



Spotlight Initiative

ANNUAL NARRATIVE PROGRAMME REPORT

PROGRAMME TITLE: LIBERIA SPOTLIGHT INITIATIVE

PROGRAMME START DATE: 01 JANUARY 2019

REPORTING PERIOD: 01 JANUARY 2022 – 31 DECEMBER 2022

<p>Programme Title & Programme Number</p> <p>Programme Title: Liberia Spotlight Initiative</p> <p>MPTF Office Project Reference Number:¹ 00112285</p>	<p>Priority regions/areas/localities for the programme</p> <p>The Programme targeted five out of fifteen counties in Liberia: Nimba, Grand Gedeh, Lofa, Grand Cape Mount, and Montserrado. These are prioritized because of the high prevalence of SGBV/HPs and fewer SRHRs.</p> <p>In Phase II, the elimination of the FGM component is expanded to an additional six FGM-practicing counties: Bong, Gbarpolu, Bong, Margibi, Grand Bassa, and River Cess covering the total of 11 out of 15 counties in Liberia.</p> <p>See the map here.</p>
<p>Recipient Organization(s)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - UN-Women - UNFPA - UNDP - UNICEF and - OHCHR 	<p>Key Partners</p> <p>Government of Liberia partners:</p> <p>Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MOGCSP); Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MFDP); Ministry of Education (MOE); Ministry of Health (MOH); Ministry of Justice (MOJ); Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), Ministry of Youth and Sports (MOYS), Ministry of Information, Cultural Affairs and Tourism (MICAT); Law Reform Commission (LRC); Independent National Human Rights Commission (INHRC), Liberian Board of Midwives and Nurses (LBMN), and National Council of Chiefs and Elders (NACCEL).</p> <p>Programme partnered with civil society organizations, including national and local/grassroots organizations, and women’s rights organizations – see Annex C</p>

¹ The Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF) Office Project Reference Number is the same number as the one on the Notification message. It is also referred to as “Project ID” on the project’s factsheet page the [MPTF Office GATEWAY](#).

Programme Cost (US\$)			Programme Start and End Dates	
Total Phase I budget, and (where OSC approved) Phase II budget as per the Spotlight CPD/RPD: Phase I: 15,844,000 USD Phase II: 6,790,286 USD			Start Date: 01.01.2019.	
Phase I and (where OSC approved) Phase II Spotlight funding: ¹ 22,634,286 USD.			End Date: 31.12.2023*.	
Agency Contribution: 3,586,637 USD			*The National Steering Committee held 08 December 2022 approved a no-cost extension up to 31 December 2023	
Spotlight Funding and Agency Contribution by Agency:				
Name of RUNO	Spotlight Phase I (+ II, where OSC approved) (USD)	UN Agency Contributions (USD)		
UNDP	\$4,615,415	\$1,339,844		
UNFPA	\$6,208,800	\$722,328		
UNICEF	\$2,470,807	\$714,423		
UN-Women	\$7,917,460	\$311,985		
OHCHR	\$1,421,804	\$498,057		
TOTAL: 26, 220,923 USD			Report Submitted By:	
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¹ The Spotlight Contribution refers to the amount transferred to the Recipient UN Organizations, which is available on the [MPTF Office GATEWAY](#).

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Acronym List

AfDB	African Development Bank
b	boys
BOS	Business Operations Strategy
CBO	Community-based organization
CPS	Comprehensive Prevention Strategy
CS-NRG	Civil Society National Reference Group
CBOs	Community Based Organizations
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DSA	Daily Subsistence Allowance
DVA	Domestic Violence Act
ECA	European Court of Auditors
EU	European Union
EUDEL	European Union Delegation to Liberia
EVAWG	Ending Violence Against Women and Girls
f	female
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
g	girls
GBV	Gender-based violence
GEWE	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
GLS	Global Learning Symposium
GOL	Government of Liberia
HPs	Harmful Practices
HRG	Human Rights and Gender
IMS	Information Management System
LGBTQIA	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/ questioning (ones' s sexual or gender identity), intersex, and asexual/aromantic/ agender persons
LNOB	Leaving No-One Behind
LNP	Liberia National Police
LRC	Law Reform Commission
LSI	Liberia Spotlight Initiative
LTA	Long-Term Agreement
LWEP	Liberia Women Empowerment Project
m	male / men
MOGCSP	Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection
MIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs
MICAT	Ministry of Information, Cultural Affairs and Tourism
MOE	Ministry of Education
MFDP	Ministry of Finance and Development Planning
MOH	Ministry of Health
MCH	Maternal and child health
MOJ	Ministry of Justice
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NACCEL	National Council of Chiefs and Elders of Liberia
NGOs	Non-governmental organizations.
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
OMT	Operations Management Team
OSC	One-stop Centre
PMCU	Program Management and Coordination Unit
PSEA	Prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse
PYCOSI	Progressive Youth for Community Safety Initiative
RC	Resident Coordinator
RCO	Resident Coordinator's Office
RUNOs	Recipient United Nations Organizations

SBCC	Social and Behaviour Change Communication
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
SIARP	Spotlight Initiative's Africa Regional Program
SOP	Standard Operating Procedures
SRHR	Sexual and reproductive health rights
SVRI	Sexual Violence Research initiative
TBD	To be determined
UN	United Nations
UFDUM	United Funding and Development for Underage Mothers
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDSS	United Nations Department for Safety and Security
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UN RC	United Nations Resident Coordinator
UNSDCF	UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
UN-Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
VAWG/ HP	Violence Against Women and Girls and Harmful Practices
V&H Centre	Vocational and Heritage Centre
VSL	Village Savings and Loans
w	women
WACPS	Women and Child Protection Services
WB	World Bank
WG	Working group
WHRDs	Women Human Rights Defenders

Executive Summary

In 2022, the Spotlight Initiative in Liberia has strategically positioned the elimination of violence against women and girls (EVAWG) and harmful practices (HP) and the promotion of sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) on the national agenda as a matter of accountability for the Government of Liberia to citizens and the international community.

The constant engagement of key stakeholders (government, traditional leaders, women-led civil society organizations, and beneficiaries) in activities and in managing implementation path and challenges has proven to be an effective strategy in addressing sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and Harmful Practices (HP) and promoting sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR).

The **ownership of the Spotlight interventions by the Government of Liberia** is creating a remarkable difference in preventing rape, domestic violence (DV) and female genital mutilation (FGM). The Liberia Government's political commitment to address issues of gender-based violence (GBV) was reconfirmed at the highest level on several occasions by the **presence and statements of HE President George Manneh Weah** and the engagement of **Vice-President and Minister of Gender, Children and Social Protection**, and **Minister of Justice** at national and international platforms.



Photo 1(left) and Photo 2(right): H.E. Dr. George Manneh Weah, President of the Republic of Liberia, signing Spotlight Initiative T-Shirt “I am #WithHer” and posing with the UN Resident Coordinator, H.E. Niels Scott, and the UN staff in One UN House on the occasion of celebration of UN Day on 24 Oct 2022. Photo Credit: UNICEF/Sonnie M. Morris.

Remarkable advances were recorded in all six pillars of the Spotlight Initiative in Liberia, especially in the steps leading towards the **legislation to outlaw FGM, protect human rights defenders and mainstream gender and human rights** in legislative processes, as well as in changes in attitudes and behaviours, services provision, and building movement and capacity of women's civil society organizations.

A historical shift came from the traditional leaders who signed a **policy paper on the temporary, three-year suspension on Sande Practices** in Liberia on 04 February 2022, making a powerful promise to Liberian women and girls that FGM would be eliminated from traditional education.

This shift culminated during 16 Days of Activism Campaign with the visit of **Jaha Dukureh, UN Women Goodwill Ambassador for Africa, on ending FGM and Child Marriage**, who witnessed female zoes handing over their cutting tools and traditional schools registration certificates to the **Chairperson of the National Council of Chiefs and Elders (NACCEL)** who committed to the elimination of FGM in Liberia. This event marked a robust milestone in attitudes and norms change among the traditional leaders who are now leading the FGM elimination efforts.

The Spotlight Initiative Programme has contributed to the enhanced advocacy for legislation to outlaw female genital mutilation (FGM), and "**An Act Prohibiting Female Genital Mutilation 2022**" was submitted to the Plenary of the House of Representatives for consideration in June 2022. A draft **Human Rights Defender's Protection Policy** paper was produced to address threats, abuse and risks of intimidation and discrimination faced by human rights advocates, especially advocates of "less accepted" human rights such LGBTIQ+ persons rights.

Over 40 members of the National GBV Taskforce from government ministries and CSOs informed the design of the comprehensive **National GBV Accountability framework**, a document aimed to enhance coordinated information flow on SGBV/ HP and SRHR among relevant government institutions.

At the institutional level, key government institutions and their CSO partners have improved organisational and personnel capacity to integrate gender and human rights into plans, policies, law reforms, and law enforcement processes. For example, 230 members (116f, 114m) of **the Criminal Justice Chain Actors' Forum** from various institutions such as line ministries, police, courts, CSOs, and traditional leaders now facilitate the timely delivery of justice and police services to survivors of SGBV at the local level because they now know how to record, document, analyse, evaluate, coordinate and publish GBV cases, GBV data and statistics and handle domestic violence (DV) cases in accordance with gender equality and women's rights principles.

A massive campaign to implement the **Social Behavioural Change (SBC) Communication Strategy and the Comprehensive Prevention Strategy (CPS)** developed in 2021 reached out to members of 50 target communities resulting in observed positive behaviour change at the community level towards SGBV, harmful practices and SRHR issues.

For example, Sinje public school in Grand Cape Mount County, bordering Sierra Leone, **recorded a 50 per cent increase in girls' school enrolment in 2022**. Spotlight Initiative, contributed to this result to a larger extent by deploying two training manuals to enhance parents' comprehension of harmful practices and violence and parents' role in the advancement of children's rights to survival, participation, growth and development, and children's best interests.

Media outlets showcase improved reporting on gender issues **making news more gender-sensitive**: the programme recorded 956 stories positively reflecting on gender issues. Simultaneously, during the broadcasting of the "**Let the Women Talk**" programme, call-in women reported to being more aware of women's rights to own and inherit land and property and to report domestic violence.

Despite some resolved difficulties in the power supply, **DNA machines ran 31 sample analyses and provided crucial evidence** and immediate access to justice for survivors, including the case involving pregnant survivor and several suspects.

The newly designed digital **GBV incident reporting tool** was created and rolled out to service providers representing a prelude to the construction and launch of the integrated and comprehensive GBVIMS system, which will enable digital reporting. This first step in **digitalised gender-based violence information management system (GBV-IMS)** supported the national gender machinery to monitor service delivery to SGBV survivors and to publish newsletters, annual SGBV report and other digital content to inform GEWE policies and programming.

Overall, 22,558 individuals (7,479 women, 11,342 girls, 1,235 men, and 2,502 boys) accessed multi-sectoral **healthcare, psychosocial, legal, and protection services**. Exactly 115 service providers apply now **Standard Operating Procedures in the Clinical Management of rape survivors** and offer **Integrated Essential Service Package** tools across all 27 health facilities.

The official records demonstrate a reduction in the number of children sent to **prison/ detention by 16.3%** as they come in contact with laws as victims, witnesses, or perpetrators of violence or criminal acts. During 2022, a total of 967 children (552f /415m) benefited from **children-friendly short-stay facilities** renovated earlier by the Spotlight Initiative.

Exactly 500 cases of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) were reported by pupils and addressed by authorities after 95,000 adolescents benefited from awareness raising and education including the Comprehensive Sexuality Manual implemented in collaboration with the Ministry of Education.

In 2022, a **decrease was recorded in repeated rape offenders by 11.3% as a result** of the initiatives support to improve social coping, rehabilitation, and economic livelihood of perpetrators of VAWG in prison facilities. Refugees and host community relations improved Nimba county after 25 housing units were completed to support both survivors of SGBV and enable durable solutions for both refugee and local communities.

Building a strong **CSO movement** to address societal gendered norms also continued in 2022 when a total of 32 grassroots women-led CBOs who received small grants from the Spotlight Initiative now participate at county SGBV task force meetings, conduct monthly SGBV awareness campaigns, including monitoring and reporting potential abuses at the community, all of which strengthened women's CSOs visibility and role in the SGBV referral pathway and fostered better relationships between SGBV stakeholders. These women's rights CBOs are key actors who coordinate SGBV referral pathways and advocate for the rights of marginalized and vulnerable persons, especially those living with HIV/AIDs, refugees, and persons with disabilities to fully implement Leaving No-one Behind principle (LNOB). For example, Grand Gedeh women **CSO representative was elected a County Council Chair** after eight youth and rural women groups intensified efforts to advocate with county authorities to incorporate SGBV/HP/SRHR into county development planning and funding.

After the **alternative livelihoods component** for traditional female zoes was expanded to additional six counties, and after the 16 Days of Activism Campaign and NACCEL public announcement of the FGM elimination was launched, the expectations and demand from female zoes are higher than available resources and more affordable ways of creating alternative sources of income and promoting cultural and heritage values without FGM are under consideration.

The implementation of the Spotlight Initiative in 2022 has demonstrated that prevention and response to SGBV and harmful practices and the promotion of SRHR are **complex issues and require a comprehensive approach, efforts, and resources** from all stakeholders and partners beyond just the Spotlight Initiative. As a flagship program and a demonstration fund for the Development Reform of the United Nations, Spotlight in Liberia is piloting important lessons on multiple UN agencies working as OneUN together towards a common goal in strategic and coordinated partnership with governments, the EU, and civil society organizations.

Spotlight Initiative's partnership with **the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MOGCS)**, which leads programming and coordination with seven other government ministries and stakeholders, continues to be good. Aside from continued dialogue and partnership with the **European Union Delegation** to Liberia and **women's civil society organizations**, as well as continued conversation with all **development partners** and **financial institutions** MOGCSP leadership and coordination represents a strong foundation for synergies in ongoing and future programmes for gender-equal Liberia.

Contextual Shifts and Implementation Status

The year 2022 in Liberia was marked by overall political stability and a high-level political will to close the gaps in gender equality. Positive developments were recorded in the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) in the political, economic, and social spheres of life.

Through the passage of the '**New Elections Law**' mandating a 30% mandatory political party gender quota and leadership by the **Senate and the House of Representatives**, women's full and effective equal participation and equal opportunity for leadership at all levels of decision-making in terms of political, economic, and public life was highly celebrated. The proposed bill, **submitted to the President of Liberia in October 2022 for assent**, is a significant milestone in the history of gender equality in Liberia and a ray of hope for Liberian women to overcome their low representation in decision-making regarding issues affecting women's human rights.

Liberia also continued to experience the impact of **heightened global uncertainties** with differentiated effects on women and girls. These included commodity price shocks associated with the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the related decline in the supply of major staple foods, and skyrocketing fuel prices.

In addition, climate change and weather unpredictability led to low agricultural productivity in Liberia, which highly relies on imported rice, a key staple food for the majority of the Liberian population, especially for 39% of the most vulnerable rural and 13% of urban people who are living in the edge of poverty. Low purchasing power and vulnerability to food insecurity constitute a risk

factor for women and girls in Liberia to experience sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in the quest for survival and to be subjected to the harmful practices of FGM and child marriage, which economically benefit perpetrators. This vulnerability requires climate-resilient seed types, investments in climate-resilient infrastructure and machinery, prevention of soil erosion, enhanced water management, and effective techniques and technologies to control pests and diseases.

A key milestone in the journey to end VAWG in 2022 included a critical increase in development partners' funding for GEWE in Liberia through the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social protection (MOGCSP). The World Bank approved a financing package of USD 44,6 million (\$17.80 million grant and \$26.80 million concessional credit) for **Liberia Women Empowerment Project (LWEP)** aimed at improving economic livelihoods and access to social services for women and girls, fostering positive social norms, and strengthening the government's capacity to advance and monitor women and girls' empowerment in Liberia. The project was greatly inspired by the Spotlight Initiative and numerous inputs from the Spotlight team which, focused on ensuring the sustainability of the Spotlight Programme gains in strengthening the coordination role of the MOGCSP through sustained financing.

In the reporting year, strong commitments and advocacy for the abolition of FGM were made as part of a massive campaign conducted by the **UN Women Goodwill Ambassador** for Ending FGM and child marriage in Africa to support Liberia in efforts to secure an environment free from harmful practices for women and girls.

The most notable commitment was made by Chief Zanzan Karwor, Chairperson of National Council of Chiefs and Elders (NACCEL), at the launch of the 16 Days of Activism Campaign, during which he pledged to ban the practice of FGM in Montserrado County by January 2023 and retrieve all implements and licenses issued to traditional zoes¹ in Montserrado County. The campaign provided an opportunity for various stakeholders to call for Liberia to embrace the concept of '**Initiation without Mutilation**', whereby young girls can undergo the cultural rites of passage into womanhood without being subjected to FGM.

The campaign also led to an increased demand to outlaw FGM through the passage of the anti-FGM Bill, and a demand for accountability to all stakeholders to act against FGM within respective mandates. As part of the anti-FGM campaign, during the launch of the 16 Days of Activism Campaign the Vocational and Heritage (V&H) Centre constructed by the Spotlight Initiative in Sonkay Town (Montserrado) was handed over to the Government of Liberia and NACCEL. This centre is one of the four facilities constructed by Spotlight Initiative to serve as hubs for alternative economic livelihoods for former practitioners of FGM, and venues for socio-cultural heritage of traditional communities, including alternative rites of passage which exclude FGM.

¹ Female traditional practitioners called zoes, who lead bush schools for girls, perform female genital mutilation (FGM) and act as birth attendants.

Reporting of SGBV cases has remained high in 2022 and is expected results of the continuous awareness raising on SGBV prevention and more streamlined reporting conducted by the National SGBV Taskforce, inclusive of national stakeholders and the Spotlight Initiative team. According to data from the MOGCSP GBV-IMS (2022), a total of 2,034 perpetrators (13f; 2,021m) have committed 1,975 SGBV cases reported in 2022, which is 214 cases more than those reported in the previous year. The most devastating trend is that 66 percent of all reported cases are rape cases, where 65% of all survivors are children below 15 more specifically 63,5% or 1,256 are girls and 34 or 1,7 percent are boys.

The LSI implementation remained on track with an average implementation rate of 88 %. A no-cost extension for implementing the LSI until the end of 2023 was approved by the National Steering Committee to ensure a smooth completion of ongoing activities and operational program closure.

Implementation progress by outcome area:

Spotlight Initiative - Outcome areas ***underlined RUNO indicates pillar lead	Implementation progress as of 31 Dec 2022¹
Outcome 1: Legal and Policy Framework (<u>OHCHR</u>)	85%
Outcome 2: Institutions – (<u>UNDP</u> , UN Women)	97%
Outcome 3: Prevention and Norm Change (<u>UN Women</u> , UNICEF, UNFPA)	85%
Outcome 4: Quality Services (UNICEF, <u>UNFPA</u> , UNDP)	89%
Outcome 5: Data (<u>UNFPA</u> , UN Women)	80%
Outcome 6: Women’s Movement (<u>UN Women</u> and UNDP)	93%
TOTAL	88%

The Liberia Spotlight Initiative (LSI) was implemented in compliance with internationally agreed upon protocols to prevent the spread of COVID-19 with moderate distractions in operations. Extra caution was exercised by Recipient United Nations Organizations (RUNOs) and other members of the UN Country Team (UNCT) during activities requiring mass gathering in targeted communities. Measures applied included hands hygiene, contact tracing and social distancing measures during town hall meetings, engagements with schools, judiciary, security, local government, CSOs and health actors. Access to vaccination for all was also promoted and facilitated.

¹ An average percentage of expenditures from the Program start to end of December 2022 against the budget for each outcome.

Programme Governance and Coordination

The LSI was governed and managed through different structures including the National Steering Committee (NSC), the Civil Society National Reference Group (CS-NRG), the Technical Working Group (TWG), and pillar working groups. Only six months after the Minister of Gender, Children and Social Protection convened high-level consultations on the Liberia Spotlight Initiative to establish “Framework for Success”, a non-legally binding Joint Statement: Strengthening Development Cooperation” was signed by the GOL, development partners (DPs), CSOs and the private sector in Monrovia on 14 April 2022. This document spells out the commitment of all parties to strengthen coordination, increase alignment, improve results, and promote mutual accountability in development coordination and remains guiding document for joint programming.

a) National Steering Committee (NSC)

In 2022, the Liberia Spotlight Initiative National Steering Committee (NSC) maintained the same structure and composition as the previous year¹. The NSC continued to guide and oversee the program’s implementation while ensuring the accountability of partners and expanding partnerships for dialogue on issues affecting the rights of women and girls in Liberia.

In 2022, the NSC held three meetings (21 April, 25 August, and 08 December 2022) attended by representatives of the World Bank (WB) and African Development Bank (AfDB) and the Minister of Finance and Development Planning (MFDP). The presence of the financial institutions reaffirmed the development partners’ and the GOL’s determination to prioritize women’s rights and the elimination of SGBV as a backbone of the country’s development alongside economic stability and growth priorities.

Furthermore, NSC’s guidance to the Spotlight Initiative Technical Committee led to improvements in reporting to internal and external audiences and guided solutions on challenging aspects of the implementation, including the running of the DNA machines for evidence gathering, delays in the construction of vocational and heritage centres for traditional practitioners, and documentation of the Spotlight Programme impact on communities. With three representatives in the NSC and a standing item on the NSC Agenda, the Civil Society National Reference Group (CS-NRG) continued to bring field voices to decision-makers and play strong advocacy, monitoring, and advisory role in national policy dialogue on FGM and SGBV elimination, leaving no one behind, and the role of men and boys in EVAWG and HP.

¹ Please see the [Liberia 2021 Annual Report](#) p.16-17 with a detailed description of the NSC composition.



Participants in the National Steering committee meetings on 20 April 2022/ Photo 3 (left) and NC in session on 08 Dec 2022 Photo 4 (right):

Key decisions taken in 2022 by the NSC included the approval of the: 2021 Annual Report, 2022 Annual Work Plan, Women Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) allocations to Liberia to complement LSI geographic coverage and partners' engagement, and the no-cost extension of the Spotlight Programme up to 31 December 2023.

b) Civil Society National Reference Group (CS-NRG)

During 2022, CS-NRG M&E Consultant/ Facilitator, the UN RCO and EUDEL Technical Focal Point continued to support operations of the Civil Society National Reference Group (CS-NRG), which maintained membership of 12 individuals, nationals experts on women's rights, elimination of VAWG and HP, and promotion of SRHR from prominent Liberian feminist, women's rights, women-led CSOs and grassroots women's networks, national women's peacebuilding umbrella organizations, rural women, young women, religion-based, persons with disability organizations, HeForShe Champions and groups representing vulnerable identities/ LGBTQI+.

Under the newly adopted Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), the number of CS-NRG members decreased from 14 to 12 individuals. SOP allowed members to be released or excused from their duties if personal priorities influenced non-attendance or conflicts of interest circumstances. The elections process in case of the replacement of the outgoing representatives of persons with disabilities in the CS-NRG was pending the completion of elections by the National Forum of PWD at the end of December 2022.

In the reporting year, under the overall CS-NRG Spotlight Initiative Programme Budget worth 115,000 USD, the revised 2020 Annual Work Plan focused on four key areas: assurance of the CS-NRG functioning and work, coordination, advocacy, and monitoring of the Spotlight Initiative implementation.

Aside from numerous online consultations and meetings, the Liberia CS-NRG held six (6) consultative working sessions to finalize and validate CS-NRG Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), develop 2022 Annual Work Plan, monitoring concept notes, advocacy strategy, and to prepare for the representation at the National Steering Committee and prepare one press conference.

Even though it took almost six months to conclude the collaborative process and consultations with all UNCT members, the production of simplified administrative rules and procedures around the Financial Compensation per Deliverables policy was successfully designed and implemented starting from June 2022.

With the support from CS-NRG M&E Consultant/ Facilitator, CS-NRG members effectively delivered on all ten (10) outputs specified in their work plan. One of the milestone outputs is Liberia CS-NRG Monitoring Scorecard which contextualized 15 out of 26 indicators to monitor the performance and improve the implementation of the Spotlight Initiative.

Deliberations from numerous online consultations, six (6) working sessions, and (2) two CS-NRG monitoring visits conducted in all five (5) LSI counties in April and November 2022 were effectively translated into policy documents and recommendations on Leaving no one behind (LNOB) policy localization, Inclusive funding and work with grassroots and women's rights community-based organizations in Liberia, and advocacy for women's rights at the grassroots level.

CS-NRG reports and recommendations presented to the NSC on three occasions stirred the action from the Government of Liberia and NACCEL to initiate the monitoring of activities for raising awareness of traditional communities on the three-year moratorium on FGM and enhance the ban's implementation in counties that are still practising FGM in Liberia. For example, a CS-NRG press conference was held after an 11-year-old girl was forcibly subjected to FGM in a secreta Sande society, almost bled to death and was saved thanks to the action of the religious leader who reported the case¹.

Thanks to a diversity of its members, CS-NRG easily reached out to CSO Secretariats and vulnerable groups during monitoring visits: people with disability, people living with HIV/AIDSs, refugees, and elderly women. Consequently, Liberia CS-NRG has prepared Twelve Recommendations for improving engagements with women's grassroots organizations in the prevention of and response to SGBV and a Report with recommendations on 'Leaving No-One Behind' (LNOB), which focuses on the protection of LGBTQI+ persons and the need for their equal access to opportunities. Lastly, CS-NRG members collected human interest stories from the field and piloted two newly designed online data collection forms to collect evidence and document Spotlight impact in Liberia.

c) Inter-agency coordination, technical committees, and other governance mechanisms

The Spotlight Initiative Programme in Liberia continued to play a strategic role in demonstrating the UN's commitment and action to fast track the achievement of the 2030 Development Agenda and UN reform. As a tool for UN Reform, Spotlight Initiative Program was the part of the Liberia SDG Leadership Lab held from 16-18 Nov 2022 with the goal to build shared vision and collective

¹ See the newspaper articles [here](#) (Front Page Africa, October 19, 2022) and [here](#) (Front Page Africa, October 27, 2022).

will among the Liberia UN Country Team to partner with the international community and the government to activate a transformative shift on Liberia's path to sustainable development.

this Spotlight Initiative Program role in highlighting integrated programming and implementation was amplified through the membership of the Programme Management and Coordination Unit (PMCU) members in various UNCT working groups (WG): Interagency Programming Team (IAPT), Gender-Theme Group (GTG), Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) WG, One UN M&E WG, and One UN Communication WG, which meet quarterly or on an ad-hoc basis. Through this participation, the Spotlight Initiative was able to work closely with the UN Country Team (UNCT) working groups in the process of implementing the gender mainstreaming strategy of the UNCT and to ensure results are reported under UNSDCF.

d) Use of UN Reform inter-agency tools

Spotlight Initiative in Liberia continued to benefit from the UNCT Operations Management Team (OMT) implementation of the Business Operations Strategy (BOS), which permits all UNCT members to use and purchase products and services through Long-Term Agreements (LTA) established by a single UN agency. The adoption and implementation of the BOS enable the United Nations to negotiate discounts and lower prices for fuel, vehicle maintenance and repair, car washing, and internet and also helps to harmonise project transaction costs such as daily subsistence allowance (DSA) and transportation rates for local participants and beneficiaries.

In addition to being collocated in one office under the UN Resident Coordinator (UN RC), Spotlight Initiative benefits from a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on shared common premises and services utilisation such as the office space, water, power, cleaning, internet and Information Technology, Medical dispensary/ Clinic and security advisory services UN DSS to all UN Agencies in Liberia.

Likewise, the UNCT and its various OneUN working groups meetings on interagency programming, monitoring and evaluation, and gender served as platforms for the Spotlight Initiative Programme to access the most critical information and tools to facilitate strategic program planning, implementation and dissemination of the lessons learned.

Programme Partnerships

a) Government

To secure success, ownership and sustainability of the Spotlight Initiative, the Programme has forged strong partnerships with the Government of Liberia through the MOGCSP, the government lead and coordinator of all activities related to addressing SGBV, harmful practices and SRHR. Aside from the MOGCSP which remained key actor to fostering interventions in favour of women, children and teenage girls, seven other ministries were engaged in the implementation of the Spotlight Initiative as government partners grounded in one or more pillars of the Spotlight Programme as focal points critical for programme coherent implementation, coordination and sustainability.



Photo 5. Minister of Gender, Children and Social Protection of Liberia, Honourable Williametta Saydee-Tarr (left) with the microphone), giving opening remarks in the presence of (from left to right) EU Ambassador H.E. Laurent Delahousse, UN RC H.E. Niels Scott and H.E. Vice-President of Liberia, Jelew Taylor and members of the diplomatic corps, Monrovia, 22 February 2022. Photo Credit: UN-Women/ Gloria Gayani.

When a temporary, three-year suspension on Sande Practices in Liberia was proclaimed in February 2022 by the Vice President in the presence of the Minister of Internal Affairs, Minister of Gender, Children and Social Protection, the Government of Liberia handed over fifteen vehicles and motorbikes to enable security and justice authorities to mobilize more quickly and to respond to incidents, collect evidence, and reach out to SGBV survivors and communities identified as SGBV hotspots in Montserrado, the most populated county of Liberia.

Partnership with the MOGCSP bolstered the sustained high-level commitment from the Office of the President and Office of the Vice President. In his September address to the UN General Assembly, the President reaffirmed combating SGBV and HP as well as promoting SRHR as top government priorities. During the UN Day commemoration in October 2022 and the President's visit to OneUN House, it was emphasised that highly effective partnerships under the Spotlight Initiative programme play a crucial role in the government's efforts to combat SGBV and promote gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE).

Similarly, the Vice-President of Liberia frequently engaged with the programme on topics considered the most sensitive in Liberian society - abolition of FGM practice. Her presence and position on FGM abolition served as a reminder that of FGM limits girls' access to education and causes poor health outcomes and the importance of alternative livelihoods solutions for traditional zoes and the role of media in raising awareness in communities.

The Vice-President attended a ceremony on February 22, 2022, to promote the Traditional Leaders' Policy Declaration on the Temporary Suspension of Sande Practises in Liberia. The Chairperson of the National Council of Chiefs and Elders, the Minister of Interior Affairs, and the Minister of Women, Children, and Social Protection signed a six-count policy document in Gbarnga, Bong County, on 4 February 2022, temporarily prohibiting FGM for three years. Following the NACCEL commitment, the Vice-President attended a historic event during the 16

Days of Activism in Sonkay Town, where traditional leaders agreed to hand over their “cutting tools” and traditional schools’ registration certificates.

In accordance with the coordination function of the MOGCSP, the Deputy Minister for Gender convenes and chairs the monthly National GBV Taskforce meetings, a forum for collaborative reporting, planning, and addressing diverse concerns and priorities from the field to which Spotlight Initiative PMCU participates. In parallel, the National GBV Taskforce WhatsApp group facilitates a dynamic exchange of information to fast-track and improve implementation and coordination on cases. During 2022, Spotlight Initiative PMCU and national GBV Taskforce held two joint discussions (June & Nov/2022) to create collaborative contributions to the LSI annual report and results, annual work plan, to define and address challenges, and identify future planning recommendations.



Photo 6: Joint Technical Committee meeting, June 2022, chaired by the Deputy Minister for Gender, Photo Credit: UNRCO/ Programme Coordinator



Photo 7: Joint Programme Review Workshop, 30 Nov - 01 Dec 2022, chaired by the Deputy Minister for Gender. Photo Credit: UNRCO/ Programme Coordinator

The Spotlight Initiative also partnered with the Liberia National Police (LNP) through the Women and Child Protection Section (WACPS) and SGBV Crimes Unit on issues of security and justice for SGBV survivors including children, as well as with the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) and the Judiciary, to foster survivors’ and child justice across the country with technical support and guidance from RUNOs.

b) Civil Society

Existing and new strategic partnerships with key CSOs were maintained and strengthened for improving advocacy, accountability, and service delivery to SGBV survivors. Through partnerships with grassroots CSOs in the Spotlight target communities, the Programme was able to scale up interventions to prevent and respond to SGBV/SEA and HPs perpetrated against children, especially adolescent girls, strengthen local and national child protection systems and community-based structures such as GBV Observatories, Child Welfare Committees and GBV taskforces, and work in collaboration with the MOGCSP to cultivate partnerships and engagements with professional associations (National Social Work Board and the Association of Liberian Social

Workers) for the implementation of recommendations from the Social Service Workforce Assessment under MOGCSP.

Through five CSO Secretariats previously established in five counties of Liberia, the Spotlight implementation in 2022 was able to expand its reach to groups more likely to be targeted or affected by gender-based discrimination, SGBV, harmful practices and SRHR violations, including persons living with HIV/AIDS, LGBTQI+ persons, women in the sex industry, and persons with disabilities. In 2022, RUNOs reports indicate that majority of these groups (32) have received grants from the Spotlight Initiative and are in the process of building strong women’s movements that will sustain the work initiated by the Spotlight Programme.

c) European Union Delegation

The Delegation of European Union (EUDEL) to Liberia continued to be a reliable partner deeply engaged in dialogue and guidance around program implementation, initiating solutions around identified challenges and supporting program events and CS-NRG advocacy efforts.

Besides the EUDEL’s active engagement in the programme through high-level coordination and dialogue in the NSC, the technical level partnership was strengthened with the arrival of the new EU Delegation to Liberia (EUDEL) Spotlight Technical Focal Point, and the visit of the European Court of Auditors (ECA) to Liberia. The EUDEL regular participation in monthly or bi-monthly PMCU meetings continue to contribute to the improvement of the Spotlight Programme plans and implementation. The EUDEL has participated in several media activities including radio talk shows and the press conference of the CS-NRG around forces initiation case.

In 2022, the EUDEL verbally committed to avail a small-scale fund allocation to gender equality programmes in Liberia in the post-Spotlight period. While the new programme’s scope might slightly differ from the scope of the Spotlight Programme, it is expected to build on gains made by the ongoing programme in preventing and responding to SGBV, HP and promoting SRHR.



Photo 8: Joint Radio Show around elimination of harmful practices and Spotlight Initiative Programme, 10 October 2022, Monrovia, see participants list below¹. Photo Credit/ UNRCO.

Photo 9 CS-NRG Press Conference² 26 Oct 2022, attended by the EU Ambassador H.E. Laurent Delahousse, Monrovia, Photo credit/ UNRCO

d) Cooperation with other (non-RUNO) UN agencies (if applicable)

Cooperation with non-RUNO agencies was organized around several One UN platforms such as Executive Management Meetings, UN Country Team Meetings as well as within other OneUN Platforms including Gender-Theme Group, One UN Monitoring and Evaluation Working groups, One UN Communication Working Group and Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) Taskforce.

Those platforms continue to enable Spotlight to share experience on applicable tools and lessons from integrated programming.

e) Other Partners and resource mobilization (if applicable)

Achievements of the Spotlight Programme in Liberia were greatly backed by the support from the Government of Sweden through its regular funding to RUNOs. Under this support, the UN Women Goodwill Ambassador on ending FGM and child marriage was able to start a massive campaign on ending FGM in Liberia. The campaign built on previous endeavours of the Spotlight Programme which resulted in a three-year suspension of FGM, and the Spotlight Programme's support to the progressive closure of "bush" schools in five FGM-practicing counties, the construction of V&H centres in four counties, and community awareness on FGM as a harmful practice.

Towards the end of the 2022, as a step for exiting the programme and building the sustainability of its results, a deeper dialogue was established with other development partners and financial institutions including United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the World Bank (WB) and African Development Bank (AfDB), to map out current and future GEWE programming in the country. The Mapping report is expected to provide entry points for the UN to collaborate and partner with major actors on GEWE, as well as consolidate the gains for more impactful results on EAW, HP and promotion of SRHR. UNRCO identified several new partnership opportunities with private sector following the RC's convening of the UN and Private Sector Round Table and launching Liberia SDG Lab exercise, both of which presented new modalities of collaboration and partnering with diverse partners and communities in Liberia.

¹ FEJAL-Female Journalists' Association of Liberia, organized a series of Radio Talk Shows as a part of the media campaign for the abolishment of FGM and promotion of women's rights. From left to right: EUDEL, Head of Political and Economic Governance, Mr. Jyrki Tornii; EUDEL Programme Officer for Gender, civil society and communication, Ms. Simona Camillini; UNRCO Programme Coordinator, Ms. Milica Turnic, and CS-NRG Co-Chair, Mr. Tamba J. F. Johnson. Photo Credit/ UN RCO Liberia.

² The CS-NRG organized a Press Conference calling for the government to protect women and girls against FGM after a 11-year-old girl was kidnaped and forcefully mutilated, and almost bled to death in Margibi, a non-Spotlight County. Photo Credit/ UN RCO Liberia.

Results

Capturing Broader Transformations Across Outcomes:

The Spotlight Programme in Liberia has adopted an integrated approach to promote SRHR and to address SGBV, and FGM, a harmful practices once considered a taboo and now the term that has entered public dialogue space in Liberia. Special boost to the anti-FGM movement happened under the technical coherence agency leadership, when a working group of Deputy Representatives of Spotlight RUNOs was established to deliberate and harmonize major cross-pillar interventions. Through this platform, all interventions addressing FGM through prevention, laws and policies, advocacy, awareness, service delivery and key community-based prevention platforms were mapped, harmonized, and led to a stronger advocacy campaign for ending FGM in Liberia.



Photo 10: Chief Zanzan Karwor (centre), Chairperson NACCEL, promising to abolish FGM in Liberia in a courtesy visit paid by the UN Women Goodwill Ambassador in November 2022. Photo Credit: UN-Women

A new concept of *'Initiation without Mutilation'* was introduced and embraced by all stakeholders, especially traditional leaders. The approach consists in promoting positive cultural heritage and traditions of communities for initiating young girls into adulthood and eliminating FGM from the processes.

The approach prompted the public commitment of Chief Zanzan Karwor, Chairperson of NACCEL, to initiate eradication of the FGM in Liberia starting in Montserrado County in January 2023, and the public renouncement of FGM by a Muslim community in Monrovia (through their Head Zoe, female traditional leader).

It is vital to emphasize that the convening and coordination role of the UN RC, remained critical of the Spotlight Initiative programme implementation and across pillars, including the presence of the UNRCO National UN Volunteer Specialist in four out of five counties. Their presence in field offices stirred the county-level coordination and monitoring enabling fast-tracking of cases and higher visibility of the Spotlight Initiative.

Reporting on the implementation of Participatory Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting (P-MER)

Liberia Spotlight Initiative Programme relied heavily on the CS-NRG monitoring and impact documenting role because due to budget constraints, the Participatory Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting (P-MER) models recommended by the PMER Guidance could not be implemented: Stakeholder analyses, Community scorecards or Citizens Report Cards, Outcome Harvesting, Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), SARAR approach¹, Beneficiary assessment (BA), the Most Significant Change (MSC), SASA Methodology² or Gender at Work Framework.³

CS-NRG participatory monitoring via focus groups and face-to-face interviews reached out across all Programme components across pillar and across RUNOs activities and enabled independent and objective perspective from the communities and CS-NRG experts made of key national feminist and women lead civil society organizations. The CS-NRG monitoring teams participated in awareness-raising activities, such as appearing as guests on several local radio talk shows to discuss the three-year suspension of FGM in Liberia, and conducted human interest stories interviews with some beneficiaries, including people with disabilities, survivors of SGBV, boys' networks, and traditional leaders.

After onboarding new UNRCO M&E Specialist, two (2) simple forms, for events and activity monitoring were developed and tested in Kobo Toolbox, free online web-based platform able to capture the effectiveness and efficiency of program activities by CS-NRG teams and PMCU staff.

Towards the year end the two forms were tested and have enabled users with smart phones (including in remote rural areas with no access to internet or telephone networks) to record events, workshops, meetings, conferences, statements, photos of beneficiaries and attendance lists as well as to record activity GPS coordinates, sex-disaggregated data about the number of participants, and identify in simple language what worked well, who were the beneficiaries, beneficiaries' opinions on the effectiveness and efficiency of activities, as well as their challenges and recommendations.

Unfortunately, only eight out of twenty-six trained Kobo users, (CS-NRG and PMCU staff) were able to use the forms and provide 22 monitoring records and 19 events records due to phone deficiencies.

¹ The acronym SARAR stands for the five attributes and capacities that are considered the minimum essentials for participation to be a dynamic and self-sustaining process: Self-esteem, Associative strength, Resourcefulness, Action planning and Responsibility. See details [here](#).

² See SASA toolbox available [here](https://raisingvoices.org/women/sasa-approach/) <https://raisingvoices.org/women/sasa-approach/>

³ See details for Gender at Work Framework [here](https://genderatwork.org/analytical-framework/): <https://genderatwork.org/analytical-framework/>

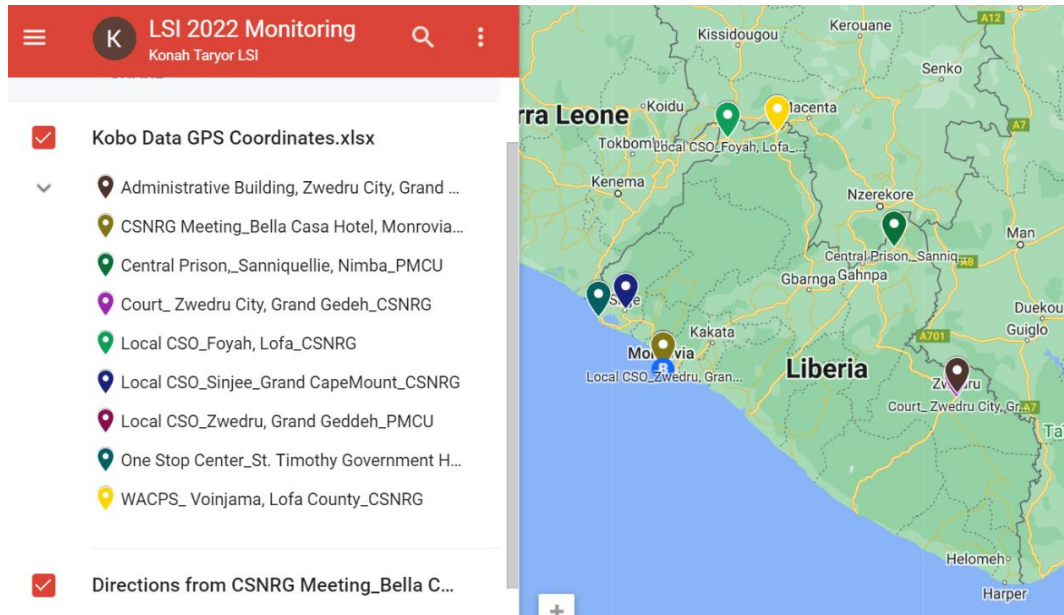


Photo 11: LSI Map of monitoring activities conducted by CS-NRG members in November 2022. Kobo Toolbox, Nov 2022. Developed by the LSI and tested by the CS-NRG and PMCU staff tracks down the GPS coordinates of monitoring sites and Liberia Spotlight Initiative activities.

After two monitoring missions to five counties, CS-NRG interviewed community members and CSO Secretariat members in accordance with the LNOB policy and their findings confirmed that:

- Communities are aware of SGBV, its impact on the life of survivors and families, and referral pathway and are actively working to reduce it.
- Within the referral pathway CSOs/CBOS confirmed to have established and maintain connections with local authorities.
- Small grants to CSOs significantly impacted people’s lives, attested by the human-interest stories and
- There are continued efforts being made to protect SGBV survivors and prosecute perpetrators.



Photo 12: CS-NRG monitoring mission members and ECOWAS Journalist meeting with CSO Secretariat representative in Salayea, Lofa County. Nov/2022; Photo credit: UNRCO

Capturing Change at Outcome Level

Outcome 1: Legal and Policy Framework

Through the implementation of the Spotlight Initiative in 2022, progress was made towards the adoption of laws and policies in line with international standards. In addition, the dissemination of relevant laws and policy statements has much contributed to the participation of community members, including male allies, in the prevention of underage girls' sexual abuse and reduction of domestic violence as reflected in collected testimonies.

Key achievements under this outcome include the following:

- A draft **Human Rights Defenders' Protection Policy** was produced in a consultative stakeholders' engagement held on 23-26 February and 10-11 March 2022 attended by 70 (42f, 28m) human rights defenders, women's human rights defenders (WHRD), INCHR, and government partners from the five (5) Spotlight Counties (Grand Gedeh, Grand Cape Mount, Lofa, Montserrado and Nimba). The policy was drafted to address threats, abuse and risks of intimidation and discrimination faced by human rights advocates in Liberia, especially those working on a range of less accepted rights issues, including FGM, rape and LGBTQI+ rights. The policy document is due to be validated by stakeholders and submitted to the cabinet for endorsement.
- A 5-year (2022- 2026) **results-focused strategic plan for the Association of Female Lawyers** of Liberia (AFELL) was produced to provide a strategic direction to the association's advocacy for the amendment of laws as well as policies and strategies to promote and protect human rights, including those aimed at ending violence especially against women, children, and marginalized groups. The strategic plan was developed in a two-day capacity development and strategic planning retreat conducted from the 2nd to the 3rd of September 2022 and attended by 40 (36f, 4m) lawyers and WHRDs. With a clear five-year strategic plan, AFFEL is expecting to improve the protection, promotion and advancement of the rights of women, children and persons from groups most at risk of gender-based marginalization and violence.
- Advocacy for the amendment of the Inheritance Law, the Domestic Violence Act and the adoption of the **Human Rights and Gender Checklist** was advanced with the leadership of the new Chairperson of the Women's Legislative Caucus (WLC).
- The Spotlight Programme has contributed to the enhanced **advocacy for a legislation to outlaw female genital mutilation (FGM)**. An explicit bill to unambiguously address FGM, "An Act Prohibiting Female Genital Mutilation 2022," was submitted on the 1st of July 2022 to the Plenary of the House of Representatives by Deputy Speaker J. Fonati Koffa. The Bill is currently at the level of the Joint Committee for review. A motion for lawmakers to consult their Constituents on the Bill was also passed. By the end of 2022, advocacy for passing the bill

was ongoing, including through engagements of the **UN Women’s Goodwill Ambassador on ending FGM and child marriage** with members of the upper and lower chambers of the Legislature, the National Council of chiefs and Elders, the Office of the Vice President and other law makers from different institutions.

- The gap in national capacities to advocate for policies, legislations and plans addressing SGBV and harmful practices as well as promoting SRHR was narrowed through the establishment of a **Human Rights and Gender Working Team** set up to strengthen the mainstreaming of gender and human rights into law reform processes in line with international standards. The HRG Working Team played a lead role in drafting the **Human Rights Defenders’ Protection Policy** and the **HRG Checklist**. The setup of this this working group was a result of a capacity building intervention conducted for national institutions working on the integration of gender and human rights standards and principles in the law attended by 30 representatives (17 f/ 13m) from the Law Reform Commission (LRC), the MOGCSP, MOJ, the Independent National Commission on Human Rights (INCHR) and women’s CSOs. A similar capacity building intervention was equally implemented for additional 85 (28f, 57m) for Nimba County development delegates, INCHR and CSO in a series of two-day trainings conducted in Ganta (Nimba County) from the 12th to the 13th of December 2022.

With the knowledge acquired and based on gender and human rights gaps identified from the County Development Resolution (county development plan for fiscal year) during the training, participants hope **to influence future years’ county development plans**.

Outcome 2: Institutions

The Liberia Spotlight Initiative has recorded significant progress in improving institutional and individual capacities to efficiently implement multisectoral programming approaches to planning, implementing and monitoring interventions aimed at preventing and responding to SGBV, HPs and SRHR-related issues at both national and subnational levels.

- A criminal Justice Chain Actors’ Forum established in four out of five counties serves as a platform for networking and sharing information and the timely delivery of justice and police services and responding to cases of SGBV and HPs. The forum brings together 230 (116f, 114m) criminal justice chain actors, approximately 55 members per county, from LNP, Courts, MOGCSP, MOH, MOE, MICAT, CSOs, and traditional leaders who now coordinate better delivery of justice and police services to SGBV survivors. Justice chain actors participating in the platform had earlier been trained on how to respond to SGBV and harmful practices effectively by MOH/SGBV Crimes Unit, and MOGCSP. The platform facilitated coordination through information sharing.
- Eleven (11) government institutions (headed by MOGCSP) have enhanced their gender analysis capacity through different capacity building initiatives implemented by the Spotlight Initiative in 2022. Accordingly, one hundred-nineteen (119) participants (54f, 65m) in these capacity-building initiatives, including 14 Gender County Coordinators, 100 officials from selected national institutions, and five (5) CSO staff acquired knowledge and understanding of

VAWG, including on the root causes, triggers and risk factors for domestic violence, GBV data analysis and documentation, as well as coordination and rapid reporting skills.

- Progress was made in promoting institutional accountability for SGBV prevention and response through availing relevant tools. One of such tools is an accountability framework document produced in 2022 to enhance the SGBV data collection approach and information flow among relevant government institutions. The accountability tool lays out a framework for responsibilities, funding, monitoring, and reporting on GBV issues across all sectors at the national level. By the end of 2022, the accountability framework document was pending validation for rollout and utilization by relevant institutions.
- With assistance from the Spotlight Initiative, 200 more women rights activists, including youth and rural women organisations, are using **advocacy skills to lead conversations with local authorities on incorporating SGBV/HP/SRHR into county development planning and funding**. These grassroots women rights activists and eight women rights groups are promoting awareness of SGBV/HP/SRHR concerns in county planning, which are expected to lead to greater financing for SGBV response and prevention, and women's involvement in decision-making. As a result of this advocacy, Ms. Choma M. Krayee, a Grand Gedeh County CSO actor, was elected County Council chair on December 31, 2022, and more women are likely to participate in county and district development plan approval and implementation.

Outcome 3: Prevention and Norms Change

In the reporting year, efforts in the prevention of SGBV and harmful practices have focused on the elimination of FGM as a negative traditional practice in Liberia. Three major changes were recorded in addressing the FGM practice: 1) the temporary suspension of the Sande Schools in line with the Government of Liberia and traditional practitioners' six-count policy statement suspending the practice of FGM for three years, including the replacement of four closed bush schools with four V&H Centres to provide alternative livelihoods to former FGM practitioners and promote positive cultural and social practices; 2) increased media engagement and reporting on SGBV, harmful practices and SRHR as evidenced by advocacy programmes aired via community-based radio stations in counties; and 3) enhanced positive behaviour change towards SGBV, harmful practices and SRHR issues demonstrated by community members through participation in SGBV community awareness sessions conducted by five (5) networks of men and boys active in the five (5) Spotlight Initiative counties out of total of 15.

Notable changes were recorded in the elimination of harmful practices and other forms of SGBV through a massive campaign to implement the Social Behavioural Change Communication Strategy and the Comprehensive Prevention Strategy developed in 2021. Through this campaign, the Spotlight Initiative in Liberia achieved the following:

- Three communities (Zolowee, Gowie and Neegbein) in Nimba County are now led by women as their chairpersons due to an increase in awareness and sensitization on the prevention of negative social norms, harmful practices and other social and gender inequalities against women, girls and persons from marginalized groups, including LGBTQIs. These women leaders are actively involved in the protection of fellow women's and girls' rights, including the

right to protection from SGBV by conducting awareness raising sessions aimed at promoting the empowerment of more women and girls and fighting against GBV and HP. These women leaders had earlier participated in awareness interventions conducted by the Spotlight Initiative which focused on the promotion of women and girls' rights to protection from all forms of violence, with a greater emphasis on SGBV. These interventions were led by the MOGCSP and have reached out to 13,095 (8119f/ 4976m) community members in Nimba, Montserrado, Grand Cape Mount, Lofa and Grand Gedeh with information dissemination on the prevention of harmful practices and negative social norms against women and girls, including the importance of promoting gender equality. Women leaders in the three communities are expected to reinforce the protection of fellow women's and girls' rights, including the right to protection from SGBV.

- 3,562 community members (1,554 women; 426 girls; 1,183 men and 399 boys) from 50 communities in Montserrado, Grand Cape Mount, Lofa, Nimba and Grand Gedeh Counties whose capacities were initially built on the content of the Comprehensive Prevention Strategy document (CPS) and the development of community action plans to address SGBV and harmful practices have been involved in the dissemination of this strategy through the use of the simplified version of this document produced by the Spotlight Initiative in the reporting period and support other communities in developing action plans as a means of ensuring communities initiative in the prevention of SGBV and harmful traditional practices as well as referral of SGBV cases to service providers. These beneficiaries are enrolled in the 50 Community Action Groups to conduct awareness raising and sensitization activities and the 20 Community SGBV Taskforce created to receive and report SGBV and HP cases to local authorities and service providers.

Community dialogues, public information and advocacy campaigns conducted by community platforms set up by the Spotlight Initiative are increasingly contributing to the promotion of gender-equitable norms, attitudes, and behaviours. These structures, including 1,250 community-based structures (GBV Observatories, Child Welfare Committees/ Children's clubs, young men and boys groups, peer educators, key influencers and women's groups) from 50 communities in the five Spotlight counties, are now leading awareness discussions on prevention of SGBV and other forms of violence against women and girls, as a result of skills and knowledge acquired from the Spotlight implementation in 2022.

In addition, 3 newly established and 5 existing male networks have increased community awareness for the elimination of violence and harmful practices against women and girls as well as the promotion of sexual and reproductive health and rights in Montserrado, Lofa, Grand Cape Mount, Grand Gedeh and Nimba counties. The awareness created by these networks in 28 communities and 27 schools has contributed to the identification of male champions who are serving as agents of change and raising awareness with other community members. The 3 newly established networks were mentored by the 5 existing male networks on conducting advocacy. Altogether, these networks have directly reached out to 3,400 community residents (1120 women,

986 men, 840 girls and 454 boys) and indirectly¹ to over 10,600 community members with key SGBV prevention and positive masculinity messages through mass gatherings and radio shows. Through these platforms, messages to raise the community awareness on various laws (Rape Law, Domestic Violence Law and Inheritance Law) were also disseminated. Social mobilization interventions conducted by these groups were facilitated by logistical support from the Spotlight Initiative.

Decision-makers, including those from non-state institutions, are actively engaging in advocacy for change in negative social norms/promotion of positive social norms affecting the lives of women. In this line, over 446 traditional leaders have contributed to the process of changing community mindsets on the FGM practice in the reporting period. The adoption of the 2nd policy statement suspending the practice of FGM throughout Liberia for the period of 3 years from February 2022 by 150 traditional leaders was followed by the closure of 65 bush schools which were operating against the policy. A total of 296 traditional zoes (97 head Zoes and 199 practitioners) committed to ending the practice and shift to alternative sources of income, utilizing the skills and knowledge acquired from the Spotlight Programme interventions in the previous year. Moreover, 121 (78f, 43m) key influential persons including members of the national GBV taskforce, legislators, the Inter- religious Council, and members of the traditional council have increased their understanding of the key SBCC Strategy components and started using the acquired knowledge in communicating adapted messages on SGBV prevention to various audiences including at worship places and community meetings. Engagements with these groups led to major advocacy commitments by legislators to amplify the need to pass and enforce the implementation of laws and policies that promote gender equality and protect the rights of women and girls against social inequalities, harmful practices, including FGM, and gender-based discrimination.

¹ Estimated in line with population projections of the 2008 Population and Housing Census as published by the national statistics office (LISGIS).



Peer educators targeting peers with key messages on the PSEA-Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (Photo 13 /left) and SGBV Referral pathway (Photo 14/ right) on school campuses in Grand Cape Mount County. Photo Credit:/ UNICEF/ Defence for Children International.

A 50% rise in girls' enrolment for the academic year 2022-2023 was observed in Sinjeh Public School, Grand Cape Mount County, and broad-based positive parenting intervention implemented by the Spotlight Programme in the year 2022 certainly contributed to this change. This intervention has reached 1,457 parents and 368 caregivers (213f, 155m) from Sinje in Grand Cape Mount County and was guided by two training manuals also produced by the Spotlight Initiative to enhance parents' knowledge and understanding on positive parenting as a way to protect children from harmful practices, other forms of violence whilst promoting their four cardinal rights to survival, participation, growth and development, and best interest. The manuals are equally meant to increase the understanding of key influential persons including chiefs, zoes, religious leaders, and teachers on gender equality and its peculiar impact on the lives of women and girls. The two manuals will continue to be used in 2023 after a core group of persons are trained as trainers for grassroots community members.

A total of 8,099 adolescent girls **have enhanced decision-making competencies on issues affecting their well-being** as a result of a training on prevention and care interventions. The training has further enhanced and built the confidence of adolescents to serves as peer educators to provide 'peer to peer support' in safe spaces where important issues related to managing the challenges of fellow adolescent girls are discussed and decisions taken.

Media reporting on prevention of GBV and promotion of positive social norms improved in 2022. Over 10,000 listeners of radio programmes in Montserrado, Grand Cape Mount, Nimba, Lofa and Grand Gedeh counties were reached with broadcast messages of the "Let the Women Talk" programme and increased their understanding of the inheritance law, the rape law, and the Domestic Violence law. Feedback (call-in programmes) received by broadcasters from listeners indicated that majority of women are more aware of their rights to own land and property, including procedures involved in the land acquisition process. **The improvement in media reporting** on gender issues is one of the Spotlight contributions due to conducted capacity building intervention targeting 240 media practitioners and 23 media managers/executives on gender sensitive reporting and reporting on SGBV incidents. With the knowledge acquired, 19 media institutions which were represented in the training have published 956 media stories on gender and SGBV

after extensive scrutiny. A related draft of ethical and gender policy for media institutions was developed in 2022 and is expected to be validated for use by media houses in 2023.

Outcome 4: Quality Services

In 2022, the Spotlight Initiative continued to improve the availability and accessibility of essential rights-based and survivor-centred services to women and girl survivors of violence, including those from marginalized groups and communities.

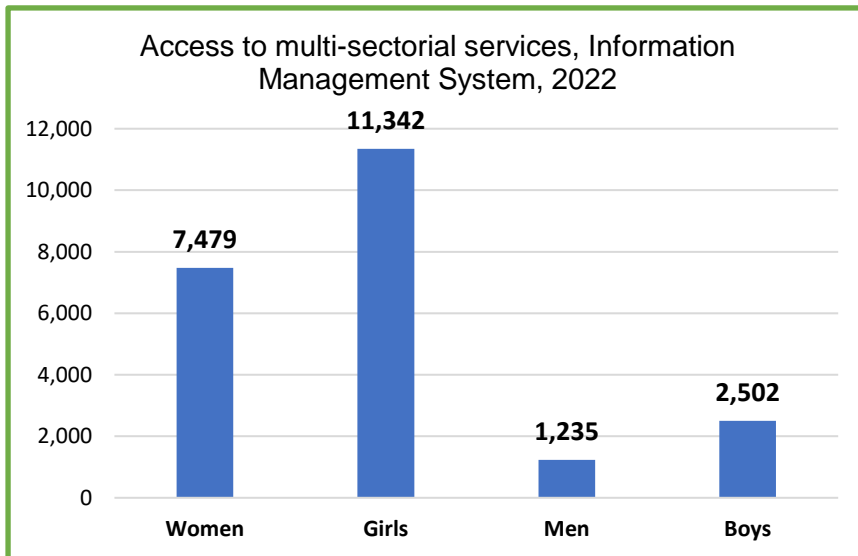
SGBV response services covered different sectors and included healthcare services (clinical management of rape and other reproductive health interventions including fistula repair surgeries, maternal health care, family planning and sexuality education for adolescents), psychosocial services (mental health care and referral, psychosocial counselling, trauma healing and rehabilitation), legal services (capacity building and the provision of logistics for adequate investigation, documentation, case file preparation, as well as enhancing prosecution), protection services (safe home), and community engagement and empowerment services (capacity building and provision of logistical support to women peace huts, rape observatory, religious and traditional leaders, women and youth engagements).

The Initiative also invested in strengthening the capacity of service providers to address forms of violence, and ensure services are of high quality for all women and girls, including those traditionally left behind. Despite the institutional challenges that are typical of the health sector in Liberia (e.g. limited workforce, high turnover of staff, low retention of staff, insufficient drugs and medical supplies), service provision to survivors in the targeted referral hospitals/health centres/clinics is now quasi-compliant to standard procedures and care, with an emphasis on protocols for standardised clinical examination, treatment, documentation, and reporting.

Key results achieved under this outcome for the reporting period include:

- Improvement in multi-sectoral capacity to strengthen service delivery to SGBV survivors: 115 (92f, 23m) government service providers improved their knowledge and skills in clinical management of rape and delivery of integrated essential SGBV response services for women and girls, survivors of SGBV. They are currently applying the skills and knowledge acquired in daily service delivery to SGBV survivors with reference to the SOP and Integrated Essential Service Package tools. Moreover, 112 (42f, 70m) magistrates, probation officers and social workers gained in-depth knowledge on handling, investigating, and adjudicating cases involving children who come into conflict and or contact with the law as victims, witnesses, or perpetrators at the conclusion of a training on justice for children and the Juvenile Procedure Code of Liberia conducted by the Spotlight Initiative in collaboration with the James A.A. Pierre Judicial Training Institute. Participants in these capacity building activities have improved the administration of justice for children by use of diversionary and restorative justice measures rather than retributive justice measures at the level of the magisterial courts. This has led to a reduction in the number of children sent to prison/detention by 16.3% as of the end of 2022.

- Improvement of access, availability, and awareness of multi-sectoral integrated services through the roll-out and implementation of the Integrated Essential Service Package, which in



turn led to an increase in the number of service users: 22,558 direct beneficiaries (7,479 women, 11,342 girls, 1,235 men, 2,502 boys) who accessed multi-sectoral services at different service provision levels. These services included psychosocial support, counselling, referrals, family planning and survivor services (case management, counselling, access to justice and economic empowerment).

Photo 15: Access to multi-sectoral services, Information Management System, 2022, MOGCSP

- 967 children (552f /415m) who came into

contact and conflict with the law, benefited from care services provided at WACPS short stay facilities which were renovated in 2021. These groups of children include SGBV survivors, offenders and lost and found children. As a result of the interventions at the care facilities, 424 children were reunified with their parents or caregivers, whilst the remaining 543 were referred to other services cases to include safe homes rehabilitation programs. Coping services for offenders came in addition to the completion of a one Social Coping Center built in Grand Cape Mount County prison compound to provide pre-trial detainees and convicted inmates of violence against women with alternative livelihood skills upon their respective release in the communities, and 25 shelters in Bahn Refugee Resettlement Camp in Nimba County in 2022 of which 15 were handed over to the local authorities.

- Improved case management coordination and collaboration of stakeholders in One-stop Centers and integrated service models: guidelines and SOP were produced and are operational. The standardized case management and supervision training curriculum was also developed and rolled out through a National Training of Trainers and three regional trainings for social workers, supervisors, paraprofessionals and community-based child protection actors and structures (Child Welfare Committee and GBV Observatory Group).
- Access to quality multi-sectoral case management for child survivors of SGBV and other forms of violence has also increased. 763 child survivors (742 girls and 21 boys) of SGBV received medical, legal, psycho-social and protection services. Through these services, 32 children, survivors from 20 communities in Montserrado are gradually reintegrating into the communities and two girls have returned to school. Additional psycho-social support was provided to enhance their long-term recovery.

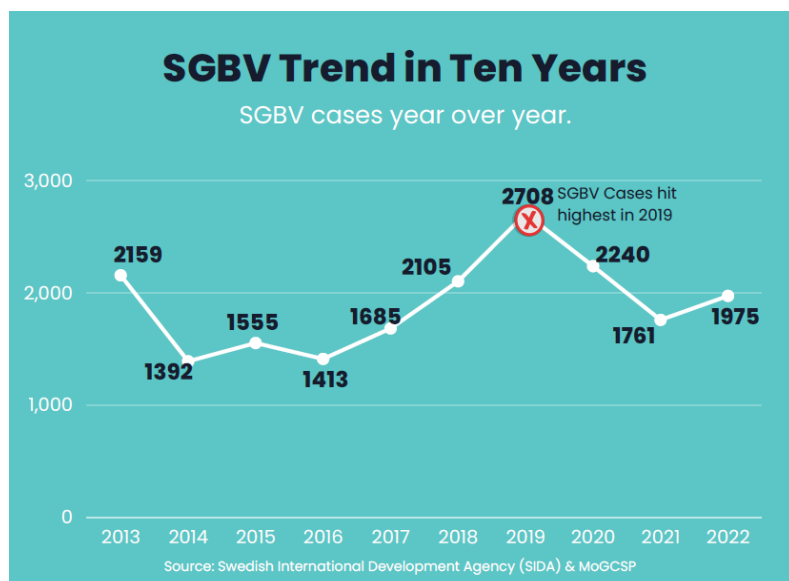
- Reporting of SGBV cases has improved in schools. Exactly 500 cases of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) were reported from schools and referred to competent authorities. The increased reporting was a result of the production and rollout of the Comprehensive Sexuality Education Manual, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education (MOE). The manual was used in building and strengthening the capacities of school health clubs and mentors in health rooms of four schools. The four schools were also refurbished and are hosting peer-to-peer mentorship and coaching on SGBV prevention, response and SRHR awareness which benefitted to over 95,000 adolescent students from the 5 Spotlight Counties.
- In 2022, a decrease was recorded in repeat offenders by 11.3%. Initiatives to improve social coping, rehabilitation and economic livelihood of perpetrators of VAWG were implemented by the Spotlight Programme in prison facilities to equip perpetrators with skills in tailoring, soap making, beads making, art and craft. Through this intervention, the offenders who completed their sentence have been easily reintegrated into their communities and are utilizing the skills gained to generate income.
- An early warning response mechanism to help detect, prevent and respond to SGBVs and HPs, as well as promote Sexual Reproductive Health Rights (SRHRs) information and services was established and institutionalized through Peace Hut Women. In 2022, about forty (40) Peace Hut Women gained economic and sustainable domestic livelihood empowerment skills and are now engaged in multiple productions including tie and dye, soap making, village savings and loans and agriculture scaled down the training to other Peace Hut members. Peace Hut engagements are contributing to changes in norms, attitudes, and practices pertaining to SGBV prevention at individual and community levels using income from the livelihood support.
- Community awareness on a wide range of essential information on referral pathways has also increased. A total of 11,035 (5,127 girls/ 1546 boys/ 2930 women & 1432 Men) persons are now aware of how and where to access SGBV response services and can also refer others.
- Fifty-five (55) judicial actors (10f, 45m) including Court Clerks, Bailiffs/ Sheriff of the Circuit Court, Magistrates, Officers from the Women and Children's Protection Section of the LNP, and members of CSOs are better harmonizing court proceedings for SGBV cases in Lofa and Grand Gedeh Counties as a result of capacity enhancement and awareness raising initiatives of the Spotlight Initiative. The involvement of criminal justice chain actors, traditional leaders and many other stakeholders have signalled a great deal to the communities, causing them to take actions and respond timely to issues of SGBV. In some communities where awareness was conducted, traditional and community leaders started to impose fines/penalties for perpetrators of domestic violence especially wife/spouse beating which was on the increase in rural communities. The fine/penalty imposed, coupled with fear of being reported to the authorities have served as deterrent factor for perpetrators. The victim protection rooms at the Circuit Courts in Lofa and Grand Gedeh counties were also equipped with furniture and ICT equipment to effectively provide timely justice services to women and children victims of SGBV.

- 70 LNP Officers and Women and Children’s Protection Sections (WACPS) Investigators (40f, 30m) from all five (5) Spotlight counties¹ reported 21% improvement in their investigative capacity thanks to the knowledge acquired from a relevant training conducted by the Spotlight Initiative. With the acquired skills and knowledge, the 70 investigators are providing improved services in investigation and handling of SGBV cases and other offences involving women and children. Additionally, the WACPS facility is under construction in Grand Gedeh County for addressing gaps in accessibility to services by SGBV survivors.

Outcome 5: Data

In collaboration with MOGCSP, the Spotlight Initiative successfully developed innovative data collection and analytical tools by using the Kobo Collect platform. The goal of this platform is to strengthen the collection, analysis, and usage of reliable and comparable data in accordance with international standards. The innovative tool and instruments were designed and used for the production, collection, monitoring and analysis of data related to VAWG with the goal of creating a unified mechanism (GBV-IMS) for the collection of data across service providers.

In addition, a total of 126 service providers (87w, 39m) have strengthened their ability to collect data on the incidence of violence, harmful practices and sexual reproductive health and rights. With the use of the Kobo collect toolbox, these service providers are contributing field data for inclusion in the national level database as reported in the MOGCSP Annual Report 2022.



¹ Seventy LNP WACPS Investigators from all five Spotlight counties were trained: Nimba-16, Lofa-10, Grand Cape Mount-10, Grand Gedeh-11 and Montserrado-23.

Outcome 6: Women's Movement

CSOs and women's rights groups have played a significant role in the progress towards the elimination of VAWG in Liberia. In the current reporting year, CSOs' and women's rights groups' networking, advocacy and work with grassroots communities led to the following achievements:

Findings from a CSO mapping exercise conducted by the Spotlight Initiative in the reporting year revealed that 576 organizations (318 women-led organizations, 158 youth-led groups and 100 organizations representing groups facing intersecting types of vulnerabilities) had increased their capacity to deliver and/or monitor the quality of services, resources, and goods to women survivors of SGBV in the 15 counties of Liberia.

A total of 16 male groups of 275 gender equality champions, established in 2022 and grouped into 3 networks, are actively engaged in advocacy for progress on ending SGBV and HP in 28 communities in five Spotlight Initiative Programme counties: Montserrado, Nimba, Lofa, Grand Cape Mount and Grand Gedeh. In collaboration with the 5 existing male networks, these networks have directly reached out to 3,400 community members (1,120f; 986m; 840g; 454b) and indirectly to over 10,600 residents with key messages on positive masculinity, SGBV prevention and awareness on existing SGBV prevention laws (the Rape Law, the Domestic Violence Law, and the Inheritance Law) in mass gatherings and radio shows. A total of 41 school clubs were also established and are contributing to the promotion of positive masculinity in different schools of the 5 counties.

Three women's rights groups (45f) are working with Grand Gedeh's County Development Sittings to include VAWG prevention on the agenda. Peer education drives County responsibility bearing advocacy. Key decision-makers and stakeholders in Konobo, Putu, Cavalla, and Gbao Districts have committed to funding to eradicate violence against women and girls through radio programmes. The Assistant Superintendent for Development and Zwedru City Mayor, both women in local government, have become change agents and are urging their colleagues to fight VAWG in the County.

A total of 32 grassroots women's rights advocates/ WHRDs have increased the capacity to integrate EVAWG into development plans in the year 2022. Those 32 organizations were provided with grants to implement advocacy activities with focus on improving advocacy for gender-inclusive development processes. The 32 grassroots organizations have also increased the capacity to design, implement, monitor, and evaluate their own programmes on SGBV and harmful practices. These organizations have started to engage in conducting community awareness and

¹ Liberia suffered two humanitarian emergencies: EBOLA Virus Disease (EVD) (2014-2015), and global pandemic (2020-2022).

advocate for ending SGBV and harmful practices in different communities of Montserrado, Grand Cape Mount, Grand Gedeh, Nimba and Lofa counties and have reached 278 communities throughout 5 counties of the Spotlight Initiative focus as reflected in the chart titled Photo 14.

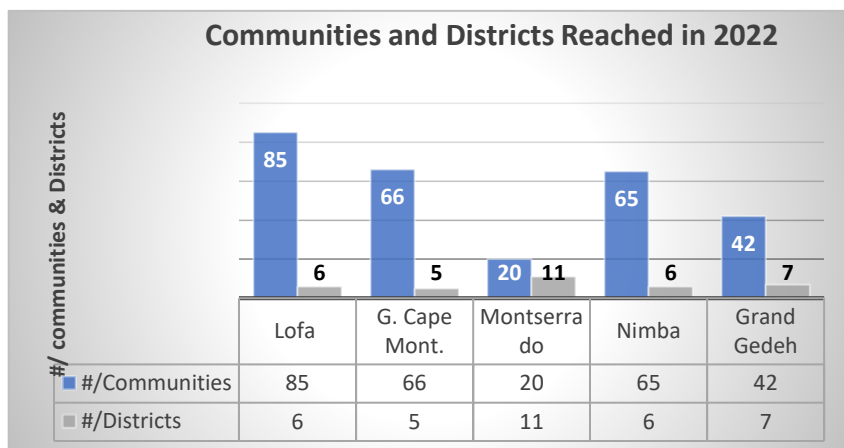


Photo 17: Communities and Districts Reached with SGBV awareness and services by CBOs

Further to focal point meetings, community dialogue meetings, and other engagements conducted by the 25 grantees to raise awareness on SGBV prevention and response, 3,733 key stakeholders and community members (1,080w, 945m, 827g, 881b) have increased their understanding and have the capacity to prevent and respond to SGBV cases in 278 communities and are

reporting cases of SGBV. Up to 57 cases were tracked and followed up by the Spotlight Programme grantees as reflected in the following table:

No.	County	Rape	Sodomy	HP	Domestic Violence	Persistent non support	Trail by ordeal	Total
1	Montserrado	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
2	Lofa	5	2	0	9	2	0	18
3	Grand Gedeh	1	0	0	2	2	0	5
4	Grand Cape Mount	2	0	2	4	0	0	8
5	Nimba	14	0	0	4	6	1	25
Total		22	2	2	20	11	1	57

Photo 18 Number of cases tracked down by CSOs' partners¹ in 2022. Source: UN-Women.

Reporting on SRHR:

The need for integrating sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services with GBV services and other relevant services cannot be overemphasized. Hence, Spotlight Initiative supported three ministries: MOH, MOJ and MOGCSP, to develop, validate and subsequently roll out a comprehensive and practical compendium of **Integrated Essential Services Package** for use by a wide spectrum of service providers, beyond just health practitioners, CSOs, CBOs and the community to include other actors such as the police, psychosocial and mental health clinicians, lawyers and courts. As a result, promotion of Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights and prevention and response to SGBV are now well-coordinated and integrated. The Spotlight Initiative continues to use the essential services package as a reference guide, while also strengthening the required essential services package delivery mechanisms.

In 2022, the Spotlight Initiative continued to build and expand on integrating SRHR into SGBV through the Integrated Essential Services Package model for comprehensive care to women and girl survivors of violence. Spotlight-supported Integrated Health facilities are now equipped with specialized drugs and supplies, required protocols and guidelines, as well as other tools to provide and improve care for women and girls survivors. These Integrated service provision centres have helped to increase access to SRHR services for SGBV survivors by 26% compared to last reporting year.

A total of 250 (150g, 100b) students from 20 public schools in Grand Cape Mount and Montserrado counties benefited from awareness information on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). This awareness, especially on menstrual hygiene management, is contributing to the retention of girls in school. Additionally, 8,099 adolescent girls and young women participated in life skills activities, which included access to information on SRHR in six (6) safe spaces. More adolescents in targeted communities are building their self-esteem which is evident in their involvement in both school and out of school activities, including by girls who are serving as 'Peer Educators' and are holding conversations with their colleagues on SRHR issues in Rural Montserrado County.

Rights Holders (Spotlight programme "beneficiaries")

¹ SGBV cases tracked by CSOs proved that CSOs remain an important part of the referral pathway and part of the solution to end SGBV and HP and to promote SRHR in Liberia.

Indicative numbers	Direct for 2022	Indirect for 2022	Comments / Explanations
Women (18 yrs. and above)	20,783	37,096	<p>Direct: This includes women who participated and benefited from information dissemination on prevention of negative social norms and harmful practices as part of the SBCC strategy roll out; Women who participated in trainings or engagement with partners account for direct beneficiaries. INDIRECT beneficiaries were calculated by multiplying the average number of people per household in Liberia according to LISGIS (4.7 persons) by the direct beneficiaries.</p> <p>Indirect: This includes women who accessed multi-sectoral services at different service provision levels: psychosocial support, counselling, referrals, family planning and survivor responses (case management, counselling, access to justice and economic empowerment) capacity building etc.</p>
Girls (5-17)	27,202	30,414	<p>Direct beneficiaries include; child survivors who benefited from multi-sectoral services at different service provision levels including psychosocial support, counselling, referrals, family planning and survivor responses (case management, counselling, access to justice and economic empowerment) capacity building, awareness information on prevention of child marriage, FGM and other forms of violence against women and girls, also, girls who accessed information on SRHR and the SGBV referral pathway. Direct beneficiaries also account for survivors of rape who received direct services from the SGBV Crimes unit.</p> <p>Indirect beneficiaries were calculated by multiplying the average number of people per household according to LISGIS (4.7 persons) by the direct beneficiaries. Indirect beneficiaries include also: Youth who were reached through radio messages, flyers, posters; awareness and provisions of SRHR services awareness and prevention and response campaigns</p>
Men (18 yrs. and above)	17,785	36,916	<p>Direct beneficiaries include men who were part of the young men and boys' groups, key influential persons and adult men who participated and benefited from information dissemination on the prevention of negative social norms and harmful practices as part of the SBCC Strategy roll out, participants from trainings or engagements with partners. This also includes men reached through the provision of SRHR/SGBV services including psychosocial services and counselling; adult men who benefited from capacity</p>

Indicative numbers	Direct for 2022	Indirect for 2022	Comments / Explanations
			strengthened in SGBV prevention and response. Indirect: calculated by multiplying the average number of people per household according to LISGIS (4.7 persons) by the direct beneficiaries) and accounts for men reached through targeted radio messages, information sharing and awareness raising.
Boys (5-17 yrs.)	7,484	15,698	Direct: Boys who were part of the young men and boys' groups, male survivors of SGBV, and others who participated and benefited from information dissemination on the prevention of negative social norms and harmful practices as part of the SBCC roll out or who participated in awareness raising on response and prevention of SGBV/HP activities. Boys accessing SRHR/SGBV services. Indirect: Youth who were reached through radio messages, flyers, posters; awareness and provisions of SRHR/SGBV services, awareness and prevention campaigns, calculated by multiplying the average number of people per household according to LISGIS (4.7 persons out of whom one or two adult women, one or two adult men and at least two children) by the direct beneficiaries)
TOTAL	73,254	120,124	

Challenges and Mitigating Measures:

Despite efforts by stakeholders in 2022, the implementation of measures to prevent SGBV and provide the safety of women and girls remained limited.

Reports from CSOs and the media continued to **signal a rise in cases of SGBV, cases of forceful FGM** targeting young girls have been reported, and the justice for the victims was slow or missing.

Adopting an exclusive law that criminalises FGM and prescribes charges is sensitive due to **entrenched cultural and traditional beliefs** requiring more citizen education around the harmful effects of FGM as well as the violation of women's human rights.

The lack of legislation to outlaw FGM has impeded prevention and response efforts and complicated access to justice by survivors of this harmful practice, including in cases of serious injury. The few cases that have gone through the justice system have been covered under Section 242 of the Penal Code, which speaks to malicious and unlawful injuries towards another person by cutting off or otherwise depriving him or her of any of the members of his body, finding

perpetrators guilty of a felony. This is punishable by up to five years in prison. Advocacy for a law by CSOs and allies multiplied and led to the anti-FGM Bill's submission to the Committee for examination.

The process for **eliminating FGM is working better in the five counties** where alternative livelihood programmes for traditional female leaders were implemented so far. Addressing the closure of bush schools and their replacement with four vocational and heritage centres in four (5) out of the 11 FGM-practicing counties **has raised expectations of traditional leaders** in the remaining counties to have similar facilities. As the demand is higher than available resources, more affordable ways of creating alternative sources of income and promoting cultural and heritage values without FGM are under consideration.

The Spotlight Initiative has also started a process to strengthen the capacity of grassroots organisations and CSOs, including their networks, into **a strong women's movement** to address the limitations in joint actions for advocacy on issues affecting women and girls.

The majority of sexual abuse cases reported to MGCSP and MOJ are girl survivors of sexual violence, where more than 63% of **rape survivors cases are girls under 15 years of age** (< 2 % are boys) and different care and protection are required as compared to women victims/survivors of rape. And in this context, the following challenges continue to surface:

The families themselves are deeply affected, and as a result, holistic care and protection are required. Many families are stigmatized and shamed, especially if the alleged perpetrator comes from the same community, including if they are well-respected members of the community such as teachers, Community leaders put pressure on families to drop the case, and in many cases with force and intimidation. While the support (such as family counselling and transportation) that has been provided through the EU Spotlight initiative has been a tremendous support to such families of the girls who tend to come from poor and vulnerable families who would otherwise not have been in a financial position to pursue their legal cases, long term solutions such as relocating families should be considered as a viable option considered so far. Such intervention would require significant and long-term financial support.

Witness protection is crucial if court cases related to rape are not to be delayed: The context has not changed much concerning the adjudication of rape / SGBV cases. As previously reported, the challenge exists in general when it comes to convicting rape cases. There are limited days in Courts, even in Court-Es, which take up rape cases: two terms of 21 days each, 42 days in total a year. Victims and their families often drop charges due to fear of retaliation in the communities and witnesses' absence in Court, which in many cases, delays court hearings. These challenges lead to the suspension of cases in Court.

Further support to the Sex Crime Unit is crucial in protecting witnesses. However, more work needs to be done, including closer follow-up, placement of witnesses in safe homes, continued support to transportation and accompaniment support. Furthermore, there is a need to introduce more child-sensitive and child-friendly procedures in Court for witnesses.

Lack of critical infrastructure and impassable roads during the rainy season in some operational areas (Lofa, Rural Nimba and Southeast), created challenges for the distribution of medical and non-medical supplies to some service provision points, especially those in the southeastern and northern parts of Liberia. To mitigate this challenge, the Spotlight Programme and IPs have worked out a plan to procure and distribute commodities, drugs and supplies bi-annually rather than quarterly as previously done. By doing this, supplies are pre-positioned, and stock out avoided during the rainy season.

Bureaucratic and operational bottlenecks at government line ministries to process documents for programs implementation have often created delays in the timely delivery of results and reporting. As a mitigation measure, the Spotlight Initiative Programme has continued to advocate with government agencies and line ministries on the need for national ownership of the interventions, since in fact, these interventions are complementary to the government's effort. There continues to be gradual improvement.

Inadequate mechanisms in place to facilitate timely and effective generation of GBV data. The delay in upgrading the GBV-IMS has created a serious data gap for evidence-based gender advocacy and programming nationally. A Kobo Collect Toolbox platform was piloted and tested designed and rolled out to service providing digital reporting. In the 2023, service providers are expected to upgrade digital reporting of GBV incident data as a prelude to the construction and launch of the integrated and comprehensive GBV-IMS system.

Advanced information technology such as Kobo Toolbox could perpetrate inequalities and remains inaccessible to members who are not as tech-savvy or who do not own smartphones or smartphones with particular technological features. Up until all members feel comfortable utilizing it, it also needs regular support, training, and testing during real-life real-monitoring efforts.

The **limited reporting capacity of partners** negatively affected the reporting quality. Thus, continuous mentoring and capacity-building in results-based management were implemented to ensure that reports are founded on results and capture actual change. Utilisation of personal mobile numbers and personal phones with limited technical performance options, restrictive budget lines for equipment procurement, and late recruitments hampered Kobo platforms' ability to collect comprehensive evidence and data. This will be retested in 2023 with CS-NRG members by equipment procurement and new data collection cycle.

Discrimination of LGBTQI+ persons: Through the Spotlight Initiative, a mapping of 13 LGBTQI+ groups throughout the country, highlighted the challenges of the LGBTQIs. Through the mapping exercise, it was determined that the LGBTQI+ community faces challenges ranging from legal issues to social issues, such as widespread discrimination, advocacy challenge, and to some extent harassment, and physical attacks. However, the programme continues to reach out to the network and provide technical and financial support. Furthermore, discussions continue to be held with the Government of Liberia for the removal of discriminatory laws and policies.

Due to budget deficit and administrative rules for two field officers, LSI field staff presence in Grand Cape Mount and Nimba counties has been discontinued while two remaining staff cover Lofa and Grand Gedeh.

The Spotlight Initiative is approaching its end date. However, the needs for consolidation currently exceed the quantity of resources to address them. The UN is working on an exit and sustainability strategy which might also require some funding support to be rolled out. The strategy to mobilize additional resources for addressing VAWG and SRHR promotion is underway.

Lessons Learned and New Opportunities

a) Lessons learned

The ownership of the Spotlight interventions by the Government of Liberia is creating a remarkable difference in the prevention of rape, domestic violence and FGM through the dissemination of laws and policy statements at the community level.

It was acknowledged among partners that **integrated and comprehensive efforts from** multiple stakeholders to address the root causes of gender inequalities, deeply rooted detrimental social norms, and their consequences such as women's poverty, low literacy levels, limited access to essential services and insufficient community awareness will bring change and benefits to communities.

The process for eliminating FGM is working better in the **five counties where alternative livelihood** programmes for traditional female leaders were implemented so far. In addition, the constant engagement of key stakeholders (government, traditional leaders, CSOs, beneficiaries) in ongoing activities and in handling implementation challenges has proven to be an effective strategy in addressing SGBV and harmful practices.

Continuous collaboration and engagements with all partners enhance transparency and promotes a cordial working relationship. Engaging community structures and local authorities in implementation/ intervention promotes accountability, local ownership, and utilization of services as well as increases participation and beneficiaries' confidence.

Community and stakeholders' engagement with the right messages enhances ownership of project activities. People in towns and villages in rural Montserrado are willing to work with human rights organizations to have messages of SGBV/Human rights spread across Montserrado for actions as a result of a multiple interactions held by the Spotlight Programme, traditional leaders and country authorities with Sonkay Town community members.

Intensified high level coordination and collaboration with line ministries, agencies and partners trickles down to technical level and ensures commitment to implementation success. In the reporting year, the MOGCSP was fully invested in the Spotlight Initiative implementation throughout all pillars. This helped to fast-track interventions that seemed to be at risk of resistance, like the prevention of FGM and closure of bush schools.

Investments in building and supporting youth-led platforms and grassroots women's organizations to drive the work of the LSI are great assets to the sustainability of the programme achievements.

The 32 grantees supported within the year are reaching out to remote and hard-to-reach places, as well as to the groups of persons more vulnerable to SGBV, harmful practices and SRHR violations.

The leadership and coordination role of the RC remains emphasized and generates multiple lessons for integrated programming in the UNCT as the Spotlight Initiative is the only joint programme that has a program coordinator and dedicated field and capital city-based team for implementation.

b) New Opportunities

The commitment of the National Council of Chiefs and Elders (NACCEL) to eliminate female genital mutilation (FGM) has created an opportunity for technical and financial assistance to support the implementation of this commitment. A Taskforce has been established to ensure the enforcement of the Chief's promise and can be expanded to address other forms of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and harmful practices (HPs). The completion of Vocational and Heritage (V&H) centres presents another opportunity for engagement with both former FGM practitioners and survivors to support alternative livelihoods and alternative rites of passage. The government, traditional leaders, and the UN are discussing a strategy to operationalize the centres effectively.

Media practitioners have increased reporting on FGM, breaking the taboo around the topic. This provides an entry point for community education and awareness campaigns to prevent FGM and offers an opportunity to intensify future campaigns related to SGBV, HPs, and SRHR.

In June 2022, a study visits to the Uganda and an exchange with Ugandan partners in the Spotlight Initiative Programme and familiarization with the continental experiences and goals of the African Regional Spotlight Programme (SIARP) revealed multiple opportunities for enhancing future SGBV programming and partnerships in Liberia. Similarly, the participation of the Liberia delegation at the Spotlight Initiative Global Learning Symposium (GLS) and Global Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI) Conference (16-23 September 2022) has resulted in the identification of a set of scientific principles and recommendations to shape up new programming in Liberia.

Innovative, Promising or Good Practices

1) Strengthening women's rights advocates' capacities to integrate SGBV/HPs/SRHR prevention and response into county development agendas (CDA)

Policymakers and other stakeholders need to support the development of women's rights advocates' capacities to influence county development plans (CDP) which in turn should include resources to advance gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment (GEWE). The CDAs planning processes and the distribution of county development funds has so far missed the incorporation of SGBV/HPs/SRHR issues.

Experience has shown that women's rights organizations currently rarely participate in county development processes. Even though organizations working on women's human rights concerns

are in the county, they are often excluded from participation in processes for addressing SGBV/HPs/SRHR issues, which are frequently addressed through donor sponsorship and by external participants with limited knowledge of the county development process.

The Spotlight Initiative has therefore worked to increase the capacity of women's rights advocates to support the integration of interventions to end VAWG in county development plans and agendas. It is expected that this new pool of trained gender advocates will effectively advance the incorporation of these issues of concern in future plans and budgets.

2) Integrated Essential Service Package for SGBV and SRHR

In 2022, the Liberia Spotlight Initiative introduced the Integrated Essential Service Package (IESP) for SGBV/SRHR, which is a comprehensive multi-sectoral case management and service provision package for responding to SGBV and promoting SRHRs. Grounded in the human rights-based approach, the survivor-centred approach, and empowerment approach, the IESP adopts the cultural and age-appropriate/sensitivity to service deliver while prioritizing survivor confidentiality, informed consent, and safety, as well as perpetrator accountability.

The adoption of the IESP has helped address poor coordination and fragmentation in the delivery of essential services to SGBV survivors in Liberia. It has also contributed to improve data collection and information management more competently. The number of survivors seeking services has increased to 22,558.

3) Strengthening collaboration amongst CSOs and government actors to enhance law reforms.

To promote a coordinated approach to legislation reform, the Law Reform Commission (LRC) held several stakeholders' consultation meetings with support from the Spotlight Initiative. Line ministries, such as the MOJ, LRC, MOGCSP, and MIA are now collaborating with CSOs to promote the legislation reform processes through multiple discussion platforms.

This unique collaborative strategy is currently tested on the revisions of the Rape Law, the Domestic Violence Act, the Inheritance Law, and the Domestic Relations Law and is expected to be finalized in 2023. Better laws will be created through the law reform implementation, including with provisions to facilitate the prosecution of offenders. If women and girls are more educated on these laws, they will be better equipped to defend themselves from perpetrators and to use the law as appropriate.

This novel approach can also be used for other UN team members and for other themes.

4) The concept of "initiation without mutilation"

Liberia has embraced the concept of 'Initiation without mutilation' to replace FGM as a rites of passage of young girls into adulthood. The approach stresses the importance of preserving cultural traditions as an integral part of upholding national identity whilst also committing to abandoning harmful traditional practices, given that culture is dynamic and thus evolves and can change. The approach was welcomed by traditional leaders who offered to champion its implementation, starting with Montserrado County.

5) The use of Kobo data collection tools in monitoring

The piloting and testing of LSI Event Recording Form and LSI Monitoring forms based on the Kobo Toolbox, free online platform that enables free data collection in areas with and without mobile network, and internet is considered a promising practise and has proven to reduce the burden of reporting while providing evidence on events and interactions with communities and grassroots actors by PMCU and CS-NRG teams.

Communications and Visibility

The Programme produced One Liberia Spotlight Newsletter summarizing Results (2019-2021) and worked with local radio stations and ECOWAS Radio to communicate these results to the public.

Furthermore, 20 talk shows and 7 jingles were produced and aired to help promote knowledge and understanding of SGBV prevention and response for residents in remote or hard-to-reach communities. Through these radio talk shows, callers and hosts exchanged views and provided clarity on SGBV issues with callers from both Spotlight and non-Spotlight communities ringing in and participating in the discussion.

a) Messages

The Spotlight Initiative mobilized key stakeholders including the MOGCSP, MOJ, and MOH, the Female Journalist Association of Liberia, among others to brainstorm and identify key issues related to SGBV, teenage pregnancy and SRHR. Results from this engagement led to the crafting of messages and the development of IEC and BCC material for general awareness raising with a view to reduce SGBV and teenage pregnancy and promote SRHR at both community and national levels.

Spotlight also utilized airtime at ECOWAS Radio and KOOL FM in Montserrado and Radio Kegema in Nimba County to strengthen information dissemination on combating/eliminating SGBV at all levels.

The following messages were directed to girls and boys via text messages, stickers and billboards.

TEXT MESSAGE

- ✓ Teenage pregnancy can delay or stop your progress. Be wise and stay in school.
- ✓ Sex for grades and grades for sex will only destroy our future leaders. Please stop it!!
- ✓ To all men: please join the fight against sexual and gender-based violence. A potential victim could be your daughter or someone close to you.
- ✓ Anyone could be a victim.
- ✓ It is not their fault, just break the bias.
- ✓ It is a human right for women and all those facing other intersecting forms of violence to live freely and unharmed.

- ✓ No to violence against women/girls.
- ✓ Rape is not a family matter, report it to the police.
- ✓ No means no, stop rape now.
- ✓ Rape is a crime.
- ✓ Bring the perpetrator to justice.
- ✓ Women are help mates, not our slaves.

STICKERS

- ✓ A sound education or 10 years in jail for rape: the choice is yours.
- ✓ Be careful! Rape with familiar people is higher than that with strange people.
- ✓ Do not sexually exploit or abuse a girl or a woman because she depends on you.

BILLBOARDS

- ✓ Girls! Free money from men is not really free. It could lead to rape.
- ✓ Domestic violence will only destroy your family.
- ✓ Parents, give your children early sex education.

b) Media and visibility events

On her first visit to Liberia from 19 to 27 November 2022, Jaha Dukureh, UN Women Goodwill Ambassador for Africa on ending FGM and child marriage held several strategic engagement meetings with high-level government officials including the Vice President of Liberia, Chief Dr. Jewel Howard Taylor and Government Ministers. She also met with various stakeholders including UN country team, diplomatic community, traditional leaders, religious leaders, civil society, women's organizations, youth activists and the media to support the country's efforts to advocate for the elimination of FGM, a harmful practice against women and girls.

The vocational and heritage centre constructed in Sonkay Town, Montserrado County, was handed over to the Government of Liberia and the NACCEL. The centre will serve as a hub to provide alternative economic livelihoods support to former practitioners of FGM and promote the socio-cultural heritage of traditional communities, including alternative rites of passage which excludes FGM. The handover ceremony was held during the launch of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence which spans the period from 25 November to 10 December 2022.

The National Council of Chiefs and Elders of Liberia (NACCEL) has committed to close all bush schools and stop the practice of FGM in Montserrado County in January 2023. The Chairperson of NACCEL, Chief Zanzan Karwor, made the commitment during the launch of the 16 Days of Activism Sonkay Town, Montserrado County, on 25 November 2022.

c) Campaigns

The Spotlight Initiative collaborated with other projects and actors to celebrate the 16 Days of Activism in Montserrado and Nimba from 25 November to 10 December 2022. During this period,

Ms. Dukureh, an international human rights activist and a survivor of both FGM and child marriage from the Gambia, shared her life experiences with Liberians and led discussions on ending FGM which gained significant momentum during and beyond the 16 Days campaign.

These days of activism were engaging and utilized the community media platforms to propagate the information of SRHR, referral pathway and girls network engagement in awareness raising including engaging men and boys. The campaign's messages and speeches were concluded with the submission of actions for national leaders and decision-makers.

The Spotlight Initiative also engaged in the commemoration of the International Day of the Girl Child which was attended by 150 adolescents and youth from the 15 counties. These participants are expected to serve as advocates in their communities. Participants were empowered with knowledge and skills and are expected to strengthen the fight against SGBV in their communities.

d) **Human interest stories**

Story 1: One man, husband and father life changing moment:

Abu Dassen is a 29-year-old male who is residing in Mambo Town, Tewor District, Grand Cape Mount County along with his wife and two kids (boy and girl). Abu has been traditional married to Miatta Kromah, age 24 years, about eight years ago. Over this period, Abu said that he has constantly exposed his partner, Miatta, to all forms of domestic violence including rape. He blamed himself for been a violent father who committed marital violence and rape against his partner. Abu made this confession after he participated in a series of community sensitization dialogues conducted by Liberia Reintegration Promoters (LIRIP).

“This sensitization has helped me to have a change behavior from being violent to a change agent since I learned about rape.” Abu narrated, *“I was overly protective of my wife due to Jealousy and being ignorant; adding, I was in the constant habits of forcing my wife to have sex even if she’s not in the mood - but I felt she was cheating on me due to my poor financial status.*

Abu said although he was employed but his salary was not regular.

“I was working as a teacher but could not receive a monthly salary on time and when the month end, I was unable to care for my wife and kids - something which cause me more violence toward my wife because of shame”.

Explaining further, Abu termed his behavior towards his wife as regrettable.

“When she leaves to visit friends or some relatives for help, I could feel that she is gone to boyfriend and upon her returned, I will question her and if she refuses to speak out, I will force her



Photo 19: Abu Dassen, (29) interviewed by CS-NRG representative, Bertie Forkpabio, Photo credit: UNRCO

to have sex; just to see if she went to different man's, who might have given her the items or money she brought home. I could even join her in fighting.”

According to Abu, his change has now come, *“but today am glad to be a changed person due to the program; learning about what constitutes rape and violence in families”*. Abu commended LIRIP for the training that has transformed him. *“The program also helps me to decide to quit the job, which was not regularly paying me, nor helping me to support my family also, and I am more productive due to my wife. Through the program, my wife and I are peaceful and are farming, where we can make farm and sell the produce to help us get what we want and is very helpful and we at peaceful”*. One of the common negative social norms and practices is that violence is generally seen as being “normal” among Liberian couples. The grassroots organization received grant from DEN-L via CSOs Secretariats established in all five Spotlight counties.

Story 2: Empowerment strengthens women agency and provides them a chance to be heard.

Evon Gbarduo is among several young women who lives have changed since she got involved with the Spotlight Project Peace Hut sustainability programme. She lives in Putu, Tiama town, a community located along the Liberian Ivorian border. In this part of Liberia, the residents mostly purchase their goods and services from nearby communities in neighbouring Ivory Coast considering the long distances traveling to Monrovia on unsafe and deplorable roads due to rains.

These contribute to life challenges as prices of consumables and services are on the increase. Evon Gbarduo serves as chairlady of the Tiama Peace Hut-Grand Gedeh county, South-eastern Liberia, and after benefiting from multiple training, through the Spotlight Project Peace Hut Sustainability Program, Evon now owns a business that is diversifying and sustaining she and her family. As one of the longest serving Peace Hut members, she has attended a series of workshops and trainings including Village Saving Loan Activity (VSLA). Evon is now helping to train other Peace hut members as well as contributing to the fund raising to support community outreach and awareness activities in Tiama Town.



Photo 20: Evon displaying one of her tie & dye products Photo credit: UNFPA

“I have attended many workshops and training, but the recent ones with Plan International Liberia with funding from the Spotlight Initiative on, Tie & Dye and Soap making seems to be the best so far. My skills in tailoring gave me an edge over others because all I needed to do was buy a bale of used clothes bedsheets and dye them for sale. I am already skilled in VSLA and now with the added skills in Tie & Dye coupled with soap making, these skills have expanded my income generating capacity which is making a positive impact in my life already.

Now I have the skills and resources that are required to produce, I will ensure that the end products are of good quality and affordable to everyone which will lessen the burden of people traveling far to get these things. I would like to thank the Donors and Implementing Partners for impacting me with these skills that have changed my life”.

The Peace Huts women are involved with the early warning and identification of sexual and gender-based violence and abuse, referring survivors for needed support, and fighting stigma and discrimination associated with SGBV and following up on and ensuring the adequacy and effectiveness of other service provision. Within the community, they are peace builders who provide low-level counselling support and mediate conflicts between family members and communities.

Additionally, they are involved with awareness raising, reporting and follow-up of SGBV cases, and are also working with other accountability structures and service providers (i.e., psychosocial service providers, police, health care service providers, and the court), around issues of SGBV prevention and response as well as the promotion of Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights - SRHR. They. Other responsibilities of the peace hut women include promoting the recovery of survivors by working with community persons to provide first aid services, mobilize socio-economic support, and offer psychology and emotional support.

Peace Huts women are also involving in awareness raising and information dissemination regarding the availability of SGBV/SRHR services (health –clinical management, legal – access to justice, psychosocial – peer counselling, or economic – small opportunities/skills training) for survivors and the negative effect of delayed access to services.

Story 3: Girls’ Knowledge of SGBV Adds Power to Prevention

My name is Mawata Sanoh, and I am living in Mamie Konedu community-Lofa county.

“I lived in this community for some years now and I never see any group coming here to talk to us about the way the men them can be treating and beating us the women in this community. In this community we the women them don’t have voice to talk because our parents them find men for us to marry and you cannot refuse, and if you refuse, they will say you are not their daughter for ever. So that how I got married to this man standing by me here so. I am happy today because this group that they call PYCOSI [*Progressive Youth for Community Safety Initiative*] came to us to talk about the bad things that can be happening to us the women them and since the first day, they gave us the small book and show us how to read because for me, I cannot read. My father refused to send me to school but with this book, you can understand by looking carefully at the drawings in the book you will know that the photo telling me that the man beating his wife with big stick, and it is bad.

Because of the book the group gave to us and even the men them get it, we the women them get small freedom now to talk and beating going down small, small because they scare that if they beat, we the women them in the village and the town chief hear it they will tell you to pay plenty money first before they put you the man in jail.

So, I am happy for this project, and we want UN-Women to be here for two more years so that we can change good, good. I am saying thank you to UN-Women for this idea and I want to be part of the group in the community to be talking to my other friends them and more especially to the men them to stop doing the sweet, sweet bad, bad thing to the small, small children”.

Selveh Johnson, a female student from the Voinjama Public school stated:

“This project has done very well for most especially we the girls in schools and even in our communities. I think if this project was not in my school, I could have been one of the girls who could have love to any of the teacher just to get good grades to make my parent happy”. “ ...but thank God for UFDUM [United Funding and Development for Underage Mothers] and PYCOSI and even the people that help with money (EU/UN Women) that help us to say No! to sex for grade or getting marry soon and all the other bad things that happened to girls in the schools and communities” ‘

“I have also taken my own time to talk to some of our teachers about what we learned in the workshop. I can even talk to some of my girlfriends in our community about what we learned”. “We have talked to plenty people in group, in the street, and even in the market about it and some will agree with me and some of them will say that it’s not good to talk about sex at our age”. “But really, the ideas gained from this project activities is a good protection idea for girls in school and even those not in school. “I have seen some of my friends getting marry very small. Some have told me about some teachers asking them for love and plenty things, but none of us used to talk about it even to one another. With the new ideas from this project, I think we have good ideas that can help us talk about some of those bad things that have made some of our friend them to drop from school”. “So, I say many thanks to the EU/ UN-Women, UFDUM/ PYCOSI-Liberia for helping girls in schools and communities to say NO to all the bad things that can stop us from going to school or to be good person for tomorrow”.

Story 4: White Cane gives hope to a person with vision impairment. Momo Kamara narrates:

Tarnue Juku, age 62, is a resident of Police Bye-Pass community in Voinjama City, Lofa County, who has been blind for many years. Tarnue recalls that he was not born blind, as he reflected on the incident. *“It was in 1972, during the outbreak of **Apollo-13** in Liberia¹, when I started experiencing some itches and pain in my eyes. At first, I thought it was a minor issue; but as time went by, the pain became severe, and then I started experiencing dullness in both eyes, until I noticed that I couldn’t see any light anymore.*

After realizing that he was totally blind, Tarnue became so depressed, disappointed, and frustrated. *“I refused to accept the reality that I was blind because I didn’t expect that I, a very*

¹ The first acute haemorrhagic conjunctivitis pandemic in Ghana, West Africa, was called Apollo illness after the 1969 Apollo moon landing. This pandemic was driven by two highly infectious viruses, the primary drivers of AHC outbreaks worldwide, including in Liberia.

active and lively child, could go totally blind. For me, I felt it could be handled by some traditional or medical treatment; but all efforts proved worthless, for there was no solution for me to regain my sight.” Tarnue continued, “my journey as a blind child, growing up to become an old blind man, was unacceptable by me, I disconnected myself from all social activities; including going to football practices which I was fully involved with, business places, family, and other public gatherings; as well as carrying on farming activities, among others. Tarnue added “being blind was a total setback to me, making me to believe that a blind person is a disabled, incapable, and static person. At this stage, Tarnue felt that he was being stigmatized in community and decided to isolate himself from all activities. Tarnue was unable to do things by himself and had to depend on others. He later dragged his younger son who could see, to become his eyes by taking him wherever he wanted to go.

Amidst all these circumstances, struggles and stigma associated with his blindness, Tarnue saw himself as less human and felt uncomfortable with life; until one fateful day, when he met a friend who introduced him to the EU\UN Spotlight Initiative. *“I am so overwhelmed; I am so happy, and I feel so much alive and restored and this is a testimony for me.” Says Tarnue. I never knew how to move on my own, I never knew I could be a part of society again, I had no hope of surviving and becoming an abled person as a blind old man. I also had no hope of getting back on my feet and becoming a useful citizen, take part in decision making processes or even participate in activities and enjoy those things I used to enjoy when I had my sight.”*

Tarnue couldn't walk a distance without someone holding his hands, due to lack of knowledge on the use of the white cane. As a result of the EU\UN Spotlight initiative, Tarnue can now walk through the principal streets of Voinjama, using his white cane without someone directing him.

“The relief, joy, peace, free space, freedom, and opportunities I now have, came because of the EU\UN Spotlight Initiative and its training on the usage of the White Cane. I can now move by myself with no one leading me. I can go anywhere, even far distances. I feel like a sighted person with my White Cane. I feel so confident with in myself that whatever a sighted person can do, I too can do the same. I am so much privileged to be a beneficiary of the EU\UN Spotlight Initiative.

Tarnue visited the Lofa United Blind Association of Liberia (LUBAL) office alone to appreciate the management team for the EU\UN Spotlight training which has enabled him to move without the assistance of someone. *“So, I stand committed to the EU\UN Spotlight Initiative, in becoming an agent of Positive change in supporting efforts and creating more awareness about the usage of the White Cane. This, I believe, will help educate and reshape the mindset of others, who see blindness as darkness and have lost hope.”*

Story 5: From HIV/AIDS Survivor to A Change Agent & Ambassador:

A young woman from Gbandu Kenema-Foya District, Lofa County, found hope through the EU/UN Spotlight Initiative Awareness Program. Agnes, a 35-year-old mother of three, was diagnosed with HIV/AIDS five years ago after experiencing persistent high fever and severe cold. At first, she kept

her diagnosis a secret, fearing that her husband would leave her and that she would face rejection and isolation from her family and community.

However, as her husband questioned her prolonged illness and sought answers, Agnes realized that hiding her HIV-positive status could jeopardize her marriage. She gathered the courage to reveal the truth to her husband, who surprised her by accepting her condition. Concerned for his own health, he also got tested and was diagnosed with HIV/AIDS a few months later. Tragically, their youngest daughter, who was born during Agnes' illness, was also found to be HIV-positive.

The family accepted their diagnoses but faced immense stigma and discrimination from their community. They were shunned, verbally abused, and socially isolated. Agnes' husband, overwhelmed by shame, decided to leave their hometown, and relocated to Monrovia, leaving her to shoulder the responsibilities of being a single parent.

Agnes spiralled into depression and hopelessness, feeling abandoned and defeated. However, her life took a turn when she encountered her uncle, who now worked as an HIV/AIDS counsellor and introduced her to the EU/UN Spotlight Initiative's AIDS Awareness Program. Attending the program gave Agnes the knowledge and tools to combat stigma and effectively manage her illness. She learned about HIV/AIDS, adhered to medication, and embraced a healthier lifestyle. She ensured that her daughter received the necessary treatment and educated her family and community on HIV/AIDS prevention and stigma reduction.

Grateful for her uncle's support and the EU/UN Spotlight Initiative's program, Agnes regained her strength and vitality. She no longer felt confined by her HIV-positive status, and she proudly considered herself a survivor. Agnes joined forces with the initiative, becoming a champion and agent of positive change. She actively participated in radio and community discussions, spreading awareness about HIV/AIDS, combating stigma, and advocating for the elimination of violence against women, girls, and children.

Agnes emphasized that HIV/AIDS is just another illness that, with proper care and support, doesn't define a person's worth or potential. She celebrated her newfound freedom to engage with society, make friends, and openly discuss HIV/AIDS without fear or shame. Agnes remained committed to the EU/UN Spotlight Initiative, dedicated to bringing more HIV survivors into the program and working towards a future free from stigma, discrimination, and violence.

Agnes's transformation serves as an inspiring testament to the power of education, awareness, and community support in combating the challenges faced by those living with HIV/AIDS. Her story exemplifies resilience, hope, and the potential for positive change in the lives of individuals and communities affected by the disease.

Story 6: Traditional leaders changed the mind-set and beliefs, Kolahun, Lofa County

The practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) among the Gbandi people can be traced as far back as over 200 years ago. Kolahun District is the home of the Gbandi people, one of five ethnic groups found in Lofa County, Liberia where the practice FGM is on the large scale.

Ma Gboludu is an elderly woman who is believed to be in her 70s, and one of the leaders in the practice of FGM for more than three decades. Ma Gboludu is the Head Zoe of the Gbandi Chiefdom and one of the most respected talented Zoe\FGM practitioners of the chiefdom. While visiting Kolahun, Ma Gboludu said she is proud of her role as the head Zoe. *“We traditional Zoes used to teach girls how to conduct themselves when they are in the presence of older people, plait hair, change cotton into different materials and take good care of their bodies to appear decent.*

Ma Gboludu recalls that when she was a child growing up, her parents sent her to school, and she was very smart. She reached as far as 11th grade and then dropped out of school.

“I grew up in a poor family that was deeply rooted in tradition. At a point in time, things became very difficult, and my parents couldn’t afford to meet up with the responsibility of supporting me; so, I became a high-school dropout and started developing interest in the Sande Society. I became so eager because some of my family members were involved in the practice and, due to my quest to form part of activities surrounding the practice of FGM, I joined them. I became very famous in the act and introduced so many young women and girls to the practice. For me, I felt the practice of FGM was very good and it was also a form of another school, where girls can learn and become better citizens to contribute to the growth and development of their communities and the larger society. As a result of my new mindset regarding the practice, I established and become owner of so many bush schools in Lofa County, where I initiated girls into adulthood through so many rituals, including FGM. Ma Gboludu explained that she not alone as they had a network that has helped her over the years.

“After so many years into the practice of FGM, I was fortunate to meet a friend called Ma Seata. She is one of the traditional leaders in Liberia. She introduced me to the EU\UN Spotlight Initiative, where I received lots of trainings. These trainings helped me as a traditional person to know a lot about the basic needs of women; including different practices between male and females and how to become a good mother or a mentor among others.”

Ma Gboludu is now one of the traditional practitioners, who has benefited from the EU\UN Spotlight trainings and awareness programs on the Elimination of Violence Against Women and girls.

“The time has come for me to change, and I am now a Messenger and an Ambassador for Change. I feel very good to have the opportunity, education and perception to go against the very thing I have been doing for so many years.” Explains Ma Gboludu. “I now know that I can form part of effort in eliminating SGBV; including FGM, because I am now aware of the evils surrounding the practice. The new idea, knowledge, and belief I have now, concerning FGM has made me realized that girls’ education, does not come from Sande Society\Bush School, through the practice of FGM. Girls become successful, build their self-esteem, and contribute to the growth and development through education from the classroom and other skills learned from informal education, without going to the Sande Society or going through FGM.”

The EU\UN Spotlight Initiative and its awareness on the elimination of SGBV has changed and transformed the life of Ma Gboludu as she reveals her next plan. *“I have closed all my bush schools and I am now heading one of the largest women’s groups in the Gbandi land in Kolahun, Lofa County. Through information and lots of training concerning the evil, danger, and harmful practices of FGM, my women decided to never again initiate or introduce girls to FGM; but rather, to promote girls’ education, raise awareness on women and girls’ rights and the health implications of FGM. I now stand committed and dedicated to work with the EU\UN Spotlight Initiative, to stand up for the rights of women, girls, and children and to push for the signing of the FGM bill into law in Liberia.*

a) **Testimonials:**

” Our Peace Huts were indebted to Access Bank due to a loan we took to carry out activities for sustainability, but from the acquired skills in Tied Dye and Soap making, we have been able to pay all debts from materials produced and sold “ **[Tiama Peace Hut]**

“I spent eight (8) years in prison doing nothing absolutely but through the invention of skills training after *constructing* the Social Coping Centre, I was enrolled into the beads-making component and got trained. Since my released, those skills are now used to provide food on my table while I do petty trading business to sustain myself and family” **[Bong Prison]**

“Accessing the Safe Home with trained service providers in caregiving and counselling, I was able to overcome the painful incident of rape perpetrated to me and now I have discovered my potential and know-how, where and when to speak out on issues women and girls are faced with” **[Lofa Safe Home]**

“We have participated in workshops and heard about human rights and in other workshops gender and gender-based violence, but we have not had the opportunity to have a workshop on integrating humans and gender in the county agenda.” I will share the knowledge with my people. We want to invite you for our next County sitting to discuss the same topic. This is important so we can make sure that everyone benefit” **[Lofa County Superintendent]**

“Whenever we are reviewing laws, policies, or related documents, we endeavour to address gender and human rights, but this is the first time to have a dedicated office with focus persons on gender and human rights. The gender and human rights checklist are very detailed, but it is a good tool to ensure that gender and human rights are mainstreamed, and that human rights and gender issues are addressed before the law is passed.” **[Law Reform Commission (LRC) Gender and Human Rights Focal Person]**

e) **Photos:**



Photo 21: Small Grant Management Training for over 30 grassroots organizations, held 29-30 June 2022, Nimba county. Photo credit: UN-Women



Photo 22 (left) & Photo 23 (right): Flumpa Township citizens in Nimba attend one-day training, Aug 2022

August 13, 2022, Participants in a one-day training on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV), Harmful Practices (HPs), and Sexual Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) in Flumpa Township, Nimba County, facilitated by Mr Bob Gleatee and his team from the MOGCSP, Nimba Office. During the training, the town chief of Flumpa emphasized the need to continue fighting for women's rights using a grassroots approach, as Action for Community Health Empowerment¹ (ACHEM) is doing.

¹ ACHEM changed its brand and name to Center for Reform and Development on Feb 23, 2023



Photo 24: Cross-section of partners from key national institutions, jointly developing National GBV Accountability Framework: GOL, UN and CSOs at a participatory development session of the National GBV Accountability Framework, Monrovia, Montserrado County. Nov/2022; Photo credit: UNDP/ Emree B. Neeplo.

f) Videos:

- a. Recordings of several Liberia Spotlight Initiative events that took place in 2022 in Voijama, Lofa County as implemented by PYCOSI in partnership with UFUDUM events Celebration of International Women's Day, 16 Days of Activism Against GBV; Stakeholder engagement events, School Club members raising awareness among parents about consequences of FGM; Celebration of in Voinjama, Lofa County Observance, 2022, Editor Augustine G Kessellie: https://youtu.be/QzIkSkW_Lw0
- b. Five-minute long drama performed by the School Club in Voijama on the child marriage, Lofa County: <https://youtube.com/watch?v=KthvenfDI8c&feature=share>.
- c. Action Oriented Youth of Liberia: Community Education to Minimize SGBV and Mainstream Path Ways to SGBV Case Reportage, Johnsonville event, uploaded 06 August 2022: https://www.facebook.com/780157278787751/posts/2574547329348728/?flike=scws_pnss

Sustainability

The experience of many states around the world demonstrates that funding for gender equality is not prioritised, that gender is left out of national and local budgets, that relevant ministries are understaffed, and that gender mainstreaming issues in other non-gender related ministries, agencies, and commissions similarly lack resources.

The Spotlight Initiative Sustainability Strategy will be completed in 2023 under the direct coordination and leadership of the government, MOGCSP, and with the participation of CSOs and development partners. As a preparatory work, during the 30 November - 1 December 2022

Joint Review Meeting with the National GBV taskforce, preliminary programme results, gaps, and future recommendations were identified.

With the new Liberia Women Empowerment Project and EUDEL commitments to further support gender equality and women's empowerment, Spotlight Initiative continues to play a crucial role in facilitating commitments from the government and other actors and highlighting lessons learned to inform future action and priorities.

The capability and willingness of the Liberian government to lead gender equality and women's empowerment initiatives and allocate national resources for advancing women's rights and eradicating VAWG are crucial to the country's long-term viability. In designing the National Anti-GBV Roadmap, acquiring two DNA machines, automobiles, and motorcycles to facilitate access to justice for survivors, and leading dialogues with traditional leaders, the government has demonstrated its commitment and ownership. and additional commitments are anticipated. For example, Ministry of Justice has reported to have factored in smaller portion of the functionality of the DNA machines in its proposed budget to the MFDP. To establish a business plan for the sustainability of the **DNA centre after** the Spotlight programme ends, the initiative is collaborating with the DNA/Forensic centre's pathologist.

The provision of DNA and forensics services, SRHR/SGBV integrated services, maternity waiting homes, safe homes, social coping centres, as well as comprehensive sexuality education are all important SGBV response interventions that are currently being discussed with the government, donors, and partners. The government has been fully involved in this initiative, and we have their assurance that they will have complete ownership when the project is finished.

To guarantee both quality and availability of services while also ensuring that the gains are preserved, and that transition is smooth, LSI will keep working with the government to identify resources for service supply and to identify steps and actors which are key for Sustainability. Most of the service centre employees work for the government, and the **safe houses and social coping centres have already** been turned over to the administration which needs to factor it in their budgets. Health response centres have all been built in previously existing hospitals.

With the safe-home staff, dialogues are initiated about other financing interventions, including the potential for funding investments in agriculture and other livelihood support.

The Programme will continue to engage the government to take the lead the identification of the Spotlight Initiative results, national government, CSOs and development partners' priorities, and alignment and coordination with the expected WB program.

Next Steps:

Ahead of the National and Presidential elections scheduled for October 10, 2023, the Spotlight Initiative continues to work with the government and development partners and other stakeholders, including civil society organizations, youth, religious and traditional leaders, justice and service providers, men, and women's rights groups, to prevent and respond to

VAWG, HP, to promote SRHR, and advocate for legislation and policies that advance gender equality and women's empowerment.

This will include a **joint review and advocacy for adopting the three laws**: the Domestic Relations and Domestic Violence Act and the Inheritance Law. Efforts to ensure the passage of the unique anti-FGM Bill into law will gain momentum with a draft bill before the House of Representatives for review and adoption.

The momentum gained in 2022 with **traditional leaders** now spearheading the implementation of the Six-County Policy on a three-year suspension of Sande schools and changing cultural norms and behaviours will continue in 2023, accompanied by alternative livelihood activities for traditional female zoes in an additional six counties.

Finalization and handover of the last, fourth, **vocational and heritage (V&H) centre** in Lofa will be completed in 2023, together with the establishment of SOP and sustainability elements for all centres' maintenance and management.

A national campaign with key messages from the **Social Behaviour Change Communication Strategy** on altering harmful social norms and preventing and ending harmful practices and behaviours against women and girls will be rolled out across the country.

SGBV survivors and their families will receive socioeconomic empowerment activities with the goal of long-term sustainable recovery, rehabilitation, and reintegration into their original or new communities. Support for **Gender County Coordinators**, including case management assistance, follow-up, and service referrals, will continue, as well as a follow-up with WACPS on the deployment of newly trained officers who went through the national training curriculum that now incorporates **SGBV/Child Protection for security officers**. Specific emphases will be giving to MoJ (SGBV Crimes Units and WACPS) and the MOGSCP to provide multi-sectoral case management services to child survivors of SGBV and Harmful Practices (HP). The **parenting manuals** will be used in 2023 after a core group of community members are trained as trainers.

It plans to keep up its tenacious lobbying of the government to ensure funding allocation and prioritization for the Initiative's sustainability initiatives. For instance, it would include the essential papers and steps for maintaining Liberia's response to SGBV, such as replication of the **Integrated Essential Services Package model** for comprehensive treatment for survivors.

More importantly, LSI will continue to participate in the Liberia **SDG Leadership Lab process** to expand and elaborate on the new way of the UNCT to empowering communities and diverse civil society for activism and active participation that will change mindsets of the people, demand service delivery and promote development, strengthen human capital, justice and equality.

CS-NRG members will use a no-cost extension to adjust the Annual Work Plan 2023 and relevant Financial Compensation to elaborate or expand on the innovative options to collect data for Spotlight indicators using the Kobo online tools and smart data collection equipment

and present their results to the stakeholders. UNRCO and RUNOs will continue to support CS-NRG positioning among African CS-NRG platforms and the design of the CS-NRG Sustainability Plan.

A more profound sense of belonging to the Spotlight Initiative and its principles has been shown to result from increased interaction with CSOs, especially at the grassroots level when communities have embraced such ownership. LSI will continue to work with women and feminist CSO groups and partners, **CSO Secretariats**.

Continued engagement with the **EUDEL, GOL and other development partners** will be promoted to enhance the program's sustainability and ownership and to develop a coordinated approach to the development of the post-Spotlight programme by using NSC guidance – it is expected to have at **least two more NSC meetings in 2023**.

Aside from the Final Programme Evaluation, execution of the Operational Closure Plan will be initiated following the Secretariat Guidelines, including Assets handover, organization of communication and visibility events, producing the Final Narrative Report and designing and implementing the Resource Mobilization Strategy.

ANNEXES:

Annex A: Results Framework

Annex B: Risk Matrix

Annex C: CSO Engagement Report

Annex D: Innovative, Promising or Good Practices Reporting Template

Annex E: Annual Work Plan