Building and Improving the Engagement of Women and Key Populations in all Processes: How to Achieve the Global Fund’s Gender and Human Rights Strategic Objective

A call from participants at a Women4GlobalFund (W4GF) workshop to the Global Fund Secretariat, Board, Technical Partners, Implementing Countries, Country Coordinating Mechanisms (CCMs), and Donors

More than 20 community-based advocates from across East and Southern Africa gathered in Johannesburg from 12–14 December 2016 to discuss key opportunities and challenges to improve Global Fund programming in our countries. As W4GF advocates, our priorities are to increase and sustain our ability as essential partners to participate in Global Fund processes and to benefit fully from its funding. We represent:

- Women in all our diversity—especially adolescent girls and young women;
- Civil society and community-based groups involved directly and indirectly in HIV, TB and malaria responses—especially those promoting gender equity; and
- Members of key and vulnerable populations, including local, regional and global networks.

Our workshop took place at a critical and opportune time as this month the Global Fund is notifying countries of base allocation amounts for the 2017–2019 funding cycle. This cycle is the first to be rolled out under the new Global Fund 2017–2022 Strategy, which includes the top-level Strategic Objective “Promote and Protect Human Rights and Gender Equality”. We welcome and applaud the elevation of gender equality to a core pillar of the Global Fund’s overall approach for the next several years. And we hope and expect that the decision will positively influence the quality and scope of programming in our countries, especially around adolescent girls and young women. Yet, we also recognise how much work needs to be done for all Global Fund partners to collaborate effectively to build resilient and sustainable systems for health—including community systems and responses—that leave no one behind, a principle that all our countries accepted when they agreed to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Now, at the start of the 2017–2019 funding cycle, is the time to take strong and bold actions to achieve this goal to improve the health and well-being of the most vulnerable to HIV, TB and malaria: girls, young women and other key and vulnerable populations. Some of our countries have just three months to prepare and submit funding requests that will steer resources towards vital interventions and services over the next three years. We are determined to guarantee that our countries’ final grant agreements include specific, costed interventions that address the critical gender and human rights barriers to our HIV, TB and malaria responses and ensure that final budgets allocate funds for these interventions.

Recommendations moving forward
Our priorities and objectives resonate with those in the Global Fund’s new Strategy. We are a long way from fulfilling these, due to longstanding challenges and barriers to equal decision-making, influence and power. This new funding cycle must be the era in which equity in all Global Fund processes is more than just lip service. Action in response to the following recommendations would represent a first, critical step toward overcoming these challenges:

1. Implementing countries and the Global Fund’s Grant Approvals Committee (GAC) and Technical Review Panel (TRP) must:

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1 Botswana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe
2 We represent communities living with HIV and/or affected by TB and malaria from diverse country contexts, backgrounds, and experiences. We are from (or work with) communities of key populations—including women living with HIV; men who have sex with men (MSM); lesbian, gay and bisexual women; transgender people; people who use drugs; indigenous people; and affected TB and malaria communities.
Ensure the inclusion of and funding for gender-transformative interventions in all Global Fund grants. This requires following numerous steps of the country dialogue process. In particular:

- National Strategic Plans (NSPs) should be gender-transformative;
- Submitted and approved funding requests should include substantial and actionable gender-transformative interventions that fully respond to adolescent girls and young women in our countries; and
- Submitted funding request that do not include such interventions should automatically be returned to countries with specific instructions to revise and strengthen gender-transformative interventions.

2. **Country Coordinating Mechanisms (CCMs) must:**
   Better support civil society and improve communications channels to ensure equal participation and representation of all CCM members. The needs and resources available to civil society CCM members differ greatly and we face particularly large and consistent challenges to effective communication with groups we represent. CCMs have a duty to support civil society members and our organisations with the capacity and resources needed to meet our representation responsibilities.

3. **Technical partners must:**
   Step up and more effectively support us. We need evidence and documentation to make the case for interventions and services we want to see supported in Global Fund programmes. We also need capacity support for critical activities such as convening constituents and building our knowledge base. Technical partners are mandated to support us in such efforts and we demand more accountability in upholding their responsibilities. Our ability to participate fully in country dialogues depends on their support, especially since CCMs often refuse to earmark funds for these activities.

4. **The Global Fund Secretariat must:**
   Mandate CCMs to strictly adhere to the Global Fund’s policies and procedures on CCMs. The eligibility requirements around inclusion and consultation among all stakeholders—including communities and key populations—across the entire grant cycle, from the development of NSPs and beyond grant making are essential. The existing policies are good and progressive, but often not implemented or enforced.

5. **The Global Fund Secretariat must:**
   Ensure that organisations and networks of women, and especially those from key affected populations, are able to access funding from the Global Fund for the important work we are doing. We are service providers and play key roles as well in raising important alarms when gaps are evident in programmes provided by Principal Recipients and our governments—and we are tired of our work being neither valued nor financially resourced. The Global Fund will not be able to turn the tide and really promote gender equality without women in communities who are the backbone of the health care system in our countries.

6. **The Global Fund Secretariat, CCMs, and all civil society CCM members must:**
   Ensure that women and those from key population-led organisations are meaningfully involved across all Global Fund processes. We demand to be heard during country dialogues and included as beneficiaries: in addition, again we reiterate that we should be designated as implementers of services and actually receive the financial and technical support promised in grants.

This overall effort should recognise and respond to the following:

- All CCM members should be given guidance on gender and human rights to better understand our needs and priorities. Such preparation is vital for all CCM members, since it’s a core obligation for them to work closely with and support woman and key population representatives (of whom there is usually only one or
small number on any CCM). Guidance is essential to overcome the fact that many Principal Recipients and other key decision-makers have insufficient knowledge or awareness of our needs and rights and ignorance makes it easy for those in power to dismiss or ignore us.

- Community and other civil society groups need technical assistance to support us to participate more meaningfully on CCMs. Often, though, our CCMs do not allocate or request money for this objective even when it is requested. The Community Rights and Gender (CRG) Department at the Global Fund Secretariat should therefore make concerted efforts to ensure that all civil society CCM members are aware of technical support opportunities available to them and act on any evaluation that shows that civil society partners are unaware of the available technical assistance.

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**Women4GlobalFund (W4GF)** is a dynamic and global platform of women and gender equality advocates who share a deep commitment to ensuring that Global Fund programmes are gender-transformative to meet the rights and priorities of women and girls in all their diversity.

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