



# POWER, POLICY AND PURPOSE

Best practices from the YW4A Initiative  
2024

# Contents



## POWER

- **Setting the Standard:** *How a quality framework is ensuring every training counts — now and beyond YW4A*
- **Shifting Advocacy to the Digital sphere:** *Leveraging digital spaces to ensure advocacy continues, no matter the challenge*
- **From Silos to Synergy:** *Kenya's Cohort 4 onboarding proves that shared leadership builds stronger safe spaces*
- **Learning in Action:** *Strengthening partnerships through regional learning*
- **Learning From the Middle to Get the End Right:** *The value of re-visiting stories of change from the mid-point of the programme to inspire endline design.*



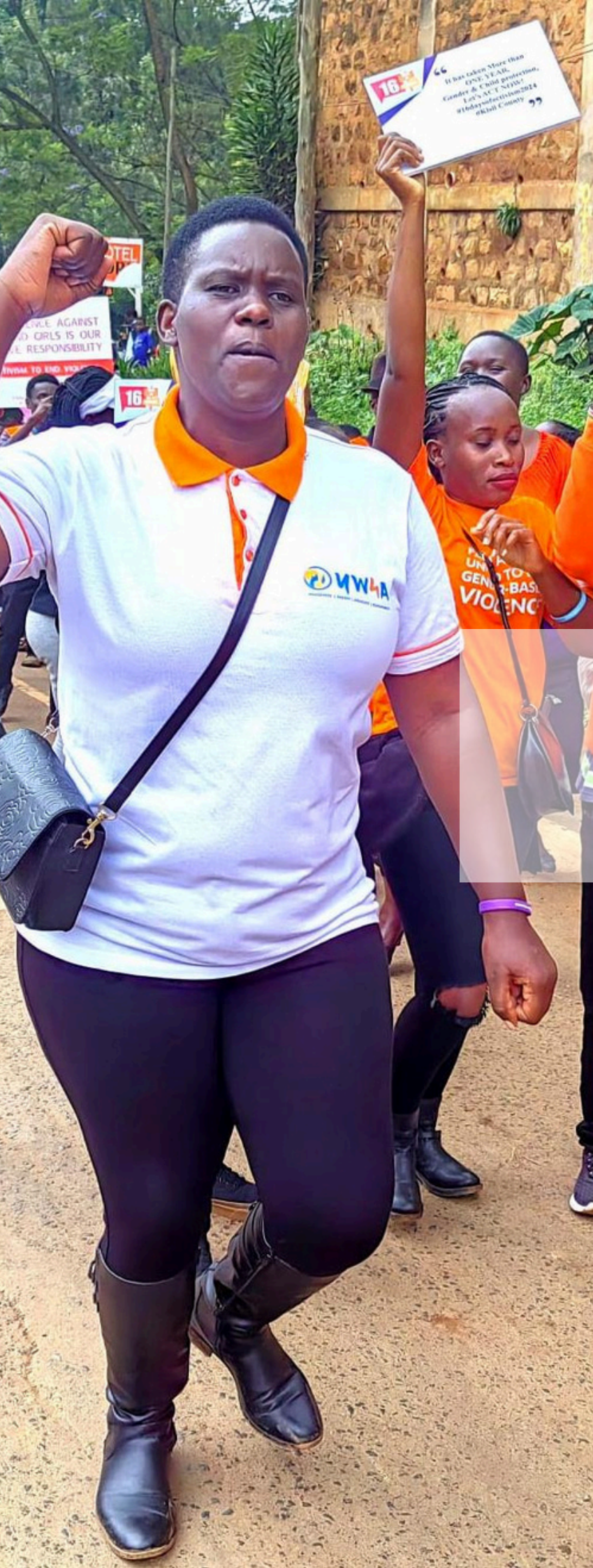
## POLICY

- **Staying the Course in Palestine:** *Young women in Palestine adapted strategies to stay engaged despite political disruption*
- **The Power of Play:** *Creative Advocacy Through Media and Arts*
- **Keeping Advocacy on Track:** *Real-time engagement through check-ins strengthened collaboration and amplified advocacy impact*
- **Claiming Space, Changing Laws:** *How young women and WROs are shaping legal reform through strategy, solidarity, and smart advocacy in the MENA region*
- **Opening Doors to Political Participation:** *A ceremony that sparked dialogue, confidence, and new connections*



## PURPOSE

- **Learning Dialogues:** *Effective Forums for Religious Leaders to Learn and Unlearn Different Cultures*
- **Faith in Collaboration:** *Intentional partnerships between FBOs and WROs expanded local advocacy and brought the faith pathway to life*
- **Rethinking Masculinity:** *How Positive Masculinity is Transforming Gender Norms and Relationships*
- **Voices That Shift Norms:** *Faith dialogues and digital advocacy brought young women's perspectives to the forefront*



16 Days of Activism  
It has taken more than  
16 years to get  
this far. We are  
not done yet.  
Let's keep the momentum going.  
#16DaysOfActivism2024  
#NoViolenceAgainstWomen

16 Days of Activism  
PEOPLE AGAINST  
GIRLS IS OUR  
RESPONSIBILITY  
ACTION TO END VIOLENCE

16 Days of Activism  
UNITED TO  
END GENDER-BASED  
VIOLENCE

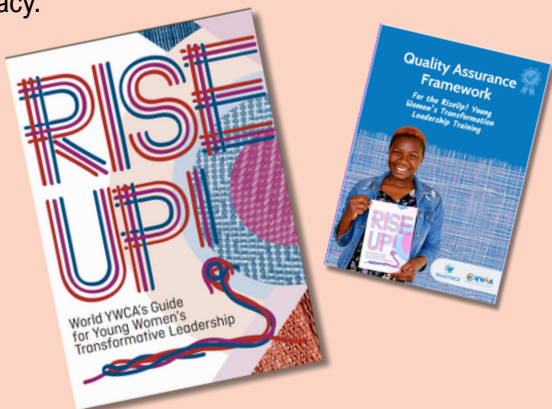
# POWER

# SETTING THE STANDARD

How a quality framework is ensuring every training counts — now and beyond YW4A

One key challenge in large, multi-country programmes is maintaining consistency and quality in training delivery. In 2024, the World YWCA addressed this by designing and rolling out a robust Quality Assurance (QA) Framework for the RiseUp! Leadership training.

This framework stands out as a best practice for its practical approach to sustaining long-term impact—ensuring that the content, experience, and monitoring of training remain strong, even beyond the lifetime of the YW4A programme. It also puts young women at the centre of accountability processes, giving them meaningful roles in validating training quality and data accuracy.



The development of the QA Framework followed recommendations from the Mid-Term Review and a participatory assessment conducted by the World YWCA. The review process identified gaps in standardisation, monitoring, and delivery of the RiseUp! training. Training quality varied across locations without a consistent framework, and the absence of clear safeguards risked uneven participant experiences. In response, the QA Framework was created to provide a common set of quality standards, ethical guidelines, and monitoring processes to ensure safe, inclusive, and impactful learning environments.

A core component of the framework is the QA checklist, which young women use to monitor sessions, validate participant data, and review endline study reports. This checklist not only improves oversight but also strengthens the role of the Young Women Reference Group (YWRG) in governance.

Members of the YWRG conducted spot checks on participant databases in their respective countries, flagged inconsistencies, and supported corrective action by the implementing organisations.

The framework draws from the World YWCA's existing Safe Spaces Guide and integrates safeguarding protocols—particularly around sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment (SEAH)—as a key quality standard. These safeguards were further embedded in the framework to support implementation by WROs and ensure that protective measures are in place across all settings. To enhance accessibility in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, the framework is being translated into Arabic as part of its final rollout in 2025.

Before finalisation, the framework was reviewed in consultation with Country Leads, the MEL Working Group, and the YWRG to ensure that it reflected diverse experiences and contexts. This collaborative process not only improved the framework's relevance but also built collective ownership among partners—another critical success factor.



*The World YWCA facilitated the development of the RiseUp! Quality Assurance Framework.*

By embedding clear, actionable standards into the RiseUp! training, YW4A has created a practical tool for sustaining high-quality leadership development. It also provides a model for how accountability and safeguarding can be embedded into programming in a participatory and scalable way.

# SHIFTING ADVOCACY TO THE DIGITAL SPHERE

Leveraging digital spaces to ensure advocacy continues, no matter the challenge

In 2024, implementing the YW4A programme in South Sudan meant constantly adapting to shifting ground. Political uncertainty, economic strain, and occasional security threats made it a challenging year—but one that also showed just how resourceful and determined our partners and young women could be.

A key part of what kept the programme moving forward was the way we worked with local women's rights and faith-based organisations. As the Christian Agency for Peace and Development (CAPaD) took on the role of country lead, it became clear that some partners needed a bit more support—not because of a lack of will, but because of capacity gaps that limited their ability to deliver.



*The team at CAPaD in Juba.*

Instead of moving ahead without them, CAPaD organised onboarding sessions that went beyond logistics. These sessions broke down financial reporting requirements and offered mentoring to help partners strengthen their internal systems. Regular check-ins created space for collaboration, questions, and honest conversations. Over time, this built trust and clarity—and it showed. Partners began taking greater ownership of activities, and young women felt more prepared and confident to lead advocacy efforts in their communities.

## Reaching Young Women More Inclusively

When the recruitment process for Cohort 4 began,

some WROs voiced concerns about it being too centred around Juba. The question was simple but important: how do we make sure young women from all regions—not just the capital—have a fair chance to participate? CAPaD took that feedback seriously. They rethought the approach, working closely with local organisations, faith groups, and educational institutions to widen the net. By doing so, they brought in young women from a mix of ethnic, geographic, and religious backgrounds. The result was a more transparent, community-driven recruitment process that felt more inclusive and grounded in local realities.

## Staying Flexible During Unrest

In November, political tensions in Juba escalated following the house arrest of a former intelligence official. The unrest made it impossible to continue with in-person gatherings and trainings in some areas. But instead of putting everything on hold, CAPaD adapted. Where possible, meetings and training sessions moved online. In areas with poor internet access, local partners stepped up to lead safe, small-scale activities within their communities. At the same time, CAPaD leaned into digital tools—using Facebook and other platforms to keep young women informed, connected, and engaged in discussions.

This online shift sparked thousands of interactions, reinforcing the potential of digital spaces for advocacy, even in difficult moments. But it also surfaced a clear need: young women need better access to affordable internet and stronger digital literacy skills to participate fully. This is something that will need continued focus in the coming year.

Despite everything 2024 threw at them, young women, WROs, and partners in South Sudan kept the YW4A spirit alive by building strong local partnerships, committing to inclusive recruitment, and staying flexible in the face of uncertainty. These practices are blueprints for resilience, and they will continue to shape how we work in complex environments going forward.

# FROM SILOS TO SYNERGY

Kenya's Cohort 4 onboarding proves that shared leadership builds stronger safe spaces

In Kenya, the Cohort 4 induction training introduced a stronger and more collaborative approach to onboarding Trainers of Trainers (ToTs). Unlike previous cohorts, where the Country Lead under Pathway 2 facilitated the RiseUp! and Feminist Consultative Methodology sessions, this round involved all technical partners. Each organisation led sessions based on their area of expertise, creating a richer and more connected learning experience.

Equality Now covered rights and advocacy, leading key conversations on legal frameworks and policy. Faith to Action Network guided the dialogue on feminism and faith, supporting young women to engage with faith-based actors. The World YWCA led the Theory of Change and leadership sessions, linking all components to the broader programme outcomes.



*Cohort 4 ToTs during the Rise Up! training in Safe Engage Foundation in Migori County, Kenya.*

Local actors were also engaged. The County Commissioner and area chief joined the training to commission the ToTs and affirm local support for their work. This support, both technical and administrative, contributed to a notable improvement in the quality and consistency of safe spaces across Cohort 4.

The success of this model led to it being replicated in South Sudan during the onboarding of the new Country Lead.

This approach is helping build leadership that is connected, confident, and capable—laying the foundation for safer and more sustainable spaces for young women.



*Young women engaging in Leadership Good practice Session in Kisii County, Kenya.*



*Young women during the technical visits to the WROs in Meru County, Kenya.*

# LEARNING IN ACTION

Strengthening partnerships through regional learning



*Dolphine Kwamboka, the World YWCA Regional Technical Programme Manager for Eastern Africa representing YW4A at the event.*

In June 2024, the YW4A initiative took centre stage at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) Eastern Africa Regional Linking and Learning Event held in Naivasha, Kenya. Organised under the Power of Women (PoW) programming, this high-level gathering brought together 67 participants from 23 consortiums across East Africa to share strategies, celebrate impact, and confront common challenges in advancing gender justice.

The World YWCA, alongside representatives from YWCA Kenya and YWCA South Sudan, played a key role in facilitating discussions and showcasing best practices from the YW4A programme. The team presented an abstract titled "**Reflection in Progress: YW4A Midterm Review Practices Unveiled**", offering a high-level overview of the programme's progress, achievements, and learning moments. The session focused on how YW4A Pathway 2 tools—the Rise Up! Leadership Manual and the Feminist Consultation Methodology (FCM)—have deeply transformed young women's leadership, particularly in navigating complex and shifting social and political contexts.

YWCA Kenya led a session on integrating sustainability into all phases of programming—from design through to implementation. They spotlighted how locally rooted, community-led strategies, especially those engaging faith leaders and village elders from the outset, have

proven crucial in embedding long-term support for young women's empowerment. These insights resonated with other partners who expressed interest in replicating the FCM model and Rise Up! framework in their own regions.

The event proved to be more than just a platform for reporting—it was a vibrant exchange of ideas, strategies, and solidarity. Every consortium shared not just their successes but also the challenges they faced, creating space for mutual learning and adaptive thinking. The presence of a diverse, cross-regional audience enabled participants to build new networks and deepen cross-border alliances, reinforcing the shared mission of gender justice.

"This was more than a showcase—it was a moment to learn, relearn, and grow. We saw how our models resonate beyond borders, and how critical it is to keep connecting our work to the broader ecosystem of feminist movements."

—Dolphine Kwamboka, the World YWCA Regional Technical Programme Manager for Eastern Africa

Key lessons included the importance of regional learning spaces to strengthen strategies and expand reach, engaging community influencers like faith leaders early to root programmes in local realities, communicating openly about both impact and challenges to build donor trust, and embedding sustainability at every stage to ensure long-term results beyond funding cycles.

Despite uncertainty around future funding, the event underscored the urgency of intensifying resource mobilisation to sustain momentum and safeguard the gains made in advancing young women's leadership. The YW4A delegation left the event not only having contributed their experiences but also having gained valuable insights to further adapt, evolve, and deepen their impact.

# LEARNING FROM THE MIDDLE TO GET THE END RIGHT

The value of re-visiting stories of change from the mid-point of the programme to inspire  
endline design

As the YW4A Initiative enters the final year of implementation and prepare for the endline, KIT revisited the Stories of Change collected for the Mid-Term Review (2023) for inspiration.

These concern 87 individual stories of evolving leadership journeys from diverse young women engaged in the Cohort 1 RiseUp! Leadership intervention. Revisiting these stories was critical in helping the programme re-align itself with the gender transformative MEL (GTMEL) ambitions from the beginning.

## Why do this?

Pressures during programme implementation often sideline the learning element of MEL. For the MTR, the Stories of Change shed light on young women's leadership experience through the programme from their perspective. From a measurement of empowerment perspective, they illustrated how empowerment is both an outcome and process in ways that numbers cannot. This is a valuable message to support reporting for upward accountability (towards the donor), especially in current political times.

With the pressures of reporting and implementation, KIT experienced limitations in fully implementing the GTMEL ambitions. There was insufficient time to conduct a deeper analysis of stories to identify more trends and to cross-check how these compared to what young women had said they would love to see from the Participatory Design process.

Lastly, KIT could not bring these stories back to the young women and Young Women Reference Group (YWRG) to analyse together to influence adaptive programming.

As KIT and partners started designing the Pathway Endline Studies and External End Evaluation from mid-2024 onwards, re-visiting the Stories of Change to

inspire the design of these studies and young women's engagement within them allowed a new opportunity to implement GTMEL.

## What did we do?

Several approaches were used to re-analyse the data. The stories from Sprockler were uploaded into a new database by country for analysis by the KIT team. First, an inductive coding approach was used to look at the data. This approach involves analysing the data to develop themes and concepts based on the data itself without imposing any structure or framework. What helped was working with a team of colleagues who were less familiar with the programme to avoid any bias of frameworks in interpretation. This analysis elicited several themes that aligned with young women's evolving leadership journeys.

Second, KIT explored how these stories and codes aligned with the results of the Participatory Design process with the YWRG (2021)—an essential part of the kick-off of GTMEL, where young women identified changes that they would love to see in the behaviours, practices, and actions of key YW4A actors and young women exercising leadership.<sup>[1]</sup> Doing this analysis revealed many synergies between the two modes of analysis.



*KIT, World YWCA and YWCA Kenya facilitate sessions on sensemaking and evidence gathering in Nairobi, Kenya.*

[1] <https://yw4a.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/What-young-women-would-love-to-see.pdf>

# LEARNING FROM THE MIDDLE TO GET THE END RIGHT

## What did we learn from this process?

From a content perspective, the stories provide a valuable illustration of how the programme is shifting power relations at different levels through the eyes of young women (See Box 1). More importantly, we could see that the project was making significant progress on achieving the change the young women wanted to see. They also clearly highlighted the interlinkages between the impact of interventions at different levels.

From a process perspective, re-examining the data provided valuable inspiration for the design of endline studies from the GTMEL perspective. This exercise reinforces the value of creating space in the endlines for the YW to 'analyse' and make sense of their own stories and themes as a precondition for validation



*ToTs and the Young Women Reference Group members play an important role in capacity building and documenting the leadership journeys of their peers. Above are the ToTs in Palestine during a training in Q1.*



*A YW4A Kenya Sub-Regional Reflection meetings hosted by Inua Mama Mjane in Meru County in June 2024*

## BOX 1: Overall themes from analysis of Stories of Change

Young women began to recognise their capacity to lead and embraced this role within their families & communities

Tied to awareness of their rights and self-worth—essential foundations for confidently exercising leadership

HOW: This process often entails introducing young women to new tools and skills and creating spaces for them to apply these resources meaningfully (with the support of the WRC through trainings and safe spaces)

RESULT: Evolving leadership journey facilitating, increase in SKILLS, SELF BELIEF & ACTION different arenas with different actors

Personal growth=> proved their abilities to themselves => become more proactive + motivated in own leadership journey

Young women began by speaking up in the family sphere and gradually expanded their voice to the community and religious spaces.

This highlights a significant shift in challenging harmful social and gender norms.

Source: Inductive Coding of stories of change (Mariam Charara Ruiz)



**POLICY**

# STAYING THE COURSE IN PALESTINE

Young women in Palestine adapted strategies to stay engaged despite political disruption

In 2024, the escalation of the political situation in Palestine significantly impacted the overall context, intensifying existing challenges and disrupting the implementation of the programme's activities. This evolving reality made it difficult to achieve the programme's goals as originally envisioned. However, partners in Palestine adapted their tools and approaches to navigate the complexities of the situation, ensuring that advocacy efforts at the national level remained effective and sustainable.

The political and security landscape posed several obstacles. Restrictions on mobility, increasing settler attacks, and the continuous military invasions into Palestinian territories created unsafe conditions for programme participants and staff. Additionally, individuals active on social media faced persecution, with some even being subjected to imprisonment. These risks compounded the difficulties of conducting advocacy work, particularly in the absence of an active Palestinian legislative council, which hindered efforts to amend, endorse, or repeal laws and policies. Furthermore, women's rights remained a low national priority, limiting the programme's ability to push for gender equality reforms.

Another major challenge was the lack of reliable statistics on gender-based violence (GBV), as accessing data in conflict zones proved extremely difficult.



*WROs and young women participating in Gender Justice Conference in Ramallah, June, 2024.*

To overcome these challenges, partners in Palestine adopted various innovative approaches to sustain their activities and advocacy efforts. In-person training and activities were converted into virtual meetings whenever possible, and a risk management plan was developed to address the challenges associated with programme implementation. Campaign objectives were revisited and updated to align with the shifting priorities under the programme. At the same time, communication protocols—such as WhatsApp groups—were established to provide real-time assessments of mobility and security conditions.



*Training in psychological First Aid in Ramallah June 2024. Such trainings also assist the young women cope with their difficult circumstances.*

Recognising the risks associated with frequent travel, partners also delivered training on how to manage safe virtual meetings and, where necessary, organised in-person training with overnight accommodations to minimise the need for commuting through checkpoints. Additional budget allocations were made for transportation to ensure safer travel for participants. Moreover, specific initiatives and activities were strategically aligned with national priorities. For instance, the surge in domestic violence against women—exacerbated by the occupation's aggression—highlighted the urgent need for legal protection, reinforcing advocacy efforts for the endorsement of the Family Protection Bill.

# STAYING THE COURSE IN PALESTINE

Given the challenges in accessing official GBV statistics, partners focused on strengthening documentation and data collection. Organisational capacity-building training sessions were held to improve the documentation of GBV cases, with analysis reports serving as critical evidence for national and international advocacy.

In 2024, documented cases were transformed into media productions that supported advocacy campaigns. Additionally, Equality Now conducted training sessions on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) documentation, data-driven advocacy, and surveying, aiming to build young women's capacity in these areas based on previous recommendations and feedback.



*In some cases, young women from Palestine defied the odds by participating in international advocacy platforms such as the 56<sup>th</sup> Session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva, where they shared the challenges that they are facing and the violation of their human rights due to the conflict in their country,*

Engaging young women in national women's rights coalitions remained a priority. Through the programme, young women were actively involved in the youth committee of Almutada, contributing to the development of the national plan for the 16 Days of Activism campaign. Moreover, key advocacy activities were integrated into Almutada's national plans, allowing for a broader impact as coalition members collaborated to amplify these efforts.

Despite the challenges, these adaptive measures ensured that programme objectives remained relevant and actionable, strengthening advocacy efforts and reinforcing the role of young women in advancing gender equality in Palestine.

"Through my participation at HRC56, I raised my voice about the challenges we face as Palestinian people, especially women, under occupation, and I highlighted the current deteriorating humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip and its impact on women's rights, limited access to healthcare and education".

-Suad Khleif (27 years), Ramallah, Palestine.

"I have turned to specialisation and training in Sharia courts to obtain a specialisation in Sharia law concerning personal status. I particularly mention women, who are the focus of my interests and ensure that they obtain their legal rights, based on the principle that women in our society are exposed to many forms of discrimination and inequality."

-Lara Abu Srouf (23 years), Beit Jala, south of the West Bank .



# THE POWER OF PLAY

## Creative Advocacy Through Media and Arts

Traditional advocacy methods sometimes fail to resonate with younger audiences or reach broader communities. To address this, the programme leveraged creative approaches like theatre, music, and sports to engage communities and promote gender equality. For example, the Evangelical Church youth initiative organised a festival where young men and women presented plays, songs, and worship sessions focused on positive masculinities and women's empowerment. Additionally, IMC produced podcasts and media campaigns to amplify messages about gender equality and positive masculinities.



*Media advocacy training in Egypt,*

The impact was significant. Creative activities like theatre and music engaged a wide audience, making messages about gender equality more relatable and impactful. Young women and men took on leadership roles in producing and performing creative content, empowering them to advocate for gender equality. These activities encouraged participants to reflect on their attitudes and behaviours, leading to a shift toward more equitable relationships.

Media campaigns reached a broader audience, amplifying messages about gender equality and positive masculinities. Key lessons included the effectiveness of creative methods in engaging communities, the importance of empowering youth to lead creative initiatives, and the value of leveraging media platforms

to enhance reach and impact. Recommendations included incorporating creative approaches like theatre, music, and sports into advocacy efforts, encouraging youth leadership, and using media and social media platforms to amplify messages



*In areas like Yambio, South Sudan, community radio is used for advocacy and sharing Social and Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) messages because it reaches a wider audience across the community.*



*Young women in Alexandria, Egypt make use of arts and crafts to share their advocacy messaging.*

# KEEPING ADVOCACY ON TRACK

Real-time engagement through check-ins strengthened collaboration and amplified advocacy impact

## Strengthening Advocacy Through Regular Check-Ins with WROs and Young Women

A significant challenge in advocacy programming is ensuring continuous engagement, adaptability, and alignment of strategies with real-time developments. Initially, Equality Now's engagement with Women's Rights Organizations (WROs) and young women's groups was primarily focused on milestones and work plans. This approach often missed critical day-to-day developments that could create opportunities for advocacy. Additionally, there were gaps in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) reporting, limiting the ability to assess progress effectively and adapt strategies accordingly.

As part of the overall programme, Equality Now led structured bi-monthly check-ins with WROs and the Young Women's Reference Group (YWRG) in Kenya to improve coordination and strategic engagement. These were divided into a session with all WROs and another with WROs and the YWRG.



*WROs in Kenya participating in the SOAWR platform with other CSOs in Africa.*

In South Sudan, monthly check-ins were implemented with WROs. These meetings provided a platform for organisations and young women to exchange updates, discuss challenges, identify opportunities, and refine advocacy strategies. They resulted in strengthened advocacy strategies by incorporating real-time insights

into planning, improved coordination and collaboration between WROs, young women, and Equality Now, enhanced M&E reporting accuracy by tracking progress and adapting interventions dynamically, and increased awareness of emerging advocacy opportunities at both national and local levels. This underscored the need to establish structured, regular check-ins to enhance engagement, use these sessions to track small but impactful changes that contribute to long-term advocacy goals, provide real-time feedback loops to improve programme alignment and impact assessment and encourage active participation from young women and WROs to ensure ownership and sustainability of advocacy efforts.



*Members of the County Assembly (MCAs) who legislate at the local level together with young women and staff from CECOME and YWCA Kisii during an engagement on sexual violence and intimate partner violence in Kisii County.*

## Capacity Building Through Self-Assessment, Mentorship, and the Masterclass Series

The programme recognised that while WROs and young women were actively engaged in advocacy, they needed to strengthen their technical skills and confidence in legal and media advocacy. Young women often hesitated to take the lead in high-level engagements due to limited mentorship and self-assessment opportunities. Additionally, there was a gap in structured training that could enhance their ability to influence policy and advocacy processes effectively.

# KEEPING ADVOCACY ON TRACK

Equality Now adopted a mentorship-driven approach, encouraging WROs and young women to strive for legal and media advocacy expertise. A guiding principle in this process has been the slogan, "Be as good as Equality Now in legal and media advocacy." This mindset was reinforced during county-level good practice sharing sessions, where young women critically evaluated their skills and identified areas where additional support was needed.

Then, Equality Now was invited to attend FEMspaces sessions to observe and strengthen peer-led advocacy. The masterclass series was developed to provide deeper training on key advocacy topics and set up open mentoring sessions for young women to seek guidance and expand their thinking on advocacy strategies.



Poster for the masterclass conducted virtually.

The key lesson learned is that a mentorship-driven, self-assessment-based approach significantly enhances young women's confidence, technical skills, and leadership in advocacy. By creating structured opportunities for training, mentorship, and peer learning, young women became more proactive, strategic, and innovative in their advocacy efforts. It also strengthened feedback loops that informed continuous improvement in advocacy planning.

To adapt this approach elsewhere, it's essential to

embed self-assessment mechanisms, establish mentorship structures, and provide specialised, context-specific training to address gaps in advocacy.

Encouraging young women to take the lead in advocacy while ensuring they receive ongoing support helps sustain their engagement. Facilitating peer-led spaces and continuous feedback loops further strengthens networks, deepens learning, and enables adaptive, creative solutions in advocacy efforts.

"Equality Now, under the legal and policy advocacy pathway in the YW4A programme, has contributed significantly to the organization's strengthened legal and media advocacy capacity, which has increased our degree of involvement with county-level duty bearers.

Our advocacy work has been aired through the local radio and TV stations, and our team has held radio talk shows and submitted calls to action on international days, which are geared towards advocating for the adoption of a gender policy for Kisii county as well as the operationalization of the rescue centre."

-Stella Achoki, Director at CECOME.



Participants discussion at Migori county SGBV Policy Review meeting.

# CLAIMING SPACE, CHANGING LAWS

How young women and WROs are shaping legal reform through strategy, solidarity, and smart advocacy in the MENA region

In restrictive civic spaces like Egypt and Palestine, where discriminatory laws and social norms encumber progress on women's rights, the YW4A programme has demonstrated how sustained, strategic advocacy by young women and WROs can lead to meaningful change.

What makes this a best practice is the layered, adaptive approach that combines legal literacy, coalition-building, international engagement, and digital safety—providing young women with the tools, platforms, and connections they need to influence legal and policy reform from local to global levels. This approach has enabled young women to step into national and international spaces and be heard on issues like child marriage, sexual violence, and family law reform.

In both countries, young women and WROs face legal frameworks that restrict freedoms and limit opportunities for change. To respond, the programme prioritised building legal knowledge and advocacy capacity among young women. In Palestine, young women who received this training have taken on leadership roles in local campaigns addressing discriminatory provisions in personal status laws. In Egypt, the training directly contributed to young women's increased participation in national-level conversations, particularly around the draft child marriage law.

To amplify this work, Equality Now supported creating and strengthening collective advocacy platforms—most notably the Hurra Coalition in Egypt. This coalition brought WROs, grassroots groups, and young leaders together to push for legal reforms. Through this coalition, young women contributed to advocacy around Egypt's penal code and policies addressing sexual violence, increasing the reach and credibility of their demands.

At the same time, the programme recognised that national advocacy could be strengthened by engagement with international mechanisms.



*Young women and the Equality Now MENA Director, Dima Dabbous (third from left) on the side lines of the Hurra Coalition meeting.*

Young women were supported in engaging with UN treaty bodies and the Human Rights Council (HRC) to amplify their voices and put additional pressure on national governments. Through this support, young women submitted shadow reports and participated in dialogue with state delegations, experiences that have strengthened their strategic advocacy planning. These learnings are now informing their preparations for the upcoming Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in 2025, where they will again represent national priorities on a global stage.



*Participants at the Hurra Coalition meeting.*

Given the risks that young activists face in restrictive environments, the programme also prioritised safety. Equality Now developed an Arabic-language toolkit on digital safety and SGBV documentation designed to help

# CLAIMING SPACE, CHANGING LAWS

young women advocate while protecting themselves and their communities. Due to be published in 2025, this toolkit is a practical response to real and growing digital threats in these contexts.



*On the side-lines of the 56th Human Rights Council session, young women and WROs from the YW4A programme met with Lieke Brand, Second Secretary for Human Rights at the Permanent Representation of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the UN (wearing orange lanyard), to share advocacy priorities and reinforce the importance of linking national efforts with international platforms.*

"As a young woman involved in international legal advocacy, I believe our perspectives challenge traditional approaches and ensure issues like gender-based violence are addressed. Our involvement in shaping international law promotes gender equality and long-term sustainability and holding decision-makers accountable."

-Passainte Beshay (29 years), Egypt

These combined efforts have delivered tangible outcomes. Young women have successfully participated in national dialogues and contributed to growing public recognition of legal issues such as child marriage and family law reform. Their involvement in regional coalitions and international forums has also reinforced the credibility of their advocacy at home.

Several lessons have emerged:

- **First**, advocacy works best when tailored to the local legal and political context.
- **Second**, linking local efforts with international platforms boosts visibility and influence.

- **Third**, digital safety must be embedded in all advocacy initiatives, especially where risks are high. Institutionalising legal and media training within WROs will be critical to sustaining this work.

Strengthening cross-border networks—especially across the MENA region—will also ensure that momentum continues beyond the life of the programme.



*Young women and AIMuntada during accountability session with Ramallah Governor.*

"Engaging with the Human Rights Council provided me with a deep understanding of how international human rights mechanisms operate. I learned about the role of special procedures in addressing specific country situations and thematic issues. Moreover, my engagement with the HRC honed my advocacy skills, as I practiced advocating for some of my country's most critical issues. I have also become more aware of the diverse human rights challenges faced by different countries. This exposure to various cultural contexts and legal frameworks broadened my perspective, allowing me to identify common issues and understand the innovative approaches being implemented to address them."

-Balqees Shaheen (26 years), Palestine

Through these efforts, the YW4A programme has helped shift the landscape for legal and policy reform in Egypt and Palestine. It has shown that even in restrictive settings, young women are not just calling for change—they are driving it.

# OPENING DOORS TO POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

A ceremony that sparked dialogue, confidence, and new connections

One persistent challenge for young women entering politics is the lack of access to decision-making spaces and mentorship. Structural barriers and societal norms often leave them feeling disconnected from political processes and leadership roles. To address this gap, the programme supported a Political Participation Ceremony—a dedicated event designed to celebrate, elevate, and connect young women with key political actors.



*Launch event Young Women's Political Participation Toolkit, Cairo - Egypt.*

What made this initiative stand out was its format: the event went beyond typical training or awareness sessions. It created a visible, inclusive platform where young women shared their personal journeys in political engagement, voiced their challenges, and presented ideas for change. The ceremony brought together a broad mix of actors, including members of parliament, party representatives, faith leaders, and over 150 young women from across the country. The event featured panel discussions, keynote addresses, and informal networking sessions that allowed for genuine relationship-building. Political leaders listened directly to young women's experiences, while young women gained rare access to individuals shaping public policy.

The impact was tangible. Sixty per cent of young women participants reported forming new connections with political figures and peers. Ninety per cent said the experience left them more motivated and confident to pursue political engagement. Testimonials described the event as a turning point—offering both inspiration and a



*Participants at the event.*

practical roadmap for next steps in political life.

A key lesson from this initiative was the value of combining storytelling with access. Creating a space where young women could be seen and heard by political decision-makers helped shift perceptions on both sides. It also reinforced the importance of early engagement with stakeholders such as political parties, who helped ensure the event's relevance and reach.

To adapt this model elsewhere, it's key to include follow-up support like mentorship or peer networks, as sustained political participation relies on ongoing leadership opportunities—not just initial access.



*Young women and WROs from Alexandria and Cairo attended the the event.*



# PURPOSE

# LEARNING DIALOGUES

Effective Forums for Religious Leaders to Learn and Unlearn Different Cultures

"Religion shouldn't be a cause and excuse to spread hatred, to oppress others. Instead, it should be a way, a safe space for us to restore faith in humanity through supporting and empowering the marginalised ones, through echoing compassion for everyone."

-Muna AbuSulayman, media personality and social justice advocate.

Religion has often perpetuated harmful norms, practices, and behaviours, particularly concerning reproductive health. To address this, the Faith to Action Network (F2AN) has worked with faith actors through approaches such as learning and dialogue sessions. These safe spaces enable people of faith, religious leaders, and faith-based institutions to explore the root causes of intra- and inter-faith tensions that undermine family health, women's rights, gender justice, and the development of peaceful, just, and inclusive communities.

F2AN considers learning and sharing events, where participants engage with different cultures and perspectives, a best practice. The Interreligious convention provides a safe space for YW4A faith actors to share experiences, challenges, and lessons. These interactions help the faith community challenge gender-discriminatory norms and promote women's rights.

In November 2024, F2AN supported the participation of faith actors from South Sudan and Kenya in a SADC and East Africa conference and a young woman at an Islamic conference in Indonesia, where they were exposed to different cultures. A religious leader from South Africa works and protects the rights of sexual and gender minorities. He talked freely about his work and its impact on young people, both socially and spiritually. This generated lots of follow-up discussions both in plenary and privately. The fact that conversations are happening is a step in the right direction. In Indonesia, the religious leaders who attended were also able to

hear shared lived realities with an activist and director of Indonesian Queer Muslims & Allies, an organisation supporting 'Queering Faiths in Indonesia'— a group of diverse faiths, diverse genders and sexualities. These forums provide learning forums, challenge them from their comfort zones and ignite sometimes uncomfortable but necessary conversations. They also strengthened the faith leader's agency and advocacy skills, which will continue after the programme ends. The platform also provided networking opportunities, and we saw an increased interest from other faith partners, such as the faith leaders from different countries sharing platforms on webinars and even inviting each other for programmes in various countries.



*Interfaith dialogues in Palestine.*

Dialogues are facilitated by eminent theologians from respected faith authorities, providing faith leaders with exposure to emerging trends, evidence, and diverse interpretations within their religious traditions. This approach has helped reduce misconceptions and promote deeper understanding. As a result, many religious leaders involved in the YW4A programme have become more open, with several shifting from conservative viewpoints to more progressive and gender-just perspectives. Notably, Bishop Elphas of NEOA has gained popularity on local radio stations for his consistent advocacy against SGBV and for raising awareness among men in his Nyakike community.

# FAITH IN COLLABORATION

Intentional partnerships between FBOs and WROs expanded local advocacy and brought the faith pathway to life

A key learning from YWCA Kenya's implementation of the YW4A programme is the value of strengthening collaboration between Women's Rights Organisations (WROs) and Faith-Based Organisations (FBOs) to ensure the faith pathway is fully integrated across all areas of work. Initially, limited coordination between WROs and FBOs meant the potential of this pathway remained largely untapped.

Recognising this gap, and acting on a 2023 recommendation to strengthen cross-pathway collaboration, YWCA Kenya took deliberate steps to bring FBOs more actively into the programme's planning and implementation.



*FBOs in Kenya.*

From 2023 onward, FBOs were invited to participate in key national meetings such as the annual review and planning sessions, as well as county-level Community Change Committee (CCC) meetings.

With the support of the country lead and the faith pathway lead, FBOs began to participate in capacity-building sessions alongside WROs. These covered critical areas such as leadership, governance, resource mobilisation, monitoring and evaluation, and forming young women's networks.

This inclusive approach encouraged stronger partnerships at the grassroots level. As a result, FBOs

started inviting WROs to participate in their community activities, and vice versa.

One notable example is the involvement of WRO-trained positive masculinity trainers in FBO-led sessions, increasing both the depth and reach of discussions around SGBV and gender equality. At the same time, WROs introduced FBOs to their local advocacy networks, opening doors to new joint initiatives and deepening collective efforts to address harmful norms.

This best practice has shown how targeted, consistent engagement between WROs and FBOs can enhance programming across all four pathways, especially when working to address sensitive issues like SGBV in faith and community spaces. The improved coordination has strengthened joint advocacy and ensured the meaningful involvement of young women and faith leaders in shaping more inclusive, community-rooted solutions.



*YWCA Kenya collaborates with FBOs such as the National Independent Church of Africa (NICA).*

# RETHINKING MASCULINITY

How Positive Masculinity is Transforming Gender Norms and Relationships

The idea of masculinity has long been tied to rigid expectations—stoicism, dominance, and control. But times are changing, and so is the understanding of what it means to be a man. Positive masculinity takes a different approach, encouraging men and boys to reflect on their roles, challenge outdated norms, and build relationships based on mutual respect. Instead of reinforcing power imbalances, this perspective promotes emotional awareness, healthy communication, and support for gender equality in everyday life.

When men actively listen, challenge discrimination, and support women's progress without feeling threatened, workplaces and communities become more inclusive. Programs focused on positive masculinity create spaces where men can openly discuss their experiences, rethink traditional beliefs, and develop a more balanced and compassionate view of masculinity. These sessions help break down patriarchal ideas while encouraging men to build relationships based on understanding and respect.



*Young men participating in the positive masculinities sessions held at the National Independent Church of Africa in Meru County, Kenya.*

F2A positive masculinities sessions focus on creating safe spaces for men and boys to discuss their experiences and redefine what it means to be masculine. These programmes encourage emotional expressiveness, empathy, and compassion among participants.

The participants are taken through a 6-session cycle, with one session weekly to give them time to comprehend what was learnt during the week. The sessions aim at engaging communities in discussions about masculinity while addressing GBV.

Additionally, community engagement strategies involve recruiting male role models who exemplify positive masculinity. These role models help challenge existing norms by demonstrating equitable behaviours within households and communities. In our case, collaborating with local influencers - religious leaders amplifies the message of positive masculinity.



*The FBOs and WROs in South Sudan convened a Men's Conference in December 2024, creating a space for men to discuss issues of GBV and gender equality.*

"Traditions are not static and can change; it is our role to end all harmful traditions and accept that as men we are not better than our sisters. Both women and men are needed to contribute to the growth and stability of any community."

-Mading Monywut. Presbyterian Church.  
South Sudan

## Real-World Impact

- Participants reported a greater understanding of gender equality, with many committing to challenge traditional masculine norms in their daily lives.
- A programme coordinator from NICA shared that young men have developed healthier relationships with their peers, such as offering more emotional support and being less aggressive in social interactions.
- One participant, Ahmed, shared that after attending the sessions, he began to model respectful behaviour at home, leading to fewer conflicts with his siblings and a more supportive family dynamic.
- A significant decrease in violence against women was observed, with one community reporting a reduction in domestic violence cases attributed to the programme.
- Two young men, Samir and Ali, shared their personal transformation stories at the 2024 annual review meeting, highlighting how they now actively challenge gender-based violence in their communities and promote women's rights.



*The Interfaith Council members in Palestine.*

### Over time, a few key lessons have stood out:

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with their peers, such as offering more emotional support and being less aggressive in social interactions.

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*"As an influential person in the church, I have to adopt and change the societal norms that exist within the church. Also, through the knowledge I have gained, I will be able to challenge societal norms in society, promote positive masculinities, and prevent gender-based violence."*

*-Reverend Sameh Philip Abel, Servant of the Rock Center at the Evangelical Church, Egypt*

## Looking Ahead

Positive masculinity is not about replacing one rigid definition of manhood with another. It's about giving men and boys the space to rethink outdated expectations and build relationships based on respect, trust, and shared responsibility. True strength is not about control—it's about knowing when to step up, when to listen, and when to stand alongside others for justice.

# VOICES THAT SHIFT NORMS

Faith dialogues and digital advocacy brought young women's perspectives to the forefront

In contexts where harmful practices like early marriage and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) are often upheld through misinterpreted religious narratives, creating space for dialogue between young women and faith leaders became essential.

The YW4A programme recognised these issues could not be addressed in isolation from the context of faith. Yet, young women had limited opportunities to engage directly with religious and community leaders.

To respond to this gap, young women trained through the RiseUp! curriculum took the lead in organising and facilitating interfaith dialogues. They partnered with faith actors and community leaders to open safe spaces for discussion where sensitive issues could be addressed from religious, legal, medical, and cultural perspectives. These dialogues placed young women at the centre—not only as participants but also as organisers and leaders.



*Young women in Alexandria, Egypt use creative ways to share about the dangers of FGM.*

The impact was clear. Faith and community leaders heard directly from young women on how early marriage and FGM affected their lives. In several cases, faith leaders expressed public support for ending these practices, and joint recommendations for further advocacy were developed. The initiative also strengthened young women's leadership, built their confidence, and helped them establish stronger

networks within their communities.



*The faith community is actively engaged in programme dialogues in Bethlehem, Palestine.*

At the same time, the programme expanded its reach by launching a digital campaign to engage broader audiences during the 16 Days of Activism in 2023. Partnering with Aya Shoaib, a well-known social media influencer in Egypt, a 10-part video series was produced covering topics such as domestic violence, mother guardianship, workplace harassment, and political participation for young women.

The campaign achieved over 500,000 views across Instagram and Facebook and generated over 150,000 interactions. Viewers shared personal testimonials and engaged in public conversations, reinforcing the campaign's resonance with everyday realities.

These efforts showed that shifting social norms requires direct engagement with influential leaders and strategic outreach through digital spaces. When young women are given the platform to lead on both fronts, they not only build their advocacy skills—they also change the conversation.