

SUSTAINABILITY GUIDANCE NOTE ON CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT

Guidance and Key Considerations

Informing the process and design of the sustainability and transition plans

1. General considerations and recommendations on Civil Society engagement during the transition/exit process of programmes

Civil society organizations – and particularly feminist and women’s rights organizations – are at the forefront of efforts to end violence against women and girls. Civil society organizations also play a vital role in ensuring that the voices and perspectives of structurally marginalized groups are integrated into programmes and policies, including into recovery plans and emergency policies. **Civil society partnerships have been fundamental to Spotlight Initiative’s governance, set up and functioning, and should be central to programmes’ sustainability plans. This helps to ensure that plans are responsive to the needs of local communities and rights holders, further fostering sustainability. Civil Society Reference Groups (CSRG) should be systematically consulted in the transition of the programme as well, given their critical advisory and accountability roles.** The below are a series of recommendations to better engage civil society in this critical phase of the programme.

- **Center community-driven approaches and perspectives in the, design and implementation and assessment of the sustainability/transition plan**
 - To do so, **the plan should be designed, implemented, monitored and assessed in partnership with civil society (including CSRG) and include critical inputs of rights holders and community members, including the women and girls Spotlight Initiative aims to serve.** Civil society, via the CSRG mechanism, is expected to be consulted/engaged in the following mechanisms and processes:
 - By the programme closure working group in the development of a joint programme closure schedule
 - In the design and approval of sustainability plans (as members of the Steering Committee) as well as the implementation of sustainability/transition plans
 - RUNOs to consult/ask the CSRG to lead community-level discussions on sustainability, e.i. to adopt a bottom-up approach that ensures rights-based sustainability plans, and recognizes that agency of rights’ holders
 - Guiding points of discussion and reflection include the following:



- How can the Spotlight programme **develop mechanisms and safe dialogue spaces so that rights holders and CSOs are active agents in defining what constitutes an "exit strategy"** and clearly defining their roles in this process?
 - Schedule **dedicated meeting(s) on the sustainability plan of the programme**. Ensure that the interested **members are included in these conversations from the very beginning** and have sufficient time to review and provide inputs to the documents (ensure the documents are available in multiple local languages).
 - How do you **ensure accountability to CSRG members and rights holders** who have contributed to designing the sustainability plans?
 - *For example, in Uganda, the CSRG has been involved in helping Spotlight Initiative sustainably transition into a new phase - shaping a new programme that merges an education programme with an EAWG programme in a meaningful way. The main focus of the CSRG is to ensure an exit/transition that does not cause harm, and that civil society and survivors remain meaningfully engaged in the new programme's design and implementation. Recording of the NRG member's presentation can be found [here](#) (Dec, 2022)*
- **Pursue efforts to secure and sustain funding to the drivers of change**
 - Work towards **sustaining political buy-in and financial commitments** at all levels, including advocating with donors and government, for **investment in women's rights organizations and feminist movements** to sustain and deepen progress made. The team should include RG members and other civil society representation in this advocacy strategy.
 - Concomitantly, **work hand-in-hand with the Civil Society Reference Group in developing and rolling out the resource mobilization strategy**.
- **Programmatic considerations for Pillar 6 in the transition phase of the programme include:**

As programmes are and will be phasing out and transitioning, these recommendations and considerations should harness the work that has already been achieved to both consolidate and sustain it beyond the programme. The following considerations should, of course, be adapted to the programmes' context.

- How can Spotlight Initiative support local activists and WROs to **embed and sustain the civil society knowledge hubs, coalition building and joint advocacy activities in local and independent structures, platforms and leadership**?
- How can Spotlight Initiative **sustain its "bridge" function between government/institutions and feminist grassroots' actors and women's rights and feminist organizations** to be considered as key and indispensable actors and agents of change in the EAWG field? How can Spotlight Initiative **contribute to sustaining cross movement alliances** and links, and foster collaborative relationships across regions and intersecting issues (EAWG, climate change, political participation, etc.)
 - For instance, Spotlight Initiative, in partnership with the CSRG and civil society partners, could set up or leverage existing networks and platforms to



- institutionalize informal and/or formal spaces of exchange, policy-making and advocacy between governments and key civil society partners.
- How can Spotlight Initiative programmes ensure that **capacity strengthening activities serve a long term goal in this last year?**
 - For instance, providing women’s rights groups with training on accountability mechanisms to better engage with social accountability mechanisms and influence approaches for prevention and response to violence against women and girls and gender equality more broadly.
 - This could also include making accessible and disseminating capacity development/strengthening tools (or supporting civil society’s use of these if they are already disseminated)), and material for civil society as well as having a training of trainers to have a pool of GBV experts that can be tapped into in the long term.
 - How can Spotlight Initiative programmes **leverage the Civil Society Reference Group mechanism and the expertise and network built by the members to strengthen and sustain movement/coalition building efforts under Pillar 6?** If the CSRG developed an independent monitoring scorecard, how does the Spotlight Initiative programme integrate these recommendations to the best of its ability in a successor programme?
 - As the UN has worked with civil society in the past years through Spotlight Initiative, there have been creative processes and workarounds necessitated at national, regional, and global levels to make sure that civil society is properly supported to participate and be informed of the technical processes and decisions regarding the programming of the Initiative: **how do Spotlight Initiative teams and RUNOs capture these lessons learned and institutionalize these creative workarounds into the operational processes and workflows** (from compensation modality, providing DSA ahead of time for civil society participants in Spotlight-events, back end workarounds etc.) as a means of sustaining and improving the meaningful engagement with civil society that has been modeled by Spotlight Initiative?

2. Sustainability of the Civil Society Reference Group mechanism

Civil Society Reference Groups have been established as an institutional mechanism to facilitate and ensure systematic civil society engagement in governance and implementation throughout the Spotlight Initiative Programme cycle. With its triple mandate, the group advises, advocates for the realization of the programme’s objectives and holds the Initiative accountable for its commitments. This new way of centering and partnering with civil society, and in particular women’s rights activists, aims to align with a human rights based approach and a decolonial way of programming. **As Spotlight Initiative programmes phase out or transition, the sustainability plan to institutionalize the structure and role of the CSRG beyond the programme should be discussed and agreed upon in a collective manner to ensure ownership and alignment with the do no harm principle. The CSRG**

Regional Forums, exchanges and programmatic results concur in establishing the relevance and importance of sustaining the Reference Group mechanism in both Spotlight Initiative 2.0 programmes as well as other GBV and gender programmes going forward.

To do so, here are a few considerations to **guide the process**. Of course, this should be informed and tailored to the programme's specific context and needs.

1. Set up dedicated sessions with the Reference Group members to discuss the sustainability of the mechanism in the country:

- Ensuring that the role and responsibilities of the CSRG is defined from the very premise of the next iteration of the programme or in future GBV programming is key for a smooth and robust collaboration. Based on the [Summary of CSRG sustainability recommendations](#), the discussion points could include:
 - What key outcome(s) does the group wish to achieve during the final year, how do they get there and what support is needed?
 - What has worked well, and what has been challenging and thus needs to change in the future iteration of the group?
 - Whether the members would like to pursue their role and mission beyond the Initiative. If so, what role do they envision?
 - Discuss the scope, roles and responsibilities of the Reference Group should it be embedded in another or broader UN programme.
 - Discuss what resources the Reference Group needs to meaningfully function in a new programme, e.g. remuneration, human resource/consultants, budget for work plan.
 - Renewal of members and inclusivity of different minorities and constituents.

2. Spotlight Initiative teams and associated RUNOs should brainstorm and discuss how the CSRG mechanism could be harnessed, adapted and institutionalized in broader GEWE/GBV/WEE programmes or sub-programmes in the country or region

- The Spotlight Initiative has set a new precedent for meaningful and deep engagement with civil society in the UN Development System. It is modeling a partnership that aims to decolonize programming and sustain its results. To ensure that the CSRG can sustain its functions beyond Spotlight Initiative and/or in future Spotlight Initiative programmes, are there other spaces or relevant UN programmes that could harness the CSRG's functions going forward? How can the CSRG mechanism be institutionalized in the broader UN frameworks in-country?
- *The **Pacific Regional and Vanuatu National Civil Society Reference Groups** have been harnessed as a broader GBV Advisory Group to other UN EAWG programmes instead of solely focusing on Spotlight Initiative programmes. Ultimately, this ensures sustainability of such accountability processes beyond Spotlight Initiative and across agencies. The programmes are also advocating for the institutionalization of the Reference Group mechanism in the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework.*



3. Spotlight Initiative and associated RUNOs should facilitate continued engagement and partnerships between the CSRG members in its efforts to engage and partner with a wide range of stakeholders beyond the existence of Spotlight.

- Should the CSRG wish to pursue its function beyond Spotlight, how does the programme enable greater political leverage for the CSRG with the UN, EU and Governments, and create cross-organizational work or new partnerships? What spaces can the programme and agencies create for sustained dialogue and engagement between governmental stakeholders and the CSRG members? Inviting the CSRG to multi-stakeholder meetings and events, and to more effectively coordinate and facilitate their engagement with the government has been suggested by RG members as an entrypoint.
- *In **Mozambique**, CSRG has established broad partnerships with the Government, UN, EU, CSOs and traditional leaders. In 2022, the CSRG worked with UNFPA and the Ministry of Planning and Finances to incorporate Spotlight's objectives and lessons on GBV and SRHR in the National Strategy For Development (ENDA). ENDA covers the entire country and will continue the work with the lessons from Spotlight after the programme closes in April 2023.*

Annex: Civil Society Reference Group Sustainability Recommendations

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Based on existing promising and best practices, below is a list of recommendations to consider for Reference Groups in future Spotlight Initiative and GBV/gender programming. These emerged from several consultations with Reference Group members and Spotlight Initiative Programme Teams globally.

ROLE OF THE CSRG
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure clarity of the role and responsibilities of the group - Maintain the triple mandate of the group to advise, advocate and hold the Initiative accountable - Maintain the diverse composition of the group (representation of different constituent groups and geographic areas) - The CSRG to be more inclusive of vulnerable groups such as LGBTQI-persons, women living with disabilities, sex workers, etc., especially in more repressive countries. - Be flexible with the group size to ensure efficiency
FUNDING, RESOURCES, SUPPORT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure adequate funding and resources to develop a budgeted work plan. Funding for the CSRG is critical for its independence, efficiency and sustainability. - Ensure fair compensation for CSRG-members' work and time committed to the Initiative. This should be a standard practice across programmes (see the CSRG Compensation Guidance Note). - Hire a dedicated civil society officer who provides technical support, coordinates the group, communicates programme updates and facilitates participation and partnership with key programme stakeholders. - See more recommendation and guidance on Role and Support in the Guidance Note on Meaningful Engagement with CSRGs.
DECISION-MAKING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Retain the governance structure with a minimum of 20% CSRG-membership in the Steering Committee of a potential Spotlight 2.0 or other UN GBV programme - Ensure timely and equal access to information. This is critical for meaningful participation in decision-making spaces. - Facilitate access to key decision-making spaces with governments, EU and UN. Such access is critical for the CSRG's advocacy role and to influence national policies and funding priorities.
ACCOUNTABILITY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Secure resources and support for the CSRG to practice its accountability role using formal avenues, such as the civil society monitoring toolkit/scorecard. This enables the group to share recommendations with the Resident Coordinator and relevant UN teams, and follow-up implementation/response.
COMMUNICATION AND PARTNERSHIP



- Ensure adequate transparency, coordination and communication between the programme coordination team and the CSRG for meaningful participation and partnership.
- Ensure more visibility for the CSRG in formal and public events at the regional/national level, to gain public recognition and build broader partnerships.
- Facilitate engagement and partnerships with government, traditional leaders, law enforcement
- Facilitate greater engagement with the wider UN-system and the EU.
- Establish stronger connections between the national, regional and global Reference Groups (e.g. through a community of practice or other inter-CSRG spaces) to ensure continued cross-regional learning and network building, beyond the Spotlight programme cycle.

MOVEMENT BUILDING

- Integrate the CSRG into activities/interventions focused on movement building, strengthening CSOs use of social accountability mechanisms, capacity building/core funding/organizational funding efforts etc. to participate, advise and lead on movement building. This will allow members to build partnerships and position themselves and their priorities on the national political agenda.

PROTECTION

- In cases where CSRG-members are being harassed or attacked by the State or a non-State actors, the existing and future Spotlight Initiative programmes should establish a context-specific process or set of actions/referrals to mitigate and address such incidents, and ensure protection and a safe space for CSRG-members (see the [Spotlight Initiative Specific Integrated Protection Approach](#))
- Integrate self-care in work plan activities to avoid burnout.