



Spotlight Initiative
To eliminate violence
against women and girls

Instituted by the European Union and the United Nations:



Guidance Note

Achieving meaningful engagement and partnership with the Civil Society Reference Groups

The meaningful engagement of civil society and women's rights/feminist groups, including those representing women facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, is a key principle of Spotlight Initiative. In line with this principle and based on early recommendations from feminist and women's rights activists, Civil Society National, Regional and Global Reference Groups (CS-RGs) have been established as an institutional mechanism to facilitate systematic civil society engagement throughout the Spotlight Initiative Programme cycle.

This Guidance Note aims to address challenges reported by Country and Regional Programme Teams¹ and CS-RGs, by providing guidance, clarifications and recommended actions that facilitate a meaningful engagement and partnership with the CS-RGs.

1. Meaningful engagement

Spotlight Initiative is expected to have a meaningful engagement and partnership with civil society that is **equal, inclusive, transparent and respectful**. The goal is to build a deep collaboration with CS-RG members, who will advise and guide the implementation of the programme.

To achieve this, it is important that the CS-RG:

- is adequately represented in Spotlight Initiative's decision-making mechanisms (Steering Committee) with at least 20% full voting representation
- is invited and allowed to fully engage in multi-stakeholder consultations and meetings
- has clearly allocated resources and support to meaningfully participate, e.g. budgeting CS-RGs' workplans (including transportation and travel costs); providing adequate notice time for meetings and technical review of documents; allowing virtual meeting participation; selecting disability-friendly venues; arranging interpretation for sign language and minority languages (when needed)
- is given feedback and timely information on how its inputs may have been considered for the programme, including justifications when those may have not been taken into account
- has established mechanisms to hold Spotlight Initiative accountable for its commitments (see Section 5)

2. Role and Responsibilities

The Civil Society Reference Group

The CS-RGs consist of around 15 diverse global/regional/national/local experts on eliminating violence against women and girls, and on gender equality and women's rights more broadly.

The CS-RG (national, regional and global) is an institutional mechanism that harnesses civil society expertise and strengthens its effectiveness and accountability to women's movements at national, regional and global levels. The CS-RGs serve a triple function; to **advise** the Initiative, to **advocate** and partner for the realization of its

¹ The Spotlight Initiative Country/Regional Programme Team is composed of representatives from the Resident Coordinators Office and Recipient UN Organizations that work to coordinate and implement the country/regional programme.



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objectives and to hold the Initiative **accountable** for its commitments. Please note, the final role and responsibilities of the CS-RG are decided by the members of the Group.

Once the CS-RG is established, it is recommended to:

- Review and agree on its mandate and responsibilities (find Terms of Reference template in [Annex A](#)),
- Agree on a brief **standard operating procedure** to guide the collaboration with the Spotlight Initiative Programme Team,
- Agree on tasks and deliverables for the year including a schedule of meetings and other activities (workplan) with a corresponding budget (find workplan template in [Annex B](#)); and,
- Agree on a modality for selection of representatives to the National/Regional Steering Committee, who will hold at least 20% full voting membership.

The Spotlight Programme Team

The CS-RGs partnership rests with the entire Spotlight Initiative Programme Team. To realize a structured engagement, it is recommended that the CS-RGs and Programme Team agree on the modalities for collaboration and communication.² The outcomes of such agreement may be documented in a jointly agreed **standard operating procedure (SOP)**.

It is further recommended that a **focal point** from the Spotlight Initiative Programme Team is assigned to the CS-RG (e.g. the programme coordinator or the technical coherence specialist). The focal point will **coordinate**³ the group and be the first point of contact for any **operational support**, including procurement to execute workplan activities.

3. CS-RG Workplan and Budget

The CS-RG should adopt a workplan with a known corresponding budget. The workplan is best defined locally by the CS-RG, guided by the local context and the group's roles and responsibilities.

The workplan may include: holding of regular meetings and access support by all members; regularly advising the Spotlight Initiative Programme Team; holding consultations with government officials, women's rights organizations and other civil society organizations to inform implementation; participating in monitoring activities and site visits; drafting shadow reports on the programme's civil society engagement, supporting advocacy campaigns and existing lobbying efforts; reviewing technical documents, supporting the contextualization of the Spotlight-Specific Integrated Protection Approach for women's human rights organizations and defenders.

² Consider communication methods that are inclusive with respect to members' abilities, connectivity capacities, security concerns, language skills, time differences, amongst others. This may be WhatsApp for daily communication, email to share meeting invites and programme documents, Skype for virtual meetings, or any other communication method that meets the needs and accessibility of the members

³ Coordination may include organize regular meetings, timeously invite CS-RG representatives to consultations and multi-stakeholder meetings, share documents for review with adequate time, etc.



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IT-equipment such as laptops, phones or tablets may be purchased to ensure members can meaningfully participate and implement work plan activities.⁴

It is recommended that the CS-RG;

commits to convene on a bi-annual or quarterly basis (in-person or virtually), sets realistic and relevant targets/activities and revisits the workplan on a six-months basis, adopts a [code of conduct](#), including clauses on quorums and conflicts of interest, selects a chair, if needed (who coordinates the group and is the primary contact person of the group); establishes working groups for execution of workplan activities, if needed, and explores online platforms and alternative inclusive mechanisms to hold meetings and communicate.

Work Plan Budget

- All programmes must include budget lines for the CS-RG in their Annual Work Plan.
- If not done so yet, at the next occasion, the CS-RG workplan budget should be incorporated into the programme Annual Work Plan (AWP) and Budget following the related Secretariat-issued guidance on Spotlight [AWPs](#) and [Budget revisions](#). In the meantime, the CS-RG workplan budget can be formalized separately to ensure it can be effective without delay.
 - Reminder on Spotlight Initiative Budget revision guidance: All cumulative adjustments to the Programme's budget that are not reflected in the Annual Work Plan can be formalized post facto (if under 25% of the RUNOs budget) with a budget revision presented to the National/Regional Steering Committee typically at the beginning of the following year.
 - The AWP and Programme budget may include only a simple summary by UNDG category of the CS-RG workplan budget that will be detailed in the CS-RG Workplan document (see model in [Annex B](#)).
- The CS-RG members will jointly draft the initial workplan and budget proposal, which will be reviewed by the Spotlight Initiative Programme Team through its working level coordination and decision-making process. If required, the final approval may be brought up to the Resident Coordinator.
- The funding source for the CS-RG workplan budget will come from Pillar 6. The Spotlight Initiative Programme Team and Resident Coordinator may want to propose a budget range or cap.
- The budget will cover all costs indicated in the workplan, including travel/transportation to meetings, IT-equipment, rent for venues, campaign material, interpretation services, etc.
- There may be activities in the workplan that do not require a budget allocation.

4. Monitoring and Reporting with civil society

⁴ Please refer to RUNOs' respective rules and regulations on equipment purchase and loans to individuals.



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As one of the primary stakeholders of the Initiative, it is vital that civil society partners have the opportunity to independently monitor, evaluate and report on Spotlight Initiative's processes and implementation. It is therefore strongly recommended to adequately plan and budget for monitoring activities and shadow reporting (including any consultancies) in the CS-RG's workplan. This is also a priority for the UN Deputy Secretary General.

The following can be expected:

- The [Count Me In! Consortium](#) in collaboration with a number of global, regional and national CS-RG members have developed a monitoring tool that will capture the achievements and challenges of Spotlight Initiative's engagement with civil society at the national, regional and global levels. The tool will report against a number of quantitative and qualitative indicators (related to the [Feminist Recommendations](#) and beyond) and is envisioned to produce an annual civil society shadow report/report card. The report will be publicly available and serve as an advocacy tool and important source of data contributing to the existing evidence bank on engaging women's rights activists, groups and organizations, and other civil society actors in ending violence against women programming. Find the toolkit [here](#).
- The Secretariat, in collaboration with civil society and UN colleagues, is developing a Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation approach that aims to define how civil society can meaningfully participate in Spotlight Initiative's M&E activities. The approach will be developed during the course of 2020.
- To ensure that CS-RG is functioning in accordance with its envisioned role and mandate, and to address any challenges in a timely manner, the CS-RG may evaluate their engagement as a Reference Group on an annual basis. This may be done through an anonymous survey or another method as the CS-RG deems fit. The evaluation will help assess challenges and opportunities, collect best practices, and quickly course correct to strengthen the partnership, where necessary. This will also help the Secretariat identify and provide support for country/regional teams with weaker engagement.
- The engagement of CS-RGs will also be externally evaluated in the Initiative's mid-term assessment.

5. Accountability

The Resident Coordinator is the appropriate entry point to resolve any issues within the Programme and ensure that a healthy relationship is sustained between the Spotlight Initiative Programme Team and the CS-RG. If an issue remains of concern after discussions with the Resident Coordinator, the CS-RG members and Resident Coordinator's Office are invited to bring the matter to the attention of the Global Spotlight Initiative Secretariat who will endeavor to support in resolving the matter, with support from the Executive Office of the Secretary-General where needed.

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