Open Statement regarding Accessibility of Spotlight Initiative Funding

In May 2018, the Count Me In! Consortium submitted to the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative 18 recommendations developed on the basis of consultations with feminist movements, organisations and activists. Spotlight has already implemented a number of these, either fully or partially. For example, a part of all country allocations in Africa and Latin America are being disbursed by UN Funds through open, competitive processes; guidance to country and regional teams and the terms of reference for the global reference group include the aim that at least half the members of every civil society reference group be affiliated with women’s rights and feminist organisations, and diverse constituencies be represented; and Spotlight is drafting an integrated protection approach to mitigate risks and provide protection and security to women’s human rights defenders engaging with Spotlight.

Congratulating Spotlight on these efforts, and in the spirit of partnership between civil society and the Initiative, we write to call for renewed attention to the very first of the 18 recommendations, that ‘50% of Spotlight funding should reach constituency-led women’s rights, girls’ rights and feminist organizations and networks [...]’. This recommendation recognised that supporting, leveraging and strengthening feminist movements is critical to Spotlight’s mission of ending gender-based violence. Reaching grassroots groups, self-led by those who are marginalised and/or working on contested issues, is essential to advancing the objective of ‘leaving no-one behind’. To achieve this benchmark, deliberate and focused efforts are necessary to channel funds to local and grassroots feminist groups and organisations.

Over the course of 2019, Spotlight implementation has been rolled out in Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America through UN country teams and UN funds. Regrettably, some aspects of these implementation efforts limit the ability of women’s rights organisations to access funds, particularly those working at the grassroots level. Not only does this hinder the achievement of Spotlight’s objective of ‘leaving no one behind’ but it also jeopardises Spotlight’s overall mission of ending violence against women and girls.
1. Onerous application processes
In some instances, such as the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women’s (UNTF) Call for Proposals for Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa under the Spotlight Initiative, applicants had to submit a detailed concept note, budget, legal registration documents, certified financial statements and organisational audit reports for up to three years - all this just to qualify, upon which they had to prepare and submit full-fledged proposals. These requirements put an undue burden on small- and medium-sized organisations, which usually do not have dedicated staff for preparing grant applications, and oftentimes have to put their programmatic work on hold in order to prepare these long and complex applications.

Further, the online application system did not function in ways that would facilitate access. For example: Applicants could not view the steps ahead, which did not allow them to prepare efficiently. In case of errors in filling out the application, the system would not communicate to the applicant what the errors were, thereby taking more time to identify and rectify them. There were glitches in the system due to which they could not download their draft applications, which was necessary for coordinating with collaborating organisations.

2. Short deadlines to apply for funding
The Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund’s (WPHF) Calls for Proposals from six countries in Africa under the Spotlight Initiative were open for one month each. The UNTF call was open for three weeks for the submission of detailed concept notes, following which applicants who were invited to submit full-fledged proposals had only three weeks in which to prepare them. UN Women put out a call for proposals under the Spotlight Initiative country programme in Malawi, which gave applicants only two weeks to submit their application, involving the completion of six mandatory forms! These are examples of short submission deadlines within implementation of the Spotlight Initiative.

Short submission deadlines do not provide sufficient time to organisations to prepare the complex applications required by UN calls for proposals. This is particularly true for: organisations seeking to form partnerships and prepare joint applications, which takes time as it usually involves a series of discussions and preparatory meetings; as well as organisations lacking staff with dedicated time and expertise to prepare complex applications, which is the case with most local and grassroots women’s organisations. Longer deadlines allow a wider range of organisations to apply, and allow them to develop robust applications.

3. Unregistered organisations cannot apply for funding
There are many reasons why an organisation may not be able to register. For example, the registration process may be too complex or costly; registering may endanger their staff, volunteers and members in a hostile social climate; a restrictive legal regime may hinder registration if they work with criminalised populations, such as sex workers, queer and trans women; or a hostile political climate may hinder registration if they do human rights-based advocacy.
Calls for proposals put out by the UN system under the Spotlight Initiative do not allow unregistered organisations to submit an application. They may only participate in submitting a joint application together with a registered organisation, and as discussed above Spotlight submission deadlines have not favoured joint applications. These practices exclude organisations doing important work at the grassroots level to end violence against women and girls. In order to strengthen efforts to end violence against women and girls, it is important for funding practices to be creative and flexible, and to actively identify ways to support unregistered grassroots organisations.

4. Re-granting of Spotlight funds is not allowed
Women’s funds mobilise resources to support the critical work of women’s rights movements fighting for women’s rights and gender equality. As such, they are an important partner in funding efforts to end violence against women and girls. In particular, they have the ability to channel funds to grassroots organisations, unregistered organisations, and those doing innovative work through the practice of re-granting funds through open, competitive calls. Working with such organizations could substantially strengthen the reach of Spotlight funding.

However, calls for proposals put out by the UN system under the Spotlight Initiative do not allow applicants to re-grant. The calls put out by the UNTF and the WPHF encourage women’s funds to apply but also inhibit their ability to do so, because the only way women’s funds could apply is if they pre-selected grantee partners, and prepared a joint application with them. Not only is this contrary to their way of working and exhibits a lack of understanding how women’s funds operate to support women’s rights movements, as discussed above Spotlight submission deadlines have not favoured joint applications.

5. Language accessibility
Programme documents, calls for proposals, and other materials of the Spotlight Initiative have been translated into some of the languages most widely used in the Initiative’s focus countries. For example, the WPHF calls for proposals for Burundi and the DRC were available in French; the UNTF call for proposals was available in English, French and Spanish. However, the official language of the focus country, Mozambique is Portuguese, and Arabic is one of the two official languages of Chad. In order for calls for proposals to be accessible to the widest array of organisations, it is important to make them available in all the widely used languages of all the countries they target.

Recommendations
Spotlight has expressed its intention to centre civil society at the heart of the initiative, including in governance, decision making, design, implementation and monitoring. At this critical stage of implementation, it is important that Spotlight develop and undertake considered processes that centre its most key civil society partners - women’s rights and feminist organisations, including local and grassroots feminist groups. In order to support and strengthen feminist and women’s rights movements, and successfully reach local and grassroots feminist groups and organisations, we recommend that the Spotlight Initiative:
1. Simplify application and reporting procedures, at the very least for small grants, so that Spotlight funding is accessible to small- and medium-sized, local and grassroots, women’s rights and feminist groups and organizations.

2. Ensure that deadlines to apply for funding provide sufficient time to allow those with limited resources to engage - at a minimum 8 weeks.

3. Similarly, ensure that timelines for other processes, such as participation in consultations, joining reference groups, and giving input on programme documents, are also reasonable and provide sufficient time for women’s rights organisations to engage.

4. Meaningfully engage the entire ecosystem of women’s rights movements, including unregistered organisations and women’s funds, and enable their access to Spotlight funding.

5. Make calls for proposals available in all the widely used languages of the countries they target.

Endorsed by:

Organisations
1. A.F.E.S.O.D.D, République Démocratique du Congo
2. ABAAD-Resource Center for Gender Equality, Lebanon
3. Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights, Canada
4. Action pour l'Education et la Promotion de la Femme (AEPF-Tchad), Tchad
5. Action pour la Lutte Contre l'Injustice Sociale (ALCIS), République Démocratique du Congo
6. Actions des Femmes Engagées pour le Développement Intégral, République Démocratique du Congo
7. Actions des Femmes Solidaires pour les Droits et le Developpement, République Démocratique du Congo
8. Advocacy for women with disabilities initiative, Nigeria
9. African Association for Prevention of Elders and Child Abuse (AAPECA), Nigeria
10. AFVMC Assistance to Families and Victims of Clandestine Migrations, Cameroun
11. Akahata A.C., Argentina
12. AMNB- Articulação de Organizações de Mulheres Negras Brasileiras, Brasil
13. Articulação Nacional de Profissionais do Sexo, Brasil
14. Asociación Calidad de Vida, Honduras
15. Asociacion de Lesbianas de El Salvador, ALESLAVINA, El Salvador
16. Asociación de Mujeres Trabajadoras Sexuales del Paraguay "Unidas en la Esperanza - UNES", Paraguay
17. Asociación de mujeres ts Liquidámbar, El Salvador
18. Asociación Movimiento de Mujeres por Nuestros Derechos Humanos-MOMUNDH, Nicaragua
19. Association de Défense et de Promotion des Populations autochtones, République du Congo
20. Association Papillon Libre, Guinée
21. Astraee Lesbian Foundation for Justice, USA
22. Awaken Resistance, Singapore
23. Baku Volunteer Center, Azerbaijan
24. Bangladesh Institute of Human Rights, Bangladesh
25. Bella Foundation for Child and Maternal Care, Nigeria
26. Breakthrough Trust, India
27. Bulgarian Fund for Women, Bulgaria
28. Calala Fondo de Mujeres, Spain
29. CEFEMINA, Centro Feminista de Informacion y Accion, Costa Rica
30. Center for Women's Global Leadership, USA
31. Center Women and Modern World, Azerbaijan
32. Centre for Liberian Assistance, Liberia
33. Centro de Derechos de Mujeres, CDM, Honduras
34. Centro de Promoción de la Mujer del Norte, Perú
35. Centro de Promoción en Salud y Asistencia Familiar, Honduras
36. CHRISTAD ASBL, République Démocratique du Congo
37. Coalition of Women Living with HIV and AIDS (COWLHA) Malawi
38. Colectivo Nacional de Mujeres Trenzadas Somos Mas ´Fundacion Arco Iris Iglo XXI, Colombia
39. Collectif des Femmes du Mali (COFEM), Mali
40. Community Teen Foundation, Nigeria
41. Development Initiative for Community Impact, Nigeria
42. Dimbaza Victim Empowerment Centre, South Africa
43. Doxa Youth Programs & Family Care, South Africa
44. East Eagle Foundation, République Démocratique du Congo
45. Els Gandal, Mali
46. Ensemble pour la Paix et l'Encadrement de la Femme en Milieu Rural, EPEFMR ONGDH, République Démocratique du Congo
47. Equality Fund, Canada
48. Facilitation for Integrated Community Rural Development, Uganda
49. FACOD ORGANIZATION, KENYA
50. Family Rights, Elderly and Child Protection (FRECHIP), Malawi
51. FEJOYCE (OTOUNGA Micheline Georgina), Gabon
52. Feminist Solutions towards Global Justice, India/USA
53. Femmes et Éducation des Adultes (FEDA), République Démocratique du Congo
54. Fiji Women’s Fund, Fiji
55. filia.die frauenstiftung, Germany
56. FOKUS -Forum for Women and Development, Norway
57. Fondo Centroamericano de Mujeres, Nicaragua
58. Fondo de Acción Urgente de América Latina, Colombia
59. Fondo de Mujeres del Sur, Argentina
60. Fondo Lunaria, Colombia
61. Fondo Semillas, México
62. For Gender Integration Association, Albania
63. Fundacion angelica quinta, El Salvador
64. Fundacion Arcoiris por el respeto a la diversidad sexual, México
65. Fundo ELAS, Brasil
66. GFA (Groupe Femmes Autochtones), République Démocratique du Congo
67. Girasoles Nicaragua
68. Global Welfare Association (GLOWA), Cameroun
69. gnc urban and rural development association of Zimbabwe
70. Good Health Community Programmes, Kenya
71. Grupo de Mulheres Negras Nzinga Mbandi, Brasil
72. Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR), Lebanon
73. Initiative for Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights Awareness(ISRHRA), Nigeria
74. International Indigenous Women's Forum-FIMI, Global
75. Internet Democracy Project, India
76. Itohan Hope Rising Foundation, Nigeria
77. Jeunesse Congolaise pour les Nations Unies, République du Congo
78. JUMUIYA WOMEN FUND, Kenya
79. Justice Makers Bangladesh, Bangladesh
80. Kadiwaku Family Foundation, République Démocratique du Congo
81. Linda Oluwabunmi Foundation (LOF), Nigeria
82. MADRE, USA
83. MAISHA-ONGD, République Démocratique du Congo
84. Mariwala Health Initiative, India
85. MenEngage Global Alliance, Nepal
86. MOMUNDH, Nicaragua
87. Movimiento de mujeres angelica Quintanilla, El Salvador
88. Moving The Goalposts, Kenya
89. MOVULAC ONG, République Démocratique du Congo
90. Muslims for Progressive Values, USA
91. NAMHHR, India
92. Niger Delta Abia Empowerment Society, Nigeria
93. Odara Instituto da Mulher Negra, Brasil
94. One More Percent, Kenya
95. ONG Coeur Citoyen, Niger
96. Open Stadiums Iranian women movement to open sport stadia, Iran
97. Organisation Internationale des Femmes du Millénaire Tchad Tel. 00235 66299921, Tchad
98. Pacificwin
99. Pakasipiti Zimbabwe
100. PROMSEX, Centro de Promocion y Defensa por los Derechos sexuales y Reproductivos, Perú
101. Radio Souriat, Syria
102. Red de Mujeres Trabajadoras Sexuales de Latinoamérica y el Caribe (RedTraSex), Argentina
103. Rede Nacional de Mulheres Negras no Combate á Violência - Brasil
105. Resilient Women's Organization, Uganda
106. Rozaria Memorial Trust, Zimbabwe
107. Shanduko Yeupenyu Child Care, Zimbabwe
108. Stoop To Rise Initiative, Nigeria
109. Sukaar welfare organization, Pakistan
110. Support for Women and Youth in Development Network, Uganda
111. The Red Elephant Foundation, India
112. Uganda Woman For Water and Sanitation, Uganda
113. Umuryango Nyarwanda w’Abagore Bafite Ubumuga/UNABU, Rwanda
114. Universal Versatile Society, India
115. Voces de la Ausencia, México
117. Womankind Worldwide, UK
118. Women Co-operation Forum Pyuthan, Nepal
119. Women Coalition for Agenda 2030, Cameroun
120. Women First International Fund, USA
121. Women for Equity Initiative, Nigeria
122. Women in Distress Organisation, Nigeria
123. Women's Resource Center, Armenia
124. WomenSpace Trust, Zimbabwe
125. XOESE, The Francophone Women's Fund, Togo
126. Zanzibar Peace, Truth & Transparency Association (ZPTTA NGO), Tanzania

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