a benefits-based approach was used to solve the problem.

5

Both Uganda and Zimbabwe experienced weak implementation capacity for some CSOs and new partners. To alleviate this challenge initial training and capacity building plans for CSO partners and women's movements including continuous monitoring and technical support was conducted.

6

Non-government actors in both countries reported constrained operating space. Shrinking civic space and atmosphere of engagement with most at risk populations in Zimbabwe and Uganda was experienced and ongoing dialogue was held with most at risk populations and Governments to discuss service delivery, and/or workshops with Women Human Rights Defenders' networks to minimise the challenge.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

Both Uganda and Zimbabwe SI programs have opportunities to leverage their current successful engagement with governments to facilitate the inclusion of civil society players in legal and policy reforms in the fight against EAWG.

Both Uganda and Zimbabwe SI programs are recommended to expand their successful capacity building activities in legal and policy reforms – to include civil society, the media and research institutions who work in the fight against VAWG.

More work should be put in the development of conceptual frameworks to harmonize their justice reform approach to incorporate aspects of working with traditional and religious leaders, boys, and men with emphasis on the eradication of VAWG in both Zimbabwe and Uganda.

# SECTION 4: Community and Civil Society Engagement

The three Spotlight countries, Malawi, Niger, and Mali adopted civil society engagement among other approaches to effectively execute their program activities - and focused community levels in delivering the program. Program focus, lessons learnt, challenges and mitigation strategies that emerged from these countries are discussed in this section and recommendations are proffered



## INNOVATIVE COLLABORATIONS

Malawi, Niger and Mali programs focus on engagement with community-level initiatives and civil society to magnify impact of efforts; engaging a whole of society approach



## PROMISING PRACTICES

The success of the Malawi, Niger, and Mali programs lies in the ability to define a common understanding and articulate these messages as tangible actions across diverse communities.



## LESSONS-LEARNED

Several generalized lessons can be drawn from the Malawi, Niger and Mali Spotlight Initiative programs including how to craft curated advocacy messages, and nurture civic engagement for wider reach.



## CHALLENGES AND MITIGATION MEASURES

Malawi, Niger and Mali programs faced a myriad of challenges, some pre-existing, and some exacerbated in the wake of contemporary issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

## MALI: VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN CONTEXT

Geographically, the implementation of the Spotlight Initiative in Mali took place in 5 areas namely Kayes, Koulikoro, Sikasso, Segou and Bamako districts. The implementation of the Program covered governance and political issues with much emphasis on policies and legislation on GBV/HP/FGM and SRH&RR. Mali has ratified international and regional instruments recognizing the equal rights and duties of women and men and prohibiting all discrimination against women. The following instruments embedded in the Mali Constitution of February 25, 1992, include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and its Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol) and these are aimed at reducing gender inequalities ensuring the same rights to citizens of both sexes without discrimination.

Culturally, there exist inequalities between men and women, with devastating social ills surrounding GBV/HP/FGM and SRH&RR. Women representation in decision-making bodies (elective, nominative positions) is low. For instance, only 10% of women participate in major household decisions. Conversely, 63% of women were not involved in any decision making. Overall, 79% of women and 47% of men believe that it is justified for a man to beat his wife for at least one or other reason. At the family level socio-cultural beliefs and misinterpretations of the Muslim religion has contributed to women and girls being subjected to GBV/HP/FGM. The same has happened in the economics front in which women and girls are economically and educationally disadvantaged. Girls of school going age drop out of school prematurely with primary school enrolment rate standing at 79.8% in 2018 of which 85.8% represented boys and 73.8% represented girls.

Most working-class women earn 50% of men's wages in similar roles and the unemployment rate is higher amongst women. Women in Mali also lack access, control and ownership of land, technology, and financing. Political upheaval and escalating security concerns, experienced in Mali in 2020 exacerbated trends of conflict-induced sexual violence, particularly affected the northern and central regions. This followed the coup d'état of 18 August, that led to a spike in cases of conflict-related sexual violence, despite underreporting owing to stigma, insecurity, and logistical constraints. This made it difficult for Government and other actors to reach conflict affected areas - affecting implementation of the SI program. Moreover, the proliferation of illicit small arms and a surge of inter-communal violence propelled civilian displacement, making women and girls more vulnerable to trafficking. The program recorded cases of conflict-related sexual violence affected 21 women and 8 girls. The incidents happened in Gao, Kayes, Ménaka, Mopti, Ségou and Timbuktu regions recording cases of gang rape, forced marriage, abduction and sexual slavery. Separately, humanitarian service providers registered 1,020 cases affecting 510 women, 489 girls, 15 boys and 6 men, as well as 68 cases of children conceived because of rape.

## MALI: PROGRAM FOCUS



Credit: UN Women Liberia

Mali's thematic focus was the expansion of the base of Civil Society Organisations activities. This expansion focused on the creation and strengthening of networks, platforms, and movements. Focus was on mobilizing and partnering with civil society organizations working in the field of gender equality and the elimination of GBV, including groups of people facing multiple forms of discrimination such as women living with HIV, those living with disabilities, albinism, migrant women, girls, and domestic workers. This approach was adopted given the fact that CSOs can reach wider audiences on issues around conflict and its impact on governance systems. Protection of women and girls against VAW, including GBV and harmful practices, and to promote their rights related to SRH&RR through a strengthened legal environment that complies with international norms and standards was another prime focus.

The program mapped out and mobilized more than 250 CSOs representing a cross section of the Malian society - involved in gender equality and the elimination of GBV, including groups of people facing multiple forms of discrimination. However, because of on-going conflict and current military intervention, working only through CSOs became logistically difficult and politically constrained. The focus of the program included strengthening CSO institutional frameworks, production, and dissemination of quality data – to be achieved through involvement and empowerment of communities, effective and equitable access to appropriate services, and dynamic and effective women's and girls' rights organizations. Because of the security and political changes these were to be rolled out in partnership with Government, especially: Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation; Ministry of Women, Children and Family Promotion; Ministry of Justice and Human Rights; Ministry of Security and Civil Protection; Ministry of Health and Social Affairs; Ministry of National Education; Ministry of Youth; Ministry of Religious Affairs and Worship; Ministry of Economy and Finance; Ministry of Communication, Ministry of Digital Economy and Prospective.

## SECTION 4

# MALAWI: VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN CONTEXT

According to Malawi Demographic Health Survey 50% of girls marry before age 18 resulting in high illiteracy rates and simultaneously undermining girl child development potential. Girls that remain in school beyond 8th grade constitute 45%. Culturally, Malawi's rural areas are marred with cases of "sexual cleansing" conducted in the name of culture. Statistically, physical violence accounts for 34% among women from age 15 while 20% of women have experienced sexual violence and spousal violence stands at 42%.

COVID-19 has not spared Malawi as evidence from 28 districts shows that data on child marriages and teenage pregnancies have increased during the COVID-19 period. The cumulative figure for the teenage pregnancies is 44,874 and those for child marriages is 12,995. COVID-19 has worsened gender gains in child marriages and teenage pregnancies, women with disabilities, minority groups, sex workers, young feminists, refugee women and women living with HIV.

## MALAWI: PROGRAM FOCUS



Credit: UN Women Malawi

Malawi has channeled efforts towards engaging community gate keepers (men and traditional leaders) for transformation of harmful social norms and to enable prevention and response to SGBV. Work has been spearheaded by chiefs and religious leaders (273 male chiefs, 40 female chiefs, 83 male sheiks and 90 male pastors) who were inspired to independently address their constituents and congregations on the negative impacts of VAWG and child marriages. However, the progress on the efforts is hampered by 1) an outdated legal framework in which the current Chiefs Act was made law in 1967, 2) Absence of a Chiefs' Policy fail to create an enabling policy/law to help Chiefs' impact change. The roles of Traditional Leaders are not anchored in a relevant policy framework and 3) the fragmentation of traditional leaders initiatives make scaling up successful interventions difficult.

Elimination of child marriages has also been the area of focus for Malawi with the annulment of child marriages. The other actions that have been taken to end child marriages has been the dethronement of chiefs who 'officiate' child marriages or who themselves get married to under-age girls. Community dialogue spaces involving traditional leaders, parents, teachers, mother groups, father groups, young boys, and girls- to curb child marriages have been set up whilst at the same time monitoring the disbursement of bursaries and other items to support the education of the girl and boy child has been ongoing.

Engaging men and boys has also been the target for Malawi's Spotlight Initiative. 'The Barbershop Toolbox' has been a key strategy for engaging them. Engagement of men and boys has been critical



in the transformation of social norms by fostering critical dialogues between men and boys on the prevention of SGBV in communities. A total of 816 champions have been mobilized and capacitated on the toolbox and male village forums through training of trainers (TOTs). In this initiative, 23 HeForShe Clubs at school level have been established engaging 459 learners (400 males, 59 female) Peer review sessions conducted to engage 1,290 beneficiaries in VAWG conversation (pastors fraternal (faith groups), youth clubs, teachers, artists/actors, farmer clubs and market vendors) have been conducted.

Over 35,000 men and boys have been reached indirectly through community awareness events and toolbox sessions in men's safe spaces. In Malawi, thanks to the mentorship programme, in a short period of time, 435 mentors were trained and through their mentorship sessions they reached out to more than 11,000 mentees.

## **NIGER: VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN CONTEXT**

Niger's context is peculiarly marked by the general (presidential, legislative) and local elections between 2020 and 2021, and the multi-dimensional crisis caused by COVID-19. The revision of the quota law in 2019 resulted in a significant registration of women in the electoral process which represented 55% of women in the electoral register. In the elections of 27 December 2020, the estimates gave numbers of 1,409 women candidates compared to 3,318 men. The women leaders' platform supported by the Spotlight Initiative has played a key role in amplifying the voice of CSOs and has drafted joint statements to support a peaceful electoral process and prevention of violence. COVID-19 has also brought multidimensional impacts on women and girls' lives. For instance, domestic violence reached its peak (19 out of 110 cases by February 2020 and 48 cases out of 164 by March 2021). There have been increased levels of stress, economic and food insecurity and unemployment. Isolation measures, border closures and restrictions on movement for economic transactions have created opportunistic conditions for an increase in levels of violence against women and girls.

Niger has suffered for a long period from insecurity and conflict. It is important to note that the Republic of Niger is part of the Lake Chad Basin countries experiencing spill over of Boko Haram violence from Nigeria. Nigeria and Niger share borders and, inevitably, the carnage of jihadists attacks. This history of conflict and insecurity, with associated impacts on EVAWG broadly, and how it impacts SI programming cannot be ignored.



## NIGER: PROGRAM FOCUS

Civil society organisations are the heartbeat of the Spotlight Initiative in Niger. Citizens believe that CSOs effectiveness can influence and advance gender equality and end violence against women and girls. To enhance CSOs effectiveness, the Spotlight Initiative mobilized civil society organizations in the elimination of Violence against Women and harmful practices called " CSO Reference Group". The group has been the interface between civil society and coordination with the agencies of the UN system of the Spotlight Initiative. It serves as an interactive space and open forum for dialogue between the Spotlight Initiative and organisations working on EVAWG, including global developments, trends, and work-related risks to end VAWG.

Niger has a strong and active CSO reference group which provides advice on the strategic direction of the Spotlight Initiative and on cutting-edge global policy issues on EVAWG. The group also assists as a partner in high-level advocacy and communication as well as in policy dialogue, including support to communications, visibility, and promotion of the objectives of the Initiative at national and global level. The activities of the CSO reference group from inception to date has been the development of a 6-month work plan to enable it to develop a dashboard for advocacy purposes (Advocacy Scorecards), participatory, monitoring and evaluation as well as to organise focus groups in target regions to: support and facilitate the collection of qualitative data for the 2020-21 Annual Report, collect lessons learned, and to develop life stories and testimonials from beneficiaries who participate in the evaluation of the program.



## PROMISING PRACTICES

The use of CSOs in the SI program confirms the argument that CSOs are closest to community structures and can more effectively reach households in times of need. CSOs also proved to be resilient even in the face of shrinking political space. For instance, while CSOs enjoy greater political space, their roles are relatively constrained in Mali and Niger. Conflict and insecurity limit the operations of CSOs, with devastating consequences to households, especially woman and girls. Mali, Niger, and Malawi Spotlight programs registered following promising practices: -

- Elevating CSO synergies and communication among the different local stakeholders and the massive sensitization of women, girls, youth, and traditional and religious leaders in favor of GBV prevention: This strategy has promoted involvement and empowerment of communities, effective and equitable access to appropriate services, and dynamic and effective women's and girls' rights organizations' participation across the three countries.
- Involvement of CSOs in Strengthening legal environment that complies with international norms and standards has contributed to protection of women and girls, against VAWG, including GBV and harmful practices, and to promote their rights related to SRH&RR in all three countries.
- Strengthening of the synergy of CSO interventions with Governmental and development partners' inter-agency coordination in the spirit of the UN reform on the results achieved and between the different stakeholders have resulted in significant changes, especially in Niger and Mali.
- Strengthened CSO institutional framework, production, and dissemination of quality data for GBV, for instance, in Malawi SI has enabled the institutionalization of the operational guidelines for male engagement to end VAWG through the development of a Male Engagement National Strategy.
- Development of conceptual frameworks to harmonize the approach to working with Traditional Leaders, boys, and men with emphasis on the eradication of HPs is key in all three countries. For example, Malawi SI formed a highly strategic alliance with Chiefs in 2020. Malawi developed the Barbershop Toolbox which has fostered critical dialogues between men and boys on the prevention of SGBV in communities



## LESSONS-LEARNED

Partnering with CSOs in SI programming has proved to be one of the most effective and direct ways to reach households, traditional leadership, and youth. CSOs have direct access to people and can create a conducive environment to deal with the elimination of VAWG and SGBV. In times of severe operational constraints occasioned by either conflict, insecurity, or government difficulties to reach local communities CSOs still manage to be present to people most left behind. Lessons learnt by Mali, Niger and Malawi during SI programme implementation are as follows:

**Synergy of actions among stakeholders of the program facilitated the implementation and the achievement of the results presented. Strategy focused on continuous information sharing and active participation of all stakeholders at all levels.**

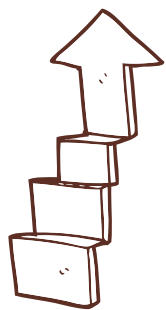
**Translation in all local languages is a critical step to reach all corners of the society.**

**Joint CSO programming on rather complex themes in the context of different countries is a good opportunity for the Spotlight countries to speak with one voice.**

**Inclusion of youths and traditional leaders is key in the implementation and subsequent success of SI initiatives. Mobilization of youth activists to support the program's actions in Mali has allowed young people to organize large-scale gatherings to call on the country's authorities to harmonize legislative framework with international norms and standards regarding the elimination of GBV. This mobilization has also served to raise awareness about the prevention of COVID 19 and GBV.**

**Innovative use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and mobilisation of young people to adapt the programme and confront challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.**

**Establishment of Traditional leaders' forums are a critical structure to coordinated implementation of social norms/HCP initiatives. A clear framework with entry points for engaging traditional leaders and use of existing district level structures make it easy for traditional leaders to engage.**



# CHALLENGES AND MITIGATION MEASURES

1

In all the three countries the SI program experienced the inadequacy of the legislative, cultural, and political frameworks: lack of harmonization of national legislation with international conventions; failure to include ratified laws in official gazettes, the use of customary rules to determine/interpret the law

- Mitigation measures include strong advocacy initiatives mostly through CSOs and community level engagements. Mobilization and involvement of traditional and religious leaders was also used to enhance the harmonization of the legislative framework with international norms and standards on the elimination of violence against women and girls.
- Strengthening knowledge of community leaders and populations on national and international laws related to the elimination of violence against women and girls so that they can commit to prevention and implement local measures for repression and support the advocacy for the adoption of a law against GBV.
- Setting up of intergenerational consultation frameworks at village level to facilitate exchanges in the community and to emphasize the prevention of GBV, especially FGM/C and child marriage.

2

During COVID-19 pandemic women experienced lack of access to new technologies which in turn reduced the possibility of sharing information, including the availability of data and its use in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Some mitigation measure employed included the deployment of CSOs which are closet to communities and convening local community events that campaigned against VAWG and SGBV.
- Provision of ICT equipment and increased use of platforms for meetings and training (Zoom; Microsoft Teams, Skype etc.), and the creation of WhatsApp groups for communication

3

Surge in SGBV and HPs (COVID-19) following the closure of schools in March 2020. All countries witnessed a major surge in cases of defilement, teenage pregnancies, and child marriages.

- Network & strengthen identified CSOs to implement advocacy plans and projects and programs to eliminate gender-based violence.
- Radio communications became the preferred channel to broadcast SI messages
- Strengthening sustainability of actions: - follow ups with beneficiaries of previous trainings to assess impact of the trainings and select the people who will be trained to be trainers to continue to transmit this knowledge.



## SECTION 5: STRENGTHENING SYNERGIES BETWEEN NATIONAL PROGRAMS AND THE CONTINENTAL SI AFRICA REGIONAL PROGRAM.

Contextually, this knowledge product makes a generalized observation that many Spotlight programs were implemented in an environment of conflict and insecurity, with associated negative impacts on EVAWG. Aligned to that, high levels of poverty, high illiteracy rates and weak state preventive and response mechanisms contributed to high levels of EVAWG. Also trending, is that Spotlight countries reported lack of quality disaggregated data and weak legal and policy frameworks in the implementation of the SI Program.

Conflict, insecurity, violent extremism, and natural disasters in many Spotlight countries are commonplace the result of which disproportionately affect women and further lead to increases in gender-based violence. Participants concurred that the SIARP should work more closely with Spotlight countries in building capacity to generate gender disaggregated data that can help in decision making and advocacy to design mitigation initiatives that alleviate all forms of violence against women and girls, including gender-based violence, harmful practices, and female genital mutilation; and achieve step changes in the adoption of sexual and reproductive health and rights. Across the 8 Spotlight countries, the COVID-19 pandemic negative impacts on the lives of women and girls is exponentially greater, with restrictions on movement, lack of livelihoods stimulus support and limited access to healthcare. There is opportunity for SIARP to increase working in synergy with national Spotlight countries to conduct comprehensive research on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic in each country, with special emphasis on women and girls. Another priority theme from the learning event was a shared recognition that SIARP and SI countries need to work together in adopting multistakeholder interventions and multisectoral approaches which bring their interventions closer to sectors like education, health, security, and social protection.

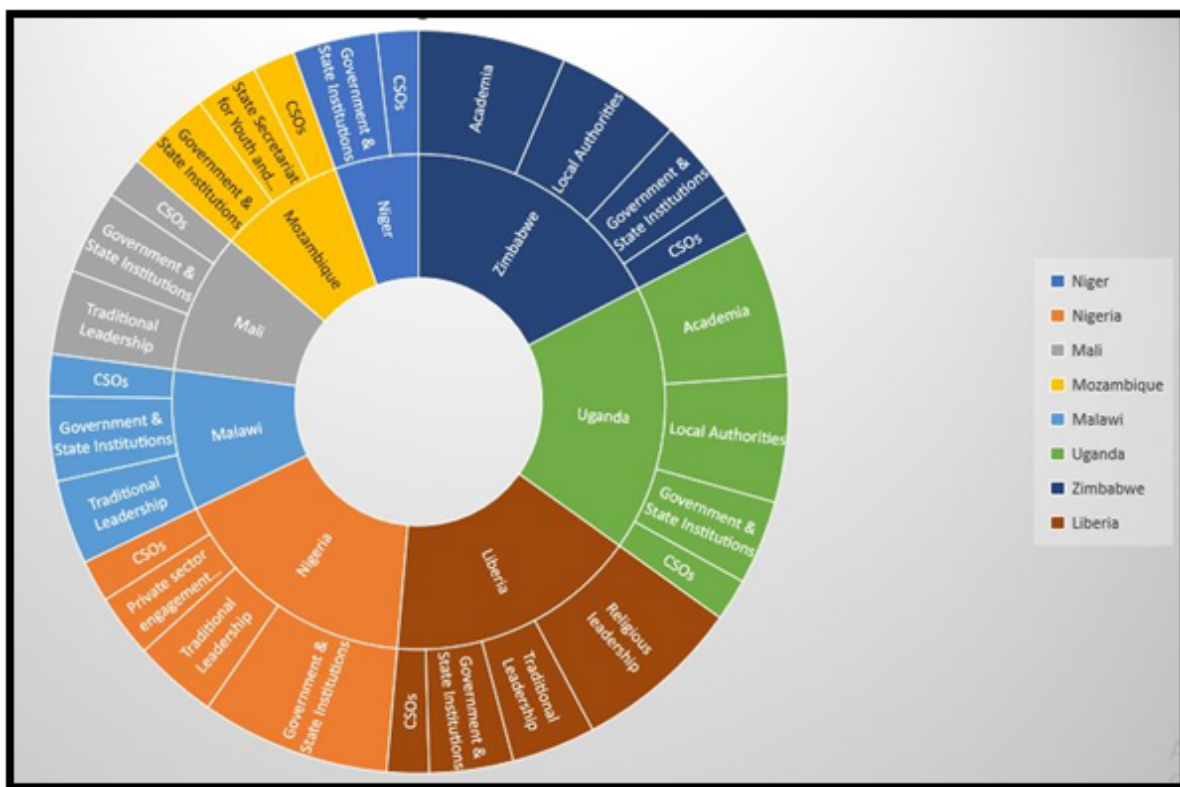
Even though the SI program was implemented in eight (8) different countries and three (3) regions of Africa, there are common trends identified in the program implementation process. Most trending was that all 8 SI country programs show similarities in terms of their partnerships; challenges that they faced; and the activities that they carried out. This section discusses the common trends across the Spotlight countries with specific focus on innovative partnerships. In all the 8 Spotlight countries the program thrived on multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral engagement and partnerships.

### 5.1.1. Partnerships

The synergy between national programs and the continental regional program was best elaborated through innovative partnerships in program design, funding arrangements, and collaborative implementation approaches. In the fight to end violence against women and girls both national and SI Africa continent program have a new opportunity to deepen the adoption of a multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral approaches and to collaborate with the following actors to deliver its activities.

- RUNOs, International CSOs, Women's Rights Organizations and research institutions
- Government actors including government ministries and agencies.
- Local traditional leadership including chiefs' wives
- Religious leaders and religious organizations
- Civil society organisations including women's movements and community-based organisations.
- Media houses, research, and academic institutions
- Private sector actors

From program reviews of the continental regional program and the presentations from the 8 Spotlight countries, below is a mapping of the critical partnerships that have made program implementation successful. A closer analysis shows that the partners are almost identical at country and continental levels.



Effective partnerships are key for SI Program success both at national and continental levels. An analysis of the figure 12 above shows that the level of success registered by the SI Program largely depended on the strength of working relationships the SI Program was able to craft from local communities to continental levels. These partners included Governments, traditional and religious leadership, civil society organisations, media, and research institutions. Both programs demonstrated that addressing GBV is not something that can be done by one body - each participating partner has a critical role to play in the SI programs. Involvement of Governments, civil society and other local structures presents a good opportunity to institutionalize efforts to eliminate violence against women and girls, and for the SI Program to ensure program support and sustainability after funding organisations are long gone. Consequently, the SI Program should involve its stakeholders at all levels from planning, implementation through to monitoring and evaluation – All Delivering as One. However, moving forward effective coordination and inclusion considerations will be key in the implementation of the SI Program. For instance, country programs reported the shrinking operating space for civil society organizations, yet CSOs are a critical cog in the partnership ecosystem of the SI Program. More can be done for Member States to create an enabling environment and partner with civil society in the implementation of the SI Program. The multistakeholder partnership approach shows that consistent engagement with implementation partners is critical. In summary;



#### PROGRAMMING LESSONS: SUSTAINABILITY

SI implementation activities should be consistent and long-term, and not a once-off for effective individual and collective transformations to blossom



#### POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Development and advocacy for enabling laws, policies, and capacity building initiatives are fertile arenas where partners can work and learn together and collaboratively share results to EVAWG;



#### BUILDING EVIDENCE-BASE

SI Program partnerships provide unique opportunity for collaboration on generating and dissemination of quality gender desegregated data both at country and continental levels;



#### SUPPORT PHASE II OF SIARP

Need for cross learning platforms and integration of learning from phase one implementation.

## 5.1.2. CHALLENGES

Despite its impressive successes, the SI Program faces daunting challenges. Among the top ten challenges experienced by partners implementing the SI Program include: weak mechanisms for coordination of Spotlight activities; existence of several sources of data collection from the implementing actors; long programme document review process for implementing partners delayed program implementation; election violence (including GBV); weak private sector engagement; lack of institutionalized mechanisms such as gender responsive budgeting; delays in the movement of funds to IPs and stakeholders due to transfer delays; virtual modalities which are an unfamiliar way of working with partners; and lack of capacities and inadequate will from stakeholders. Figure 13 presents and illustrates the universe of challenges experienced by Spotlight countries during phase I of the SI Program.

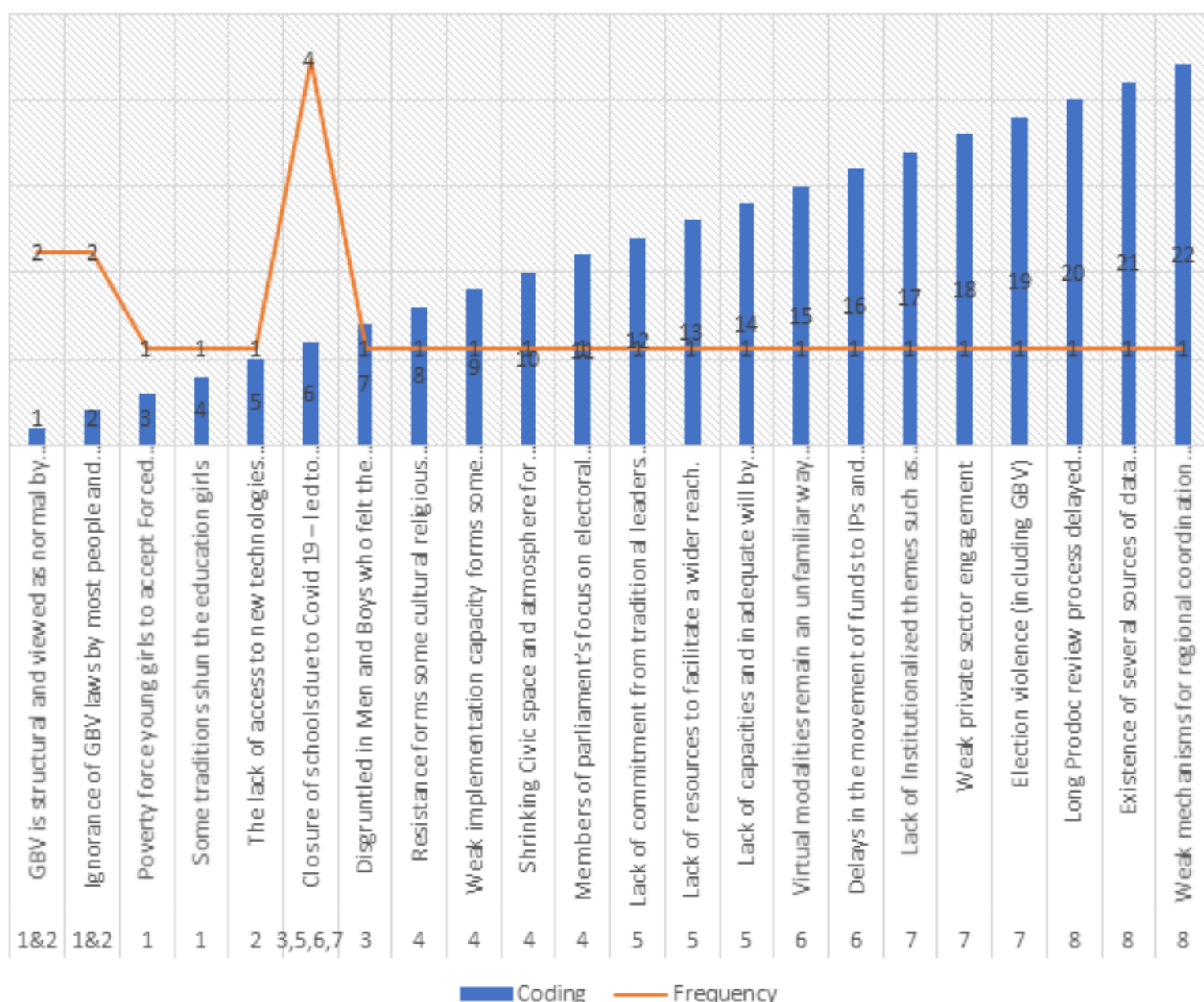


Figure 13: SI Program Implementation Challenges

## 5.2. High-Level Thematic Focus and Achievements

Despite formidable operational challenges, the SI Program achieved tremendous thematic outcomes in fighting violence against women and girls, including GBV/HP/FGM and SRH&RR. There are some trending results achieved by all Spotlight countries, while other distinctive outcomes were registered by individual countries. Notable outcomes include Development of a Male Engagement Strategy (Malawi), the Establishment of platforms for quality dialogue with governments on disability issues (Mali), and other keen examples are as follows:

### ALL COUNTRIES

- Innovative partnerships with civil society and women's organizations
- Strengthened capacities of community gatekeepers
- Engagement of traditional and religious leaders
- High level engagement and cooperation with Government
- High level advocacy for legal and policy reforms for EVAWG

### NIGER, NIGERIA, LIBERIA, MALAWI & MALI

- Accountability frameworks for advocacy that guides traditional and religious leader's advocacy

### LIBERIA & MOZAMBIQUE

- Mobilization of community level stakeholders using contextualized approaches

### LIBERIA, UGANDA & ZIMBABWE

- Working with Government to improve legal frameworks and policies



## 5.3. Disaggregated summary Spotlight Countries Activities & Results

Deriving from the high-level outcome themes referenced above, the Learning Event learned of the rich country level program activities and results that defined the uniqueness of each program.

The figure below provides a mapping of key and defining activities and results of each of the 8 Spotlight countries over the SI Program implementation period.

Zimbabwe	Supported strengthened the constitutional monitoring mandate of the Zimbabwe Gender Commission	Supporting GEWE Oversight institutions		Liberia	Supported development of legislative frameworks and laws on EVAWG	Supported fighting harmful practices - closure of bush schools	Uganda	Provided institutional support to Justice Services	Provision of legal aid survivors of VAWG
Supported the judiciary on improving access to justice for all women	Supported review of global normative commitments	Supported analysis of GBV, SGBV and SRHR in the social sector ministries		Created a database of traditional zoes/practitioners	FGM Bill developed		Provided Mental and Psychosocial support to survivors of VAWG	Supported the justice institutions to develop harmonized GBV data collection tools	
Supported research on gender and EVAWG	Supported Behavioural Change Communications Campaigns	Established social movement on GBV, SGBV and HP with the creation of CSO consortiums	Innovators against GBV, IAFs and IPs launched awareness raising and anti-GBV campaigns	300 traditional practitioners debunked the practice of FGM and now acting as change agents	Strengthened capacities of community gatekeepers to create awareness of HPs		Supported Women's rights organization advocacy efforts against GBV		
Supported creation of public safe spaces	Supported the establishment of men and boys' networks on VAWG	Linking young activists to regional networks		Malawi	Formed a highly strategic alliance with Chiefs	Supported development of a conceptual framework to harmonize the approach to working with Traditional Leaders	Promoted positive masculinities to respond to EVAWG		

## 5.4. Summary of Lessons Learnt

Depending on country operating context and quality of partnerships forged in the implementation of the SI Program each program learned valuable lessons to enrich future programming. However, a summary analysis shows that the most trending and shared lessons learnt were - Leveraging ongoing national initiatives; need for National Steering Committee that oversees SI program; distribution of funds directly to women led grassroots organizations; capturing change stories around FGM to ensure visibility; consultative dialogues at subnational and community levels were key for buy-in; Spotlight has provided a much-needed platform to enhance cooperation among UN, Government, and Civil Society; Government leadership at all levels is crucial for program success; establishment of Traditional leaders' forums and structures are a critical structure to coordinate SI implementation; cultural institutions and the community they lead are a source of positive gender resources; and engagement with media and government institutions has resulted in improved care for survivors of violence referred by the SI Program.

Accelerating efforts in harnessing data, new technologies and innovative media platforms will help SI programming and implementation to remain accessible, relevant, flexible, and effective in addressing GBV/HP/FGM and promotion of SRHR in Africa. For instance, joint programming with other stakeholders including CSOs, Innovation and use of ICT to adapt to COVID-19 challenges (WhatsApp groups) and promotion of synergies at national and regional levels were also critical lessons for programming.

## 5.5. Opportunities to strengthen synergies between national and regional programs

The Learning Event demonstrated that there are several entry points for SIARP and Spotlight countries to work together on the enactment and implementation of enabling laws and policies to better protect women and girls; creating more responsive institutions; supporting the collection of disaggregated gender data to facilitate a better-informed decision-making; raising awareness and preventing violence by joining forces with communities, traditional and religious leaders, teachers, and civil society organisations.

In the short term, it is prudent for SIARP to work with each country program to research to what extent and in what specific ways the Regional Spotlight Programme has prioritized the strengthening of existing strategies and initiatives at country level - including the AU Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment 2018-2028, Agenda 2030, Agenda 2063, the Maputo Plan of Action on the Operationalization of the Continental Policy Framework for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (2016-2030), Protocol to the African Charter on the Maputo Protocol, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, AU Roadmap on Harnessing the Demographic Dividend, the African Youth Charter (2006); and the Common Position on Ending Child Marriage in Africa (2015).

To increase the impact of the Spotlight program and activities as well as achieving the sustainability of the Spotlight country programs the following linkages and opportunities were identified.

- Adoption of international norms and implementation of legal frameworks and protocols at country levels are common problems and therefore the development of tools and standard operating procedures can help all players to better understand the rules and to apply them in fighting EVAWG.
- Innovation is key, especially in the face of social transformation that has been brought by COVID-19 pandemic, digital platforms are the best in sharing information, practices, resources, and digital learning. SIARP and Spotlight countries should accelerate efforts towards that direction.
- Consistent engagement and involvement of traditional leaders is important, as custodians of culture, they should be viewed as agents of change and Spotlight activities leverage on them.
- Leveraging accountable and mutually beneficial partnerships – the program brings many players to fight violence against women and therefore accountability frameworks must be designed to ensure continental and regular involvement and cross-country participation for maximum benefits.
- Creating linkages with non-Spotlight Countries and go beyond Spotlight countries leveraging the diversity of the continent. There is need for a holistic and comprehensive regional approach which also included context-specific interventions to drive micro and macro behavioural change

Across the 8 countries success is anchored on effective and sustained partnerships. The importance of establishing lasting partnerships and engagement at community levels proved to work wonders in SI programs implementation in all countries. To win the fight against VAWG all the SI programs should emphasize formation of partnerships and women grassroots organisations that are motivated and involved in Program design, implementation, and evaluation. For SI program implementation to be successful it was supported by several partners - including the government ministries and departments, non-governmental organisations and CSOs. Funding from international development partners including the European Union and the United Nations system played a catalytic role and will continue to be needed during phase II of the Program.

In the eight African countries where the Spotlight Initiative is implemented tremendous results towards ending VAWG have been recorded. There are documented good practice models to deliver quality and integrated services can be scaled up in Phase II of the SI Program. For instance, innovative initiatives to collect data on SGBV to improve services and inform policy making that have been developed. In Mozambique and Zimbabwe SGBV mobile clinic models and One-Stop Centers have been developed to reach out to women and girls in both urban and remote, hard to reach communities. In Nigeria joint advocacy to National State Governments leveraging on national initiatives such as the inter-ministerial committee and National government federals National Steering Committee that oversees Spotlight at the National and civil society reference groups (CSRG) has proved successful and worth replication in other countries.

Multi-stakeholder and multisectoral intervention approaches to ending violence against women and girls are critical and will be required in phase II. More work is needed to bring in the private sector. In Phase II the SI Program should capitalise on the importance of Delivering as One - increasing boys and men involvement in the mobilization process; local community involvement, local leadership, and government leadership at all levels of program for success and sustainability.

The generation and dissemination of disaggregated data and comprehensive evidence-based research and knowledge management (contextualized to local situations and conditions) remains key to the successful implementation of country SI programs. Gender transformative design, partnerships, resourcing, data, and collaborative program implementation should be prioritized as accelerators in registering measurable milestones in the fight against VAWG during Phase II.

SIARP and Spotlight countries should accelerate efforts in advocacy and communications. To end VAWG, SGBV/HP and promote SRHR - advocacy and communications are required at all levels – to combat slow ratification of, and lack of awareness of HR instruments; insufficient enforcement of national legislation and the rule of law; insufficient resource allocation; and lack of action plans, national planning frameworks that bring significant change in the lives of women and girls.

COVID-19 presented challenges to the programme, across Africa. It has made worse the already bad situation of early pregnancies, early marriages, school dropouts, and physical abuse among other social ills. However, initial strategies in technological innovation in the execution of Spotlight activities and programs have been adopted. As a result of COVID-19 most countries harnessed technology to reach out to communities through social media and other platforms and this is a commendable development. With the support of SIARP, country level studies should be conducted to alleviate negative impacts of COVID-19.

To strengthen the next Learning Event, a pre-event survey may help gather data from relevant implementing agencies.

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Published by: African Union Commission (AUC) and United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)

Implemented by: African Union Commission Women, Gender and Youth Directorate, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Contact: Lindiwe Ngwenya, African Union – Women, Gender and Youth Directorate (WGYD) and Dr. Godwin Hlatshwayo, UN WOMEN

**African Union, Department of Information  
Communications**

**Contact: Doreen Apollos**

**UN Women, Program Coordinator, Spotlight Initiative  
Africa Regional Program**

**Contact: Azmera Kassahun**

