

## Feminist Recommendations to the Spotlight Initiative

As recent studies make clear, one of the most significant factors in reducing and ending violence against women and girls is the presence of active and engaged feminist movements:

“The key to change has been autonomous feminist mobilization in national and transnational settings. Research reveals that broad transformations – such as economic development, political democratization, or changing societal attitudes about gender roles – do not, in and of themselves, push the issue of violence against women to the fore. Women in high office do not suffice, and mixed-gender organizations such as political parties or government bureaucracies may not recognize this priority – unless feminist groups organize on their own to push for remedies.”<sup>1</sup>

To succeed in its important mission to end gender-based violence, the Spotlight Initiative must deliberately support, leverage, and strengthen existing and emerging feminist movements, both nationally and transnationally. Those who have been at the forefront of organizing efforts to bring an end to discrimination and gender-based violence should have a strong voice in the priorities and decisions that drive the Spotlight Initiative’s investments.

In addition, to maximize its impact and sustainability, the Spotlight Initiative should honor, be led by, and benefit from decades of existing knowledge and experience funding feminist constituencies and organizations. This includes meaningful involvement of independent transnational, regional, and national women’s funds, as well as the UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women (UNTF-EVAW).

The Count Me In! Consortium submits these formal recommendations to the Spotlight Initiative. These recommendations are based on consultation with feminist movements and organizations and leverage best practices in funding long-term transformations in the lives of women and girls around the world.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Participation

1. Fifty percent (50%) of Spotlight funding should reach constituency-led women's rights, girl's rights and feminist organizations and networks with track records of taking rights-based action to end violence against women and girls (VAWG).
2. Ensure that Spotlight's decision-making structures include meaningful participation from women's rights and feminist organizations with expertise in EVAWG. Aim for at least 50% representation of women's rights and feminist movement leaders in decision making at all stages, from conceptualisation to country program development to implementation.
3. Civil Society Reference groups at country, regional, and global levels should be made up of a majority of constituency-led women's rights/feminist organizations and movements.
4. Such reference groups should represent a diversity of constituencies, ensuring that there are young feminists, LBQTI individuals, women with disabilities, indigenous, religious, racial and ethnic minorities, migrant, domestic, informal and sex workers, and women living with HIV/AIDS.
5. Independent civil society organizations, particularly women's rights and feminist organizations and leaders, should participate as full members of all governance bodies, including the Global Governance Body, with a binding voice in decision making. Observer status is not meaningful participation.
6. Create coordination mechanisms for country, regional, and global reference groups (civil society) and decision-making teams (UNCTs, global governance body etc.). Namely, these levels should not work in isolation, but should adhere to the same policies and guidelines and have clear steps

to integrate strategies, and mechanisms to dialogue and influence one another.

## Funding Mechanisms

Independent women's funds and the UNTF-EVAW have a long history of effectively and consistently reaching constituency-led women's rights and feminist groups. Women's funds' and the UNTF-EVAW's deep networks and funding models should be leveraged to ensure that Spotlight resources are invested in groups with a proven and significant potential to end VAWG.

Every year, these existing mechanisms receive millions of dollars of worthwhile requests focused on an intersectional analysis of violence that they can not support due to lack of funds. Spotlight funds should be used to reduce this gap by partnering with these mechanisms.

7. Fifty percent (50%) of total funds should be channeled through existing mechanisms (women's funds and the UNTF-EVAW).

8. Spotlight's calls for proposals and proposal assessment guidelines should expressly prioritize groups that address an intersectional analysis of violence, including based on sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, disability, age, race, ethnicity, and economic oppression, among other dimensions.

9. Spotlight's funding decisions about specific proposals and overarching strategies should be made on the basis of appraisals and assessments undertaken by individuals and groups with strong backgrounds in EVAWG and include women's rights and feminists movement leaders working on VAWG, as well as women's funds.

10. The Spotlight Initiative should adhere to an open, competitive grantmaking process -- a key principle of responsible philanthropy -- based on transparency and valuing capacity and commitment. The Initiative's current guideline that all funds flow through UN organizations alone contradicts this principle, adds considerable administrative, overhead costs,

and layers of bureaucracy, and reduces funds that should be directly invested in ending VAWG.

11. As the Spotlight Initiative seeks to mobilize new funds from other major donors, it is essential to ensure that this does not reduce the already-limited available resources for women's rights, girl's rights, and feminist movements. Spotlight should encourage funders, including the EU, bilaterals, and private foundations, to also fund women's rights and feminist organizations, groups and networks directly, thus deepening the ecosystem of resources available to end violence against women and girls.

12. While we understand that Spotlight will be mobilizing new major donors and that it is likely some of these will be joining the governance body, we strongly recommend that these donors be held accountable to upholding an unambiguous commitment to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), the rights of LGBTQTI people, economic rights, and the right to development using an intersectional, rights-based approach as enshrined in the basic principles of universal rights and indivisible rights and consistent with the frameworks of CEDAW and the Beijing Declaration.

### Disbursement & Implementation

13. Use and build on data and existing knowledge about ending VAWG. Most importantly, Spotlight's programming should build on analysis of the ways in which structural bias and discrimination against women in economic, political, and social systems creates and compounds VAWG, both in so-called peace as well as conflict contexts.

14. Funds to be spent at country level should not be required to go through UN Resident Coordinator offices and UN Country Teams. This holds women's rights and EAWG strategies hostage to the variable capacities and political alliances of local UN country teams. Instead, funds should go to those with credible proposals and strong track records and knowledge related to

EVAWG, based on a competitive and external grant review process. (See Recommendation #10.)

15. The Spotlight initiative will be working in countries where state parties may be hostile to and/or oppose human rights work and the work of women human rights defenders (WHRDs) to end violence against women and girls. These WHRDs are critical to creating lasting change and contributing to the effective impact of Spotlight. There must be mechanisms in place to ensure: WHRDs' active participation and decision making (see points 1 through 5); integrated protection that assures there are no reprisals or additional risk as a result of their participation; and funding for these WHRDs, their work, and their integrated protection.

16. Spotlight expressly should adopt an integrated protection approach (based on EU and UN guidelines and resolutions) to secure the safety of women human rights defenders, particularly in cases where there is potential for conflict with hostile governments, corporations or other non-state actors, in countries where Spotlight is working.

17. In addition, we are concerned that governments hostile to the rights of girls and women can and will seek to influence UN teams and their decision making on the participation of WHRDs and women's rights and feminist organizations in these countries. Spotlight should identify clear steps, including the engagement of external review committees (recommendation #10), coordination with existing women's funding mechanisms (#7), and accountability mechanisms (#18) to support a competitive and open process, particularly in cases where states may attempt to interfere in or oppose direct funding for EVAWG.

18. Processes in every country should be monitored by women's rights and feminist organizations to ensure that UNCTs and UN organizations are upholding these recommendations. Spotlight should support and provide guidelines for UNCTs to engage with monitoring efforts.

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<sup>1</sup>*The Civic Origins of Progressive Policy Change: Combating Violence against Women in Global Perspective, 1975–2005, by Mala Htun and S. Laurel Weldon*

Count Me In! (CMI!) is a special joint initiative led by Mama Cash, including the sex worker-led Red Umbrella Fund RUF, together with the Association for Women's Rights in Development AWID, CREA, Just Associates JASS; three Urgent Action Funds Urgent Action Fund (UAF), Urgent Action Fund Africa (UAF-Africa), and Urgent Action Fund Latin America and Caribbean (UAF-LAC). The Dutch gender platform WO=MEN is a strategic partner for lobbying and advocacy. CMI! is funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and supports the voices and activism of women, girls, trans people and intersex people who are often most marginalised by their communities.