



Sustaining Women's leadership

Rising Beyond Violence

Stories of Strength from West Nile

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MEMPROW*

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Sustaining Women's leadership

Remarks from **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR** MEMPROW

Gender-based violence remains one of the most urgent and complex challenges facing women and girls in the African Great Lakes region. At MEMPROW, our commitment to preventing SGBV and empowering survivors is rooted in the understanding that true peace and development are only possible when every woman and girl lives free from fear and violence.

This visibility document presents a heartfelt compilation of impact stories, testimonials, and reach statistics from our ongoing work under the project *"A Long-Term Perspective - Prevention of SGBV and Empowerment of Affected Women and Girls."* Each story speaks to resilience, healing, and hope, showing the strength of girls who have faced unimaginable hardships yet continue to rise in their communities.

Through integrated approaches combining prevention, psycho-social support, economic empowerment, and advocacy, we have witnessed transformative change. Women and girls are reclaiming their agency, influencing policy, and breaking cycles of violence that have long held back progress in the region.

While the challenges remain formidable, this document affirms that sustainable change is possible when we listen to, learn from, and stand with survivors. I extend my deepest gratitude to the women and girls whose courage inspires us every day, to our dedicated partners and donor MEDICA MONDIALE who make this work possible, and to our passionate team driving these interventions on the ground.

Together, we continue to envision a future where safety, dignity, and opportunity are the rights of every woman and girl in the African Great Lakes region.

Immaculate Mukasa
Executive Director, MEMPROW





Executive SNAPSHOT

This project visibility document captures the impactful journey of MEMPROW's initiative "*A Long-Term Perspective - Prevention of SGBV and Empowerment of Affected Women and Girls in the African Great Lakes Region.*" It highlights a powerful blend of personal testimonies, success stories, and measurable data demonstrating the project's reach and effectiveness in addressing sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

In the last three years, MEMPROW has worked closely with women and girls, police, health workers, women advisers, government institutions, cultural and religious leaders across the region through multifaceted interventions that prioritize prevention, survivor support, economic empowerment, and community advocacy. The project's integrated approach fosters healing and resilience while challenging the structural norms that perpetuate violence.

The stories shared here reflect how women and girls have regained confidence, leadership, and economic independence, becoming active agents of change in combating SGBV. Testimonies reveal improved access to psychosocial services, enhanced reception of survivors of violence, improved livelihood and access to resources for economic empowerment.

By centering the voices and experiences of affected women, MEMPROW advances a sustainable, gender-transformative model that not only addresses immediate needs but also builds long-term social change in the West Nile sub-region.

This document celebrates the progress made and acknowledges the ongoing work required to ensure every woman and girl can live with dignity and freedom. MEMPROW remains dedicated to strengthening partnerships and scaling innovative solutions to eradicate SGBV and empower survivors toward a just and equitable future.

KEY DEFINITIONS

1

Community Activist

Someone who takes **intentional, organized action to address issues** affecting their local or broader community. Activists typically work **from the ground up**, mobilizing others, raising awareness, and pushing for change through advocacy, education, and direct action.

2

Child Mothers

A **child mother** is a girl who has become a mother **before reaching the age of 18**. This often results from **child marriage, sexual violence, lack of access to sexual and reproductive health services**, or **poverty-related vulnerabilities**.

3

Inclusion/Inclusivity

This is a practice or policy of including and integrating all people and groups in menstrual health programming. This report specifically emphasizes the inclusion of people from different backgrounds and recognizes the unique barriers they may encounter.

4

Localization

This is the process of adapting and customizing actions to meet the needs of a specific community, as identified by its language, culture, and expectations.

5

SASA! Together

SASA! Together is a community mobilization approach designed to prevent violence against women

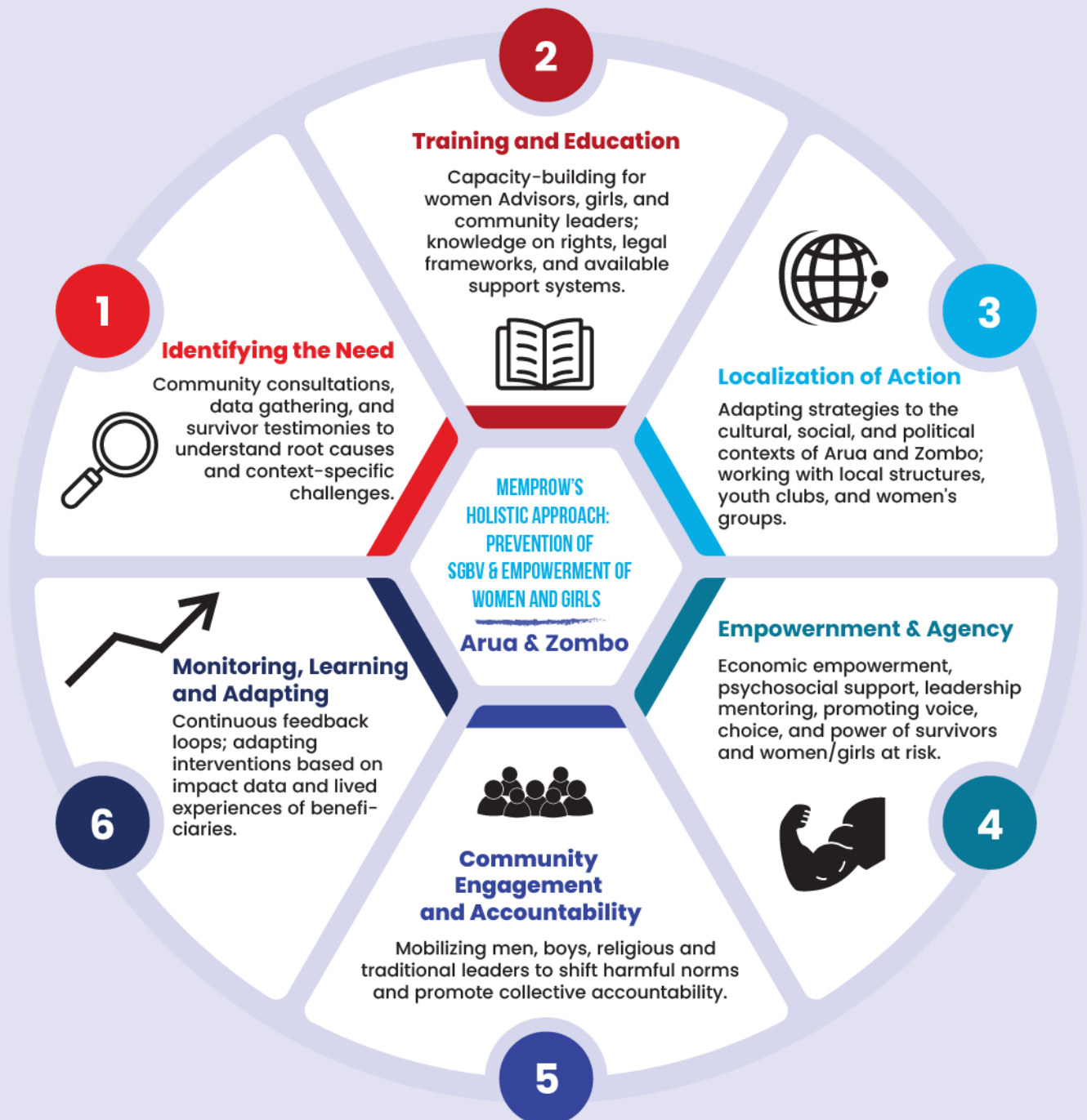
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Partners

Refer to stakeholders who have a direct partnership with MEMPROW. This may be a beneficiary, duty bearers, parents of Child mothers, Community activists, grassroots actors, non-profit or international organizations who are supporting our work in SGBV.

THE HOLISTIC APPROACH

SEE FAR II Holistic Approach Circle: Prevention of SGBV & Empowerment of Women and Girls



ACTIVITY GALLERY





ACTIVITY GALLERY



ACTIVITY GALLERY



Stories that Inspired Us

A collection of stories that capture the essence of the human spirit, showcasing resilience, hope, and the power of dreams. Each story serves as a symbol, lighting the path for those seeking inspiration and courage in their own lives. From the triumphs of individuals who overcame seemingly insurmountable odds to communities that banded together to create change, these narratives remind us of the incredible strength and compassion that reside within us all.

Imagine the stories of an adolescent child's mothers, despite the challenges of growing up in a small village with limited resources, who is now able to live a life far from what circumstances of teenage pregnancy or SGBV would have defined. Through sheer determination and a community that believed in their talent and potential, they not only achieved their dreams but also inspired others to pursue their own.

Or look at the story of a SASA! *Together* Activists who, in the aftermath of introducing the SASA! model to their communities, now come together to rebuild their community and their own households away from the violence that defined it. Their collective spirit and unwavering support for addressing violence in the community continued to serve as a powerful reminder of the strength found in unity and community solidarity.

These stories, and countless others like them, teach us the importance of perseverance, empathy, and the impact one person can have on the world. They encourage us to look beyond our circumstances and to believe in the possibility of a brighter future, fueled by the simple yet profound acts of solidarity and Actions.

Agnes Piracel, 39 - Woman Advisor – Kpelepete Village

A voice once silenced by anger, now leading with calm, confidence, and care.

Before MEMPROW, Agnes describes her life as filled with frustration. “If someone brought me a rumour, I would confront them immediately. I didn’t stop to think. I reacted first.” At home, anger often spilled into her parenting and her marriage. “I used to lash out at my children. When my husband talked, I wouldn’t even look at him. He was loud, and I didn’t see the point of listening.”

But everything began to shift when she became a woman advisor under the SEE FAR Project.

As she stepped into leadership, Agnes also stepped into self-awareness. Now, she assesses situations before reacting. She’s learned to speak calmly with her husband, offering ideas, negotiating, and making shared decisions. “He noticed the change. He told me, ‘This knowledge is helping both of us.’ We are no longer two angry people shouting. We’re a team building our home.”

She beams when she talks about how they now parent together. Before sending their two children off to boarding school, she and her husband sit with them for a “school talk”—a quiet ritual of care, guidance, and love.

In her community, Agnes is now a point of hope. She recalls a time when her sister-in-law and her husband were close to separating. “The husband came to me. I brought them together to talk. I listened. They listened. Today, they are still together, raising their children in peace.” Agnes remembers once believing she had no power.

“I used to say, ‘Me? What can I do? I’m just a woman.’ MEMPROW changed that. I learned I have rights. I have a voice.”

She didn’t just change her mindset—she reshaped how others see her. “Women in my village never used to respect me. But now, we call meetings together. We counsel. We lift each other up.”

With confidence, Agnes now speaks in village courts, asks questions, and mentors young girls. She’s learned to manage her money—renting land, investing in herself first, and then supporting her family.

“I no longer live just for others. I think about myself too. I buy things for me, not out of selfishness, but self-worth.” When asked about the girls she’s mentored, she proudly names Comfort and Jovian—both young mothers who are now running a small business and a salon, rebuilding their lives with dignity.

Together with other women advisors, Agnes guides girls in how to stay safe, be resourceful, and support their families. “We show them that they matter. That being a mother doesn’t mean your future is over.”

Her advice to girls is gentle and firm:

“Come to us. We will listen, support, and walk with you. The world doesn’t need violence or domination. We need humility, care, and shared living”. As we continue to walk this journey, “Five years from now, I want to continue as a counsellor. I want to keep growing. And I want to see these girls rise even higher than I have.”

“I started to listen. To think before I speak. I began to reflect on my behavior and how it affected my children, my husband, and even my neighbors.” — Agnes



Listening, Loving, Leading: Morris Inspires a New Model of Manhood

OCAMGIU MORRIS- SASA Activist

Before I joined SASA! Together, I believed that as a man, my word had to be final. I used to control everything in my home—how money was spent, how decisions were made, and how my two wives and children lived their lives. If my suggestions were not followed, I would use force,

“I thought power was about control. But I’ve learned that real power is about listening, sharing, and building together. ~Morris”

including beating. I thought that made me more respected. I believed that love came through fear, not fairness.

Through SASA!, I started seeing things differently. One of the most important lessons I learned was about joint decision-making. Today, if my wife or child is unwell, even with just a slight fever, I’m the first to take them to the hospital. Before, I never saw their health as a shared concern—but now I understand that caring is a responsibility, not a favour.

At home, I have changed. I used to return from drinking and demand sex without thinking about how my wives felt—what they wanted or whether they were even ready. That’s not how love works. Today, I respect their decisions, their boundaries, their bodies.

“I now know that treating my wives and children with kindness doesn’t make me less of a man—it makes me a better one. ~Morris”



I’ve also changed how I treat my children. I have 11 in total—9 with my first wife and 2 with the second. I used to discipline them harshly, thinking fear would teach them. But now I see that when I use calm words and involve them in family conversations, they grow with more confidence and respect.

In my community, people have started noticing the difference. They see that the new Morris isn’t the man who used to shout, control, and beat. They now see someone who listens, fetches his own water, takes care of the house when needed, and supports peace in the home.

Before, I wouldn’t touch any household chores—I thought they were not for me. Today, I carry my own water to bathe, fetch drinking water, and do small things around the house that show respect. Funny enough, these are the very things I used to argue and beat over. I just didn’t know better.

“SASA! has helped me leave behind the old me. I now say, don’t listen to the Morris of the past—listen to the Morris of today. He has something different to offer.”

As a SASA! activist, I take this message beyond my home. I attend at least four meetings a month, and I go to savings groups and community gatherings to speak about power balance, respect, and non-violence. Since I started this journey, I believe I’ve reached over 400 people—and I can proudly say that many now understand the need for change.

My Message to men is simple:

Violence is not leadership. Control is not love. True partnership makes families stronger. I tell men that their homes will not fall apart if they share decisions with their wives—they will grow stronger. We should advise each other, not compete. I’m still growing. But every day I live as proof that men can change. And when they do, whole communities change.



"When Peace Came Home!"

A LOOK AT DAVID'S JOURNEY THROUGH SASA! ACTIVISM WITH MEMPROW

"I was the thunder in my home. But now, I am the rain; gentle, needed, and nourishing." – David

In an open compound of his Home in Otheko, David stands with the SASA activist with an easy smile, a laugh that once was rare, buried under years of conflict and chaos. Today, he speaks openly about his transformation, holding nothing back. His story is rooted in pain, watered by reflection, and now flowering with hope.

David and Akumu, his wife since 1996, have walked a long road. For years, that road was rocky, marked by heavy drinking, control, and violence. "I would come home drunk, shouting, causing chaos like it was nothing. She would always be on her toes, afraid, sometimes beaten," David admits, his tone sober. "People told her to leave me. But she kept coming back. Maybe it was love. Or maybe she had nowhere to go."

Marriage, Before the Light Came

David recalls how, like many men around him, he saw marriage as a domain of dominance. "My role was to provide and command. Hers was to serve, cook, and stay quiet. That's what we were taught. That's what we saw," he explains. "Even when things were bad, the community expected her to adjust, not me."

The couple had dreams, raising livestock, helping relatives, but chaos always came first. "We had plans. But I had my chaos too," he says, with a wistful glance at the ground.

When SASA! Knocked

It wasn't David who first received SASA! Activist, it was Akumu. "At first, she went alone. I was still drinking then. But something shifted. She also stopped drinking for a while. She got saved. I saw a light in her I hadn't seen before."

David was skeptical, but a local catechist and a SASA Activist, whom he affectionately calls *japonji*, persisted. "He didn't give up. He visited us. Spoke to me like a man. Not to scold, but to teach. That's when I began listening."

Gradually, David began to change. "I reduced the alcohol. I started seeing how my actions weren't just harming her, they were killing our home, our dreams."

A Collaborative Home Found

One of the most insightful changes has been in how the couple now makes decisions. "Before, I wouldn't even ask her opinion. Now, we sit down and talk. I've realized she has ideas; important ones," he says, pausing. "Even though, sometimes, women can think negatively, like when she thought my plans to plant coffee were for marrying a second wife," he chuckles. "But I humbled myself. And guess what? That coffee bought us goats."

David speaks of shared chores with pride. "I bathe the kids, do dishes, and even work on harvests. I don't wait for daughters to do it. We garden together now. We're a team."

There's still tension sometimes, like when he wanted to buy a radio and Akumu disagreed. "She said we needed food instead. So I kept the money, told her my plans, and bought it later. It's better that way. No fights. Just honesty."

David doesn't claim perfection, but he stands as proof of progress. "Since SASA, no serious fights. Our activist still visits us. That follow-up is gold. MEMPROW has changed our home." David sees change in his community too. "SASA is teaching us to work together, to live in peace. It's no longer about who's louder. It's about who's listening. Who's building."

A Message to others

David is clear-eyed about his past and determined about his future. "To men who think their voices matter more, I was once like you. But I've learned: violence doesn't make you a man. Listening does. Respect does. Peace does." And to other couples? "Don't wait for the worst. Start early. Change is hard, but it's sweet."

His final words carry the weight of hard-earned wisdom: ***"The year of fighting has ended. I want to be the reason violence ends in other homes too."***

A photograph of three people standing in front of a thatched hut. On the left is a woman in a pink t-shirt. In the center is a man wearing a blue t-shirt with a logo and a wide-brimmed hat. On the right is a woman in a white button-down shirt. The background shows the thatched roof of a building and some foliage.

Choosing Change Everyday

Okila Godfred

"Before SASA!, people feared my home. Today, they visit it for peace. Before, I ruled with anger; now, I lead with love."

My name is **Okila Godfred**. I live in Otheko, Zombo District, Uganda. I am a husband to **Leonora and Manuela**, and I'm here to tell you a story, not just of regret, but of **redemption**.

I used to believe that being a man meant being feared. I drank heavily. I avoided work. I let anger and pride run my household. My home was not a place of warmth; it was a place people avoided. Even my wives walked on eggshells around me.

But as one wise saying goes:

"When the roots are deep, there is no reason to fear the wind." SASA! Helped me rediscover my roots, the good in me I had buried beneath bitterness and outdated beliefs.

The Incentive of Change

When I first encountered SASA! Through MEMPROW, I didn't expect much. I thought, "These are just words." But the more I listened, the more I saw myself in the wrong mirror. I saw a man who was not leading, but destroying. And I asked myself:

"What legacy do I want to leave for my children?"

That question shook me. I made a decision: I would not let alcohol, violence, or ego define my manhood. I left drinking behind and started attending sessions religiously. I learnt that real power is not about control, it's about connection.

Today, I live differently.

I plan everything with my wives. Leonora has her own house. Manuela and I share parenting duties. We farm, budget, and pray together. I no longer wait to be served. I cook. I wash clothes. I fetch water. I bathe and prepare our children for school.

"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." This is now our family motto. And yes, we are going far—together.

Even with my chronic illness, a painful cough I've battled for six years, my wives have stood by me. Before SASATogether!, I never talked about my sickness. Now, we discuss it openly and go to the hospital together. Because love doesn't fear vulnerability.

I've spoken to many men—some who were on the brink of losing their families. One couple I helped had even separated. The man was violent and drank too much. After we talked, they reunited. He changed—though later relapsed. But we won't give up on him.

"A single conversation can plant the seed of a forest."
And I believe in watering that seed, again and again.

Voices from Home

Leonora, my first wife, says:

"My husband was once the most violent man. He beat me over the smallest mistake. But today, he fears hurting me. We now make every decision together, about our children, our land, and our lives. If he hadn't changed, I would have left with our children."

Manuela, my second wife, adds:

"He now lights the fire, cooks, and supports us fully. We contribute together. He even picks up the children and prepares them for school. Alcohol nearly destroyed our home, but SASA Together! brought it back."

Lessons

I used to think that asking for help or sharing responsibility was a weakness. But now I know:

"Strong men aren't those who control others, but those who control themselves."

SASA Together! gave me more than tools; it gave me a new heart. My transformation isn't perfect, but it's honest. And now, **I walk beside my wives, not in front of them.**

I still struggle with illness. But my home has never been more alive. And I am committed to helping more men find this same path. Because:

"When one man changes, a whole village begins to breathe easier."

Wellness

In Her Hands

Ongiera Beatrice

Beatrice's journey with MEMPROW is evidence of what happens when women are seen, trained, and trusted.

Wellness, in her story, is a **right** and a **radical act of reclaiming self-care in the margins of daily survival**. Through her, wellness travels from theory into lived experience, from workshops into homes.

In the quiet mornings of her village, before the market bustles to life and children begin calling for breakfast, **Beatrice Ongiera** takes a moment to stretch. Her arms reach skyward, her feet rooted in the earth. Just a year ago, this simple act was unfamiliar, unimaginable, even. But today, Beatrice is not just a mother, mentor, and community member; she understands **wellness has** purpose.

Beatrice is a **woman advisor** under MEMPROW's community structure, chosen by child mothers themselves to guide and support them. "The girls selected me," she shares with a humble smile. "I think they saw something in me, even when I didn't fully see it in myself yet."

Her involvement began with a **two-day training on wellness practices** offered by MEMPROW. At first, she admits, she didn't understand much about what wellness truly meant. "I used to think rest meant sleeping off tiredness, or just taking Panadol when the body aches," she says. "But now, I know how to listen to my body. I know how to stretch, how to massage myself. I don't rush for medicine anymore."

What truly transformed Beatrice wasn't just the technical learning; it was the **collective experience**. "We were many women advisors together," she recalls. "Just being with other women, learning together, laughing, stretching, it made me feel lighter, not just in my body but in my heart."

The training introduced Beatrice to basic wellness techniques: **arm and leg stretches, planks, breathing exercises, and massage**. She took them home, not just in practice, but in principle. Now, she teaches them to others, particularly the child mothers she mentors.

"When we sit together as women and stretch, we're not just helping our bodies. We're helping each other carry life's load. That's wellness, too."

Beatrice is honest about the **barriers rural women face** in prioritizing wellness. "We are always working," she explains. "Business, housework, children, there's hardly any time to rest, let alone stretch." But she's also practical and forward-thinking. "We can choose one day, a day-off-market day, for example, to replace chores with group exercise. Even 20 minutes makes a difference."

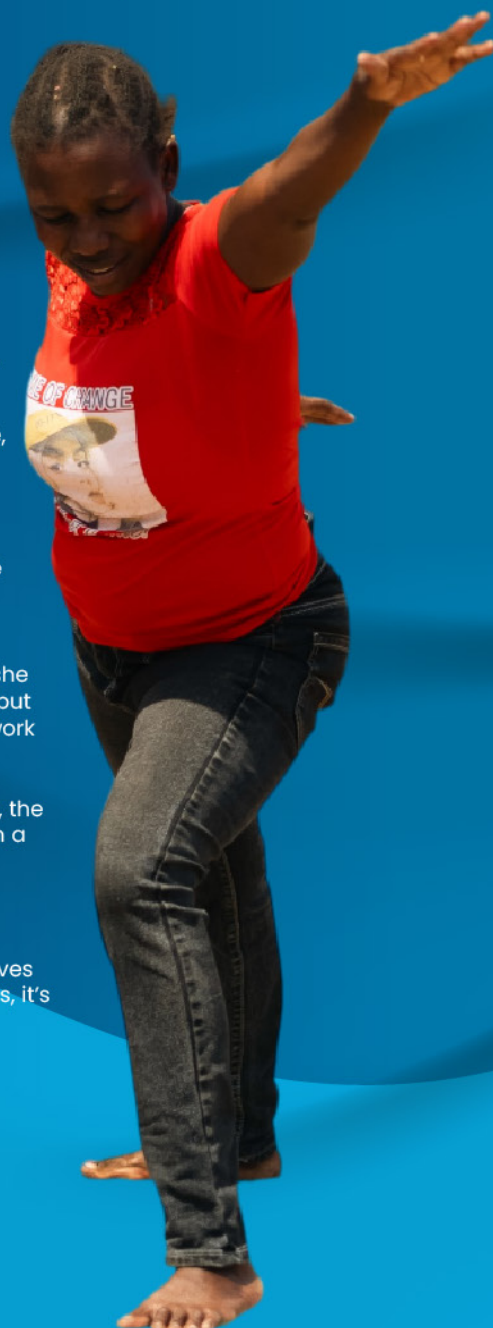
Traditional knowledge around wellness, she admits, is limited. "My father used to tell us to run when we were in school, but no one taught us how to care for our bodies with intention." Now, she sees an opportunity to build a **new culture of wellness** in her community, one rooted in shared experience, not just inherited survival.

The impact Beatrice has seen in others is quiet but powerful. "One girl told me she doesn't feel sick like before. She used to complain of body pains all the time, but now she says she stretches every evening. That alone makes me know this work matters."

MEMPROW's support, she says, made all the difference. "They gave us the tools, the knowledge, and the confidence. I didn't know I could do this. Now I feel like I am a teacher of something important."

When asked what she envisions for the future, her answer is clear:

"We must continue. I want more women to know how to help themselves like I have. It's not just about the body, it's about our lives. This wellness, it's in our hands now."





POWERING SECOND CHANCES FOR CHILD MOTHERS in West Nile through Seed Capital

"In the past, people looked at us and saw a mistake. Now, they see businesswomen," says Fiona, a young mother from Zombo. Her story, like many others, begins in pain but is now unfolding in purpose, thanks to SEE FAR II's bold commitment to restoring dignity through seed capital.

In communities like Zombo and Arua, the odds are stacked heavily against child mothers. Pushed out of school, excluded from decision-making, and burdened with responsibilities too heavy for their age, many are left with no pathway back to education or economic independence. But SEE FAR II saw not victims, but visionaries waiting for someone to bet on them.

Through the seed capital intervention in 2025, 51 child mothers in Zombo and Arua were given more than just money; they were given the tools to rebuild their lives and livelihoods. In Zombo, 15 received tailoring machines, 3 started salons, and 11 were supported to launch small businesses like selling food items. In Arua, 7 girls began tailoring with their new machines, 1 was supported to establish a salon, and 14 received funds to start businesses of their own. These were not random distributions; they were intentional investments in the dreams and determination of young women who had been silenced and sidelined.

The result? A quiet revolution in their households and communities. Dorcas, like many others who are now in school, can embrace a new angle to life and at the same time provide for their children without begging or borrowing. Halima, who once lived at the mercy of relatives, now operates her beauty salon in Arua, serving clients and mentoring peers. Their children eat better. Their homes feel safer. Their voices are louder. And perhaps most importantly, their futures are now theirs to shape.

The impact has been undeniable. As one of the beneficiaries put it, "Increased capital means more earnings. We are now supporting ourselves and our dependents." The confidence in their tone says it all.

SEE FAR II has demonstrated that when you equip young women with the right resources and trust, transformation is inevitable. But the need far outweighs the reach. Imagine what could happen if we scaled this effort: more tailoring centres, more business incubation, more stories rewritten. With greater funding, we can take this tested model beyond Zombo and Arua, and create a future where no child mother is left behind.



Becoming a **Trailblazer** AT THE KAAL (CHIEFDOM) OMUA

At 60 years old, **Yunes Kayeny** from Cana village in Paidha Sub-county is living proof that it's never too late to lead change. She is redefining what leadership looks like in the Alur Kingdom.

With other women in Zombo, Yunes participated in a series of MEMPROW's gender, women's rights, and human rights training programs, a transformative experience that equipped her with the knowledge and confidence to step into the public sphere. Today, she stands as a living symbol of what empowered women can achieve in even the most tradition-bound spaces.

"I used to think only men could speak on matters of leadership," Yunes recalls. "But the training opened my eyes. I now know my voice matters, not just in my home, but in the whole community."

Using the tools and strategies she learned from MEMPROW, Yunes **successfully influenced her own installation as a women's leader** in the Paidha Umua Chiefdom, a role never before held by a woman in that context. Her ascension marked an unprecedented breakthrough in gender representation within the Alur Kingdom.

But Yunes' impact didn't stop there.

When a group of male clan elders resisted the installation of the current chief, **Rwoth Emmanuel**

Angia, Yunes boldly stood her ground. Drawing on her deep understanding of women's rights and traditional governance, she **challenged the resistance, escalating the matter to the office of the Resident District Commissioner**. Her courageous advocacy was pivotal in ensuring the installation of the young chief went forward.

Through her firmness, Yunes not only defended fair leadership but also modeled what it means for women to **speak truth to power**.

"I knew I had to act. Silence would have meant defeat—not just for the chief, but for every woman who is told to stay in her place," she said.

Today, Yunes continues to serve as an inspiration of possibility. Her leadership resonates across the chiefdom, **inspiring women and traditional leaders alike to reimagine gender roles** and support equality at all levels of governance.

Her story is one among many that reflect the enduring impact of MEMPROW's capacity-building work in the Alur Kingdom, where the Roles of women and Girls are starting to be appreciated



Cultural Institutions Take a Stand Against **GBV** Shifting Norms

Under the **SEE FAR** initiative, MEMPROW has been working steadily to unpack and transform deeply entrenched social norms that fuel gender-based violence (GBV).

In a landmark move, the **Alur Kingdom**, under the leadership of Ubimu Phillip Olarker Rauni III, issued a **public pronouncement against GBV**, marking a new chapter in the fight against harmful cultural practices. This bold shift, facilitated through our engagement under the **#He4She** program, came after a series of transformative dialogues with traditional and religious leaders. The Kingdom officially **curtailed prolonged marriage celebrations**, which had become fertile ground for early and forced marriages, and put a stop to **unauthorized "Aburaka" dances**, which had strayed far from their original, dignified purpose. During **SEE Far II**, we continued to roll this Pronouncement out.

Once an innocent, daylight cultural gathering for girls, **Aburaka** had devolved into a night-time event that exposed young people, especially girls, to physical and sexual violence. Recognizing the growing harm, the Kingdom restored the original values of the dance and decided to limit celebrations to a single day, thereby reaffirming its role as a protector of its people, especially women and girls.

The effect of this work has reached neighboring traditional institutions. In **2025**, the **Lugbara Kari** leadership followed suit, issuing their **pronouncement against harmful norms**, following sustained engagements and training supported by MEMPROW under **SEE FAR**. One particular harmful practice that came under fire was "Aruba", a dangerous belief that a woman must pay a man after experiencing sexual violence to avoid a curse on her children. This distorted tradition has long silenced survivors and protected perpetrators under the veil of superstition.

After several dialogues and capacity-building sessions with religious and cultural leaders, Lugbara Kari recognized the deep trauma such practices inflict—and took decisive action. Their pronouncement rejected "Aruba" and other GBV-enabling beliefs, affirming the Kingdom's new direction grounded in protection, justice, and dignity for all.

These changes are not isolated. They are becoming precedent. Development partners, civil society actors, and youth-led networks now cite these pronouncements as part of their advocacy and implementation frameworks. Where once cultural norms were used to justify harm, they are now being reimaged to prevent it.

Strengthening the Chain of Care by Reinforcing THE REFERRAL PATHWAYS IN WEST NILE



In the corridors of rural health centres and the offices of police stations in Zombo and Arua districts, a new kind of conversation has begun; one that speaks of care, justice, and healing. For too long, girls and young women who had survived violence bore their trauma in silence, navigating broken systems and facing indifference where there should have been support.

Through the SEE FAR2 project, with support from Medical Mondiale, we set out with a bold, necessary goal: to reinforce the referral pathways between police, health centres, and communities, ensuring that survivors of violence could access the care and justice they deserve quickly, safely, and with dignity.

We began by convening training for police and health workers from Arua and Zombo districts, focused on gender and human rights, self-care, trauma resistance, basic individual and group counselling, and referral pathway management. They were taught to respond; listen, feel, and to understand the weight of silence that survivors often carry.

During a follow up in December 2024 with 9 frontline officials—2 men and 7 women drawn from the pool of trained officers police stations and health facilities across Zombo and Arua. We understood the transformation taking place.

At Otheko and Pajulu health centres, and the Police Health Centre, data began to reflect the impact. Adolescent girls aged 15 to 19—a demographic often invisible in official statistics—started showing up. In October alone, Pajulu Health Centre recorded 29 antenatal visits from teenage girls, many of whom had never interacted with the formal health system before. At Otheko, the same age group showed consistent attendance from June to November, with a peak of 27 visits in August.

These numbers may appear clinical, but behind each visit is a young girl stepping out of the shadows and into care. It's a sign of growing trust; trust in a system that, for once, feels safe enough to approach. Meanwhile, at the police front, a painful but vital truth emerged. Between October and November 2024, 17 cases of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) were reported and handled: 3 aggravated assaults, 1 rape, and 13 defilement cases. While the severity and number of cases remain alarming, they also signal a critical change; survivors are coming forward, and police are responding.

By equipping police officers, health workers, and other stakeholders with both the skills and the mindset to support survivors, MEMPROW is not only building systems, it is humanizing them. Survivors are not being passed from desk to desk. They are being met with empathy, support, and a growing sense of accountability.

The SEE FAR2 project has shown that when service providers understand trauma, when they know how to care and when to refer, the system starts to work, not perfectly, but intentionally. A health worker no longer just records numbers; she asks the right questions. A police officer no longer silences a girl; he listens and acts.

The story of referral pathways in Zombo and Arua is still being written. But already, the lines are clearer, the voices louder, and the response more compassionate.

Health centre	Age	Nov	Oct	Sep	Aug	Jul	Jun
Otheko health Centre	Below 15	00	00	00	01	00	00
	15 - 19		16	11	26	27	13
Pajulu health Centre	Below 15	00	00	01	00	00	00
	15 - 19	18	29	26	00	00	00
Police health Centre	Below 15	01					
	15 - 19	57					

Testimonial *Corner*

"As you know, women do not want to touch their money; they want to keep it for their personal use, but they taught us in the SASA! Activity that even when you have a husband, it is good to support each other; as a result, when my husband was sick, I contributed some money for his medication and also buy food at home; now I am different"

*~Aliango, SASA Together!
Beneficiary*

"Self-care has greatly improved in terms of the we eat, engaging in routine exercises and have enough sleep/rest so that sicknesses do not put them down easily" and continued that "previously We used to have mood swings/annoyance but at least MEMPROW has taught us to love ourselves more so that we can deliver good services"

*~Madam Beatrice Ayikor
Deputy SGBV Desk*

"... I used to think that family secrets could not be revealed ...people also used to say that if a husband does not beat his wife, then she will not know that he loves her ...all these beliefs were changed through SASA."

*~Anonymous
Community Member*

"Being a polygamous man, traditionally, I enjoyed all the privileges and power. Most often I would sit comfortably in the sitting room listening to the radio while my wives and children were busy cooking in the kitchen but with SASA activism, I realized we can balance power by sharing work at home, supporting each other. I am no longer the same. I support them with house chores, and most often we spend our free time playing cards with the wives."

~Community Member

"We used to look at complainants as failures, be rude and stigmatise them, but the attitude towards these scenarios has changed, we have secured convictions and we see success in our cases."

~Beatrice

"I live in a community where some form of violence including emotional is considered Okay for a man to discipline and shout/abuse his wife, incidentally, I was quick at inflicting violence to my wife but now learning from SASA activism on the negative impact of violence; I decided to stop it; I am no longer the same and also use the same knowledge to share with other men in the community"

*~Onega Community Member
Jupaneke Village*

"All along, I have not been giving my time and attention to SASA activism, thinking that it's a waste of time, until I had an issue with my wife, and the activist supported in settling the violence without asking for money, which has made the cost of justice cheap. I thank MEMPROW for this"

~Omirambe

"Back then we used to talk to the clients especially young mothers with the blame language for producing when they are young but now we can ably talk to them with the customer care language."

*~Irene Apio acting
In-charge CFPU*

"When I got pregnant, I lost hope in life; my daily lives was packed with trouble, stigma, loneliness and no future ahead until I got a chance to get enrolled in SEE FAR2 program as one of the project beneficiaries, we were taken through various empowerment program that includes, self-care, gender and human rights, economic empowerment and seed capital that changed my stories, I feel loved and supported with frequent visit of staff at our home where I can share my story freely say"

~Amviko Caroline Child Mother Arua

"Masculinity refers to the socially constructed attributes, attitudes, behaviours and expressions expected of men. These may start as early as during pregnancy and birth. Today in Uganda, this may be manifested through the gender reveal colours, blue = boys, pink = girls."

~Dr. Mary Ssonko Nabacwa

"Toxic masculinity thrives on ignorance and idleness. We need to engage community and Cultural leaders and use ethnography to understand and redefine gender roles."

*~Rev. Nathan Mugalu –
Parish Priest, Church of Uganda*

"The law does not allow for euphemism. Victims and witnesses must clearly state their words. Let's rethink the word 'champion.' If men are doing good, they're simply being human."

*~Titus Asimwe – Programs
Officer, WPI Legal Aid*

"It is the idea of society that dictates the behaviour of men especially in terms of leadership and strength. Thus, men grow to have an exaggerated sense of self-importance whereas women are passengers in the world made to bear children. This brings in the aspect of gender roles, we must integrate men through the engagement of the community, school and church, among others, to educate and empower actors and activists of change, to combat negative masculinity and promote a safe environment for women and girls"

~Immaculée – E.D PAIF

WOW Notes

I once dreamt of creating change in my community, to light a path where there was once only shadow. But like many young women around me, I found myself locked out. Opportunities were few, and the spaces to explore our potential were even fewer. We live in a place where patriarchy wakes up before the sun and tells women when to rise, how to speak, and how far they can dream.

I often asked myself: What can I do for the many child mothers around me? Some were denied education. Others were victims of defilement, sometimes at the hands of those meant to protect them.

During a community dialogue organized by MEMPROW, we invited Ayio, a young mother and survivor, to share her story. She stood before the girls, not with shame, but with courage. Her words were firm, her pain transformed into power. She spoke about surviving child marriage, about the violence she endured, and about why the cycle must end with her generation.

That day, something shifted. The community development officer was moved. Ayio was appointed as a champion for girls in the district, proof that lived experience carries authority. Since then, she has been leading peer sessions, sensitizing girls on the dangers of early pregnancy and forced marriage, and creating safe spaces for honest, healing conversations.

And for me? Watching her reclaim her narrative reminded me that changing the system isn't a solo act. It begins in small rooms, in brave moments, and in voices that refuse to be silenced. Because when one girl rises, she lifts others with her.....

~MEMPROW Girl, from Zombo

Being part of the Feminist Leadership training organized by MEMPROW marked a turning point in my leadership journey. The training sharpened my public speaking skills, strengthened my confidence, and challenged me to step up and take space. Today, I serve as one of the women councilors of Arivu Ward, and I am now contesting for a seat as Arua City Councillor. That growth was not accidental; it was nurtured through the principles and affirmations I received from the training.

One young woman in our cohort shared how, during a community survey, her team leader struggled to get a fearful respondent to engage. She said, 'My team leader had given up—but I stepped in, spoke with the respondent, and they agreed to be interviewed.' That's the ripple effect of feminist leadership—where we uplift, step in, and step up.

Out of the 28 women we connected with, at least three are now aspiring for higher-level leadership roles. That says a lot about the kind of transformative leadership we are building.

The self-care sessions were another powerful shift. Many of us had internalized the idea that our well-being had to be someone else's responsibility. Now, self-reliance has become part of our leadership. As one of us put it: 'I take myself out without waiting for a man to do so. I no longer glorify burnout like I used to. I nurture myself and celebrate every milestone I reach.'

That's what feminist leadership looks like: empowered, intentional, and whole.

— Anim Orodriyo, participant in MEMPROW's Feminist Leadership Training

Every year in Paidha, about October–November is the season for gathering "Usene" or grasshoppers for food. It is also a period when more young girls are defiled when they go out to collect the delicacy. Some women are raped, school drops out rates increase the following year among girls. Other related vices against women and girls also increase. Beatrice, a mentor who yearly constructs grasshopper trapping facilities at her home as a business, has refused to allow any child under eighteen to collect the grasshoppers from near her area. Children have obliged. She hopes to convince business people like her to do the same to contribute to reducing teenage pregnancy in their community by limiting children's exposure to this nighttime food gathering which sometimes occurs as late as 2.00 am.

~Beatrice, Mentor Paidha



Incorporating feminist principles and gender mainstreaming into our work has truly been eye-opening. One thing I'm proud of is how we included boys in our training sessions. It wasn't just about teaching girls; we made sure boys were part of it too, so they could take this knowledge back to their communities. Right now, we have 26 gender champions, organized into 12 groups, who are actively spreading these messages.

Personally, this journey has helped me grow. I used to say "yes" to everything, even when I wasn't sure I could manage. But now, I've learned it's okay to say "no" when I feel overwhelmed or unsure about a task. This has made a big difference in how I handle my responsibilities.

The training also helped us understand the difference between feminism and feminist principles, which was important. Awareness about sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) has increased a lot in our community. We now have 210 youth trainers who are equipped to handle GBV issues, and I've heard of at least five success stories where people have passed on what they learned, improving support and referral pathways for survivors.

In schools, the mentorship program has boosted girls' performance. Even teachers formed their groups to mentor girls, which is encouraging. I remember the Arivu Ward woman councilor telling me how, during a recent PTA meeting, parents spoke highly of the changes they've seen. That kind of feedback shows we're moving in the right direction.

*~Oriba Alice, Feminist Leader,
MEMPROW Girl,
and Lecturer at Muni University*



I want to express my heartfelt appreciation to MEMPROW for the impactful training they conducted. Since then, I have been able to economically empower many women in my SACCO. I often talk with them about their rights, especially concerning cultural and social norms around land ownership and food.

One thing I'm proud of is mentoring 60 women in briquette making, which helps reduce their over-dependence on men for income. I also took the opportunity during a Social Accountability and Advocacy (SAA) dialogue to talk about the roles of both men and women in decision-making.

Additionally, I organized sensitization sessions for 50 teenage mothers and their parents. Many parents admitted that the harsh language they use toward their children has greatly affected the girls' self-esteem.



Mentorship didn't stop there — we extended it to schools too. I visited three schools: Jiako, Future Foundation, and Asuru Primary School. Teachers in these schools formed groups to support girls' mentorship. So far, I have met with 20 girls from P.4 to P.7 at Jiako, 75 girls in P.4 at Future Foundation, and 100 girls from P.6 to P.7 at Asuru Primary School in Arua.

Thanks to MEMPROW's training, I feel more confident and equipped to support women and girls in my community.

~Oluru Josephine



#WowNotes

I am writing this letter with a heart full of gratitude and appreciation for the remarkable role your organization has played in transforming my life and the entire Police Fraternity of west Nile Region.

Through your programs and selfless support, I have experienced significant personal growth and positive change through your Engagements and Trainings in counselling and Guidance, Trauma management, mentorship, Human rights, and sexual and gender-based violence cases Management and Investigations, empowerment, and psychosocial support.

Your work has left a lasting mark on my journey. Your compassion and dedication have not only uplifted me but also inspired hope and confidence in my future. Words cannot fully express how grateful I am for the opportunities you have opened for me. You gave me a second chance when I needed it most, and for that, I will always remain thankful. Your commitment to serving vulnerable communities is truly admirable, and I am proud to be a beneficiary of your noble efforts.

May your organization continue to grow and reach more lives, just as you have touched us as Uganda Police Force.

I pray for strength, resources, and continued blessings upon all your initiatives and team members.

With sincere thanks,

SP. Anguyo Jimmy Bayiga.
Arua Regional Police Headquarters



Numbers or Statistics of Program Reach

SEE FAR2

AREA	REACH
Economic empowerment	78
Self-Care sessions (Child mothers and women advisors) Staff (retreat)	129
Support handling of cases with a stress and trauma responsive approach (staff, police, women advisors and health workers)	47
SASA Together reach Start and awareness phase	4129
Change agents/local activists in the 4 identified villages of Paidha SC	20
Feminist leadership trainings and participation in feminist spaces	86
Conferences and conventions organized	136
Awareness sessions	12
Exchange learning visits for child mothers	146
Conversations on positive parenting through dialogues	379
Gender and Human Rights...Police, technocrats, community leaders	131
Joint training and engagement of parents and selected Mentors	146
Child mothers fun based activities	51
Learning days	71





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Plot 1476 Muyenga Road,
Kampala, Uganda



+256(0) 761 848 408



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Rising Beyond Violence

Stories of Strength from West Nile



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