

THE WORK BETWEEN US

YOUNG FEMINIST ORGANISING IN UGANDA

A story of community, courage, care and collective power.



Before We Begin



Sustaining Women's leadership

Many lives. One shared story. This booklet grows from conversations MEMPROW held with girls and young women organising in Uganda. It carries one documented education journey and the wider realities participants discussed: gender-based violence, discrimination, financial pressure, leadership, digital opportunity and risk, burnout, mentorship, evidence, solidarity and collective care.

Mirembe is a composite character. Her story brings several experiences together without claiming that one person lived every event. The first-person voice boxes are careful reconstructions from meeting notes; they are not verbatim quotations. Before public publication, MEMPROW can replace or strengthen them with quotations approved by the young feminists themselves.

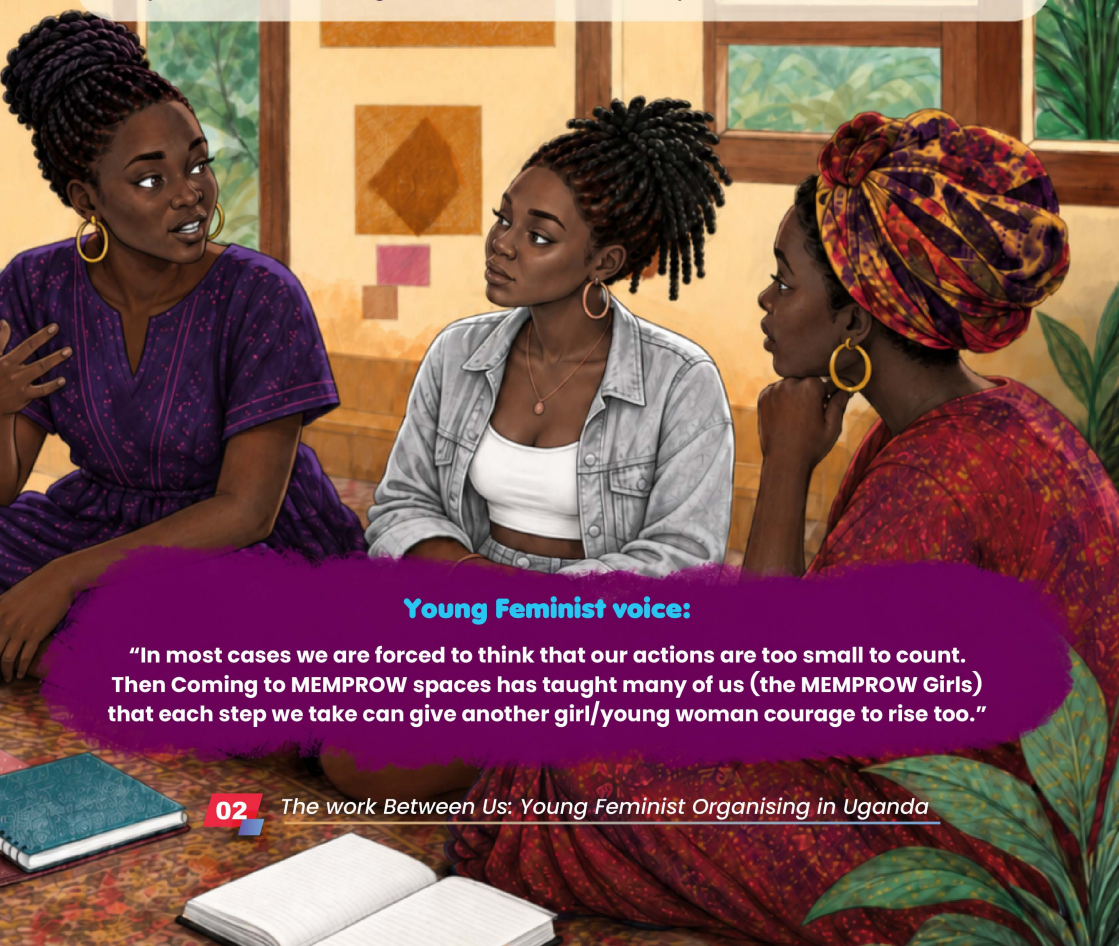
This is not a story about rescuing young women. It is a story about recognising the organising they already do – and what becomes possible when their work is trusted, resourced and shared.

The room where many roads meet

Community is More than a Place

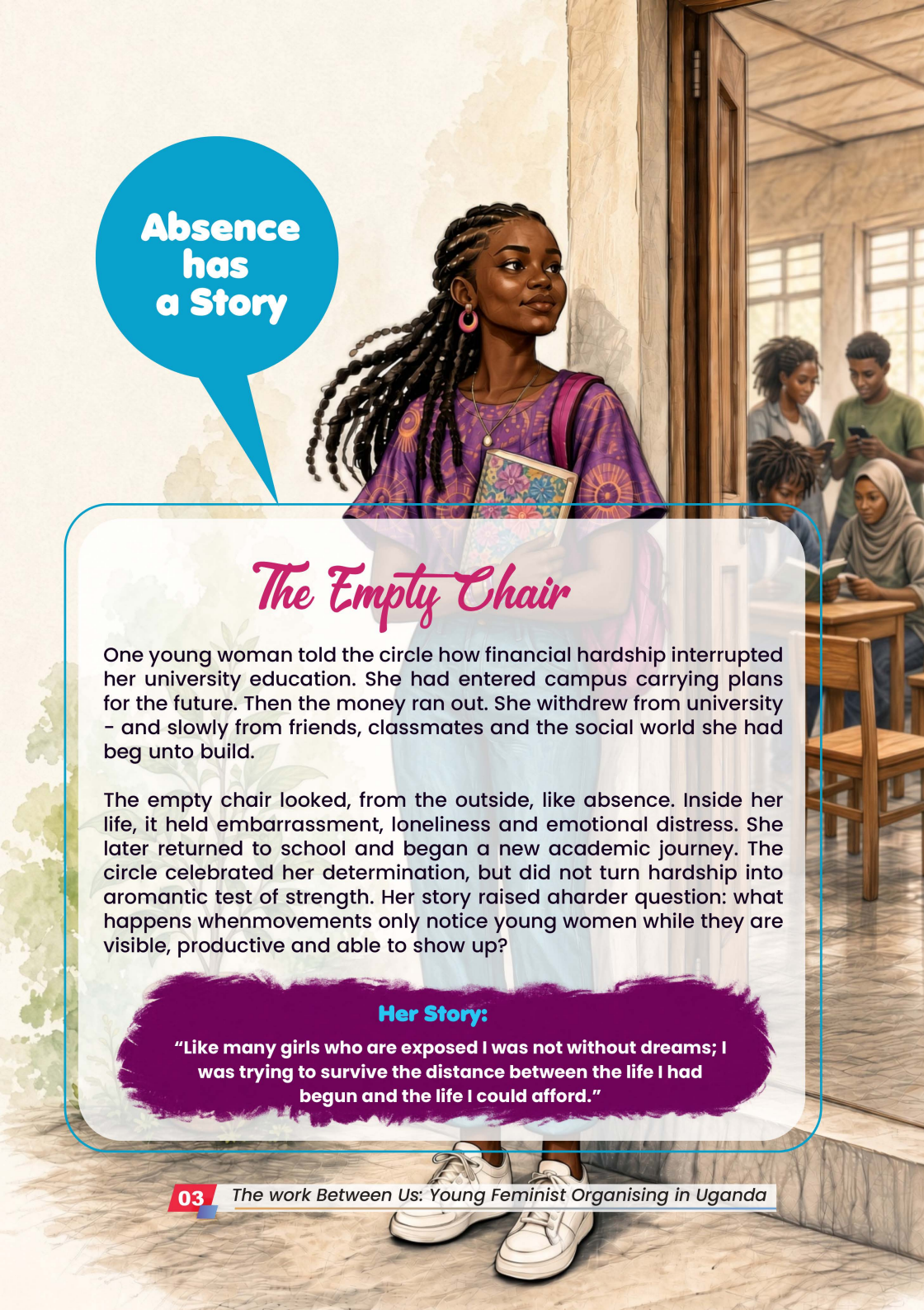
Mirembe arrived with a notebook, a nearly empty data bundle and three unfinished tasks waiting on her phone. Around her, young women joined from schools, universities, community groups, workplaces and online spaces. Somewhere already leading. Others were still learning to name what they had been doing all along: checking on a neighbour, sharing a scholarship link, documenting harassment or speaking in a student meeting.

At one MEMPROW hybrid dialogue, 62 people gathered in the room and online. They did not begin with a perfect definition of organising. They began with stories. Community, they reflected, is a web of shared experiences, identities, hopes and responsibilities. One person can start a step. A movement begins when others can step with her.



Young Feminist voice:

"In most cases we are forced to think that our actions are too small to count. Then Coming to MEMPROW spaces has taught many of us (the MEMPROW Girls) that each step we take can give another girl/young woman courage to rise too."



**Absence
has
a Story**

The Empty Chair

One young woman told the circle how financial hardship interrupted her university education. She had entered campus carrying plans for the future. Then the money ran out. She withdrew from university – and slowly from friends, classmates and the social world she had beg unto build.

The empty chair looked, from the outside, like absence. Inside her life, it held embarrassment, loneliness and emotional distress. She later returned to school and began a new academic journey. The circle celebrated her determination, but did not turn hardship into a romantic test of strength. Her story raised a harder question: what happens when movements only notice young women while they are visible, productive and able to show up?

Her Story:

“Like many girls who are exposed I was not without dreams; I was trying to survive the distance between the life I had begun and the life I could afford.”

Do not Mistake Silence for Leaving

When a member goes quiet, a group can quickly decide that she no longer cares. But silence may mean school fees, transport costs, illness, violence, unpaid work, family pressure, online harassment, exhaustion or shame. Commitment can be present even when attendance is not.

So the circle practised another kind of organising: checking in without demanding an explanation; listening without turning pain into gossip; asking what support would be useful; keeping a door open. Collective care was not a reward after the 'real work.' It was part of the work. A movement that cannot hold people through difficult seasons will keep losing knowledge, trust and leaders.



The check-in
is movement
work

Mirembe's Note:

"When I think about my involvement in the sisterhood, I try as much as possible to not only ask "why did a sister stop coming?" But rather ask, "what changed around her and how can we stay connected without controlling..." It's my reminder and contribution to your feminist journey"

A Movement has Many Hands

The girls named a familiar trap: the belief that one committed person must solve every problem. Mirembe imagined the movement as a woven basket. Public speaking was one strand, not the whole basket. Documentation, budgeting, mobilisation, research, design, photography, digital communication, safeguarding, facilitation and care were strands too. Sustainable organising meant seeing these abilities, sharing responsibility and making room for each person to contribute. It also meant building structures – community-based organisations, network agreements, leadership transitions and accountability practices – so the work did not collapse when one exhausted leader stepped back.

The Circle's Practice:

**Name the task. Name the skill. Share the role.
Credit the labour. Pass the knowledge on.**

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*The work Between Us:
Young Feminist Organising
in Uganda*



THE ISSUES DO NOT ARRIVE ONE BY ONE

Our Lives do not come in Programme Categories

Gender-based violence connected young women across different locations and backgrounds. Participants spoke about sexual harassment, abuse, discrimination and social norms that restrict women's choices. But violence rarely arrived alone.

It could be tied to financial dependence. A girl excluded from education might have fewer routes to income. A young woman without income might have less room to leave an abusive situation. A leader facing sexist attacks might begin doubting whether she belonged in public life. A community rule, a workplace practice and a private fear could reinforce one another.

The circle refused a single-issue story. Young feminist organising had to connect safety, education, economic justice, leadership, health, culture and voice.

"As we journey it's important that we remind ourselves to never separate the violence from the conditions that make it difficult to resist... that's how the enabling increase"



STORY AND EVIDENCE

A Story can Open the Door; Evidence can hold it open

Personal testimony can make an issue impossible to ignore. Yet policy makers often ask: How many people are affected? Who? Where? In what ways? What happens if nothing changes?

That is why the circle placed story beside documentation and research. Miremba wrote down not only what happened, but the pattern around it: location, age group, form of harm, barriers to reporting, response received and consequences.

Evidence did not make lived experience more 'real.' It helped advocates show scale, identify patterns, challenge denial and make a precise demand. The girls also wanted records of success: young women leading institutions, entering science and technology, building enterprises, influencing policy and organising in communities.

Movement Tool:

Story + evidence + a clear ask + the right audience = stronger advocacy.

WHO IS ALLOWED TO LEAD?

Confidence cannot Dismantle a Discriminatory System by itself

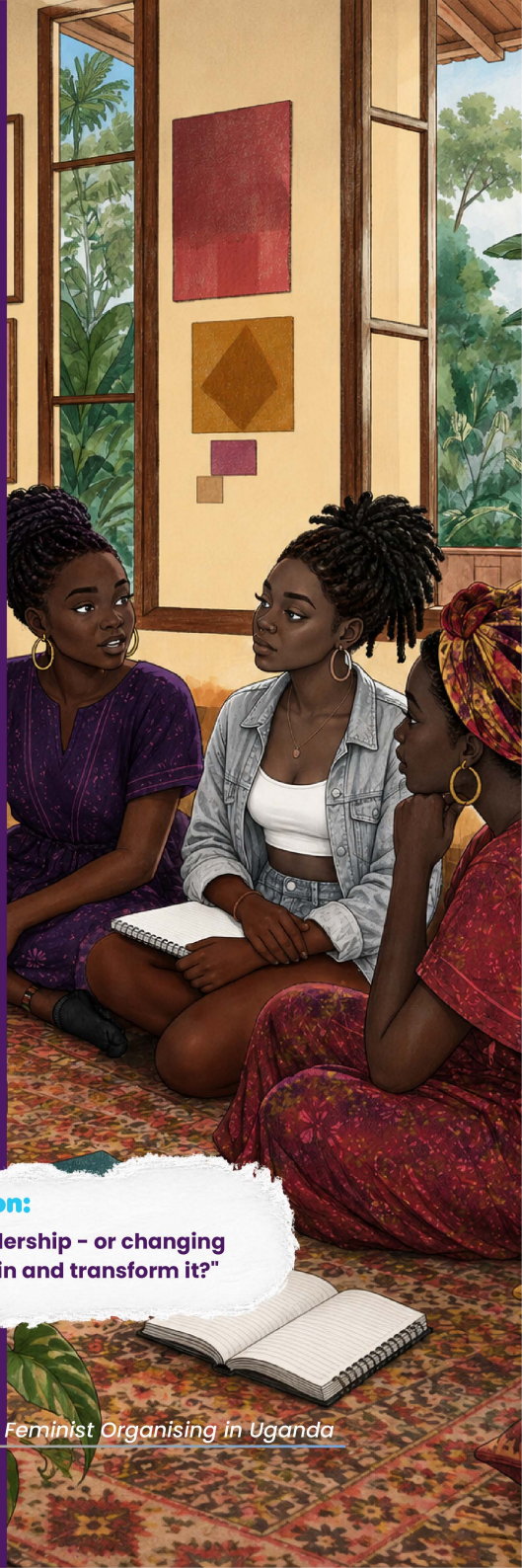
Some participants had entered rooms where women's ability was questioned before they even spoke. Old messages followed them: this career is not for women; leadership is too hard; a confident girl is disrespectful; another woman's success is a threat.

The circle named the problem without pretending women are automatically perfect leaders. Participants insisted that corruption or harm must be challenged consistently, regardless of gender. Accountability should never become an excuse for sexist humiliation – and solidarity should never mean silence about wrongdoing.

Young women need opportunities to practise leadership, mentors who open doors, and communities that do not punish them for taking up space. Institutions also have work to do.

Mirembe's Question:

"Are we preparing girls to enter leadership – or changing leadership so girls can enter, remain and transform it?"





THE PHONE IS A BRIDGE AND A BATTLEFIELD

Safety must Grow with our Reach

Digital spaces let young feminists learn, organise, share opportunities and reach people far beyond one meeting room. A post can connect a rural organiser to a national conversation. A WhatsApp group can move a scholarship notice, safety alert or call to action in minutes. The same spaces can carry cyberbullying, misinformation, intimidation, sexualised attacks and other technology-facilitated gender-based violence. Online harm can reduce confidence, participation, safety and well-being. Telling girls to 'just be careful' places the whole burden on them. Digital organising needs collective safety: strong account practices, consent before sharing images or personal information, trusted reporting routes, documentation of abuse, response plans and people who will act when harm occurs.



Young Feminist Voice:

"One thing I know about digital or online presence, is that the internet enhances my voice but it can also bring backlash closer to me than before that's why we must talk about technological facilitated Gender based violence"

THE HIDDEN INVOICE

Care has a Budget

Activism has costs that rarely appear in a photograph: data, transport, meals, printing, safe meeting space, childcare, time away from paid work, emotional labour and the effort of returning after an attack. There is another cost too – the pressure to keep going while tired, frightened or uncertain. The dialogue concept named what is often left unspoken: burnout, self-doubt, emotional exhaustion and the expectation that committed young feminists should continue even when support is thin. Rest matters, but no breathing exercise can replace fair compensation, shared workloads, flexible timelines, safeguarding and long-term support.

COLLECTIVE CARE LOOKS LIKE

Checking in. Budgeting for safety and well-being.
Rotating demanding roles. Planning pauses.
Responding when harm is reported. Letting people
return without shame.

**MONEY CHANGES WHAT CHOICE
IS POSSIBLE**

*An open door should not
close behind one person*

The discussion linked economic independence to safety and decision-making. Financial vulnerability can increase exposure to exploitation, dependence and abusive situations. Income alone is not enough; young women also asked for financial literacy – budgeting, saving, tracking expenses, managing resources and making informed choices.

They named practical routes: entrepreneurship, government programmes, scholarships, internships, science and technology opportunities, digital work and skills such as photography, graphics and event management. They also named the gap: many opportunities never reach the young women who need them because information travels through closed networks or arrives too late. Sharing an opportunity became movement work. So did asking organisations for clear internship policies and fair treatment, and mentoring another young woman after gaining a skill.

THE CIRCLE'S COMMITMENT

When one of us finds a door, we share the information, explain the process and help others prepare.

ALLIES WITHOUT TAKING THE MICROPHONE

Support is not Control

Participants recognised that gender justice cannot be built by young women alone. Men, religious and cultural leaders, policymakers, educators, employers and institutions can help change the conditions that sustain inequality. But an ally is not a saviour. The work is not to replace young feminists, soften their demands or become the public face of their struggle. It is to listen, use access responsibly, challenge harmful practices in one's own spaces, share resources, protect room for young women's leadership and remain accountable. Mirembé drew two circles in her notebook. One said support. The other said control. She wrote the difference between them: who defines the problem, who makes the decision, who receives the credit and who can say no.

An Ally's Question

"What role are young feminists asking me to play - and how will I know if my support is strengthening their power?"

BUILD STRUCTURES, NOT HEROES

Sustainability is not Enduring More with Less

The girls wanted movements that could outlive a campaign, grant or charismatic leader. That required leadership transitions with mentorship and knowledge transfer; clear roles and records; fair and safe internship practices; databases of members' skills; regular spaces to reconnect; strong referral and reporting pathways; community mobilisation; legal and administrative awareness; and accountable community-based organisations.

It also required language people could use in daily life. A movement grows when its ideas can travel beyond meeting rooms – into homes, schools, workplaces, local councils, cultural spaces and online communities. Sustainability means creating conditions in which responsibility, information, resources, safety and care can move across the network.

Movement Check

If one person pauses, does the knowledge remain? If harm occurs, does a trusted response exist? Can a new leader learn without starting from zero?



What young Feminist Organising needs

A PRACTICAL INVITATION

FOR MEMPROW, PARTNERS, INSTITUTIONS AND FUNDERS

1

Fund the real costs

Transport, data, documentation, safeguarding, well-being and coordination.

2

Offer flexible, longer-term support

Let movements plan, adapt, build trust and respond to changing realities.

3

Invest in leadership continuity

Resource mentorship, transitions and intergenerational learning without controlling agendas.

4

Strengthen digital safety

Support prevention, reporting and response to technology-facilitated gender-based violence.

5

Resource evidence and memory

Support research and documentation so lived experience shapes policy and public debate.

6

Open economic pathways

Expand practical skills, financial literacy, fair internships and openly shared opportunities.

7

Fund care and fair labour

Value the people and invisible work that make visible campaign outcomes possible.

8

Treat young feminists as partners

Recognise their analysis and solutions, not only their needs.

**CHOICE, VOICE AND POWER BECOME SUSTAINABLE
WHEN HELD IN COMMUNITY.**



Sustaining Women's Leadership

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