

## 44<sup>th</sup> Global Fund Board meeting: W4GF Advocacy statement Promote and protect human rights and gender equality: now – and for the road ahead!

Women4Global Fund (W4GF) is a global movement of women from implementer countries, dedicated to ensuring that the Global Fund addresses the needs and rights of women and girls through its investment in HIV, TB and Malaria programs.

In advance of the 44<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Global Fund Board, W4GF advocates ***call on the leadership of the Global Fund to address the urgent need to step up action ‘to protect and promote human rights and gender equality’*** across the Global Fund’s portfolio, in line with the Global Fund’s Strategy (Strategic Objective 3, (SO3)). W4GF is ***alarmed by the lack of progress*** on SO3, which is slipping back in terms of gender equality, risking achievement of global goals. There has been ***insufficient attention to gender equality and human rights in the Global Fund’s response to COVID-19*** with weak information about how the Global Fund is addressing major gender equality and human rights challenges, and ***inadequate action to stem the growth in gender-based violence***, linked to responses to COVID-19.

*2020 has been an important year and has brought with it unexpected challenges. The Global Fund commenced its new allocation cycle, dispersing US \$14 billion as part of the mid-way point in its strategy Investing to End Epidemics (2017-2022). The challenges of COVID-19 have made this more complex, and the Global Fund has responded swiftly with additional support and flexibilities to countries, including new funds through the C19RM. A two year process has also been started to develop the next Global Fund Strategy (2023-2028).*

### The Global Fund’s response to COVID-19

As early as [April](#) and [May](#) this year, W4GF urged the Global Fund to:

- . Remain alert to the gendered aspects of COVID-19 and to support countries to flatten the curve of inequalities given the increases in domestic violence, and weakening access to sexual and reproductive health services - both of which also put women and girls at increased risk of HIV;
- . Encourage countries to access the COVID-19 flexibilities, and the COVID-19 Response Mechanism (C19RM) to address social inequities, and to monitor implementation of this policy;
- . Continue to encourage countries to adopt programmes and services that are ‘gender security aware’ and responsive - and to reinforce this continuously in Global Fund guidance and support to countries;
- . Ensure accountability and request that countries provide updates on how funds are being used to enable women and adolescent girls and young women to escape immediate impacts of violence, and the related increased risks of HIV;
- . Track the ability of women and girls to access treatment for HIV, TB and malaria, as well as essential sexual and reproductive health and rights services which impact on HIV programs and save lives;
- . Ensure that communities remain at the core of responses to COVID-19, in global and local decision-making processes, including funds accessed through the C19RM.

The Global Fund’s own preliminary analysis suggests that very little support has gone to countries to respond to the rapidly growing rates of violence that many women (and children) are facing in their own homes, exacerbated by forced shelter and lockdowns. On top of these human rights abuses, many women – especially from key populations - lack access to sexual and reproductive health services. Many W4GF Advocates report that whilst they were consulted when their countries applied to the Global Fund for flexibilities through the C19RM, very few of them know what support has been agreed and they see little gender responsive action, including to address the rising rates of gender-based violence.

W4GF applauds the Global Fund for its strong guidance on COVID-19, gender equality and human rights. However, this guidance must translate into action and funding that is more inclusive of community, that is properly aligned with SO3 to promote and protect gender equality, and where the Global Fund can track this engagement properly. W4GF reiterates our original asks and emphasizes the need for urgent action to:

- **Make sure the Global Fund's actions on COVID-19 are fully aligned with SO3, to promote and protect gender equality and human rights;**
- **Ensure that C19RM operates in a way that is inclusive of community voices, and responds fully to the rights, needs and health of women and girls.**
- **Ensure that countries are open and transparent about the process to decide what gets funded with Global Fund COVID-19 flexibilities.**

*W4GF finds it unacceptable that so few women who engaged in the process at country level are unaware of what is being supported by the Global Fund.*

### The Global Fund's capacity to deliver on SO3 to promote and protect gender equality

Many W4GF Advocates have engaged in the national processes to prepare and submit funding requests in this allocation cycle. W4GF is disheartened that despite the substantial work of so many W4GF advocates, significant barriers persist at country level in the deliberations of CCMs. This translates into weak funding requests that now appear to be regressing in respect of gender equality, despite the growing and urgent need to respond to gender disparities.

Our own observations and experiences, as W4GF Advocates, at country level align with the findings of the TRP which noted – in its recent review of Window 1 – that gender equality was the weakest aspect of the most recent Global Fund proposals. *“Of particular concern were the areas of addressing gender-related barriers to service, where only 44% of funding requests in Window 1 were assessed as good or very good (versus 56% in the 2017-2019 cycle)”*. The TRP's second report this year (25 August) reiterates pointing to several areas where there is insufficient attention to gender equality, and key issues related to women and girls.

In [our submission to the development of the next Global Fund Strategy](#), W4GF stresses the importance of meaningfully engaging us at all levels of decision making. We reiterate our recommendation that the Global Fund processes must:

- **Scale up expertise and input on gender and gender equality, women and girls, across all Global Fund structures at global, regional and national levels. This includes urgently addressing the current situation where the Global Fund Secretariat no longer has focused attention on gender equality in the Community, Rights and Gender team. This must change.**

*W4GF finds it unacceptable that there is no longer a Gender Adviser in the Global Fund's secretariat, given the current strategic focus on Gender Equality. We believe that the inadequacy of the most recent funding requests directly reflects this lack of capacity, as reflected in the TRP's concerns.*

It is not reasonable to ask countries to amend proposals to address gender equality - to be compliant with SO3 and address the needs and rights of their populations - when they cannot access sufficient guidance and support from the Global Fund earlier in the process. **W4GF is alarmed by this slipping back on gender equality. This will be counted in lives lost and needs urgent action and leadership now.**