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peace for the twenty-first century”

Statement submitted by Virginia Gildersleeve International Fund, Inc., a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being
circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council
resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

The Virginia Gildersleeve International Fund invests in grassroots initiatives driven by women and girls in developing economies that advance their lives in a sustainable way. Through a multi-stage growth partnership model, Virginia Gildersleeve International Fund partners long-term with women-led grassroots organizations to help them grow and deliver on their mission. We help organizations move from emerging to established, and we support programmes to effectively deliver activities improving outcomes in the lives of women, girls, and trans people, and ultimately contribute to lasting impact.

The visionary agenda of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action created the necessary impetus to plan for a world where every woman and girl can exercise her freedoms and choices and has equal access to opportunities to learn, grow, and thrive. It generated transformational and concrete changes to advance women's and girls' rights. Yet, there is much work left to be done, as no country has yet achieved gender equality; women continue to earn less than men, the 7 per cent gap in access to financial services globally between women and men continues to persist, and women's economic development lags as a result of unequal distribution of income, health, education, and decision-making powers. Beijing+25 brings forth new opportunities to re-evaluate, reconnect, and regenerate momentum through action to promote the necessary political will and public mobilization to achieve gender equality for all.

Women's leadership and respect for grassroots women's groups are at the core of our grant making. Virginia Gildersleeve International Fund believes that:

- The strength and sustainability of its grantee organizations – or organizational capacity – is just as important as the programmes they implement.
- Our grantees are experts in their own contexts and should have more opportunities to take centre stage on the issues they address.
- Women's enterprise is woven into the fabric of community. As primary caregivers and often income earners, women are key players in family survival strategy. Entrepreneurship and self-sufficiency is therefore integral to addressing the barriers to women's economic empowerment.

Virginia Gildersleeve International Fund has invested over \$4 million in grants to almost 700 organizations impacting nearly half a million marginalized women and girls in 94 countries. Our grantmaking experience has taught us that women's economic empowerment is critical to achieving gender equality and that women-led, community-based organizations are crucial partners and strong assets for achieving the economic empowerment of women and girls and gender equity in their communities. These groups exist at the nexus of the women and the community, operate in remote environments, understand and can respond to local needs, and are able to leverage their connections and networks to shift the norms. However, instead of receiving core support to invest in key capacities and infrastructure, they receive restricted funding or are subcontracted by global development actors for projects of which their communities have no ownership. Additionally, notwithstanding the urgent need for global actors to achieve impact, scale, and rapid social change, community-based organizations are systematically marginalized as they are perceived to be too small for investment.

Our grantees consistently tell us that capacity gaps threaten their ability to meet pressing needs of women and girls in their communities. Without the essential capacity-building funds, community-based organizations are forced to either forsake critical actions necessary for their organization's long-term growth or divert funds

necessary for programming to meet their operational costs. Supporting the growth and development of community-based organizations, in addition to providing programme-specific funding, would allow them to invest not only in their programmatic work, but also build their capacity for long-term sustainability.

Our belief that achieving gender equity will remain unattainable without targeted investments in community-based organizations has motivated us to take an active partnership approach with our grantees. Our three-stage model, in which Virginia Gildersleeve International Fund will fund women-led groups who have received little or no previous funding, enables us to invest heavily in the groups who will benefit, providing leverage for longer-term grantees as they increase their impact and develop the capacity and credibility to approach large funders. This unique grantmaking model is designed specifically to support and partner with new and emerging women-led grassroots organizations working in communities where gender inequities remain pervasive. Per this model, grantees will be given flexible funding and will have the opportunity to receive up to six years of funding in amounts of as much as \$95,000.

This new model is the product of extensive consultation with our grantees. Feedback from three of our grantees, included below, highlights the need for concerted action and funding to build the capacity of community-based organizations to deliver effectively on their missions.

- Migration and Asylum Project, India, shares that: “There are very few opportunities for small organizations to directly engage both with the donors and partners and jointly develop organizational assessment and planning tools that are suited for small emerging organizations like ours.”
- Kyamuduma Farmers’ Cooperative Society LTD, Uganda, shared with us that: “Virginia Gildersleeve International Fund’s funding model will help us strengthen institutional development in terms of staff capacity development, fundraising, management information and communications systems, networking, and market linkages. It will also enhance our advocacy capacity to fundraise for more resources. The model will also strengthen our already existing struggles, which seek to promote vulnerable women’s economic status.”
- Teen Mothers Initiative, Kenya shares that: “Technically, the partnership will enable Teen Mothers Initiative to recruit and retain motivated and innovative staff with lots of expertise and experiences in proposal writing, programme management, and more, which is relevant to successful development and implementation of programmes, as well as the growth and development of the organization. The model will also enable Teen Mothers Initiative to network with similar organizations and other donors, which will enhance the profile and visibility of Teen Mothers Initiative at both the local and international level.”

Since launching this new partnership model, we are already encouraged by the new and exciting opportunities that are opening up for our grantees, as clarified by our grantee, Eldoret Women for Development, located in Eldoret, Kenya. Eldoret Women for Development is a women’s organization founded by two female ex-inmates who were wrongfully convicted of crimes they did not commit. The organization focuses on providing economic and social support for women being released from prison, so that they can reintegrate into the community and overcome the stigma, discrimination, and poverty they could otherwise face as ex-inmates. Working in urban slums where women have very little space and almost no means to generate income, Eldoret Women for Development teaches women a unique method of sack gardening, where they grow vegetables vertically in repurposed cement bags. This method has yielded spectacular results – women are growing enough vegetables

to feed their families healthy foods, while selling excess produce in local markets. With financial literacy training, participants are also learning how to track profits and save. Perhaps most impressive, in a community where poverty drives a high recidivism rate, not one Eldoret Women for Development participant has returned to prison since the programme started in 2017. This year has been Eldoret Women for Development's most successful to date, as our long-term flexible funding has enabled them to invest in core infrastructure. Using our funds, they were able to obtain office space, design a website, add a new staff person (a young female ex-inmate), and create new programme evaluation tools to better monitor their results. Of particular note, Eldoret Women for Development was recently appointed to their county's steering committee to offer technical advice on the empowerment of women through their unique method of sack gardening. We believe this opportunity would not have been possible without the visibility and credibility gained through Virginia Gildersleeve International Fund's new partnership model.

Without real and meaningful partnerships with all actors at the global, regional, and local level, achieving gender equality and leaving no one behind will remain lofty goals. In conclusion, on behalf of its grantees, Virginia Gildersleeve International Fund calls on the sixty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, Generation Equality, and all Member States to invest in building the capacity of community-based organizations, especially women-led organizations and associations.
