No. 10
Learning from Practice Series Research Perspectives

Building a Movement to prevent Violence against Women in the Horn, East and Southern Africa

1. Overview

Feminist organising is one of the strongest drivers of progress on ending violence against women (Htun & Weldon, 2012). But this work is not linear. The **GBV Prevention Network** has catalysed the movement to prevent violence against women (VAW) across the Horn, East, and Southern Africa (HESA) region since 2003, observing both hard-won gains and backlash. Through it all, feminist spaces have remained vital grounds for connection, resilience, and reimagining.

Box 1: What is movement building in the context of VAW prevention?

A movement is the weaving together of many networks, actors and organizations around a shared political vision, connected through formal and informal links and sustained over time. Movements take many forms; they are not only the visible moments of protest and rarely follow a fixed roadmap. Movement building is therefore the work of growing and sustaining this collective, moving in cycles rather than a straight line, through ups, downs, including experiencing backlash. Movement building for VAW prevention involves diverse strategies including consciousness-raising, feminist analysis of power, building solidarity, joint learning and reflections, and practising self and collective care. The VAW prevention movement has advanced women's rights and gender equality over decades and keeps evolving to meet new priorities and resist backlash. For more, see the **Movement Building** zine (JASS, Furia & Raising Voices).

In 2024, the GBV Prevention Network brought together six partners across Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania, Botswana and Zambia under the **'Fostering Learning and Activism for a Movement to End Violence' (FLAME)** initiative, supported by the **United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence against Women and Girls,** with funding from the European Union through the **ACT Programme.**

FLAME intended to strengthen the VAW prevention movement across the region. It set out to respond to rising challenges in VAW prevention including (1) an increasingly depoliticised approach to ending VAW that risks losing the feminist analysis of gender and power and pays less attention to keeping women and girls at the centre (Raising Voices & AWDF, 2019; COFEM, 2018); (2) shrinking civic space for feminist solidarity, with funding often tied to short-term projects and siloed work (AWID, 2025); (3) a culture of hustle and burden of addressing complex issue creating burnout among activists rather than providing healing and rejuvenation; and (4) the systematic devaluing of practice-based learning — critical

in keeping the movement vibrant and grounded in reflection — through an overreliance on narrow standards of 'evidence' (Raising Voices, 2022). During FLAME we experienced unprecedented crises and changes in the VAW prevention ecosystem, making our movement building efforts even more urgent than when we began.

We find ourselves in a moment of coordinated and heightened backlash against women's rights movements and shrinking funding for women's rights organization, while anti-rights actors are growing more organised and better resourced (Erikson & Majumdar, 2025; AWID, 2025). Digital hostility toward feminist activists is rising. The political landscape is penalising and restricting feminist language (Yourish et al., 2025). United States foreign aid cuts have devastatingly scaled back VAW prevention and response programming and research, undermining global efforts and progress (Stern E., 2026). **Yet, feminist movements are not new to challenges and continue to find ways to organize and meet this moment of crisis.**

In this context, it is critical to share learning to strengthen the VAW prevention movement. This paper shares our experience and lessons from implementing diverse movement building strategies **(section 4)** and a three-step process (Ground, Rethink, Sustain) to align and strengthen regional movement building **(section 5)**. We conclude with recommendations for activists and funders toward a stronger VAW prevention movement **(section 6).**

2. Programme Context

The GBV Prevention Network is a vibrant network of activists and organizations working to prevent VAW in the HESA. Established in 2003, the Network is coordinated by Raising Voices, based in Kampala, Uganda and currently engaging more than 5,200 individuals and organizational members in HESA region and beyond. The Network focuses on three, interconnected levels: individual (personal), organizational and collective. It mobilizes the movement to prevent VAW in the region through three interlinked aims: (1) enhancing members' feminist analysis of VAW, (2) fostering solidarity between and among members, and (3) increasing collective activism at the individual and organizational levels.

Towards the end of 2024, the Network partnered with six member organizations across Uganda, Rwanda, Botswana, Tanzania and Zambia **under the FLAME initiative to nurture the VAW prevention regional movement.** FLAME was led by **Raising Voices,** and comprised five other women's rights organizations; **Women Against Rape** in Botswana, **Rwanda Women's Network** in Rwanda, **Young Women's Christian Association** in Zambia, **Women in Law & Development Africa** in Tanzania and **Healing and Resilience after Trauma** (HaRT) in Uganda. These partnerships were built on long-standing collaborations, grounded in a shared vision and values. Partners, who were at the forefront of FLAME, brought deep grounding in their national contexts and connections within the feminist movement.

Over the partnership period (2024–2026), we implemented four mutually-reinforcing movement building activities, each designed to advance the Network's objectives. Described in **Table 1**, these activities involved creating supportive, shared spaces for feminist activists, emphasising self and collective care, and sharing advocacy materials. While the in-person strategies focused on the five countries where partners were based, the virtual (online) strategies were open to all Network members and followers.



Table 1. The four Movement building activities, their intentions, and modality

#	Activities	Description
1	**Rethink & Re energise (R&R)** Modality: In-Person Levels: Individual and Organizational	Safer, women-only spaces bringing together activists to reflect on core feminist concepts (e.g., power, patriarchy, activism, values) while integrating self and collective care and ongoing learning. The process sought to strengthen feminist analysis of VAW and reclaim the political framing, and combined critical reflection with collective care practices such as yoga, meditation, zumba, and art therapy to nurture care and solidarity. R&Rs were co-hosted by partners across the five countries as two-day in-person gatherings, with two rounds held approximately six months apart in 2025. Following the country-level R&R processes, a **regional convening** hosted in in Uganda in March 2026 brought at least five representatives from each partner country to deepen collective learning and identify a regional agenda.
2	**Feminist Care Series** Modality: Virtual Levels: Individual and Collective	A four-part virtual series, co-created by HaRT and the GBV Prevention Network, on feminist care for VAW prevention movement building held between June and October 2025. Open to all Network members via registration, it aimed to deepen understanding of self and collective care as a feminist practice central to VAW prevention activism, support healing and rejuvenation, and build connection and solidarity. Each two-hour session paired knowledge-sharing on care with guided group practices (including journalling, somatic movement, breathing, spoken word, and poetry) followed by moderated plenary discussion. Complementing the care practices embedded in **R&Rs**, the series extended this focus online to Network members beyond the five partner countries.
3	**Social Media Campaigns** Modality: Virtual Level: Individual	Three online campaigns, (1) 'This is Movement' on movement building, (2) 'Funding Feminist Futures', and the (3) **16 Days of Activism campaign** (described in #4) were developed in response to emerging trends and developments in feminist spaces in 2025. They aimed to spark online conversations on feminist movement building and funding, foster solidarity, and support online activism. The campaigns were disseminated across social media platforms including Facebook, X (discontinued after four months), Bluesky, and Instagram, using diverse formats including graphics, memes, daily posts, blogs, and live conversations.
4	**16 Days of Activism campaign** Modality: Hybrid (in-person and virtual) Level: Collective	Every year, the Network develops a regional theme for the 16 Days of Activism against gender-based violence and produces an action and advocacy kit to support coordinated campaigning and regional solidarity across HESA. In 2025, partners co-developed the theme **'Reimagining Feminist Futures: Rising in Solidarity, Thriving out of Crisis**', drawing on shared analysis of rising backlash and crisis, including reflections from **R&Rs.** The accompanying kit brought combined advocacy and reflection materials (posters, affirmation cards, conversation starter strips, ribbons, calendars, fridge magnets, and campaign guides) with hard copies prioritised for smaller community-based organisations and digital versions shared with all Network members.



3. How We Learned

Through FLAME, we set out to answer two learning questions:

1. What is the experience of individuals and organisations as they engage with Network's in-person and virtual movement building strategies aimed at deepening analysis, solidarity and activism? (covered under **Section 4**)

2. How can existing movement building efforts at national and regional levels be reinforced, aligned and connected? (covered under **Section 5**)

The first explores how movement building strategies supported Network's objectives of deepening feminist analysis, fostering solidarity and increasing activism. The second consolidates learning across strategies, drawing implications for VAW prevention movement building.

We designed our approach to centre **practice-based learning**, which we consider to be a critical yet often undervalued part of the knowledge base on VAW prevention. To this end, we wove reflection in all activities. For example, facilitators captured observations in a shared online journal, the team debriefed after activities, and programme staff across the five countries met in three Reflect & Act sessions to interpret what was emerging. Insights shaped decisions on an ongoing basis. For example, feedback after each care session guided what was included next, such as a wider range of practices, and Reflect & Act discussions led to introducing French translation in Rwanda. At the Regional convening, participants engaged in participatory exercises such as 'road travelled' (**Box 2**) to reflect together on their journeys. **Table 2** summarises the learning methods.



At Raising Voices, we understand practice-based learning as the cumulative journey of intentional learning over time, informed by insights gained from direct experiences, observations, stories, informal reflections, monitoring processes, and more. Check out this **info-sheet on practice-based learning** to learn more!

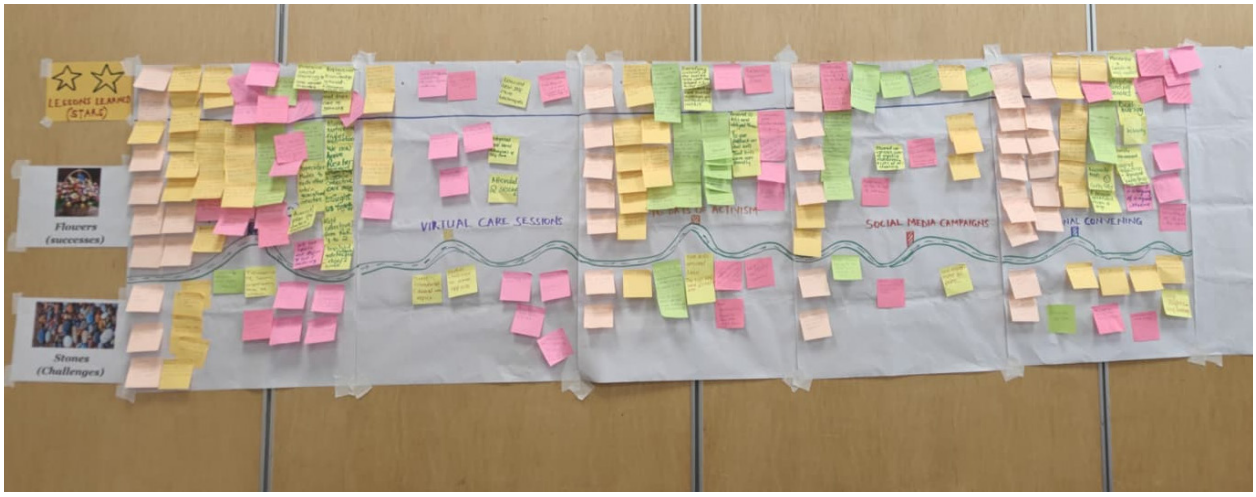
Table 2: How we learned from each movement building activity

Activity	How we learned	
	Methods for each activity	**Cross-cutting methods**
Rethink & Re energise (R&R) and Regional Convening	Baseline (96), midline (109) and endline (92) participant surveys (78–85% response); 153 post-R&R feedback forms (~60% response); 17 facilitator feedback forms across 10 R&Rs; 25 Convening feedback forms (68% of participants); Convening notes and participatory sessions	• Road Travelled (Box 2), country stories exercises at the regional convening • 3 Reflect & Act sessions with programme staff across five countries; • Project meetings, team debriefs and a shared online journal; • Validation workshop with all six partners.
Virtual Feminist Care Series	99 post-session feedback forms across four sessions (62% of participants)	
Social Media Campaigns	2025 social media analytics and reports	
16 Days of Activism	118 kit recipient feedback forms (84 hard-copy recipients, 33%; 34 soft-copy users)	

A feminist consultant, supported by Raising Voices' Learning and Network teams, led the triangulation, analysis and synthesis, guided by the learning questions. We first looked at each activity for what shifted, the challenges faced and the lessons learnt (**Section 4**). We then analysed these findings together, alongside movement building conversations from the regional convening, to draw out broader insights (**Section 5**). Emerging findings were discussed with partners throughout FLAME and at a final participatory validation workshop, where partners collectively interpreted the results and discussed recommendations (**section 6**). This process challenged some of our assumptions. For example, the group had initially framed social media as a low-cost way to reach members, but validation process highlighted the sustained investment it requires in skills, content and coordination. Such interactions strengthened the overall legitimacy, co-ownership and feminist accountability of the knowledge that is documented in this paper.

Box 2: Participatory Learning through "Road travelled" exercise

"Road travelled" was a reflective journey exercise at the regional convening, looking back across our experience of implementing diverse movement building strategies. We chose to do this in person, with 37 representatives from five countries (Uganda, Botswana, Rwanda, Tanzania, Zambia) in the room. Each country first reflected on their own flowers (successes), stones (challenges), and stars (lessons). We then came together to build a shared road, drawing the individual journeys into one, followed by discussion of the key themes emerging across our collective experience in plenary. The exercise surfaced important learnings, offering a way to hold both individual perspectives and draw out collective direction for future work.



Scope, Strengths and Limitations

This paper shares practice-based learning that intentionally centres participants' experiences, reflections and collective analysis; it does not intend to assess quantitative impact. It focuses on collective learning across activities and contexts rather than reporting on each country. The learning reflects the perspectives of organisations and activists who see themselves as movement builders, rather than broader communities, and those who shared feedback may have been more invested than those who did not. Feedback was uneven across activities. R&R survey timing varied slightly across countries, and because not all participants attended both rounds, survey results reflect differences across the group rather than tracked individuals. For social media we relied on platform metrics and team reflections rather than audience feedback. The paper's strength lies in triangulation across multiple sources, ongoing reflection, and in sharing practice-based knowledge grounded in activist experience.

4. Programme Experience and Learning

In this section, we share experience and lessons from each movement building activity implemented as part of FLAME, moving from in-person to virtual and hybrid processes. For each, we describe its purpose, who participated, the shifts they experienced, and practical lessons (detailed description of each activity in **Table 1**). The next section draws these together into broader learning on movement building.

4.1 Rethink & Re-energise *(in-person)*

Across the two rounds, R&R gatherings brought together activists in all five countries, with 26 people taking part on average in each country in each round. Participants spanned a range of ages, with an estimated average age of around 40. About two-thirds were aged 31 to 50, and smaller groups were under 30 or over 50. The majority had worked in the VAW field for four years or more, while a smaller group were newer to the field (19% with one to three years, 7% with under a year). Though intended for the same group, about a third attended only the first round, a third only the second, and a third attended both. Partner organisations in the five countries invited and mobilized the activists. Some participants had taken part in an R&R before FLAME.

To consolidate learning and build regional solidarity, 37 women activists from Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania, Botswana and Zambia then came together for an in-person regional convening in March 2026 in Uganda. These included members from partner organisations and other activists who had participated consistently in country R&Rs. The convening produced **one shared regional agenda,** with four agreed strategic priorities and related actions and timelines (**Box 3**).

Shifts described by participants

R&Rs were consistently rated as **highly meaningful** in every country, and the survey responses point to shifts in three areas.

Care embedded organisationally and prioritized personally. Understanding of care was already high among both baseline respondents and remained high at endline. Compared to baseline respondents, the key shift reported among endline respondents was **increased investment and structural support for care practices**. Across all five countries, activists reported embedding care into organizational practice through wellness policies, self-care days, flexible and remote work, no-meeting days, peer support circles, and regular check-ins. Alongside these organisational shifts, participants described personal practices — mindfulness, physical wellness, boundaries and rest, and making room for joy. For some, engaging in intentional care opened space for healing. Many committed resources too, with 43% reporting allocation of budget for care, and a further 49% planning to.

> *"Women Against Rape has reviewed the internal communications and scheduled staff rotation on Monday to do motivation, Wednesday to do presentation on topic of choice, on Friday to offer self and collective care for the weekend."*— R&R Participant, Botswana

Deepened feminist analysis. Compared with baseline respondents, more endline respondents identified as activists 'all the time' (95% vs 84%) and understood power imbalance as the root cause of VAW (79% vs 70%). Every endline respondent said R&R had strengthened their feminist analysis, and many described growing confidence in their activism. Participants described speaking up in their communities, advocating for others, and sharing power. At the regional convening, reflection on feminist leadership and backlash deepened this analysis further.

> *"I wear my feminist politics like skin."* — R&R participant, Uganda

Attending both R&R rounds was associated with stronger reported outcomes. The pattern was strongest for organizational outcomes (integration, budget) followed by self-reported individual outcomes (confidence), suggesting that sustained engagement may help translate learning into institutional and personal change.

From country-level solidarity to a shared regional agenda. At country level, participants valued facilitation led by local organisations and emphasised the need for intergenerational dialogue. They used the gatherings to map feminist organisations and plan joint action based on contextual needs. The **regional convening** extended this across countries: an inclusive, intergenerational and caring physical space deepened connection, modelled feminist principles, and created space for reflection on feminist leadership. Participants described teams stretched thin, a lack of resources, difficult decisions about letting staff go, and shrinking civic space, including online, where it has become riskier to speak up. Coming together helped them make sense of the **backlash** they are experiencing, and respond collectively, **moving from isolated effort toward a collective vision.** Each country reflected on what was going well in their context, challenges and where support was needed from the region, which informed the joint priorities (Box 3).



"All countries face similar challenges, especially funding, but they equally have the same determination and collective vision to end VAWG."—
Regional Convening participant, Zambia

Box 3: The regional agenda: four shared priorities

At the convening, participants agreed on four priorities for a shared regional agenda to strengthen the VAW prevention movement:

1. **Mobilizing resource jointly and growing financial sustainability.** Strengthening members' capacity to mobilise resources in the face of dwindling funding for feminist VAW prevention work.
2. **Strengthening capacity for members to effectively engage regional and global frameworks on feminism and VAW prevention.** Operationalise feminist principles and evidence-based approaches across their programming, advocacy, and organisational practice.
3. **Navigating and responding to backlash.** Strengthening members' ability to respond to the growing socio-political backlash against gender justice, so they can operate safely, sustain advocacy, and protect feminist gains.
4. **Coordinating and collaborating.** Strengthening coordination among members to improve information sharing, collective learning, joint advocacy, and the implementation of regional initiatives.

For each priority, participating organizations took ownership and following the convening a detailed action plan was developed with concrete next steps and timeframes.

Lessons from Practice

Deepening feminist analysis requires time and grounding, particularly amidst current backlash. Participants described being labelled anti-men, facing misinterpretation, religious pressure, or a lack of support and for a few, there were misunderstandings about what 'feminism' meant. Additionally, some misconceptions around effective ways of preventing VAW persisted pointing to the need for grounding in prevention.

When organizations experience funding squeeze and are struggling to survive, investments in feminist analysis and care are deprioritized. Financial and time pressures were consistently mentioned as barriers to integrate lessons from R&Rs.

Sustained engagement was linked to stronger outcomes, yet a consistent group was hard to hold. It requires strategies to build commitment among those attending, and ongoing mobilization and organizing. Deliberate use of virtual methods to keep the group connected between gatherings, and understanding what supports people to return, merit further exploration.

Being strategic takes discipline. Moving from shared enthusiasm to a focused, realistic agenda was not easy. The pull was toward over-ambition. Starting from a long list, participants voted using Mentimeter to agree on four priorities, supported by open and honest guidance from facilitators.

Inclusive spaces take deliberate effort. Accessibility needs planning, for example sign language interpretation. Interactive, art-based and participatory sessions helped balance power in the room and drew in a wider range of voices.

4.2 Virtual Feminist Care Series *(virtual)*

The four-part virtual series on feminist care, exploring and practising care as part of movement building for VAW prevention, saw 219 people, primarily from Africa, register from 151 organisations across 33 countries. On average, each session drew about 40 participants. While we do not have complete attendance data across sessions, feedback forms suggest a core group returned: most feedback respondents at each session had attended the previous one (78% at the second, 92% at the third), and in the final session, about half of the 24 respondents had attended all four.

Shifts described by participants

Respondents consistently described that their **understanding of care deepened**—as personal and collective, and as critical for feminist activism through crisis and backlash.

> *"It offered not only techniques but also a feminist philosophy that honors the body, mind, and community."* – Virtual care series participant, Tanzania

They appreciated the range of practical embodiment skills shared that **made care feel possible to practise and sustain,** describing these as simple yet impactful. All respondents who provided feedback to the final session reported feeling confident to sustain their care practice after the series. Participants reported onward sharing of techniques learnt and expressed a desire for more sessions.

> *"What resonated most was the mindfulness through the RAIN meditation, body scan and today's riding wave. The breath practice and movement based practice were calming to my body and gave me a balance. Overall, the skills of self care were inspirational and I am taking these with me especially the positive affirmations, poetry, love letter writing to self, reading and listening to inspirational feminists' work and music."* - Virtual care series participant, Uganda

Lessons from Practice

It is important to align expectations with the virtual format. Some participants requested in-person or hybrid formats, even though this space was intentionally designed as virtual. We learnt that more people may register for a virtual session than show up, especially given the open and easy nature of registration and busy schedules during working hours.

Building momentum in virtual spaces is challenging and differs from in-person spaces. A core group returned more than once, but participants shifted across sessions. Some participants joined late, plenaries were sometimes quiet, and videos turned off to manage internet bandwidth, all of which may come in the way of connection. In response to feedback, organizers shared guiding materials and videos with registrants, so they could engage in practices at their own pace. Integrating more interactive formats during the session (e.g., mentimeter) created more engagement and connection.

Participants named deeper barriers to integrating care, including time and work pressures, including care being seen as a waste of time by those around them.

4.3 Social Media Campaigns *(virtual)*

In 2025, to complement ongoing FLAME activities and connect activists on key themes, the Network's social media activities focused on movement building, with three campaigns addressing issues we identified as urgent: what movements are ('This is Movement'), resourcing ('Funding Feminist Futures'), and solidarity in times of crisis (the 16 Days of Activism campaign, 'Reimagining Feminist Futures: Rising in Solidarity, Thriving out of Crisis'). Across platforms, the Network's overall engagement rose compared to the previous year. The active audience was concentrated in East and Southern Africa, followed by West and Central Africa and North America. Campaigns' reach skewed young and female: mostly women aged 25–35, then women 35–44, then men aged 25–34.

The Network discontinued its X page at the end of May 2025, following a rise in anti-rights sentiments on the platform without clear policies to address hate speech, and moved to Bluesky as a more values-aligned space. This came up as a point of discussion at the regional convening: several activists were still using X and found it helpful to hear about the Network's experience and thinking behind the decision.

What worked well

Social media posts with good-quality photos had higher engagement and reach, as did content that tagged partner and other organisations, especially those who were engaged and further amplified it. Joining solidarity campaigns also helped strengthen virtual relationships with affiliated organisations. Announcing campaigns in advance may have helped build attention before they launched, and bringing different kinds of content together under one shared theme was considered helpful too. Responding to comments and messages opened a channel of support for vulnerable audience members who reached out for support..

Lessons from Practice

As a regional Network, we need a more coordinated and collective voice. The road travelled exercise at the convening highlighted that partners primarily engage through their own platforms, with limited cross-amplification (following, tagging, or resharing). The R&R survey echoed this too. Activists reported they build solidarity mainly through coalitions (40%) and in-person meetings (34%), and less through social media (18%). The potential of campaigning as a coordinated Network remains underutilized, providing direction for future efforts.

Online reach is uneven and hard to track, and safety concerns limit engagement. Activists shared that platform algorithms seem to shape what is seen and by whom, and they shift in ways that are not clearly understood. Women and activists in rural areas, and those with limited access to devices or data, may be left out altogether. For those online, the environment can be hostile, and activists described holding back on what they share.

Social media is misunderstood as low-cost. In the all-partner validation process, our reflection pushed back on a simplistic reading of social media as a low effort, low cost and high reach channel. To have real impact, it needs strategic thinking and investment, including in communication skills, in good quality, creative content across diverse media, and in coordinated campaigns that meet the moment.

4.4 16 Days of Activism *(hybrid)*

Each year, the Network supports locally led 16 Days campaigns through a shared regional theme and an action and advocacy kit, so that activists across the region campaign with a common voice while adapting to their own contexts. In 2025, FLAME partners co-developed the theme 'Reimagining Feminist Futures: Rising in Solidarity, Thriving out of Crisis', building on ongoing R&R discussions, and the campaign was carried online through social media (see 4.3). 250 hard-copy kits were distributed to 220 organisations and 30 individuals in 18 countries, prioritising smaller community-based organisations. Feedback was low, but those who responded estimated reaching 375,645 people, through markets, churches, schools, radio and a further 40,234 reached online through social media.

Recipients' experience and shifts

Shared messaging resonated and supported solidarity. Because the five partners shaped the theme together, the campaign carried a common message across the Network. Having access to the kits (both soft and hard-copies) brought a sense of solidarity and appreciation, and a shared voice and analysis reduced duplication of effort.

Deepened existing efforts and strengthened capacity. Organisations already run their own 16 Days campaign activities across the region. The 16 Days kit provided practical resources to include in their activities. Members found the materials well-designed and useful, and appreciated their creativity, especially the fridge magnets. Partners reported integrating materials in diverse ways, for example, members from Zambia and Rwanda engaged in radio programmes, and members from Tanzania ran a national caravan campaign and a GBV award that celebrated 16 community activists. For smaller, under-resourced, and grassroots organisations especially, the hard-copies materials supplied strengthened their campaigning.

Lessons from Practice

There was scope to make the materials more accessible. Members suggested translating the kit into more languages and using more visual, and radio-friendly formats. Further adaptation for people with disabilities and earlier distribution would support local adaptation and wider use.

Feedback was lower than expected. Even among organisations that received hard copies, many did not report back. This limits what we can learn about the campaign's reach and use. Stronger, simpler feedback channels would deepen this learning in future.

5. Movement Building Learning: Ground - Rethink - Sustain

Our experience surfaced learning on how to align and strengthen movementbuilding efforts at national and regional levels. Partners at the regional convening reflected on our journey through the road travelled exercise (**Box 2**) and country stories, looking at each country's current movement: what was working well, the gaps, and where support was needed. Our analysis of these reflections, alongside Reflect & Act sessions and activity-level learning (**Section 4**), identified **three cyclical steps** to strengthen regional movement building efforts: **Ground, Rethink and Sustain**. These three steps were then validated with partners. We unpack them below:



5.1 GROUND. Recognising shared context, risks and opportunities

Grounding ourselves in the forces that both **bring us together and pull us apart** emerged as a key step towards creating connection and a cohesive political vision.

What brings us together

Activists shared that what brings us together is a **shared commitment to VAW prevention**, and **the practice of solidarity**: mutual support, joint efforts, collaboration, learning, and a collective resilience built on the progress made as a field.

Beyond this shared purpose, **backlash and shrinking civic space** for feminist activism emerged as a key shared challenge across contexts. Activists at the regional convening, from all the five countries, described experiencing backlash in different forms: restrictive laws, arrests, and at times violence. Alongside this, they named rising insecurity in digital spaces; well-resourced anti-rights agendas that spread disinformation and misconceptions about

feminism and co-opt the language of male engagement in ways that pull away from accountability to women and girls; and funding cuts to feminist and gender work that have stretched organisations thin, forced some to close, and deny committed activists their livelihoods. **Taken together, this shared context and common purpose create an opportunity to connect and organise as a movement.**



Partners describing experience in FLAME using one word in the Validation meeting.

What pulls us apart

At the same time, connection is not automatic. It does not follow simply from shared context and goodwill. There are risks to connection that need acknowledging and navigating, including:

- **Competition over resources.** Scarce funding leads to a zero-sum mindset, pitting organisations against one another.
- **Depoliticization and differing beliefs.** Pressure to soften feminist analysis to access funding or avoid backlash, alongside ideological differences and, at times, not applying feminist values to ourselves.
- **Power dynamics.** A focus on singular organizational visibility over collective purpose, a lack of intersectional analysis that risks leaving groups behind, and not enough effort to bring younger activists along through intergenerational dialogue.
- **Inadequate coordination.** Organisations working in parallel, and coalitions limited to national rather than regional level.

5.2 RETHINK. From reactive to proactive

Working through the risks to connection required rethinking our stance and shifting from reactive to proactive. It called for creating space to rise above firefighting toward strategic movement building. This is necessary but hard, as survival pressures constantly pull organisations back into reactive mode, leaving little room to step back and reflect on the bigger picture. **A practice-based learning approach that prioritises intentional reflection, analysis, and action can support us in this transition.** Our discussions surfaced several lessons to guide future action.

- **Collective resourcing and feminist funding.** Taking an approach of solidarity through joint fundraising and supporting one another, over competition. This means calling for more pooled funding towards coalitions instead of single organizations, and calling for feminist funding that is long-term, core, and trust-based, with support for collective care and for practice-based learning that emphasizes strategic reflection. It also means highlighting the reality that anti-rights actors are well-funded while feminist activists' firefight on constrained resources.

- **Knowledge as power.** Deepening feminist analysis and advocacy emerged as ways to build collective strength. Partners also raised generating evidence through collective research, and strengthening communications to counter backlash narratives.
- **Strategic, creative, and safe use of technology.** Using technology deliberately, with investment in the skills and resources for stronger communications and more impactful campaigns (Box 4). This has to be done with attention to safety, given the digital scrutiny activists face, and with activists supporting one another in navigating it.
- **Prioritising depth over breadth.** A key lesson was resisting over-ambition in favour of prioritising key issues and pursuing them with depth.

BOX 4: Virtual and In-person Modalities - using each deliberately

Virtual - ***Holds:*** reach and accessibility across distance; repeatable touchpoints; shareable practical skills. ***Strains:*** harder to build depth/community; digital divide; unsafe environments (TFGBV, self-censorship); mismatched expectations.

In-person - ***Holds:*** depth, trust and solidarity; intergenerational connection; models feminist principles. ***Strains:*** costly and infrequent; sustaining connection beyond the room is the unresolved challenge; who gets included.

The learning: Virtual and in-person modalities are not substitutes. Virtual can sustain relationships *between* in-person moments - used deliberately, safely, and with clear expectations. Combining them well requires tailoring the design of engagements and facilitation to each modality, regular touchpoints, information flow across spaces, and time and commitment from both organisers and participants.

5.3 SUSTAIN. Collective action to sustain the momentum

Sustaining momentum requires the deeper work of strengthening our connective tissue (Strengthening the VAWG Prevention Ecosystem, 2024). Nurturing our relationships through dialogue, shared values and shared practices can hold us together across difference, so that movement building can continue beyond any single initiative.

- **Practising feminist values.** Intentionally practising feminist values of intersectionality, inclusivity and reflexivity, not only in programming but in how we relate to with another. As feminists, this also requires bringing our differing beliefs into the room and making space for difficult conversations that build alignment. This requires feminist leadership that works "inside out", starting with ourselves.
- **Intergeneration dialogue.** Prioritizing dialogue between feminists of different ages and creating space for knowledge exchange, storytelling, mentorship, and mutual support.
- **Connecting and coordinating.** Building knowledge of what different partners are focusing on is important to be able to act together. Practical ways to support coordination – clear roles, physical meetings where possible supported by virtual spaces to bridge distances, shared advocacy calendar to keep coordination alive between gatherings.
- **Cultivating care and joy.** Collective care emerged not as a luxury but as movement infrastructure. It makes long-term work possible by preventing burnout, deepening solidarity and nurturing creativity. Sustaining activism requires embedding care into how organisations work, and building in joy, imagination, and cultural expression as essential feminist sustenance, rather than afterthoughts.
- **Owning actions.** Distributed ownership and accountability with organisations and activists taking the lead on agreed actions rather than depending on any single coordinator.



Box 5: Sustaining in practice

Across the initiative, sustaining the work took concrete forms:

- **Open candid conversations**. Creating space for honest dialogue across differences and contexts.
- **A shared regional agenda and action plan,** with several organisations taking leadership on different actions; e.g. the **FemTech** Law Initiative took the lead in organizing a two-part webinar series on Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV) and Artificial Intelligence (AI).
- **Care: embedded in organisational practice.** Emerging from the R&R processes, organisations adopted wellness policies, self-care days, flexible working arrangements, and peer support. Some committing budgetary resources to sustain these practices.
- **Momentum beyond the project.** Early signs of connection, coordination, and practices continuing past the initiative's own timeframe through ongoing activities and collaborations; e.g. following the convening, three members from Tanzania, Uganda, and Rwanda collaborated to develop and submit a joint proposal to UN Women.

6. Recommendations

6.1 For activists and movement-builders

- **Mobilise resources collectively.** Where possible, approach resource mobilisation as a shared effort, strengthening solidarity.
- **Embed collective care practices structurally.** Strengthen peer support, mentorship, and collective care practices so activists can show up as their full selves, and stay resilient term.
- **Use digital spaces strategically.** Move toward more strategic, collaborative use of social media to reach wider and younger audiences, including investing in strengthening communications skills. Strengthen the capacity to recognise and respond to technology-facilitated violence against women.
- **Stay connected and collaborate.** Deliberately maintain connection across organisations and countries. Conduct activities together, coordinate among civil society organisations, and exchange knowledge about the changing landscape.
- **Practise intersectionality.** Build intentional inclusion into the work, including for persons living with disability, so no group is left behind.
- **Develop and share leadership.** Mentor emerging activists, particularly young women and those from rural communities, so leadership is shared, renewed, and sustained.
- **Strengthen feedback mechanisms** through simple tools, designed with analysis in mind, could help capture feedback more consistently.

6.2 For funders

- **Resource both in-person gatherings and virtual engagement**. Both have a role in keeping the movement connected and coordinated: in-person spaces build depth and trust, while virtual spaces offer connection across distance and ongoing opportunities to strategise and strengthen skills. Support deliberate planning tailored to each modality's strengths and constraints.
- **Resource movements collectively.** Provide funding to activist-led collectives, coalitions and movements, including through pooled funds or shared support to networks.
- **Provide flexible, long-term, and core funding toward movement building efforts.** Movement building is not linear and does not fit project timelines. Approaching it as a project tied to fixed outputs can make it harder for groups to respond as things change. Flexible funding lets activists, organisations and coalitions respond to emerging challenges, including backlash, strategically.
- **Support collaboration and cross-learning.** Invest in knowledge exchange, coordination, and coalition-building, so organisations can work in solidarity rather than in isolation.
- **Invest in leadership and learning.** Support leadership development and succession planning, thought leadership on technology-facilitated violence against women, and practice-based learning as a critical source of knowledge.
- **Enable strategic, inclusive planning.** Resource the planning processes that let organisations set priorities strategically and inclusively.
- **Prioritise wellbeing.** Fund self and collective care as essential foundation for the work.

7. Final Word

FLAME's multi-pronged effort to address key challenges in the VAW prevention movement deepened regional solidarity and connective tissue. It enhanced feminist analysis of VAW within the GBV Prevention Network, contributed to a stronger sense of connection and solidarity among members in the Network, and energized members in the region. Our learning reaffirms that we need connection and collaboration to grow the movement, space to respond strategically to shared challenges, and efforts to sustain communication among actors.

Interested in Learning more?

Check out these resources for more on movement building:

- **Zines series** (JASS, Furia & Raising Voices): activist reflections on movement building, intersectionality, repressive contexts, and self and collective care. **https://preventgbvafrica.org/zines**
- **VAWG Movement Building in the Global South** (Raising Voices, 2015): an earlier global consultation with activists. **https://raisingvoices.org/resources/movement building-in-the-global-south/**
- **Nurturing and Elevating Practice-Based Learning** (Raising Voices, 2022), part of the *Learning from Practice* series: our journey with practice-based learning. **https://raisingvoices.org/resources/nurturing-elevating-practice-basedlearning/**
- ***Get Moving!*** (GBV Prevention Network): a feminist introspection process supporting organisations to grow, transform and build a positive culture. **https://preventgbvafrica.org/get-moving/**



- **Building Power in Feminist and Women's Movements to End VAWG** (UN Trust Fund, 2024): a framework of seven interlinked types of power drawn from grantee practice. **https://untf.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2024/01/building-power-in-feminist-and-womens-movements-to-end-violence-against-women-and-girls-learning-from-civil-society-organizations-funded-by-the-un-trust-fund**
- **UN Trust Fund Movement Building Series**: a collection of resources on feminist and women's movements for ending violence against women and girls: **https://untf.unwomen.org/en/learning-hub/knowledge-products/movement building**

The **Learning from Practice Series** is a collection of articles that synthesize perspectives and activism emerging from Raising Voices' experience in preventing violence against women and children.

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