(Women First International Fund (previously Virginia Gildersleeve International Fund)

(www.womenfirstfund.org)

(Anita Thomass, Representative to the UN, athomas@womenfirstfund.org)

Chapeau

(Add your concise, concrete, and action-oriented language for the Chapeau)

Chapter I. Sustainable development and financing for development

(Women First International Fund (previously Virginia Gildersleeve International Fund), partners with women and trans-led community-centered organizations in emerging economies to promote gender equity. Through its unique grantmaking model with flexible funding, network building, and targeted capacity, the Fund partners with new and emerging grassroots women-led organizations, in countries where gender inequities remain pervasive, to sustain programs that enhance the economic empowerment of women, girls, and trans people to address widespread gender inequalities. Since its founding in 1969, the Fund has invested over US$ 4 million in grants and impacted nearly half a million marginalized women, girls, and trans people globally. Our mission is grounded in the recognition that expertise and solutions are found within the very communities that experience systemic oppression daily, especially as those most affected by inequality and injustice are often left behind and remain unheard and unseen in pivotal decision-making spaces.

Poverty and inequality remain daunting challenges for the foreseeable future with an additional 165 million people falling into poverty between 2020 and 2023, disproportionately impacting marginalized women, girls, and trans communities. In the aftermath of crises, women and transpeople find themselves grappling with a loss of livelihoods, battling economic hardship without adequate social protection mechanisms, are frequently excluded from the negotiation table, and have no voice in decisions that directly impact their lives and communities. Women's enterprise is woven into the fabric of the community, as primary caregivers and often income earners, and key players in family survival strategy. Entrepreneurship and self-sufficiency are therefore integral to addressing the barriers to women's economic empowerment.

Gender inequality will continue to persist unless all women, girls, and trans people achieve equal rights and are assured a just transition where new jobs are green and decent. Women's access to green jobs and

climate-resilient livelihoods will be a key stepping stone to help economies bounce back. But for this to happen, it is important to address systemic issues such as gender-based job segmentation, gender pay gaps, poor representation of women at the decision-making tables, and ensuring a safe and healthy work environment free from violence and harassment.

Grassroots organizations, particularly those led by women and trans activists, with their deep understanding of the complex challenges faced by marginalized individuals, and informed by lived experiences, can play an important role in addressing the numerous obstacles on the path to advancing economic justice and rights. However, despite their potential, these organizations often lack access to the necessary resources and decision-making power to enact meaningful change and their aspirations are often undermined, and significantly underfunded. The underfunding of these grassroots movements impedes their ability to address systemic barriers and uplift historically oppressed communities. Poverty and inequality will persist unless we reject the status quo that consistently underfunds and overlooks the transformative power of investing in feminist action led by those closest to the problem and adopt a strategy that shifts both resources and decision-making power to the organizations and movements dedicated to advancing economic justice and gender equality within their communities.

We make the following recommendations:

1. Recognize the role of community-led organizations in advancing credible, lasting solutions for gender equality and economic justice.
2. Embrace a holistic, people-centered, intersectional approach to identifying and investing in community-led solutions for a gender-equal world.
3. Collaborate with women and trans-led organizations to address the root causes of inequality and injustice.
4. Ensure that those directly affected by gender-based oppression and economic exploitation are central to shaping solutions and decisions.
5. Finance with a Gender Perspective and allocate resources to grassroots groups led by women and trans individuals, focusing on underfunded, small, emerging organizations with annual budgets of less than $50,000 and ensuring the resources reach them.
6. Provide flexible, multi-year, unrestricted funding to gender justice organizations so that local expertise plays a central role in decision-making processes regarding resource allocation, definitions of economic and gender justice, and, consequently, determining which institutional strengthening needs must be prioritized.
7. Implement Gender-Sensitive Budgeting Practices at the national level to ensure that women and trans-led grassroots organizations have systemic support through legal, social, and economic frameworks that equip them to effectively advance gender equality within their communities.
8. Challenge standardized definitions of success and prioritize context-specific measures of impact based on for example, gender-disaggregated data, and/or what is most important to those leading change in their communities.
9. Invest in education and training programs for women and girls that would allow them to easily transition into green jobs.

10. Ensure women, girls, and indigenous women workers, whose jobs are dependent upon a healthy planet are agents of change and are part of every decision-making that affects their rights and dignity.
11. Divest all fossil fuel investments and end fossil fuel subsidies. These funds should be diverted to climate finance, targeting Nature-based Solutions to deliver on both the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement.
12. Governments must take decisive steps to address violence and harassment in the world of work by ratifying and implementing ILO Convention No. 190.*)*

Chapter II. International peace and security

(Add your organization's concise, concrete, and action-oriented recommendations for Chapter 2)

Chapter III. Science, technology and innovation and digital cooperation

*(*Innovation, technological change, and education in the digital age are key drivers for long-term economic growth and achieving gender equality. However, the persistent gender digital divide, inequity in access to education, and the de-prioritization of education financing by governments all over the world create tremendous setbacks for achieving gender equality and empowerment of women. The repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, economic and climate crises, and ongoing conflict situations in many countries pose significant challenges and disruptions to education, innovation, and technological advancement.

An example of this is the widespread and unprecedented disruption in learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. As schools around the world closed to contain the spread of the virus and as more developed countries shifted learning to more sophisticated mediums aided by innovation and technology, millions of children around the world, especially in the global South and East, stopped learning. Moreover, when schools reopened, a number of children did not return.

According to the 2023 Global Innovation Index report, the socioeconomic impact of innovation remains low for a second consecutive year. A key challenge is converting the potential of novel innovation waves into tangible benefits that flow to everyone, everywhere. Technology adoption might be growing but take-up is not yet fast enough. Weak signs of technological progress, adoption, and innovation's socioeconomic impact are putting the future of innovation-driven growth at stake in many parts of the world.

It is estimated that 1 in 6 people do not have basic access to electricity impeding the use of innovation, technological advancement, and education. It is estimated that 90 million children in sub-Saharan Africa go to primary schools without electricity. Therefore, there is a very low chance that they will have access to computers or access to the Internet. The low use and access to innovation, technology, and education by women globally have been linked to cultural, economic, and infrastructural barriers including affordability, digital skills, biases in technology development and deployment, online harassment, and limited time due to women being primary caregivers in their homes.

Broadband access is key for technological advancement. Research shows that mobile broadband adoption is more widespread, with 87 subscriptions per 100 inhabitants. In contrast, fixed broadband subscriptions stood at only 17.6 per 100 inhabitants, though these are typically shared within households and therefore

cover more people. Penetration rates for fixed broadband – which is often necessary for more advanced applications – remained poor in low-income economies.

Digital connectivity leads to educational opportunities for women which in turn provides a straightforward pathway for work in the digital sector for women. However, women continue to be at a disadvantage even with accessing the internet, one of the most common forms of technology used in all facets of life today. Access to the internet offers valuable resources that can assist women in their personal and economic advancements. However, as women are significantly more likely to face online harassment and violence, it discourages many women from engaging actively in the digital space. Research shows that women are twice as likely as men to have their intimate images shared without their consent. In addition, ensuring a safe virtual workspace, free from violence and harassment is important as many companies adopt hybrid workspaces with a virtual component. Bridging the digital divide and ensuring a safe online environment are crucial for the empowerment of women and girls.

Internet shutdown including complete blocks of Internet connectivity by governments has increased in the recent past. Research has documented 931 shutdowns between 2016 and 2021 in 74 countries globally. It goes without saying that Internet shutdowns increase the digital divide and have negative economic implications across sectors, for example limiting financial transactions, commerce, and industry. Additionally, the lack of data protection for users of technology causes a lot of mistrust in governments leading to limited use.

The green and renewable energy sector presents a growing job market as more governments and corporations transition to renewable energy sources. However, reports show that less than a third of employees in the sector and only 22% of technical roles are held by women. This is despite several studies that show that companies with more diverse leadership are more profitable, sustainable, and energy efficient. Equipping women with STEM skills will help achieve a more equitable workforce in the renewable energy sector which will help ensure a more equitable energy transition.

In this scenario, concerted investments by governments in Science, Technology, Education, and Mathematics (STEM) education are crucial to close the gender gap to advance economic growth, job creation, and improved research. Fostering the active participation of women and girls in STEM fields is necessary for diversity in perspectives, diversity in research outcomes, for designing products and services that better meet the needs of all consumers, and for broader social progress, as greater gender equity in all spheres can contribute to a more just and equitable society. But this requires a multifaceted approach—from instilling confidence in girls within families to creating incentives for women to join and stay in STEM fields. While there are more girls in schools than ever before, they are particularly underrepresented in STEM education creating gender-disparate STEM careers.

Improving women's access to STEM Education will also help them better understand the significant role energy access plays in their lives and give them the skills they need to harness renewable sources of energy and utilise polluting sources more sustainably. Even though women are the primary energy managers in many homes and studies show that women are more likely than men to conserve energy (using up to 22% less) they are often left out of discussions addressing energy poverty.

We make the following recommendations to governments:

1. Increase national budget funding allocation toward education to align with existing global and regional commitments.
2. Increase investments in the research and development of Science Technology and Innovations, with gender considerations.
3. Global and national financing mechanisms must direct innovation and technology toward women and girls in rural communities and living in poverty, and rural education and infrastructure.
4. Connect all regions in their respective countries to the national electricity grid and or provide access to renewable energy sources.
5. Institute a gendered approach to address online aggravation and crimes.
6. Invest in digital identity programs and interoperable payment systems to ensure relief measures reach all women, girls, and trans people in marginalized communities in an effective, equitable, and timely manner.

Add your organization's concise, concrete, and action-oriented recommendations for Chapter 3)

Chapter IV. Youth and future generations

(Add your organization's concise, concrete, and action-oriented recommendations for Chapter 4)

Chapter V. Transforming global governance

(Add your organization's concise, concrete, and action-oriented recommendations for Chapter 5)