

# YOUNG.FEMINIST.FEARLESS. HOLDING THE LINE

STATE OF YOUTH CIVIL SOCIETY REPORT



**RESTLESS  
DEVELOPMENT**  
POWERED BY YOUNG PEOPLE



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**We live in uncertain times!** Worldwide, we are witnessing attacks on the rights of women, girls and non-binary persons, threatening our foremothers' hard-fought gains. From preventing access to sexual health services in the United States and banning girls from education in Afghanistan, to restricting digital feminist organising in China and brutally suppressing feminist activism in Iran, **the global rollback of rights is coordinated, wellfunded, and gaining momentum everywhere.**

**Young feminist activists are revered as heroes and are often at the frontline of democratic struggles, employing creative methods to hold the line- yet we fail to realise the toll of activism on their wellbeing, mental health, and hopes for the future.** This is particularly critical for young women and non-binary young people involved in feminist movements, as they are both uniquely vulnerable and forced to be increasingly brave. Their actions appear fearless from the outside, but **this work is fraught with danger and comes at a personal cost.**

**"The work is strenuous. Who takes care of people who take care of other people? Who is the activist for the activists? It is emotionally, financially, and physically draining. There are not enough people taking care of activists."**

- Young feminist from Uganda.

We all have a role in protecting these fearless leaders - the stakes have never been higher.

**"It's hard to imagine the future at the moment with everything going on..."**

- Young activist from Lebanon.

**This year's State of Youth Civil Society Report - Young, Feminist, and Fearless: Holding the Line**, focuses on feminist movements and their critical role in making the world more equitable, safe and accessible for everyone. **Young feminists are fearless and hold the line despite the dangers** to their security, the uncertainty that today's world presents, and the cost to their mental health. **They are pushing back against tyranny!**

Restless Development's youth-led researchers interacted with young feminists from 82 countries, conducting 127 individual interviews and 20 focus group discussions and reviewing

847 responses to a global online survey. **This year, we strategically selected seven countries - India, Iran, Lebanon, Uganda, Honduras, Brazil, and Sierra Leone** as spotlight countries enabling us to explore the experiences and perspectives of young feminists by gathering extensive qualitative data in these countries.

We found that **while young feminists are mainly optimistic about the future, their resilience is waning**, and without a concerted effort to support them sustainably, they risk burning out. The needs of feminist movements differ significantly from traditional non-profits. This report highlights the critical need for feminist allies to play a more significant role in supporting young feminist movements, both in terms of increased funding support and the type of funding that is made available.

## 1) YOUNG FEMINISTS ARE AT THE FOREFRONT OF FEMINIST MOVEMENTS

The study found that young feminists are increasingly at the forefront of the feminist movement. Most survey participants expressed their involvement in various movements. Key findings included:

- **35% of respondents actively participate in young feminist movements.** Younger feminists, specifically younger women and non-binary persons are the most actively engaged in feminist movements.

- **Rampant social injustices against women and non-binary persons**, such as gender discrimination, harassment, gender-based violence, lack of sexual and reproductive healthcare, and prevailing social norms that curtail women's rights, act as catalysts for young feminists

- Young feminists are collaborative: **47% reported engaging in transnational collaborations with other feminist movements**

## 2) SOCIAL MEDIA IS POWERING FEMINIST MOVEMENTS

**Social media has emerged as a crucial and cost effective tool for young people to further the feminist movement, serving as the primary facilitator for transnational collaborations and immediate response to real-time issues.** 85% of our survey respondents identified social media campaigns as the most popular strategy employed by young feminists to drive social, political, and cultural change.

The study found that;

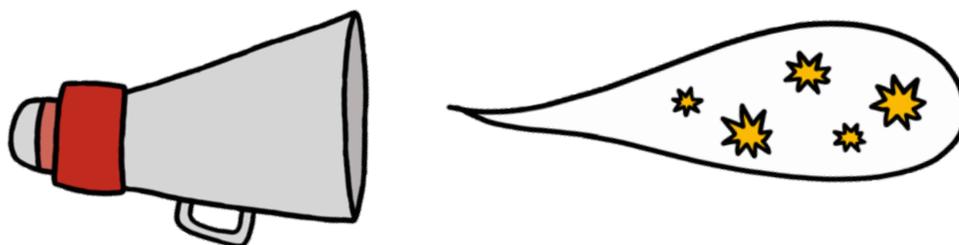
- **Feminist movements are fuelled by creativity**, and social media provides a platform for this to flourish through art, design, music, and mediums, which enable a more daring commentary/activism to grow. They can be free(er) online artistically and politically, creating a new and exciting cultural landscape.

- **Social media enabled greater collaboration between movements**, leading to increased transnational ideas and alliances

- **Social media allowed feminist movements to amplify their voices** - raising awareness about local and national issues at the global level.
- Particularly noteworthy is that **social media allows marginalised groups to share their experiences and narratives authentically and assertively** – an accessibility often lacking in mainstream media.

However, it also found that feminist movements see social media as **a double-edged sword**, fraught with danger as well as opportunity.

- Respondents highlighted that **young feminists risk drifting away from on-the-ground civic organising** and losing face-to-face engagement and real-time community support. Can we protect them from its effects?
- Young feminists are 'growing up' in **a toxic online world**. Online safety is a problem, with online harassment threatening their well-being.
- At the same time, **big tech companies are censoring young feminists' messages** and imposing restrictions on what can be published even in situations where the messages pose no threat to the wellbeing of others.



### 3) FEMINIST MOVEMENTS STRUGGLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH

The study highlights the massive impact that being part of a feminist movement has on the mental well-being of young activists. Respondents actively participating in feminist movements reported significant emotional, financial, and physical strain.

Key findings included...

- **36% of respondents** acknowledged that their mental health was negatively impacted.
- **The intersectional impact across gender and age groups showed that non-binary individuals and those transitioning through age brackets experience more adverse effects on their mental health.** Notably, the negative effects of participating in young feminist movements were more pronounced among survey respondents who identified as non-binary (80%) compared to female (37%) and male (28%).
- Young feminist activists who identify as part of the **LGBTQIA+ community** or who **live with disabilities** often face more substantial barriers and challenges in their advocacy.
- **Trauma acts as a catalyst** for joining feminist movements, and it can have long-lasting effects
- **Lack of support from allies** also contributes to the mental health challenges of feminists
- **Negative perceptions and misunderstandings within the community** about the nature and purpose of their work are significant sources of distress for young feminists.

## 4) YOUNG FEMINIST MOVEMENTS FACE COUNTLESS THREATS

Young feminists have faced threats and harassment, both offline and online, for voicing their beliefs, forcing them to radically adopt unusual personal safety measures.

Young feminists reported death threats, banishment from their communities, and severe restrictions on freedom of movement and expression.

**Threats are not confined to physical spaces;** they also permeate the online world. Harassment has become so rampant that some young feminists have found it necessary to **deactivate their social media accounts**, marking a significant infringement on their ability to participate in the digital discourse.

Young feminists have also had to **adopt measures to ensure their safety**, often living in a state of heightened vigilance.

### Measures include:

- hiring personal legal assistance
- carrying self-defence items like red chilli powder, vinegar, and sticks- everyday commodities transformed into means of protection
- avoiding certain communities
- altering their daily routines to ensure their safety and survival.
- shutting down social media accounts

## 5) FEMINIST MOVEMENTS NEED STRONGER ALLIES WHO LISTEN AND RESPOND TO THEIR NEEDS

This research underscores the critical role of consistent and sustainable funding for young feminist movements emphasising that funding bodies must trust the potential of young people.

Key findings included:

- There is a profound disconnect between donor strategies and the genuine needs of feminist grassroots movements. This disconnect is primarily linked to a system built on rigid restrictions, complex application procedures, and a focus on project-based funding, often proving inflexible and inaccessible to these movements.
- **67% of respondents said that training was their most significant need, while 65% selected unrestricted funding.**
- **Many feminists are self-funded and rely on their families to support them**
- Trust is a significant barrier to donors investing in young feminist movements. Changing the perspective of funding bodies is emphasised, especially more trust in young people and their ability to lead and implement projects effectively.
- Informal nature of many movements makes **donor funds hard to secure**
- Feminist movements' **need for funding differs from that of traditional NGOs.** Funding

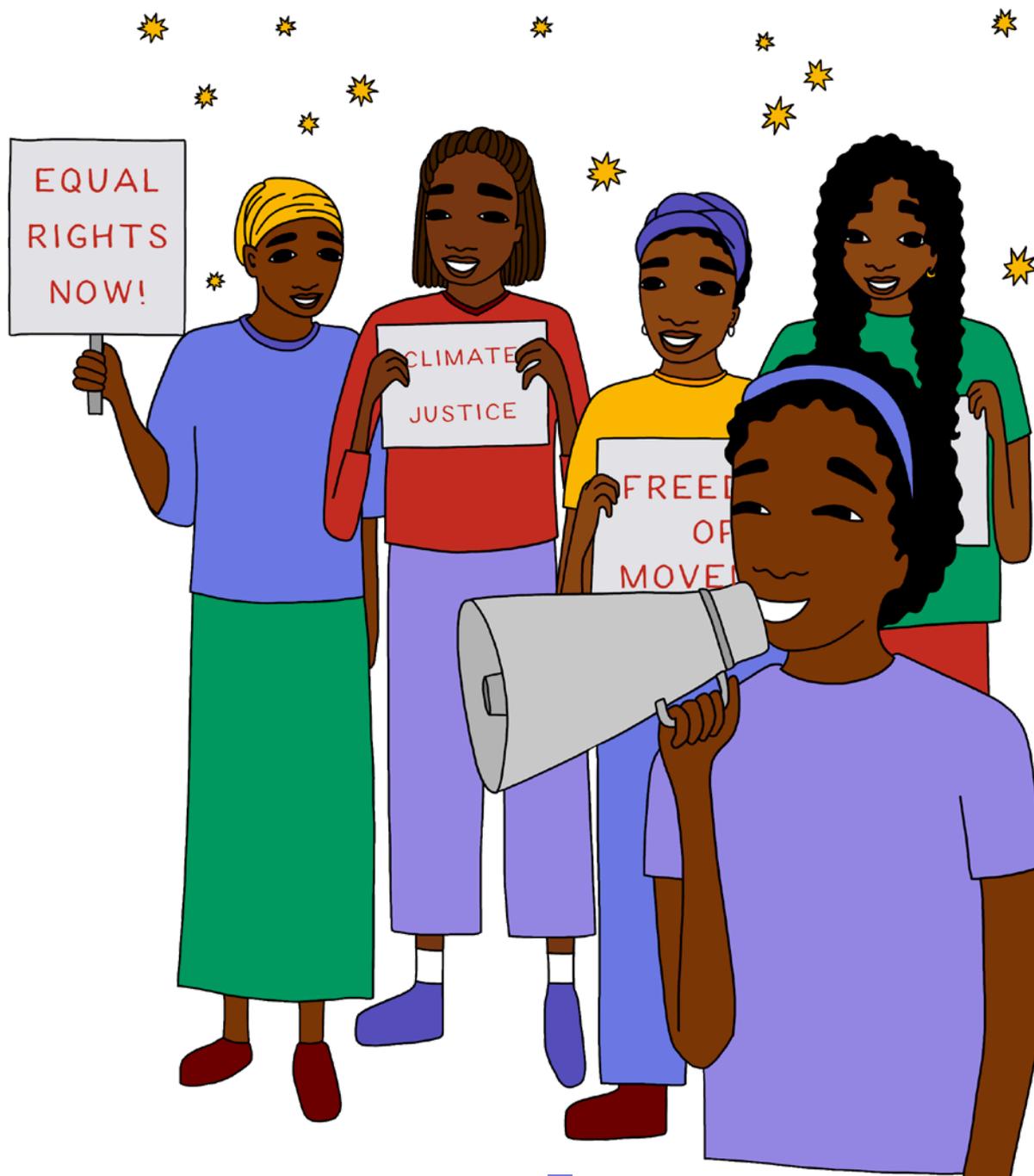
items that most NGOs don't need to consider, particularly self-care measures and personal safety, is necessary.

- **Lack of donor support** can lead young feminists to seek funds from less secure sources, putting them in further danger.

**"[Donors need] to let us set the agenda, not vice versa."**

- A respondent from Lebanon

- We heard a loud call for **rethinking funding strategies**, emphasising more empathetic, contextual, and inclusive approaches to enabling grassroots movements.



# WHAT DO YOUNG FEMINISTS NEED? TOP RECOMMENDATIONS FROM OUR FEARLESS FEMINISTS

## Be fearless and support feminist movements - become the activist for the activists!

- **Rethink funding and rebuild trust:** Funding needs to shift from traditional organisational models towards structures that better support feminist movements. Feminist movements are incredibly diverse. Funders need to recognise this and radically adapt to become more inclusive, empathetic, and open to funding feminist action, even if it feels scary, to begin with!
- **Get rid of bureaucratic barriers:** The funding process should be feminist movement friendly, streamlined, and stripped of unnecessary bureaucracy. This will make getting funds into the right people's hands easier, enabling movements to respond more effectively and swiftly to emergent needs.
- **Redefine what impact means:** Forget traditional NGO theories of change and log frames. Feminist movements think, work, and define success differently. Meet feminist movements where they are, trust them to do what's needed, and don't get hung up on metrics and KPIs - you must play the long game!
- **Build genuine allyship and partnerships:** Feminist movements can't do it alone - they need friends! The success of young feminist movements depends on accountable and trustful relationships based on love and respect. How can your organisation be a better friend to young feminist movements?
- **Amplify the voices of young feminists:** Feminist movements have a lot to say - but don't always have the right platforms to be heard. Think about how your organisation meaningfully supports feminist movements to shout as loud (or quietly!) as they want. Provide platforms on their terms - and don't expect them to tow the party line. Feminist movements want more action, less extraction!
- **Prioritise mental health and wellbeing:** Recognize the mental health strains that come with activism and allocate dedicated funding to mental health services and self-care support for activists.
- **Provide access to training:** Allies should also prioritise and actively advocate for the safety and security of young feminists. This could involve implementing protective measures, creating safe spaces, and working to address systemic threats and harassment.
- **Push back against social media giants:** Advocate for unrestricted access to social media platforms for young feminists and force platforms to eradicate online harassment.

# FOREWORD

**BY CHIDO CLEOPATRA MPEMBA**

I am honoured to present the State of Youth Civil Society 2023 Report, which provides a comprehensive understanding of the challenges, triumphs, and extraordinary resilience of young people and youth-led civil society worldwide. This report, based on the experiences and insights of young people from 82 countries, reflects the vibrant spirit of youth activism and the transformative power of digital connectivity in shaping our societies.

As the African Union Youth Envoy, I have witnessed firsthand the remarkable dedication and unwavering commitment of young people across the African continent. Therefore, I resonate deeply with the report's findings, which highlight the active participation of young people in social movements and activism. It is inspiring to learn that 70% of respondents have engaged in protests or demonstrations, emphasising their determination to drive positive change and shape a more just and equitable world.

However, the report also sheds light on the challenges faced by young people and youth-led civil society. It reveals that 60% of respondents encounter barriers in accessing funding and resources, hindering the realisation of their initiatives. Moreover, 45% of respondents face social stigma and discrimination based on age, gender, or other factors. These findings emphasise the urgent need to address systemic barriers and create an inclusive environment that ensures equal opportunities for all young people.

Despite these challenges, the report unveils the proactive measures taken by young people to overcome obstacles and effect change. It highlights that 80% of respondents utilise digital platforms to connect with fellow activists, mobilise for causes, and build supportive networks.

This aligns with the digital empowerment initiatives undertaken during my tenure as the African Union Youth Envoy, emphasising the transformative role of technology in amplifying voices and fostering collaboration.

The report further recognises the influential role of young feminist movements in advancing gender equality and challenging patriarchal norms. It is heartening to learn that 70% of respondents identify as feminists or allies of feminism, underscoring the progress made in promoting gender justice. As the Youth Envoy, I have had the privilege of collaborating with inspiring young feminist leaders who tirelessly advocate for the rights and empowerment of all young people, fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.

Additionally, the report emphasises the grassroots organising and advocacy efforts of young people, with 60% of respondents having organised community events or campaigns. This grassroots engagement reflects the agency and commitment of young people to address local challenges, promote social cohesion, and contribute to sustainable development. During my extensive listening tours across the African continent, I have witnessed the unwavering dedication and innovative spirit of young leaders addressing pressing community challenges.

As we reflect on the findings of this report, it becomes evident that young people are not just the leaders of tomorrow; they are the leaders of today. Their voices, actions, and aspirations hold the power to transform societies. Therefore, it is imperative for governments, institutions, and stakeholders to recognise and invest in the potential of youth.

To further progress and overcome the challenges identified, we must work together across borders and sectors to create an enabling environment for youth-led initiatives. This necessitates increased funding, mentorship programmes, capacity-building opportunities, and the integration of youth perspectives into decision-making processes.

As the African Union Youth Envoy, I remain steadfast in my commitment to advocating for the rights and aspirations of young people. Together, we can shape an inclusive and prosperous Africa that harnesses the full potential of its youth.

In conclusion, I extend my deepest gratitude to all the young people who participated in this study and shared their invaluable insights. I also express my appreciation to the researchers, organisations, and stakeholders who contributed to this report. Let us seize the momentum generated by this study to redouble our efforts in empowering young people, advancing their rights, and building a future where every young person can thrive.

With unwavering optimism and a firm belief in the power of youth,

Chido Mpemba  
African Union Youth Envoy

# FOREWORD

BY GHAZAL FOROUTAN

Young feminists have played a crucial role in driving global feminist movements, contributing to democracy, and challenging autocracy. Their leadership, especially when women are involved, has brought about democratic transformations worldwide throughout history. Recently, young feminists have emerged as powerful agents of change.

Survey results show significant participation in these movements, with variations across ages and genders. Motivated by recognising social injustices against women, young feminists face numerous challenges. Global strategies have significantly promoted collaboration and solidarity, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of activism. The study also reveals that many respondents actively seek opportunities to collaborate with feminist movements across borders, highlighting the global interconnectedness of feminist advocacy efforts. Specific cases, like Honduras, demonstrate how external funding and digital platforms have facilitated transnational collaborations, albeit with varying effectiveness, according to respondents.

Social media has become essential for young feminists to advance their movement. It is a primary platform for transnational collaborations and real-time responses to pressing issues. Despite real drawbacks like online harassment and reduced face-to-face interactions, young activists leverage social media to amplify their voices, recognising that it should complement rather than replace on-the-ground activism and civic engagement. Nowadays, that is how all young people are advocating for their rights and freedoms.

We are witnessing the impact of personal identities, social activism, and professional commitments on the mental well-being of young feminist activists. Intersectionality is crucial in understanding these effects, particularly among activists identifying as part of the LGBTQIA+ community or with disabilities. Respondents, especially those actively participating in feminist movements, report significant emotional, financial, and physical strain.

Young feminist movements face numerous threats to their safety and security worldwide. As a result, their freedom of movement and expression is constrained. To navigate these challenges, young feminists adopt unconventional safety measures such as carrying self-defence items and seeking personal legal assistance, significantly altering their daily lives. The struggle for safety and security while advocating for their causes shapes their journey through their countries' social and political scenery.

Funding plays a critical role in enhancing the effectiveness of young feminist movements. The research emphasises the need to change the perspective of funding bodies to trust in the potential of young people.

Supporting young feminists requires a context-specific approach with less hardship and easier conditions to encourage broader involvement in feminist work.

In the recent year, Iran bore witness to a historically significant event—the inception of a women-led revolution. Across global landscapes, individuals of diverse genders united, taking to the streets and raising their voices in a passionate call for equal rights. Notably,

this marks an unprecedented occurrence as Iran experiences the emergence of a feminist movement for the first time. Notably, the influence of this transformative movement extends beyond geographical borders, prompting artists and designers to actively leveraging the digital sphere, these artistic individuals amplify the revolution's essence, uniting in the shared pursuit of gender equality and justice.

\* Ghazal Foroutan is a Design Activist and Assistant professor at Augusta University





# 1- INTRODUCTION

## THE EROSION OF DEMOCRACY: IMPLICATIONS AND THE ROLE OF YOUTH

Over the past three decades, global democracy has experienced a concerning downward trend. Indices measuring the health of democracy worldwide reveal a consistent decline, with the average level of democracy experienced by global citizens in 2021 regressing to levels comparable to those of 1989<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, the Economic Intelligence Unit's 2022 Democracy Index found that only 8% reside in a "full democracy", and more than one-third of the world's population lives under authoritarian rule (36.9%).<sup>2</sup> Consequently, the progress achieved by previous generations in fostering a more equitable society is at risk. This deterioration in democratic governance is so alarming that it has been included in UNICEF's list of the top eight threats impacting children in 2023, as autocracies have a higher propensity to impose limitations on children's rights, particularly those that ensure civil liberties and freedoms.<sup>3</sup>

While the world is witnessing this concerning decline in democratic trends, the global youth population is expanding rapidly, particularly in developing nations. From 2017 to 2050, half of the world's population growth is predicted to be concentrated in just nine countries: India, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Pakistan, Ethiopia, the United Republic of Tanzania, the United States of America, Uganda, and Indonesia<sup>4</sup>. However, as of 2022, none of these countries are ranked full democracies by the Economist Intelligence Unit<sup>5</sup>. Recent data from 160 countries indicates that young people worldwide are becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the current democratic systems in the face of declining democratic trends<sup>6</sup>. This dissatisfaction is not only growing in absolute terms but also relative to older cohorts at comparable stages of life<sup>7</sup>. Various factors contribute to this growing dissatisfaction among

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1 V-Dem Institute. (2022). Democracy Report 2022: Global Decline in Democracy. University of Gothenburg. Retrieved from [https://vdem.net/media/publications/dr\\_2022.pdf](https://vdem.net/media/publications/dr_2022.pdf)

2 The Economist Intelligence Unit. (2023). Democracy Index 2022: Frontline democracy and the battle for Ukraine. Retrieved from [[https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/DI-final-versionreport.pdf?mkt\\_tok=NzUzLVJJUS00MzgAAAGLZjisJpQaDDvh7pzgdgqRgawdpsM843b4FjZsc\\_P\\_ep6LPNi56lawnTINLEakAKdZdcs7wl0aKpgGOP4s20HXFEBFcaxZuEOKRBz\\_8InIdnMcw](https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/DI-final-versionreport.pdf?mkt_tok=NzUzLVJJUS00MzgAAAGLZjisJpQaDDvh7pzgdgqRgawdpsM843b4FjZsc_P_ep6LPNi56lawnTINLEakAKdZdcs7wl0aKpgGOP4s20HXFEBFcaxZuEOKRBz_8InIdnMcw)]

3 UNICEF Innocenti. (2023). Prospects for Children in the Polycrisis: A 2023 Global Outlook. United Nations Children's Fund. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/globalinsight/media/3001/file/UNICEF-Innocenti-Prospects-for-Children-Global-Outlook-2023.pdf>

4 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, n.d. World population is projected to reach 9.8 billion in 2050, and 11.2 billion in 2100. United Nations. Available at: <https://www.un.org/ru/desa/world-population-projected-reach-98-billion-2050-and-112-billion-2100> [Accessed 1 May 2023].

5 The Economist Intelligence Unit. (2023). Democracy Index 2022: Frontline democracy and the battle for Ukraine. Retrieved from [[https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/DI-finalversionreport.pdf?mkt\\_tok=NzUzLVJJUS00MzgAAAGLZjisJpQaDDvh7pzgdgqRgawdpsM843b4FjZsc\\_P\\_ep6LPNi56lawnTINLEakAKdZdcs7wl0aKpgGOP4s20HXFEBFcaxZuEOKRBz\\_8InIdnMcw](https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/DI-finalversionreport.pdf?mkt_tok=NzUzLVJJUS00MzgAAAGLZjisJpQaDDvh7pzgdgqRgawdpsM843b4FjZsc_P_ep6LPNi56lawnTINLEakAKdZdcs7wl0aKpgGOP4s20HXFEBFcaxZuEOKRBz_8InIdnMcw)]

6 Bennett Institute for Public Policy, University of Cambridge, 2020. Youth and Satisfaction with Democracy. Centre for the Future of Democracy. Available at: [https://www.cam.ac.uk/system/files/youth\\_and\\_satisfaction\\_with\\_democracy.pdf](https://www.cam.ac.uk/system/files/youth_and_satisfaction_with_democracy.pdf) [Accessed 1 May 2023].

7 Bennett Institute for Public Policy, University of Cambridge, 2020. Youth and Satisfaction with Democracy. Centre for the Future of Democracy. Available at: [https://www.cam.ac.uk/system/files/youth\\_and\\_satisfaction\\_with\\_democracy.pdf](https://www.cam.ac.uk/system/files/youth_and_satisfaction_with_democracy.pdf) [Accessed 1 May 2023].

young people, including unequal representation, limited access to opportunities, and a lack of responsiveness from political institutions. Young people often feel disconnected from the decision-making processes that directly affect their lives, leading to disenfranchisement and disengagement from the political system.

As a result of this dissatisfaction, A UNICEF report remarks that social movements, particularly those led by young people and women, are likely to counteract these negative trends<sup>8</sup>. This recognition of youth-led and feminist movements as a force for change highlights the importance of engaging and increasing the agency of young people, especially young feminists in the democratic process. Overall, these statistics underscore the urgency and timeliness of conducting research on young feminists who are challenging democratic backsliding, as their voices and activism play a crucial role in reversing this alarming trend and advocating for a more just and democratic future<sup>9</sup>.

## WHY ARE WE FOCUSING ON YOUNG FEMINIST MOVEMENTS?

Movements, particularly those led by feminists, have emerged as powerful agents of change, employing creative strategies and fostering transnational solidarity to advance democratic values and impede oppressive regimes. In recent years, young feminists specifically, have made remarkable strides globally, leading the way in various movements, leveraging direct action and societal norm transformation, and in the process, pioneering and actualising revolutionary leadership styles<sup>10</sup>.

In examining the landscape of feminist activism, we have focused on feminist movements rather than organisations. Movements can be understood as collective efforts to bring about political, social, or cultural change, often in response to specific issues or grievances. Movements can include formally structured organisations, but in contrast, they tend to be more loosely organised and encompass a wide range of activities, such as online petitions, protests, boycotts, and marches<sup>11</sup>. Feminist movements seek to advocate for gender equality and equity by adopting an intersectional approach and dismantling patriarchal structures through a diverse range of ideologies, goals, and actions<sup>12</sup>. Movements often arise as impromptu responses to distinct issues communities face, uniting people around specific objectives like the #MeToo campaign in the United States, A Rapist in Your Path in Chile, Fees Must Fall in South Africa, or #EndSARs in Nigeria. This focus on movements stems from the recognition that these groups often struggle for visibility and access to financial resources due to their informal nature, compared to civil society organisations. By focusing on movements rather than civil society organisations and networks, our goal was to keep the research scope contained while highlighting these vital, yet frequently underappreciated, catalysts for change. This report asked five research questions to study these movements:

1. How can young global feminist movements be characterised?

8 UNICEF Innocenti. (2023). Prospects for Children in the Polycrisis: A 2023 Global Outlook. United Nations Children's Fund. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/globalinsight/media/3001/file/UNICEF-Innocenti-Prospects-for-Children-Global-Outlook-2023.pdf>

9 UNICEF Innocenti. (2023). Prospects for Children in the Polycrisis: A 2023 Global Outlook. United Nations Children's Fund. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/globalinsight/media/3001/file/UNICEF-Innocenti-Prospects-for-Children-Global-Outlook-2023.pdf>

10 Leiper O'Malley, D. & Johnson, R. (2018) 'A young feminist new order: an exploration of why young feminists organise the way they do', Pages 533-550. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2018.1526370> (Accessed: 22 May 2023).

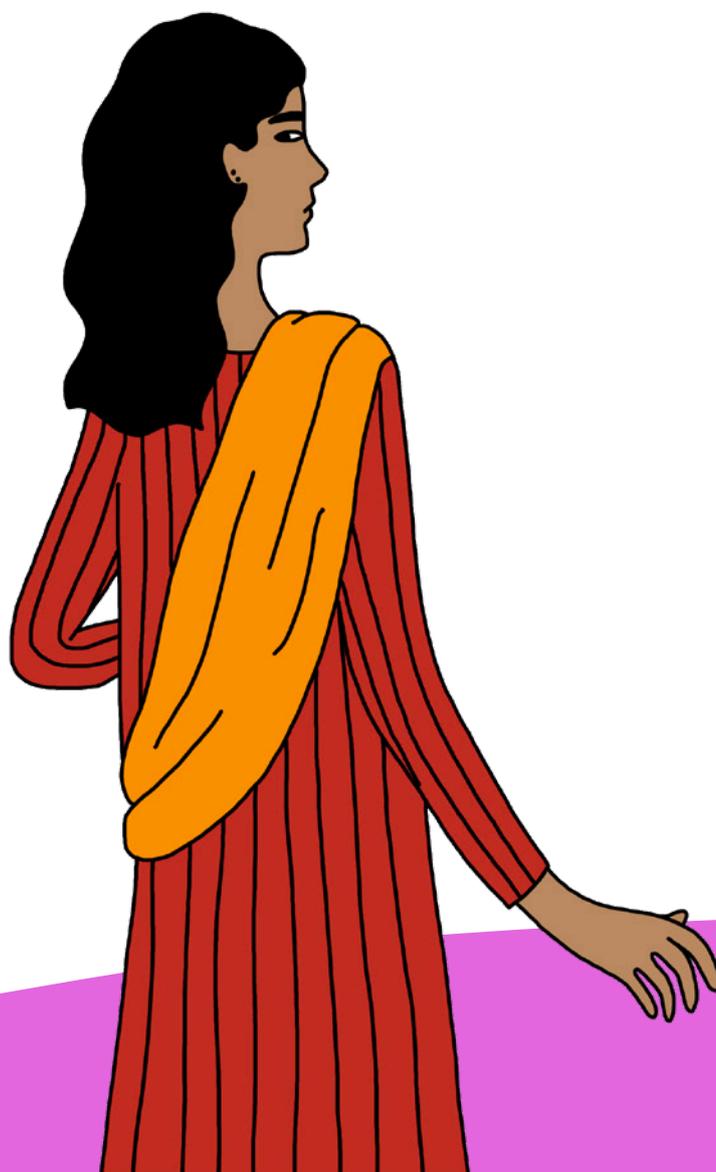
11 Johnston, H., 2014. What is a social movement? John Wiley & Sons.

12 Rupp, L.J. (2001) "Feminist movements," International Encyclopaedia of the Social & Behavioural Sciences, pp. 5469-5472. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/b0-08-043076-7/04003-1>.

2. What creative strategies have young feminist movements used to promote democracy and push back against autocracy, and to what extent have these strategies been effective?
3. How have transnational strategies helped to foster solidarity and collaboration across feminist movements?
4. What self-care and safety measures have young feminist movements employed to protect themselves and their members?
5. How can strategic partners and allies increase the effectiveness and sustainability of young feminist movements?

## STUDY LIMITATIONS

While the study aimed to gather a global perspective, there was a clear over-representation of respondents from Africa (64%). This over-representation, while valuable in providing in-depth insights into this demographic, may skew the overall findings and limit the generalizability of the study's conclusions to other geographical regions. In addition, we received insufficient data from Iran, with multiple interview requests getting declined due to safety reasons, we also received limited survey responses from Lebanon. As these countries are facing unique political and economic challenges it would be valuable to understand the perspectives of young feminists there in future studies.





# 2- YOUNG FEMINISTS ARE AT THE FOREFRONT OF FEMINIST MOVEMENTS

## 2.1 SECTION SUMMARY

The **pivotal role of youth-led feminist movements** in bolstering democracy and challenging autocracy over the past seven decades is unquestionable. These movements, particularly where women were in leadership roles, have been key catalysts for democratic transformations worldwide, as seen in Eastern Europe, Latin America, and Southeast Asia throughout the 80s and 90s. Young feminists have emerged as **potent agents of change**, using innovative strategies and fostering international solidarity to further democratic values and resist oppressive regimes. Survey results highlight the considerable participation in these movements, with slight variations across different ages and genders. Various factors motivate their engagement, including recognising widespread social injustices against women, although the journey is often fraught with numerous challenges.

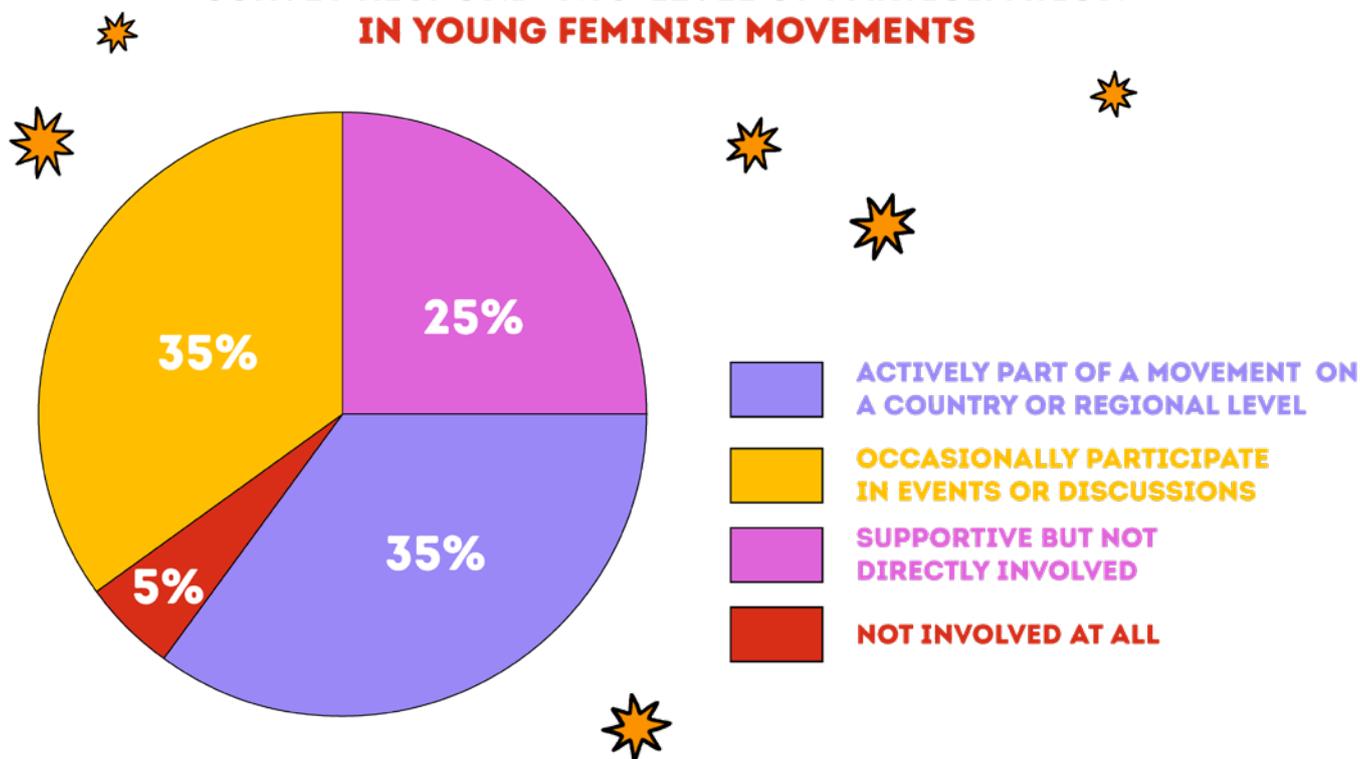
**Transnational strategies have significantly nurtured solidarity and collaboration**, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of activism. This study also revealed that a significant number of respondents are actively **seeking opportunities to collaborate with feminist movements across borders**, demonstrating the interconnectedness of feminist advocacy efforts globally. The survey also touched upon cases like Honduras where external funding and digital platforms have enhanced transnational collaborations, despite the inherent challenges. The perceived effectiveness of these collaborations varied among respondents.

## 2.2 YOUNG FEMINISTS ARE AT THE FOREFRONT OF THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT

The importance of young global feminist movements in **promoting democracy and fighting against autocracy** cannot be understated. Women's push for political and economic integration has been instrumental in sparking democratic transformations, mainly where they led to large-scale movements. The democratic shifts in Eastern Europe, Latin America, and Southeast Asia throughout the 1980s and 1990s were, to some extent, fuelled by widespread popular movements where women held crucial positions<sup>13</sup>. **Feminist movements have emerged as powerful agents of change, employing creative strategies and fostering transnational solidarity to advance democratic values and impede oppressive regimes.** In recent years, young feminists specifically, have made remarkable strides globally. They are leading the way in various movements, leveraging direct action and societal norm transformation, and in the process, pioneering and actualising revolutionary leadership styles.<sup>14</sup>

Most survey participants expressed their involvement in young feminist movements, with 35% actively participating and an equal proportion (35%) occasionally engaging in events or discussions related to feminism. A subset of respondents (25%) indicated their support for these movements without direct involvement, while a small percentage (5%) reported no involvement.

**SURVEY RESPONDENTS' LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION IN YOUNG FEMINIST MOVEMENTS**



<sup>13</sup> Chenoweth, E. and Marks, Z., 2022. Revenge of the Patriarchs: Why Autocrats Fear Women. Foreign Affairs, March/April. Available at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2022-02-08/women-rights-revenge-patriarchs> [Accessed 1 May 2023].

<sup>14</sup> Leiper O'Malley, D. & Johnson, R. (2018) 'A young feminist new order: an exploration of why young feminists organise the way they do', Pages 533-550. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2018.1526370> (Accessed: 22 May 2023).

## 2.3 YOUNGER FEMINISTS, SPECIFICALLY YOUNGER WOMEN ARE THE MOST ACTIVELY ENGAGED IN FEMINIST MOVEMENTS

Across the **82 countries** included in this survey, participation in young feminist movements exhibited slight variations among different age brackets. A significant concentration of survey respondents actively engaged in different movements was observed among those aged between **25 and 34 years (37%)**, followed closely by the **35-44 age group (36%)** and respondents **under 25 years (32%)**.

The age distribution within the spotlight countries closely mirrors the global age distribution. **However, a detailed examination of the data reveals variations across different age ranges.** Notably, there is a decrease in active participation in young feminist movements as respondents' age increases. Among respondents aged 25- 34 years, 43% reported only occasional participation in feminist events or discussions, while 35% expressed active involvement. In the 35-44 age bracket, 38% of respondents preferred a supportive role without direct engagement in feminist movements, compared to 33% of other respondents who chose active participation. Our interviews revealed that as feminists grow older, more responsibilities such as families, potentially limit the amount of time dedicated to actively participating in the feminist movement.

However, **it's crucial to note that this decrease in active participation as one's age increases is not necessarily indicative of a diminished commitment to the feminist cause.** It may also signal structural issues within the movement, creating barriers for specific age groups. Qualitative data unearthed numerous instances of generational tension among feminists in various age brackets. This theme was especially pronounced in Uganda. In interviews with young Ugandan feminists, a straightforward narrative emerged. They painted a picture of a movement predominantly occupied by older women, creating an environment that is less than welcoming for the younger generation. One respondent encapsulated this sentiment, saying, **"[Educated] and old feminist groups are isolated and so closed off from the real world. Young feminists have to work ten times harder to fit in or even to feel welcome in that space."** This observation underscored a perceived generational divide in Uganda's feminist movement, shedding light on potential friction points and opportunities for growth. This highlights the need for intergenerational dialogue and inclusivity, to ensure the movement's continued relevance and efficacy.

**The extent of participation in young feminist movements varied among survey respondents of different genders.** For female respondents, a majority (38%) indicated a preference for occasional involvement in feminist events or discussions. This choice was closely followed by active participation in national, regional, or global feminist movements (32%). A smaller portion of female respondents (28%) preferred a supportive role without direct involvement in feminist movements.

Conversely, a more significant portion of male respondents (45%) demonstrated active participation in national, regional, or global movements, in comparison to occasional participation (30%) or playing supportive roles instead of direct involvement (20%). Among respondents identifying as non-binary, a significant portion showed active engagement in feminist movements (47%) or occasional participation in feminist events or discussions

(47%). Non-binary respondents accounted for the most minor proportion of individuals who preferred a supportive role without direct involvement in feminist movements (7%).

Interviews found that young feminists are motivated by various factors to engage in the movement. **Most notably, the recognition of rampant social injustices against women, such as gender discrimination, harassment, gender-based violence, lack of sexual and reproductive healthcare, and prevailing social norms that curtail women's rights, act as catalysts.** As these issues are specific and more frequently experienced by women and non-binary persons, it has motivated them to take action against the status quo.

"The challenges I encountered while growing up as a girl inspired me to join the feminist movement." A respondent from Sierra Leone Section 3 of the report uncovers how some of the social injustices are traumatic and are more often encountered by young women and non-binary persons. **These traumas, while motivating their interest in feminist movements, also adversely contribute to the dwindling mental health among young feminists.**



## 2.4 BEYOND BOUNDARIES: HOW TRANSNATIONAL STRATEGIES FOSTER SOLIDARITY IN YOUNG FEMINIST MOVEMENTS

**Transnational strategies have fostered solidarity and collaboration across feminist movements globally.** This is evident in how different organisations and activists share their content and efforts beyond their immediate local context, through various mediums, particularly social media. Networks are created **locally and internationally**, bolstering support and visibility for various causes. For example, activists and organisations based in one country (e.g., Lebanon or Iran) can interact with, learn from, and support others in different countries (e.g., Egypt or India), enriching their understanding and broadening their perspectives. This has also helped create **an environment of mutual support where groups can rally around each other's causes and amplify each other's messages on a global platform.**

Furthermore, these strategies have encouraged **a more intersectional approach to activism**, fostering a stronger sense of global community and shared struggle. There's a shift from focusing solely on local issues to engaging with broader, global ones, such as the Black Lives Matter movement or gun control discussions in the United States. **The understanding that struggles are interconnected transcends geographical boundaries** and contributes to a more united front against human rights violations. This commitment to international solidarity allows individuals and organisations to respond to and support various causes that align with their values, fostering a broader collective impact. **Hence, transnational strategies have not only facilitated wider collaborations but also fuelled a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of activism.**

Most survey respondents (47%) reported **collaborating with feminist movements from countries other than their own.** In contrast, 35% of respondents indicated that they had not participated in such collaborations, while a smaller portion (17%) expressed uncertainty about their involvement with feminist movements from their countries. This reflects the significant number of individuals who have **actively sought opportunities to collaborate with feminist movements across borders**, thus underscoring the global nature of these collaborations and the interconnectedness of feminist advocacy efforts.

**"We get a lot of engagement and we want to work on these things more. On social media, we can reach more people. There are organisations in Egypt and India that share our stuff and vice versa - and we do meet up in spaces like conferences etc., it makes it a lot easier because we know each other's work, we collaborate with student clubs, and feminists that reach out to us."**

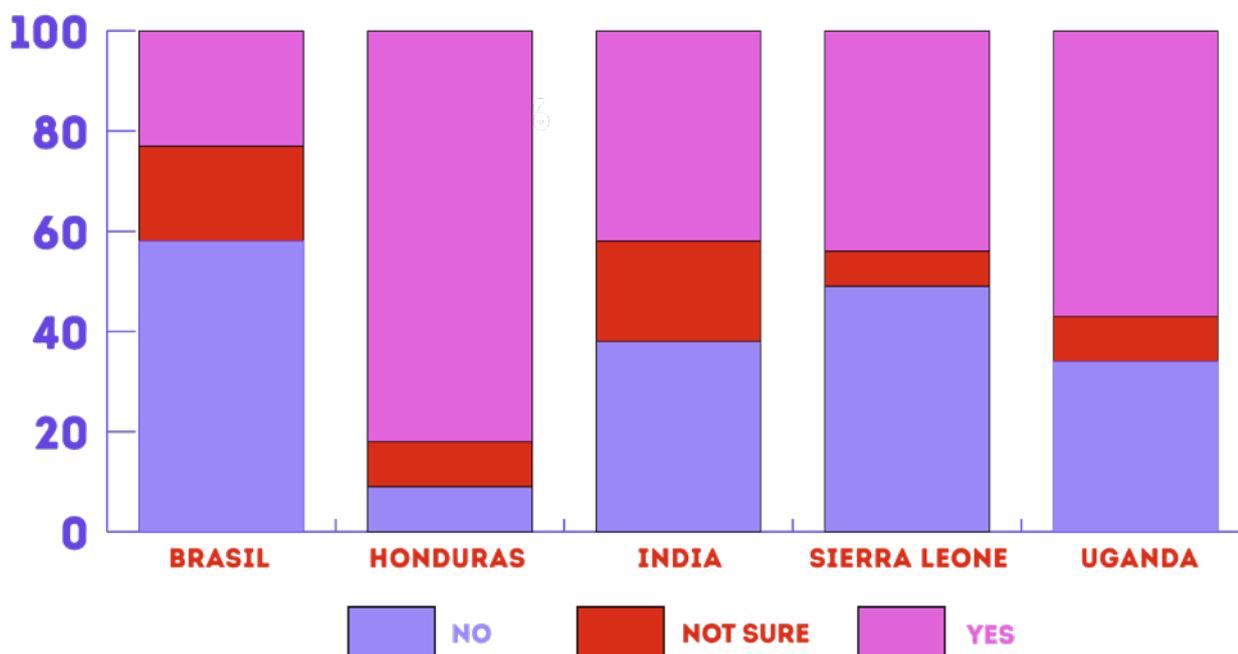
**- A respondent from Lebanon**

Chi-square tests conducted as part of the analysis revealed a **highly statistically significant relationship between participation in feminist movements and participation in transnational collaborations**. Individuals who actively participate in or support feminist movements are more likely to extend their involvement to transnational collaborations, potentially indicating a broader commitment to global feminist causes and initiatives.

The analysis revealed a clear pattern indicating that as the level of participation in feminist movements increases, **an increasing proportion of individuals are involved in transnational collaborations**. For instance, among respondents actively involved in a country-level, regional, or global feminist movement, **a significant majority (67%) reported also engaging in transnational collaborations**. As the level of participation in feminist movements decreases, it was found that among respondents who occasionally participate in events or discussions related to feminist movements, a notable proportion (47%) are involved in transnational collaborations. Although this percentage is slightly lower than for those actively involved, it still demonstrates **a positive relationship between participation in feminist movements and engagement in transnational collaborations**.

Furthermore, the findings revealed **variations in participation in transnational collaborations among the spotlight countries**. Honduras stood out with a strong majority (82%) of survey respondents indicating their collaboration with feminist movements beyond their borders, while only 9% reported not participating in such collaborations. Similarly, Uganda (57%) and India (42%) demonstrated high numbers of transnational collaborations. On the other hand, Brazil (58%) and Sierra Leone (49%) accounted for a substantial proportion of survey respondents who have not engaged in collaborations with other feminist movements beyond their borders. **This divergence in participation rates suggests the presence of unique challenges and barriers that could hinder international collaboration in certain regions**. One plausible explanation, especially for Brazil could be the potential language barriers, which can limit access to resources, cross-border collaborations, and international networking opportunities.

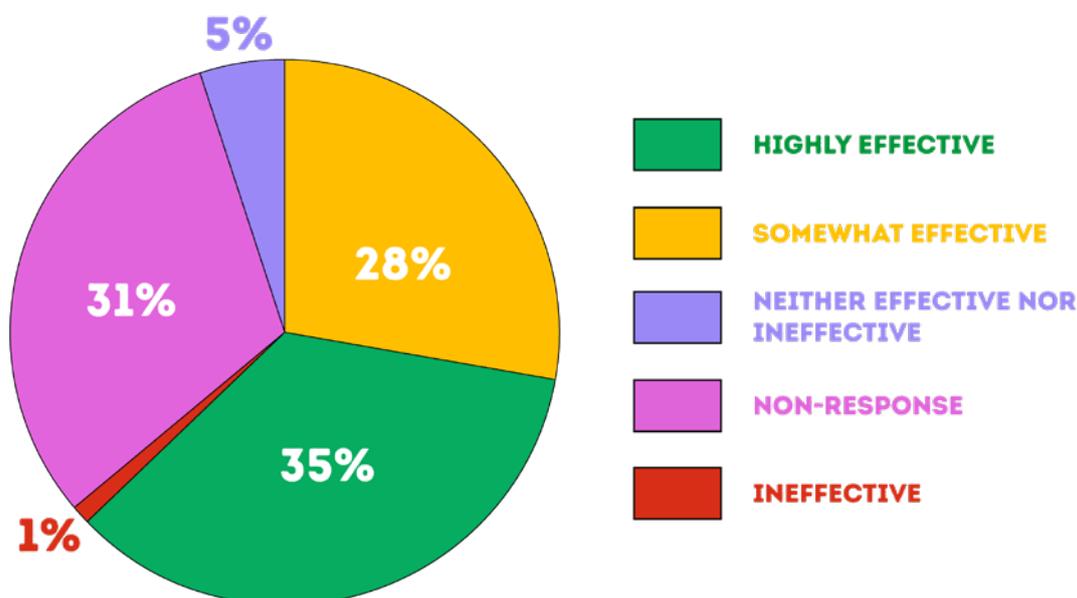
### HAVE YOU PARTICIPATED IN ANY COLLABORATIONS WITH OTHER FEMINIST MOVEMENTS FROM DIFFERENT COUNTRIES ?



“It is worth noting that more than half of the survey respondents in the 45-54 age bracket reported active participation in a feminist movement. However, it is important to acknowledge that this percentage is derived from a relatively smaller subset of respondents within this specific age group, which may slightly overstate the actual proportion.”

## 2.5 EFFECTIVENESS OF TRANSNATIONAL COLLABORATIONS

HAVE YOU PARTICIPATED IN ANY COLLABORATIONS WITH OTHER FEMINIST MOVEMENTS FROM DIFFERENT COUNTRIES ?



When assessing the effectiveness of their participation in transnational collaborations, survey respondents provided varying perspectives. Among the respondents, 35% expressed that they found these collaborations highly effective, meaning that **these collaborations bring about positive impact within the movement**. An additional 28% stated that their participation was somewhat effective. This suggests that transnational collaborations have the potential to bring about meaningful change and amplify the voices of feminist movements. On the contrary, a small percentage of respondents (2%) considered such collaborations to be mostly ineffective, while a larger proportion (5%) expressed indifference toward their effectiveness.

Overall, **the varying perspectives on the effectiveness of transnational collaborations suggest that their impact may depend on several factors**, such as the specific goals of the collaboration, the level of engagement and commitment from participants, and the nature of the challenges being addressed by transnational collaboration. It is crucial for feminist movements to continuously assess and adapt their transnational strategies to maximise their effectiveness and ensure that they align with their goals and objectives. By learning from both successes and limitations, **feminist movements can refine their approaches and leverage the power of transnational collaborations to create a more equitable and inclusive world for all.**

# THE IMPACT OF TRANSNATIONAL COLLABORATIONS IN HONDURAS

## Beyond Borders: International Funding, Digital Connections, and the Global Feminist Movement

The findings revealed variations in participation in transnational collaborations among the spotlight countries. Honduras stood out with a strong majority (82%) of survey respondents indicating their collaboration with feminist movements beyond their own borders, while only 9% reported not participating in such collaborations. Transnational collaborations are fostered primarily through funding channels and the use of digital platforms for training, education, and networking.

Challenges in securing sustainable funding have led many young feminist movements in Honduras to turn to external revenue streams, with a significant number of activist organisations receiving funding from international donors:

**“The conservative people in Honduras are the ones with the money, but that money does not reach social groups because social groups do not form any type of interest for conservatives. Normally, feminist activism and all feminist organisations are financed by other countries and other NGOs that are outside Latin America.”**

Many feminist groups also have issues acquiring legal status, so they must utilise third-party umbrella organisations or NGOs to access certain resources. Many of these third-party groups are international organisations, and in turn, this fosters transnational collaboration.

Additionally, some young feminist groups in Honduras foster transnational collaboration by establishing regional chapters of international organisations. For example, Honduras has a country chapter that participates in the international Period Action Day movement.

While many young feminist groups in Honduras receive international funding and support, many participants highlighted the challenges with this economic model. They find themselves censored or confined to the limits of the goals of an external organisation, rather than supported to focus on the most relevant issues they are facing now. The majority of feminists highlighted a critical need for access to unrestricted funds that allow them to control the allocation of resources, which could influence transnational relationships moving forward. Furthermore, countries across the globe have leveraged social media and other digital platforms to great effect, enabling conversations and fostering connections among feminists in different regions, especially for those residing in areas where local feminist movements are non-existent. For movements in Honduras, social media acts as a bridge, connecting individuals to a global cause, allowing them to receive support and participate actively without having to relocate to urban hubs of feminist activity like Tegucigalpa.

More specifically, digital platforms have enabled young feminists to access resources such as training and educational workshops from organisations in other parts of the world. They have also increased awareness of broader women's issues and allowed young feminist organisations to learn lessons from the successes and failures of ongoing efforts in other countries. Further, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, young people around the world have continued to utilise digital spaces to facilitate digital activism and pave the way for collaboration with other feminist movements beyond the borders of their countries.

**"I think that the [digital] platforms have come to add a lot to the feminist resources. For example, Oxfam has good feminist resources that we can receive virtually, even when they are in Mexico. Apart from learning how Argentina managed to legalise abortion, among other things...the collectives in Argentina open platforms so that we can learn how they achieved progress in sexual and reproductive rights."**

Social media and other digital platforms have also offered a space for transparency and solidarity. Young feminists in Honduras can witness the ongoing issues and connect to people in other parts of Central and Latin America who are facing similar challenges.

**"For example, if you are a migrant woman, if I want to leave the country, I know that in Guatemala I have compas<sup>15</sup>, I know that in Mexico I have compas."**

Young feminist movements in Honduras have experienced significant successes in transnational collaboration within the digital space, and it is likely to continue to grow moving forward.

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<sup>15</sup> Colleagues from the feminist movement, women in Honduras call other organised feminist women "compas", it comes from "compañeras"



# 3- DIGITALLY FORWARD: SOCIAL MEDIA AS THE PREMIER CREATIVE STRATEGY FOR YOUNG FEMINISTS

## 3.1 SECTION SUMMARY

Social media has emerged as a crucial and cost-effective tool for young people to further the feminist movement, serving as the primary facilitator for transnational collaborations and immediate response to realtime issues. Young activists are leveraging this digital platform to amplify their voices within the confines of limited funding potential however, drawbacks exist. **Online harassment, reduced face-to-face interactions, high data costs and restrictions from big tech companies on what should be published** are some of the glaring challenges. Young feminists maintain a strong understanding that **while social media plays a significant role, it should complement, not replace, on-the-ground activism and civic engagement**, underlining the importance of a balanced approach to digital and real-world action in advancing feminist causes.



## 3.2 LITERATURE REVIEW EMPHASISES THE IMPORTANCE OF CREATIVITY IN FEMINIST MOVEMENTS

Creativity is a coveted attribute in various settings, spanning from professional environments, and education to the arts. **Within the feminist movement, creativity is a necessity**, first because it allows women the ability to diverge from established social norms and expectations, and to imagine alternative realities<sup>15</sup> but secondly because **it affords women a louder and universal way of furthering their movement**. “Feminists are creative. Because they have to be. Art is a mode of expression which transcends languages and borders.”<sup>16</sup>

Young feminists, specifically, “are using creative and innovative strategies to strengthen movements, to increase awareness, build capacities, and advocate for gender, climate, socioeconomic, and political justice worldwide.”<sup>17</sup> **These creative strategies, such as music, dance, poetry, writing, digital storytelling, and technology are enabling young people to express themselves and to raise awareness and encourage more young women to join the movement.**

Key to the current creative strategies is the implementation and utilisation of digital technologies to share the feminist message and connect with like minded individuals and groups from other parts of the world in a way that would not have been possible in previously. A report by Young Feminist Fund - FRIDA found that several factors affect the type of strategies that young feminists use, and these include **safety and security, the capacity and skills of the team, the budget of the group, friendships, and their understanding of feminism itself.**<sup>18</sup>

## 3.3 SOCIAL MEDIA: THE CREATIVE MAINSTAY IN CONTEMPORARY FEMINIST MOVEMENTS

Interviews and focus group discussions with young feminists across seven countries showed how **digital platforms, specifically, social media, are a crucial tool that young feminists use in furthering their movements**. Its role has been highlighted as the most creative strategy for fostering transnational collaboration and facilitating discussions on various critical topics. **Virtual platforms like social media have provided a space that transcends geographic boundaries**, paving the way for enhanced access, cross-border collaboration,

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<sup>15</sup> Van Breen, J.A., Gocłowska, M.A., Spears, R. et al. (2020) ‘Creativity for the Group: Distinctive Feminists Engage in Divergent Thinking When Acting on Behalf of Women’, Volume 12, Issue 4. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/194855062092641> (Accessed: 22 May 2023).

<sup>16</sup> Mama Cash (2019). Creativity is not a luxury for feminists. Available at: <https://www.mamacash.org/en/creativity-is-not-a-luxury-forfeminists> (Accessed: 22 May 2023).

<sup>17</sup> Bashi, G., Martelotte, L., Modungwa, B., & Olmos, M. E. (2018) ‘Young feminists’ creative strategies to challenge the status quo: a view from FRIDA’, Pages 439-457. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13552074.2018.1526464> (Accessed: 22 May 2023).

<sup>18</sup> Bashi, G., Martelotte, L., Modungwa, B., & Olmos, M. E. (2018) ‘Young feminists’ creative strategies to challenge the status quo: a view from FRIDA’, Pages 439-457. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13552074.2018.1526464> (Accessed: 22 May 2023).

and networking. The anonymity provided by these platforms enables individuals to engage in discussions they might otherwise shy away from. From organising and fundraising to sharing updates and expressing solidarity with global movements, social media has revolutionised how young feminists operate. Particularly noteworthy is that **social media allows marginalised groups to share their experiences and narratives authentically and assertively – an accessibility often lacking in mainstream media.** It is important to recognize that while social media has become a powerful platform for the feminist movement, **it is not universally accessible to all young feminists.** Internet access remains limited in certain regions and communities, posing barriers to participation and engagement for those who cannot readily connect online. **We must acknowledge and address this digital divide** to ensure that the voices and perspectives of all young feminists are heard and amplified, regardless of their level of access to the internet.

Globally, most of our survey respondents (85%) identified social media campaigns as one of the popular strategies employed by young feminists to drive social, political, or cultural change. Beyond the digital realm, grassroots organising and community building (64%), art and cultural expressions (64%), and public demonstrations or protests (54%) were highlighted as other prominent strategies embraced by young feminist movements to amplify their voices.

## CREATIVE STRATEGIES USED BY YOUNG FEMINISTS



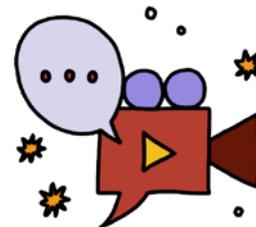
64%

ARTS & CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS  
(E.G. MURALS, STREET ART, THEATRE)



85%

SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGNS



52%

DIGITAL STORYTELLING



64%

GRASSROOTS ORGANISING &  
COMMUNITY BUILDING



54%

PUBLIC DEMONSTRATION  
OR PROTESTS



45%

ONLINE PETITIONS

The advent of social media has had **a transformative effect on the feminist movement, especially among younger activists.** Our research found that these digital platforms have been instrumental in broadening the scope of the movement, fostering a sense of community, and providing a safe space for individuals to articulate their thoughts, experiences, and potential solutions to societal issues faced by women. **Social media has amplified the visibility of feminist movements globally,** enabling easy knowledge sharing and collaboration for advocating women's rights.<sup>19 20</sup>

**"Many women, who didn't have a voice, resorted to Instagram to speak."**

- Respondent from India

**"[Social media] helped my voice reach people at the far end, and reduce transportation costs reaching those afar, it has increased my networking and also made my message easy, fast, and less expensive."**

- Respondent from Sierra Leone

**"Social media and digital media have given us a lot of power."**

- Respondent from India

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19 MAKEDA PR (2019). 'Feminism in the Digital Age: How Social Media is Impacting African Women's Liberation'. Available at: [https://medium.com/@MAKEDA\\_PR/feminism-in-the-digital-age-how-social-media-is-impacting-african-womens-liberation-519ee7b8c440](https://medium.com/@MAKEDA_PR/feminism-in-the-digital-age-how-social-media-is-impacting-african-womens-liberation-519ee7b8c440) (Accessed: 17 May 2023).

20 Kangere, M., Kemitare, J. & Michau, L. (2017) 'Hashtag activism: popularising feminist analysis of violence against women in the Horn, East and Southern Africa', *Feminist Media Studies*, DOI: 10.1080/14680777.2017.1350526. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2017.1350526> . (Accessed: 17 May 2023).



# THROUGH THE SCREEN: THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN IRAN'S FEMINIST DIALOGUE

## An interview with Zahra, an activist from Iran

Iranian women have always been active participants and key figures in the nation's protests, tirelessly advocating for change and equal rights. Recently, however, a new surge in cyberfeminism has begun to reshape the protest landscape, a shift precipitated by a conjunction of censorship and threats.<sup>21</sup> Social media, with its global reach and immediate connectivity, has emerged as a potent platform, enabling Iranian women to articulate their dissent and demand change.

A significant catalyst for this online movement was the tragic case of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old woman who lost her life in custody. Arrested by Iran's morality police for allegedly donning her mandatory headscarf too loosely, her death ignited a wave of outrage and grief. This incident served as a painful reminder of the severity of the issues Iranian women are fighting against, causing a surge in online and offline protests.

To better understand the evolving dynamics of this movement, we engaged in a dialogue with Zahra, a design activist who contributed a powerful art piece to these protests. Her work, spurred by Mahsa's untimely death, has resonated with the online community and street protestors, demonstrating the intertwined nature of the digital and physical realms of resistance. Throughout our discussion, Zahra underscored the indispensable role of social media in her work and within the broader context of Iran's feminist movement. This digital platform not only bolsters her message but also amplifies the voices of many women like her, striving for change in Iran.

The role of social media, specifically Instagram, is integral to Zahra's work and activism. She remarks that even more generally, social media platforms have been integral in facilitating the expression and sharing of the message of the movement, particularly amongst younger people.

**“I think with especially the movement that's going on in Iran right now, the only platform people are using to get their voices out there is social media, it can be Twitter, it can be Instagram or Tik Tok”**

Zahra personally harnesses the power of this platform to amplify her message, reaching a global audience and connecting with like-minded individuals. As she stated in her interview, social media became a tool, communication method, and a platform to share her art and get her message across the world. This global connection, facilitated by Instagram, enables her work to be used in protests worldwide, significantly extending its reach and impact. It underscores the critical importance of social media in today's activist landscape, where it plays a fundamental role in shaping, distributing, and amplifying narratives of resistance. Some of her artwork has been used in protests across the world, she remarks.

21 Rouach, D. (2019). Social Media and Women's Emancipation: The Birth of Iranian Cyberfeminism 1/3. IGG - GEO. Available at: <https://igg-geo.org/?p=4107&lang=en> (Accessed: 6 June 2023)

**“After I published the poster on my Instagram, I got a tonne of messages from all over the world, requesting to use my artwork in their protests and or they made stickers out of it and put it around town. Also, many people pointed it out without me asking or saying anything. And I think that that design is living its purpose. I designed it in response to that movement. But when it’s being used by people for the actual protests, that’s when it’s actually living its purpose.”**

Zahra remarks that Creative forms of activism are also a way that feminists use to meditate also care for their mental health.

**When I’m designing, working, or illustrating, that’s when I do my meditation. That’s the kind of thing that really calms me down and helps me kind of go through my days without breaking. ...that’s how I take care of my soul.**

Through her artwork, she can support other movements as well. While her primary focus is on women’s rights in Iran, she mentions her support for other movements like Black Lives Matter and discussions around gun control. A strong belief in human rights informs her activism.

\*Zahra is a pseudonym.



While social media has had a positive influence, **there are strong remarks that online activism doesn't substitute on the ground civic work.** As Zahra mentioned in her interview, while her online designs pushed the message forward, they started "living their purpose" when young people printed them and used them in marches and protests worldwide.

**Moreover, while digital platforms can foster online relationships and global solidarity, they shouldn't supersede the importance of physical, and social relationships.** Additionally, the digitisation of feminist messages has led to some concerns about the oversimplification of the message behind these movements, where complex issues are reduced to viral memes and jokes, potentially diluting the depth of the movement's message.

**"Social media contributed to flattening the message - it turned the movement into a meme... Integrating more people into our work is best done through word of mouth."**

- Respondent from Lebanon

**"Online relations are not social relations. Online activism does not substitute civic work on the ground. It reflects militant laziness. This preoccupation with being present online - this is to hide our helplessness in actually being able to do real work"**

- Respondent from Lebanon

Notably, throughout the research process, **Restless Development encountered first-hand the constraints imposed by major tech corporations.** Our research encountered these restrictions, often framed as safeguards for user privacy or measures against misinformation, inadvertently hampering the reach and impact of crucial social campaigns such as ours, **presenting an unexpected roadblock in our journey towards global change.**

## FACEBOOK'S AD POLICY: A ROADBLOCK FOR FEMINIST MOVEMENT BUILDING

**"REJECTED. THESE ADS DO NOT COMPLY WITH OUR ADVERTISING POLICIES"**

This was the message that I, Restless Development's Global Communications Manager received on Facebook, just as the organisation was preparing to launch its annual State of Youth Civil Society Report Survey worldwide.

The offending ad?



**"Your chance to get featured in our flagship State of Youth Civil Society Report! Participate in our Young Feminist Fearless Survey to raise feminist voices across the globe and put your organisation on the feminist movement map. Complete the survey today to help make a difference in the world of feminist activism."**

This is one of the many times that our ads have been rejected for not meeting Facebook Ad policy requirements. Indeed, an innocuous ad like this, designed solely to gather valuable insights from young feminists should be allowed to run on the platform?

As the digital marketing lead for Restless Development, a global non-profit, I work to ensure that we can use digital tools and platforms to create maximum impact and ensure inclusivity by reaching a diverse audience of young people online and offline.

With this goal, we ran a series of Facebook ads for Restless Development's State of Youth Civil Society Report titled "Young Feminist Fearless: Holding the line". The report - the organisation's annual flagship publication aims to map young feminist voices, examine the new realities of feminist movement building and make transnational alliances possible, and what better way to kick-start a global movement of solidarity, than by using a platform like Facebook with a user base of over 3 billion people?

Social media has radically transformed civil society by allowing large-scale conversation and cooperation to occur instantly and continuously. However, six years after the #MeToo movement changed feminist conversations online, Facebook still considers discussions about women's rights "sensitive" and "heavily debated".

Facebook's Ad policy, implemented to fight misinformation and protect user privacy, requires organisations running ads on "social issues" to obtain additional authorisation, adding a "paid for by" disclaimer on these ads. The authorisation process, however, is not foolproof, as Vice and Business Insider investigations have exposed the ease with which fake ads can be approved.

In addition to being an extremely time-consuming and burdensome process, this authorisation is only granted on a country-by-country basis. Women's rights, however, are not local issues and cannot be confined to nations or regions; they are part of a global conversation that requires international participation and collaboration, one that we at Restless Development are trying to make happen through the State of Youth Civil Society Report.

Our work spans nine countries, significantly impacting thousands of young leaders annually. However, this report transcends our current reach. With our upcoming ad campaign, we aspire to connect with feminist leaders from every corner of the world and amplify voices of the often overlooked. To achieve this, this ad campaign needed a global reach to ensure that we do not limit ourselves to exclusively featuring feminist voices from the UK. By confining authorisation to individual countries, Facebook systematically blocks global movements from being built and hinders organisations' ability to run a cohesive global campaign for gender equality.

The impact of Facebook's location limitation extends beyond hindering the reach and impact of organisations like Restless Development. It perpetuates a fragmented understanding of feminism and gender equality, reinforcing the notion that these issues are limited to specific countries or regions. By constraining the visibility and reach of feminist campaigns like ours, Facebook inadvertently undermines the universality and interconnectedness of the struggle for gender equality.

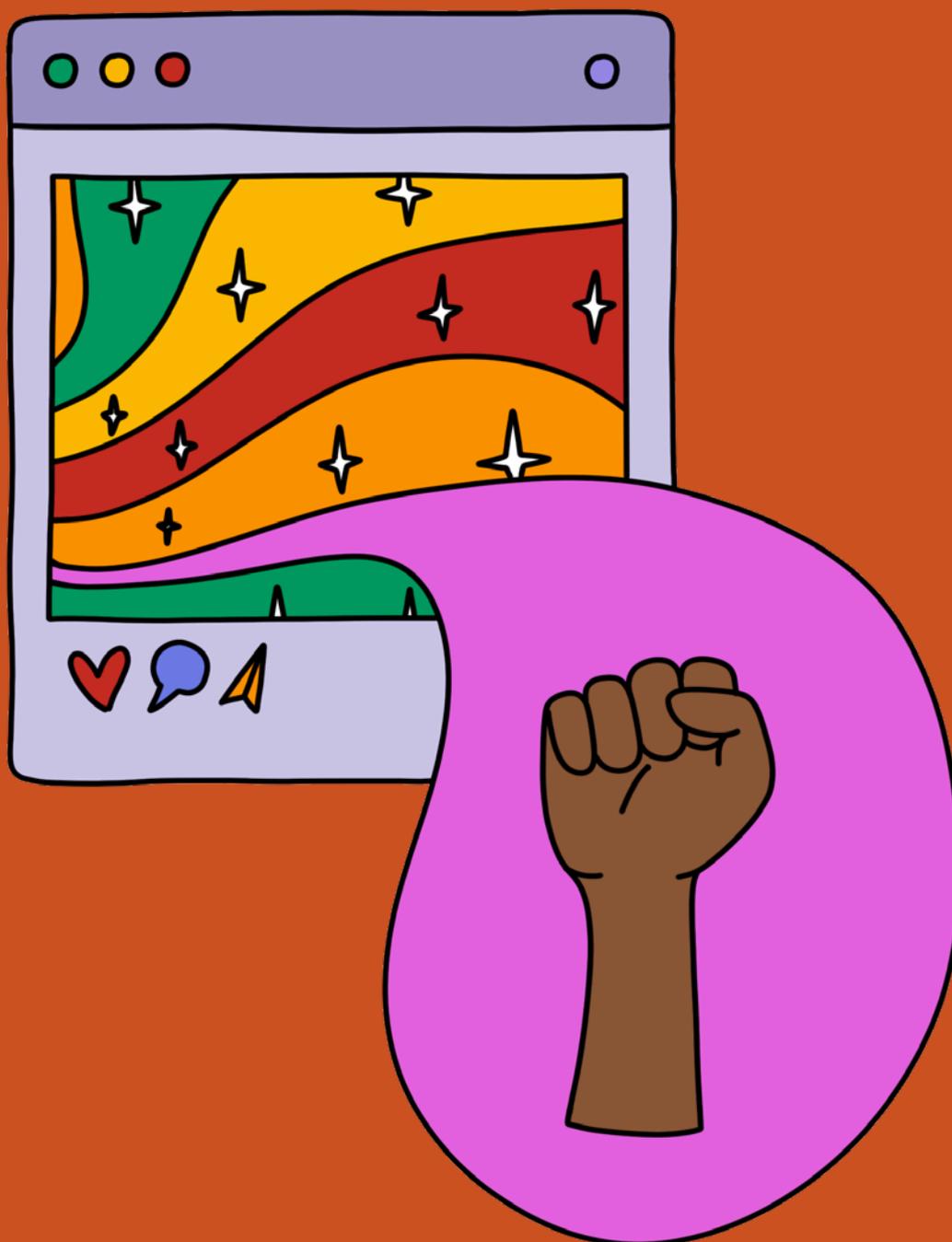
Additionally, Facebook's lack of transparency about the reason for the rejection of ads and the company's inability to provide specific feedback hampers the ability of advertisers to adjust and improve their ads to meet Facebook's guidelines. Advertisers are left to speculate and make assumptions about the possible violations or concerns raised by Facebook's algorithms or review process, causing significant delays in running ad campaigns.

In 2022, Facebook removed detailed targeting options that relate to topics that may be perceived as sensitive, including Sexual orientation (e.g., "same-sex marriage" and "LGBT culture"). This change widened the gap between organisations and their potential audience, making it more challenging to create meaningful connections and foster engagement with individuals who have already demonstrated an interest in these topics. As a result, feminist organisations have been struggling to effectively communicate their messages, recruit new supporters, and expand their impact.

In order to navigate the hurdles posed by Facebook's ad policy, I adopted a creative and trial-and-error approach to ensure the success of our transnational organising efforts. By supplementing our social media campaign with email marketing, virtual focus group discussions, and interviews, we were able to reach over 1000 young people across over 80 countries with our Young Feminist Fearless Survey, making our research truly global, representative, and inclusive. Our registered offices in various countries in Asia and

Africa proved invaluable in reaching feminists in those regions. However, for groups and organisations without international offices and additional marketing resources, Facebook's ad policy can severely hamper outreach efforts and jeopardise funding, undermining global initiatives for gender equality.

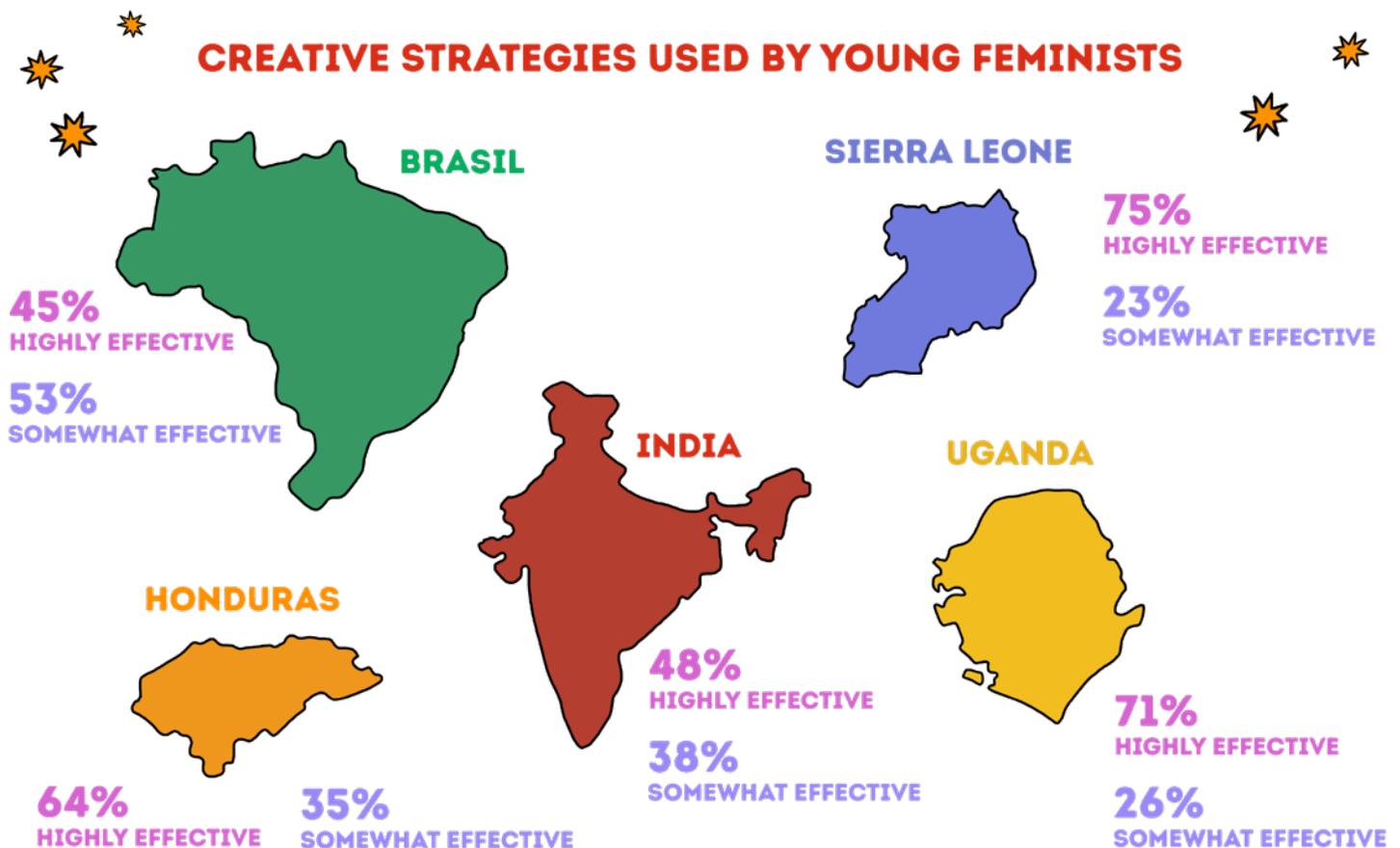
In today's interconnected world, the internet has created global virtual communities where individuals can find support and solidarity from their international peers. This sense of solidarity is crucial for advancing social progress. However, Facebook's restrictive ad policy hinders the ability of organisations to harness the power of technology to catalyse change and connect with a broader audience. It is essential to streamline and simplify authorisation processes to create a level playing field to ensure that non-profits, activists, and movement leaders, regardless of the size of resources, can leverage the platform's reach and global community to drive change on a global scale.



## 3.4 ARE THESE STRATEGIES EFFECTIVE?

The quotes above added a new inquiry to the research: Were these strategies effective? Do young people find success by utilising creative strategies?

From the global survey, most survey respondents from the spotlight countries recognised the effectiveness of creative strategies in driving positive change. Expressly, more than half of the respondents indicated that these strategies were highly effective (62%), while other respondents deemed them somewhat effective (35%), as indicated by the shaded areas below. Through the interviews, we found that the impact of creative strategies on communities and countries is met with mixed perceptions among young feminists. Young feminists' perceptions of effectiveness varied across a spectrum. While some see these strategies as effective because they change people's attitudes towards feminist conversations and topics like menstruation and sexual health, others express reservations and remark that they would like to see more systemic changes for them to deem these strategies effective. To some, raising awareness on the feminist discourse is enough.



"The existence of this discussion around these topics between people is enough to me - regardless of government policies. The feminist discourse (albeit all differences within it) is becoming more common"

- Respondent from Lebanon

To others, this is merely the beginning. Some interviewed feminists remark that there was a failure in the implementation of policies and laws.

**“We can’t work on systematic change because we have no government.”**

- Respondent from Lebanon

Upon further examination, the statistical analysis conducted using a chi-square test, with a p-value of  $<0.001$ , **confirmed a significant relationship between the level of participation in young feminist movements and the effectiveness of the employed creative strategies.** Respondents actively engaging in country-level, regional, or global movements are more likely to witness favourable outcomes when using creative strategies to advocate or protest for political, social, and cultural changes. **On the other hand, respondents who only occasionally participate in events or discussions, or those who are supportive but not directly involved, are more prone to experiencing mixed results.** Their utilisation of creative strategies may yield somewhat effective outcomes or may not be effective at all.

Interviewees also observe that **advancements at a macro level frequently encounter resistance**, undermining the overall progress toward gender equality and feminist causes. Given these challenges, **grassroots organising has emerged as the preferred strategy for creating a meaningful impact among these young feminists.** This approach allows for local engagement and change at a community level, bypassing the policy-based hurdles encountered at a national scale.

While the above results underscore how social media has significantly facilitated the work of young feminists, **the case study from Brazil brings to light the equally important creative strategies often employed by these activists, namely grassroots organising and artwork.** The narrative of young indigenous feminists in Brazil provides a vivid illustration of how the interconnectedness of social media activism and on-the-ground work took the young feminist movement to greater heights, thus amplifying its impact.



### 3.5 LAND AND LIFE: THE CREATIVE STRIDES OF BRAZIL'S YOUNG FEMINIST INDIGENOUS MOVEMENT

Brazil's first Indigenous women's organisation was formed in 1987, two years after the new democratic constitution that guarantees land rights to Indigenous people. However, this is still an ongoing struggle. 21-year-old Indigenous communicator and activist Alice Pataxó shed light on the crucial challenge of accessing and protecting Indigenous lands and the significant role played by Indigenous women in advocating for land rights.

**"We must understand that our priority as indigenous women is land demarcation. That is the primary way to guarantee human rights. That allows our work with women inside communities. Without pursuing demarcation, we don't guarantee women's rights."**

Global feminist movements influenced the increased participation of indigenous women at national and international levels, helping to facilitate discussions on specific problems women face in their communities.

However, new guidelines have not always been well-received by existing organisations with some members expressing concerns that they might jeopardise tradition. However, Pataxó reiterated that the Indigenous women's youth movement firmly believes that "violence is nobody's culture."

Jaciara Borari is part of the Association of Indigenous Women, Suraras of Tapajós, whose mission is to combat racism and violence against Indigenous women. To fulfil their mission, they work to empower women by providing economic support, sharing information about legal rights "village to village," and promoting safe spaces as the "circle of affectivity" where they can discuss gender-based issues and support each other. To Borari, the "circle of affectivity" is our greatest strategy. It is a space that personally empowered us. It is a time to vent, to find refuge, to welcome women's needs...So we can go back into the fight strengthened".

Indigenous women face a delicate situation: balancing their loyalty to their people and addressing genderspecific concerns. They have a deep feeling of belonging, but also a great understanding of their community's vulnerability. This tension creates a constant demand for Indigenous women to flow between gender specificities and more collective aspects of their identity, fostering a relational self. Like strands of braids that spin and modify as they weave themselves and their political action, this is both a challenge and a focus for the generation of young women.

However, they recognise that these challenges are easier to face collectively. "We are always surrounded by those we love, and we fight for them. This strengthens me because we aren't

here just fighting – we’re living, sharing food, sharing stories, and strength”, said Txai Surui. She founded a Youth Indigenous Movement at Rondônia and coordinated Kanindé, a 30-year-old indigenous organisation. In 2021 she gained international prominence by making a speech at the opening of COP26.

Access to university has been pivotal to the growth of Indigenous women’s leadership in the last 10 years. Activist and YouTuber Val Munduruku is also President of the Association of Indigenous Women Suraras of Tapajós. Through university, she found a new understanding of the challenges her people were facing: “My involvement came from what I learned at my undergraduate (program) and made me understand that my people were being affected by these development projects I was learning about”.

From 2019 to 2022, Brazil experienced a government led by Jair Bolsonaro with an authoritarian discourse that refused to demarcate indigenous lands, resulting in a surge of illegal invasions. This significantly impacted indigenous communities, but indigenous youth and women were the most affected. In

Munduruku’s region, Alto Tapajós, illegal mining was brutal: “When we face a government which is against women like the former one, we watch our constitutional rights suffer many threats and setbacks. When we talk about territory, the threat to women’s bodies is the main issue. We are the ones who suffer from sexual violence, and other forms of violence due to alcoholism, drugs, and weapons that enter the territories through illegal activities.” In 2019, she participated in the COP25 where she denounced the consequences of this predatory activity.

Borari, discussed other consequences of this crime:

**“It’s about our gender and struggle. Our rights are continuously violated through mercury contamination. Women no longer have children, and children are born with health problems connected with this contamination.”**

During the last several years, Indigenous women of all ages have created strategies to shed light on these crimes, amplify their struggles, and join forces to defend their land, rights, and their lives. A crucial strategy was the creation in 2019 of the ANMIGA (National Association of Women Warriors of Ancestry), an organisation that established a national network to strengthen Indigenous women in their fight for collective rights. ANMIGA was responsible for the organisation of the March of Indigenous Women in 2019, which caught considerable media attention and showed the world the threats. Indigenous land was facing the rise of the extreme-right government. This March has now become an annually recurring event.

Indigenous women leaders have created international campaigns and become recognised communicators, achieving significant visibility both within and beyond Brazil’s borders. Young people have been an important force in these efforts. Communicators and activists, Samela Satere Mawe and Alice Pataxó challenge prejudiced narratives by producing their own content about Indigenous issues. Alice shared:

**“We created a community of people who had no access to Indigenous issues before, and who embraced our movement, thanks to social media. Our virtual mobilisation has had many effects. During COVID we were able to raise a lot of food and donations. We can reach people and support people and that’s the big reward of all.”**

As we watch this remarkable phenomenon of young and older Indigenous women working side by side, taking new political roles, it is also important to acknowledge the fundamental, grassroots work they have been doing in defence of forestlands, even though the work has not gained the same public attention. Txai Surui explains why this outnumbered group is “holding the line”:

**“The territory for us is life. We say that there is no democracy without demarcating Indigenous territories, but it is more than that: there is no future without it! We accomplish the most important mission currently of dealing with the climate crisis. Who is on the front line, doing the main mission of protecting the forest? It is us! This fight is often a fight in the mind because they colonise our mind too. In these last four years, some have been co-opted. When that happened, the women always stayed in the territory. So, why do I think women have this role? It’s because we’ve always been on the front line.”**

In Brazil’s October 2022 elections, Celia Xakriabá, a 33-year-old activist and ANMIGA founder was elected as Federal Deputy, becoming the second Indigenous woman ever to hold this position. The newly-elected government created the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples, and Sonia Guajajara was appointed First Minister.

Joênia Wapichana, who was the first Indigenous woman appointed as Federal Deputy, assumed the presidency of the Indigenous federal agency Funai. Although in their 40s, Guajajara and Wapichana are responsible for creating unity and access for young leaders to occupy positions of power within and outside of their villages. Kaline Cassiano da Silva, a 25-year-old activist and Coordinator of Indigenous Women at Articulation of Indigenous Peoples and Organizations of the Northeast explained how ANMIGA played a fundamental role in this.

**"We're the fruit of ANMIGA! The young activists are being shaped by the older ones, who've conquered important spaces and inspired us. ANMIGA is forming many multipliers of this work. Women are the seeds, sowing policies, and occupying spaces."**



## EMPOWERMENT AMIDST CHALLENGES: A CLOSER LOOK AT ANMIGA'S IMPACT ON INDIGENOUS WOMEN IN BRAZIL

### ANMIGA - National Association of Women Warriors of Ancestry

As the only national association run by women and geared towards Indigenous women that caters to all the ethnicities and their diverse demands, ANMIGA's focus is to represent the specific agendas of Indigenous women on a national and international level, considering the challenges faced within Indigenous organizations and within communities. It promotes political empowerment of women both inside our community and outside. By working at the national level, it has a greater capacity to support leaders in confronting local machismos, as it generates greater visibility that helps to add new allies to the cause of Indigenous women, always respecting the local culture.

Social media is an important resource to publicize actions, and to share information between different regions and promote connections, both between Indigenous women from different regions and with non-Indigenous partners. While it facilitates communication and allows women to access information, it's not available for many communities who don't have Internet access.

ANMIGA is aware of the importance of taking care of those who care, and the "conversation circles" are an important space built to share difficulties and challenges. Unfortunately, there's no resources to offer therapy or other kinds of professional emotional support. We struggle to fund our activities related to access to legal rights and mental health. There is no long-term funding, and we need to ask for funds every time we organize an activity, which makes everything more difficult. We want more indigenous women involved and occupying decision-making spaces, for that we need more allies, so get involved!

Written by:

Sueli Khey Tomas, 30 y/o - Kaingang

Kaline Cassiano da Silva, 25 y/o - Potiguara

Alcineide Moreira Cordeiro, 31 y/o - Piratapuya

To promote social changes, they use another powerful tool: art. "For us, art is life – craftsmanship, body painting... our life is art. Art has the power to touch people that often activism doesn't," said Suruí. Munduruku also recognised this capacity of art when speaking about their regional dance Carimbó group:

**"We're occupying a space that as an Association we (usually) wouldn't. Through our art, we can share our experiences. Art is the most beautiful way to face the struggle. It doesn't have to be just tiring and gruelling. The stage is a place where we can celebrate as we send our message".**

Art is also a way to support young women, as funding their activism is a major challenge. The bureaucracy is hard to manage, and there needs to be more flexibility, especially with international funds. The lack of training in the application process also makes it harder for grassroots associations to access funding, and the activists want to be supported to develop the projects themselves. Munduruku explained:

**“We don’t want only to be the people who receive the project. We want to be the protagonists of it.”**

Indigenous women understand the value of forming alliances with diverse groups of women, as collective action strengthens all causes. Simultaneously, they recognize the need to address existing differences respectfully, fostering dialogue that considers multiple realities and acknowledges diverse experiences and needs. For young Indigenous women, the fight for land demarcation is vital to their very existence.

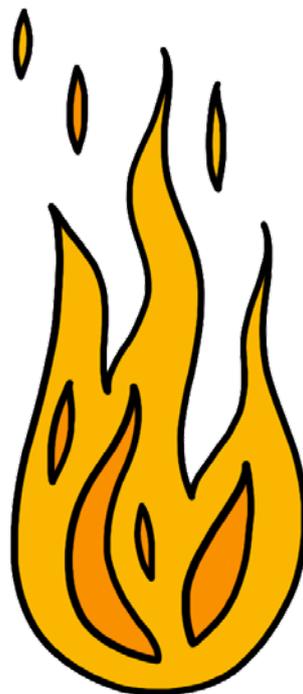
Júlia Trujillo Miras



# 4- MENTAL HEALTH STRUGGLES AMONG YOUNG FEMINISTS: AN UNSEEN BATTLE

## 4.1 SECTION SUMMARY

The study highlights **the impact of personal identities, social activism, and professional commitment on the mental well-being of these individuals.** Intersectionality is crucial in understanding these impacts, especially concerning **activists identifying as part of the LGBTQIA+ community or living with disabilities.** Respondents, notably those actively participating in feminist movements, report significant emotional, financial, and physical strain. **Furthermore, trauma related to gender-based violence, early marriages, or HIV stigma was found to be a common trigger for their involvement in activism,** adding another layer of mental health challenges. The intersectional impact across gender and age groups showed that **non-binary individuals and those transitioning through age brackets experience more adverse effects on their mental health.**



## 4.2 IT IS CRUCIAL TO EXAMINE MENTAL AND PHYSICAL WELL-BEING ISSUES

The research sought to investigate the mental well-being of young feminists, a topic that has emerged as an essential and pressing issue. The intersection of personal identity, professional commitment, and social activism often places considerable emotional strain on these individuals, affecting their mental health significantly. The balance of **maintaining personal well-being while confronting societal resistance and daunting challenges** is an area that demands careful exploration and understanding.<sup>22</sup>

Moreover, it's important to examine the role of intersectionality in this context. The literature reveals that young feminist activists who identify as part of the LGBTQIA+ community or who live with disabilities face more substantial barriers and challenges in their advocacy. These additional vulnerabilities underscore **the need for inclusive safety measures and support systems within the feminist movements** that address the specific needs and experiences of all members, especially those who feel marginalised within already under served spaces.

## 4.3 UNDERNEATH THE RESILIENCE: YOUNG FEMINISTS AND THEIR BATTLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH

A pressing concern that has surfaced from the interviews is the toll that feminist activism takes on the mental well-being of young participants. "The work is strenuous," one respondent said, emphasising the multifaceted nature of the drain they experience, "It is emotionally, financially, physically draining." They poignantly highlighted the lack of support systems for activists, questioning, **"Who takes care of people who take care of other people? Who is the activist for the activists?"** The emotional burden of observing fellow activists being unjustly incarcerated is an additional stressor, adding to the challenge of maintaining mental well-being.

Moreover, external factors exacerbate these internal struggles. Negative perceptions and misunderstandings within the community about the nature and purpose of their work are significant sources of distress. One participant voiced:

**"Personally, the community's perception of our work is a significant source of mental distress for me"**

**- Respondent from Sierra Leone**

22 Naimasih, N. (2022) 'Mental Health in Kenyan Women Activists', The Elephant. Available at:

<https://www.theelephant.info/culture/2022/06/11/mental-health-in-kenyan-women-activists/> (Accessed: 7 June 2023).

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**Another layer of distress comes from stakeholders who, instead of offering support, often add to the pressures faced by young feminists.** This lack of support significantly affects their mental health, as one respondent shared, "Their lack of support greatly affects me mentally. Without the necessary support, it becomes incredibly challenging for me." The impact on the individual's mental health doesn't just stop there; it seeps into their motivation and efficiency in carrying out activities. A respondent acknowledged:

**"The difficulties we encounter while carrying out our activities have a significant impact on my mental state. When things are not done properly and on time, I feel bad and unmotivated."**

**- Respondent from Sierra Leone**

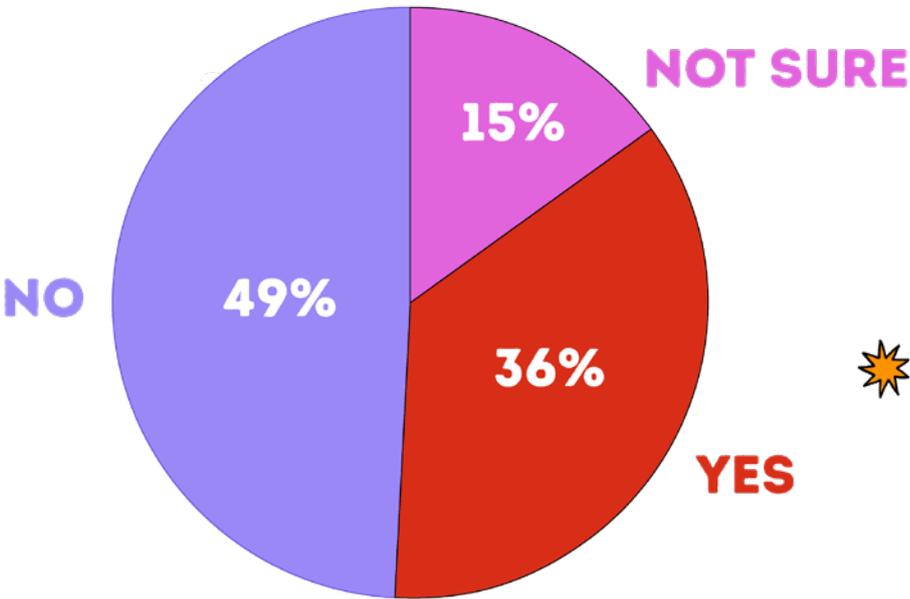
These narratives strongly underscore the necessity of mental health support within the sphere of young feminist activism.

When survey respondents were asked about the impact of their participation in the feminist movement on their mental health, nearly half of the participants (49%) responded with 'no', indicating that their mental health was not negatively affected. Conversely, 36% of respondents acknowledged that their mental health was negatively impacted, while 15% expressed uncertainty.

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23 Naimasih, N. (2022) 'Mental Health in Kenyan Women Activists', The Elephant. Available at: <https://www.theelephant.info/culture/2022/06/11/mental-health-in-kenyan-women-activists/> (Accessed: 7 June 2023).

**DOES PARTICIPATING IN YOUNG FEMINIST MOVEMENTS  
NEGATIVELY IMPACT YOUR MENTAL HEALTH ?**



Upon analysing the data, it became evident that **respondents who reported their mental health was not significantly impacted were primarily those who either occasionally participated in events and discussions or provided support without direct involvement in young feminist movements.** In contrast, survey respondents actively engaged with country-level, regional, or global feminist movements (52%) affirmed that their participation harmed their mental well-being.

**"The difficulties we encounter while carrying out our activities significantly impact my mental state."**

- Respondent from Sierra Leone

**"The truth is very complicated because sometimes we are so involved, in wanting to change the reality in which we live and I think that we neglect that part of the peace of mind and self-care"**

- Respondent from Honduras

**"Overthinking about the resistance you face in your work affects your wellbeing and mental health."**

- Respondent from Sierra Leone

**"The anxiety that I live with every day, I was once asked by my therapist if I have a safe place to go to in my mind and I did not have that."**

- Respondent from India

## 4.4 THE ROLE OF TRAUMATIC EVENTS IN SHAPING YOUNG FEMINIST ACTIVISM

It's noteworthy that **most young feminists cited their active participation in the feminist movement as being spurred by general traumatic events widely reported in the news**, such as the tragic incident of Mahsa Amini.<sup>24</sup>

Others reported being galvanised by traumatic occurrences within their communities. They are driven by the need to confront challenges such as gender-based violence, early marriages, stigmatisation due to HIV status, cultural norms that favour boys, and male dominance within families. **These significant issues exert an even more substantial toll on young people's mental health.** Young feminists grapple with these often-distressing experiences and the pressures of being part of the movement.

**"My cousin was being raped by my uncle, and because she was HIV positive everyone didn't take it seriously and said she would die anyway. Therefore, the rape was an opportunity for her not to die a virgin. This upset me and made me want to do something...this inspired me to speak up for her and any other person in this situation."**

- A respondent from Uganda

**"Domestic violence influenced my decision to become involved in feminism. I experienced my military father beating my mother and other military personnel beating their wives and girls. It was so upsetting that I started a movement to advocate against the many vices women and girls go through. My experience has shaped me to respect women, not to beat them but protect them and let them have their rights."**

- Respondent from Sierra Leone

**"The anxiety that I live with every day, I was once asked by my therapist if I have a safe place to go to in my mind and I did not have that."**

**- Respondent from India**

One respondent from Uganda remarked that many young feminists she works with have experienced other traumas and are still processing their effects on their work, **"I think some women need first to heal and not allow their unfortunate experiences to define how and who they choose to work with."**

## **4.5 EXAMINING THE INTERSECTIONAL IMPACT ACROSS GENDER AND AGE GROUPS**

Recognizing the intersectionality of diverse identities is critical to understanding individuals' unique experiences and challenges in various socio-political contexts. In the feminist movement, this concept is particularly relevant as it highlights the multiple layers of discrimination faced by individuals who do not fit neatly into societal constructs. Notably, the adverse effects of participating in young feminist movements were more pronounced among survey respondents who identified as non-binary (80%) compared to female (37%) and male (28%) respondents.

### **GENDER DISTRIBUTION OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS WHO EXPERIENCED A NEGATIVE IMPACT ON THEIR MENTAL HEALTH**



**54%**  
**WOMEN**



**80%**  
**NON-BINARY**



**28%**  
**MEN**

This observation highlights the additional barriers and challenges faced by non-binary young individuals when striving to bring about political, social, and cultural change through young feminist movements. **Beyond gender identities, our research found that the most severe mental health impacts were experienced by persons with disabilities, those within the LGBTQIA+ community, those living with HIV, and those living in rural areas..**

**"I am a black queer woman. I am at the intersection where racism, sexism, and homophobia meet. It's triple the discrimination. I make the world's worst cocktail, and I am not a unicorn, so there are other women like me."**

**- A respondent from Uganda**

Across various age groups, including those under 25 years (31%), 25-34 years (37%), and 35-44 years (40%), a noteworthy trend emerges: **an increasing number of young people involved in feminist movements begin to encounter negative impacts on their mental health as they transition across different age brackets.** A respondent from India remarks that she anticipates not being able to continue with her activism work as she grows older and gets married, and has a family, as there will be more aspects she will have to manage, such as a limit in freedom in her work.

**"When I get married, I don't know if I will be able to continue... what will happen when we get married- I keep thinking about that. I have seen many girls who used to live their lives freely before marriage, but after that, they tie themselves down. I fear that might happen to me as well. So, I don't know about the future"**

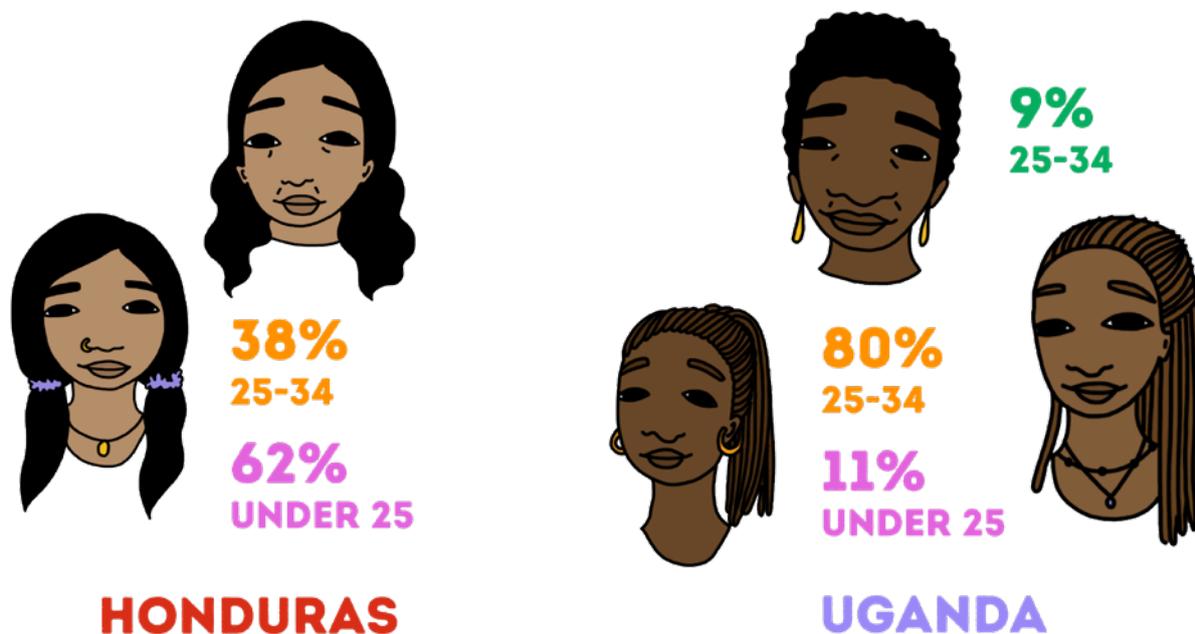
**- Respondent from India**



## 4.6 UNVEILING THE INTERSECTION OF AGE AND MENTAL HEALTH: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF YOUNG FEMINIST MOVEMENTS IN HONDURAS AND UGANDA

Zooming into two of the spotlight countries, Honduras and Uganda, we notice interesting insights regarding the relationship between age and negative impacts on mental health among survey respondents within young feminist movements. Among respondents who reported experiencing negative impacts, a significant majority (62%) in Honduras were under 25.

### AGE DISTRIBUTION OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS WHO EXPERIENCED NEGATIVE IMPACTS ON THEIR MENTAL HEALTH IN HONDURAS AND UGANDA



In Honduras, as respondents progressed into the 25-34 years age bracket, the percentage of those experiencing negative impacts decreased to 38%. This indicates that young people in this country are more likely to face mental health challenges early on in their engagement with feminist movements, with a relatively lower incidence as they enter their late 20s and early 30s. The interviews revealed that young feminists face challenges from two sources, older feminists and the society as a whole. Our respondents remarked that older feminists often regard the younger ones as not having enough experience resulting in young feminists being sidelined regardless of their intentions to be part of the movement. However, once they gain more experience, they gain more trust and carve their space and report being treated with more respect and feeling heard within the movement.

In contrast, the situation in Uganda presents a different pattern. Notably, a substantial majority (80%) of respondents in the 25-34 age range reported experiencing negative impacts on their mental health. This suggests that young people in Uganda may encounter more significant challenges to their mental well-being as they grow older within the context of their involvement in young feminist movements. The feminist movement in Uganda has

been growing and transforming over time, with various women's groups at national and grassroots levels advocating for women's rights and civic participation. Uganda is deemed the most youthful country in the world, with more than three-quarters (78 percent) of its citizens below the age of 35, this youthful population is projected to double in the next 25 years.<sup>25</sup> Our research found that the movement is largely occupied by older women, but there is a rising tide of young, proactive feminists eager for change. However, many of these young feminists struggle with identification within movements due to a lack of solidarity, negative public perceptions of feminism, lack of ideological clarity, and insufficient mentorship from older feminists.<sup>26</sup>

A respondent remarked:

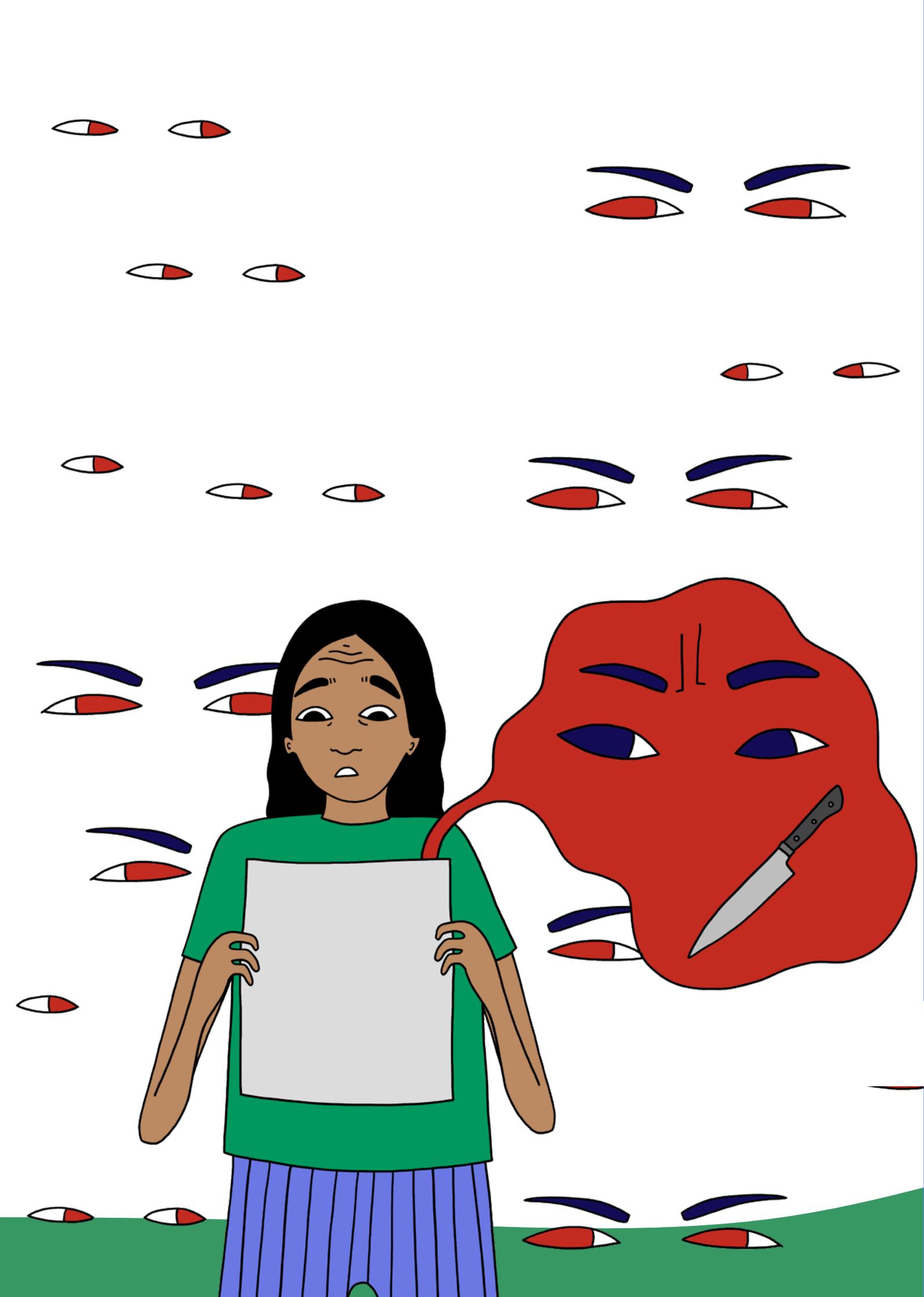
**"Young women don't feel protected as many are judged at work by adults, talked about, and usually blamed for making mistakes, yet they are not guided."**

As a result, many young feminists work independently, creating a fragmented movement with no unified voice. Interviewees shared that the feminist movement in Uganda is plagued by social conservatism, which divides the movement. Many women would rather describe themselves as "gender advocates" than "feminists", as they still are against issues such as abortion and homosexuality. These sentiments were constant within most of the interview respondents despite the respondents' age presenting as a key contributor to the trend above.



25 UNICEF Uganda (n.d.) What We Do: U-Report. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/uganda/what-we-do/u-report> (Accessed: 17 May 2023).

26 The Economist (2020). How Ugandan Feminists Make Themselves Heard. Available at: <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2020/06/04/how-ugandan-feminists-make-themselves-heard> (Accessed: 17 May 2023).



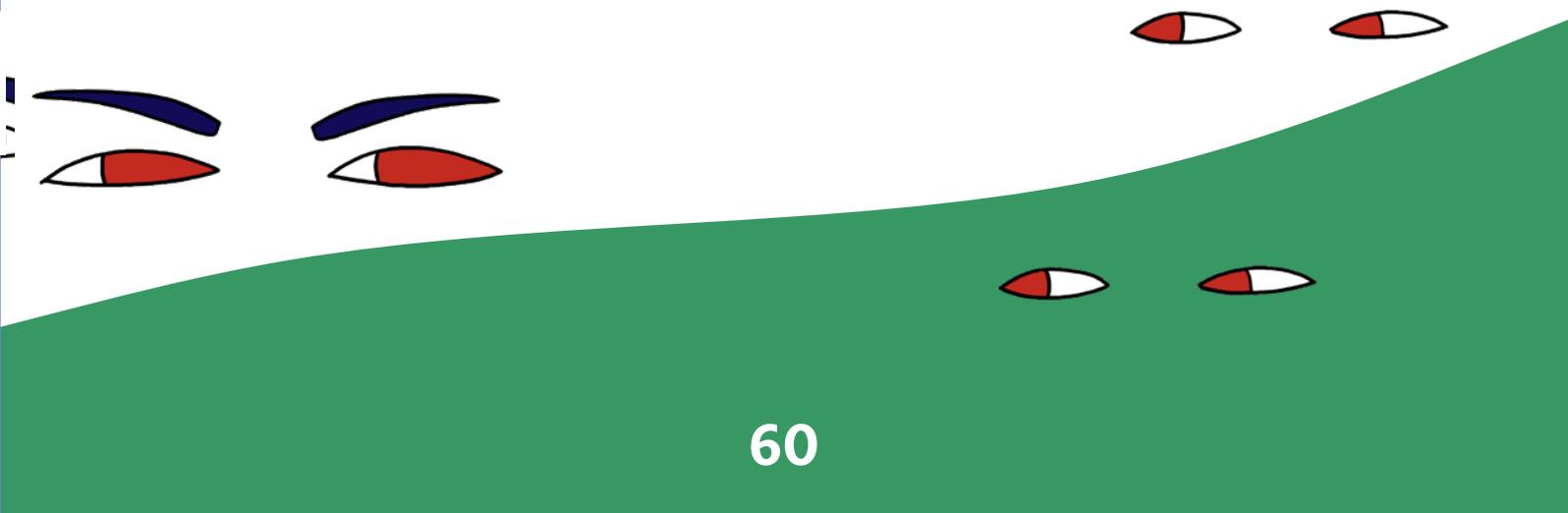
# 5- WHO PROTECTS THE PROTECTORS?

## UNVEILING THE SHOCKING SAFETY AND SELF-CARE CHALLENGES FACED BY YOUNG FEMINISTS

### 5.1 SECTION SUMMARY

The **increasing concerns over safety and security among young feminists** globally are highlighted in the spotlight countries. Young feminists have faced **threats and harassment**, both offline and online, for voicing their beliefs, bringing about constraints in their freedom of movement and expression. **The situation necessitates that they adopt unconventional safety measures such as carrying self-defence items and hiring personal legal help**, altering their daily lives significantly. This struggle for safety and security as they advocate for different causes shapes their navigation through social and political landscapes in their respective countries.

**Young feminists actively engage in discussions about self-care and safety measures within their movements, reporting threats to authorities, employing secure communication channels, taking precautions on social media, and resorting to therapy and legal help when necessary.** They emphasise work-life balance, creativity, and mental health check-ins as necessary self-care measures. Interestingly, the concept of collective care emerges, challenging the individualistic nature of self-care. Respondents called for **more support in ensuring digital safety and enhanced security measures at physical gatherings and events to enhance safety.** The narrative underscores the urgent need to address the safety and security concerns of young feminists



## 5.2 SAFETY AND SECURITY CONCERNS IN YOUNG FEMINIST MOBILISING

**Safety and security are paramount concerns for young feminists across the globe**, impacting their lives in profound ways. Narratives from spotlight countries, such as India and Lebanon highlight how these young feminists are threatened and harassed simply for advocating for their rights. In India, the social structures rooted in caste systems expose feminists to various dangers, including **death threats and banishment from their communities**. In Lebanon, their political engagement and outspokenness subject them to severe restrictions on freedom of movement and expression. These threats permeate the online world from physical spaces and vice versa. **Harassment** has become so rampant that some feminists have resorted to deactivating their social media accounts, marking a significant infringement on their ability to participate in the digital discourse.

**"In some cases, like when I received a death threat, I just left the place. In other cases, where I was thrown out of the village, I relocated and started working with others who were more accepting."**

- Respondent from India

**"We used to go, not knowing if we would be arrested or beaten."**

- Respondent from Lebanon

**"I've lost count of online harassment, to the point that I had to deactivate my account.."**

- Respondent from India

**"I cannot live wherever I want because of the political threats that I and my partner endure. It puts a limit on my freedom of movement and expression. There are places I cannot go to because I have worked on cases there, and people there oppose this and would harm me."**

- Respondent from Lebanon

**"I was stopped from entering certain communities and also received death threats."**

- Respondent from India

Moreover, these feminists have had to adopt measures to ensure their personal safety, often finding themselves living in a state of heightened vigilance. **They have had to adapt to carrying self-defence items** like red chilli powder and sticks, everyday commodities transformed into means of protection. These young feminists are bearing the brunt of social and political opposition, altering their daily routines to ensure their safety and survival.

**"When we have activities, I always carry my first-aid kit in my backpack. I carried a first-aid kit, and I also carried vinegar because we had been gassed.."**

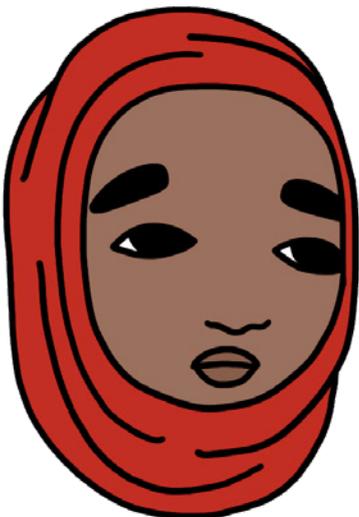
- Respondent from Honduras

**"I also carry red chilli powder with me because as a woman I am more cautious."**

- Respondent from India

**"I learned my lesson and started carrying a stick."**

- Respondent from India



**"I have a lawyer, I don't go out much,  
and I don't let my dogs walk alone in the  
neighbourhood. I am very wary of where I go."**

**- Respondent from Lebanon**

**"If I go [for a meeting] by car, I change the  
route on my way back."**

**- Respondent from Honduras**

**"I know that many times they say WhatsApp is the  
same as Telegram. Still we don't use WhatsApp, we use  
Telegram, and for more sensitive issues, we use Signal."**

**- Respondent from Honduras**



**"I always map where we are going to be, where the exits are, what access is closest to us...We also carry a change of clothes."**

- Respondent from Honduras

**"I always keep my ears on the ground to hear any information that may affect my friends and warn them before any harm comes to them."**

- Respondent from Uganda

**The use of masks during protests is another revealing example.** While originally intended as a protective measure against the spread of COVID-19, they have taken on an additional function - **concealing the identities of these young women to protect them from potential repercussions.** The act of hiding their identity underscores the dangers they face and reflects the sacrifices they make for their cause. In summary, the intersection of safety, security, and feminist advocacy remains a key issue for young feminists worldwide, shaping how they navigate social and political landscapes in their countries..

**"People are wearing masks, but the mask is just for her to stay anonymous and safe. And that's something that has been going around in the protests. So, it's no longer about COVID-19. It's just protecting your identity. Since masks have become so normal."**

- Respondent from Iran

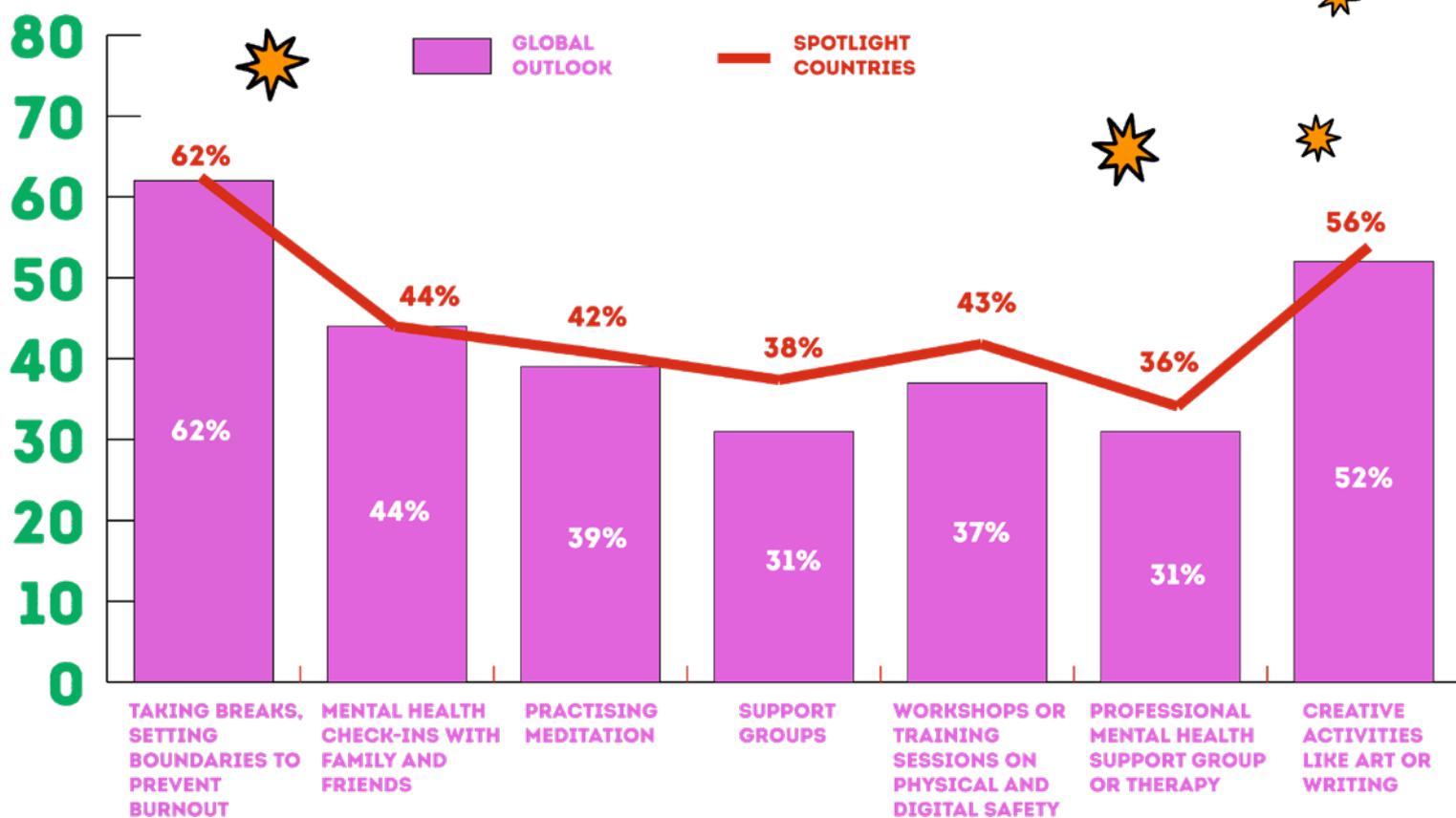
## 5.3 WHAT DO YOUNG FEMINISTS DO TO REMAIN SAFE AND SECURE IN THE DIGITAL AND PHYSICAL WORLD?

In the face of all these gravely concerning safety issues, we found that **many respondents that participated in this survey engaged in discussions about self-care and safety measures within their movements.** In aggregate, a significant proportion of survey respondents (42%) reported occasionally engaging in these discussions. A slightly smaller proportion of respondents (35%) said they frequently discuss self-care and safety measures.

Conversely, a minority of respondents (18%) reported rarely having these discussions, while a mere 5% of respondents claimed to have never participated in such discussions. The respondents underscore the importance of promptly reporting potential threats to authorities and maintaining open lines of communication with local leaders. **Understanding basic legal principles is also an effective deterrent against potential harassers.** Some activists have sought help directly from government officials, such as district collector officials, to address issues of harassment. Personal safety precautions, including careful information management on social media platforms, avoiding confrontational situations, and maintaining emergency contacts, are also highlighted. Some respondents opt for more secure communication channels like Protonmail and Signal instead of more popular platforms like WhatsApp and Gmail. **Furthermore, the respondents stress the significance of the time, place, and situation in avoiding threats.** Activists also strive to hold accountable those who harass them through reporting and filing complaints. Recognising the psychological toll of activism, some have sought therapy and engaged pro-bono therapists and lawyers for additional support.

In the global survey, respondents identified various self-care and safety measures they employ while participating in young feminist movements. **Taking breaks and setting boundaries to prevent burnout emerged as the most commonly mentioned measure, with 62% of respondents globally adopting this practice.** Engaging in creative strategies like art or writing was another prevalent measure, reported by 52% of respondents. **Additionally, holding mental health check-ins with friends and family was highlighted as an important self-care practice by many respondents.** However, self-care and safety measures such as engaging in support groups (38%) and seeking professional mental health support or therapy (31%) were relatively less utilised globally and within the spotlight countries. Cost of professional services, and organising community support groups were cited as the critical reasons for this lower trend.

## SURVEY RESPONDANTS' LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION IN YOUNG FEMINIST MOVEMENTS



A closer examination of the self-care and safety measures employed by different age groups, specifically focusing on respondents under the age of 25 and those within the 25-34 age range, provides an interesting insight. Among respondents under 25, the preferred self-care practice was engaging in creative activities, with 62% of them opting for this measure. Young feminists from India remarked, "I write poems in Odia based on what I have gone through. Feminism is a practice of patience." **Another feminist from Iran mentioned, "When I'm designing, working or illustrating, that's when I do my meditation. That's the kind of thing that calms me down and helps me."**

Conversely, 65% of survey respondents aged between 25 and 34 years indicated that taking breaks and setting boundaries to prevent burnout was their preferred self-care approach. **Older young feminists gave advice to younger feminists emphasising the importance of taking breaks and setting boundaries.**

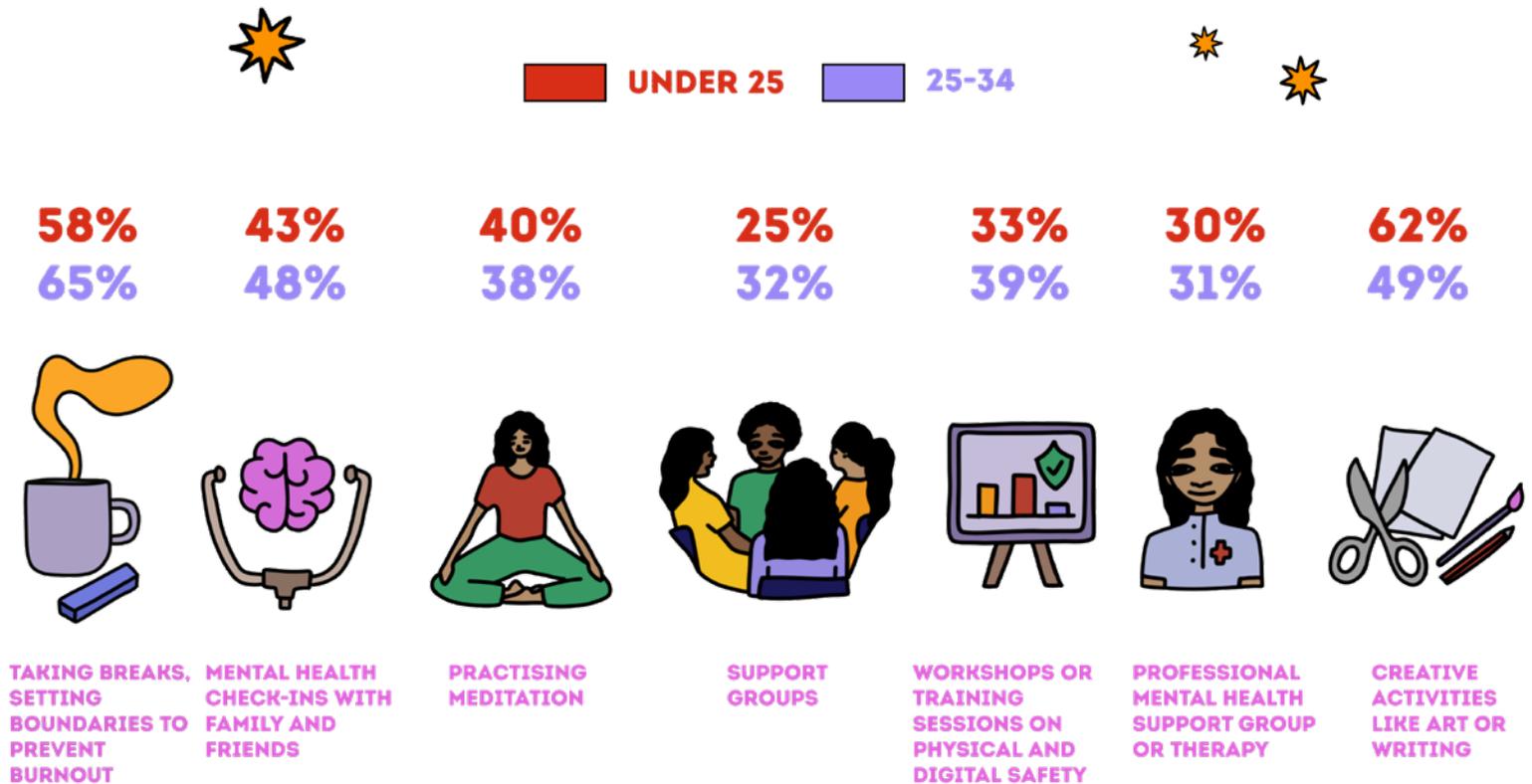
**"It is essential to understand one's-strengths, limitations, and personal boundaries. Taking care of one's mental and emotional well-being is crucial to sustaining the activism journey."**

- Respondent from Sierra Leone

**"If it puts your life in danger, think twice before you do it. It is okay. It is not betrayal; you've done your part. There is always another woman willing to carry on."**

- Respondent from Uganda

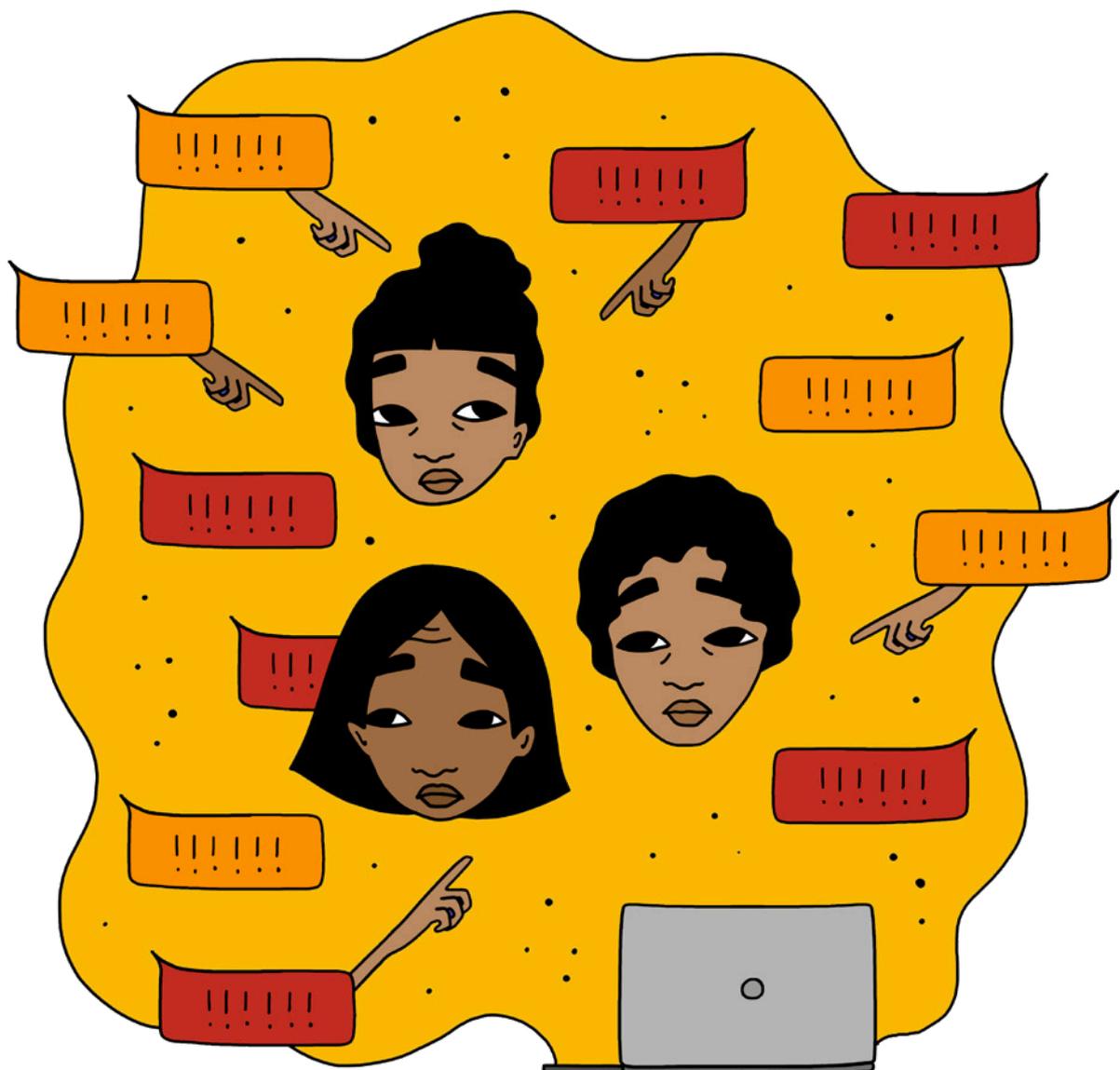
## AGE DISTRIBUTION OF SELF-CARE AND SAFETY MEASURES USED BY SURVEY RESPONDENTS



**One unique perspective brought forward was the notion of collective care instead of self-care.** This view challenges the traditional idea of self-care being an individual pursuit and underscores the communal aspect of it.

**"Community care makes more sense than self-care. I don't really rely on self-care which is purely consumerist not only in the materialist sense but also on the identity level...This question sounds so funny to me because I see my comrades struggling in many ways - weird sleeping schedules, unhealthy food habits - investing their time in organising. Now.. I don't know... Self-care requires that you recognise your "self" and this is something I am still struggling with, and I don't know how much I recognise myself outside of the other."**

**- Respondent from Lebanon**



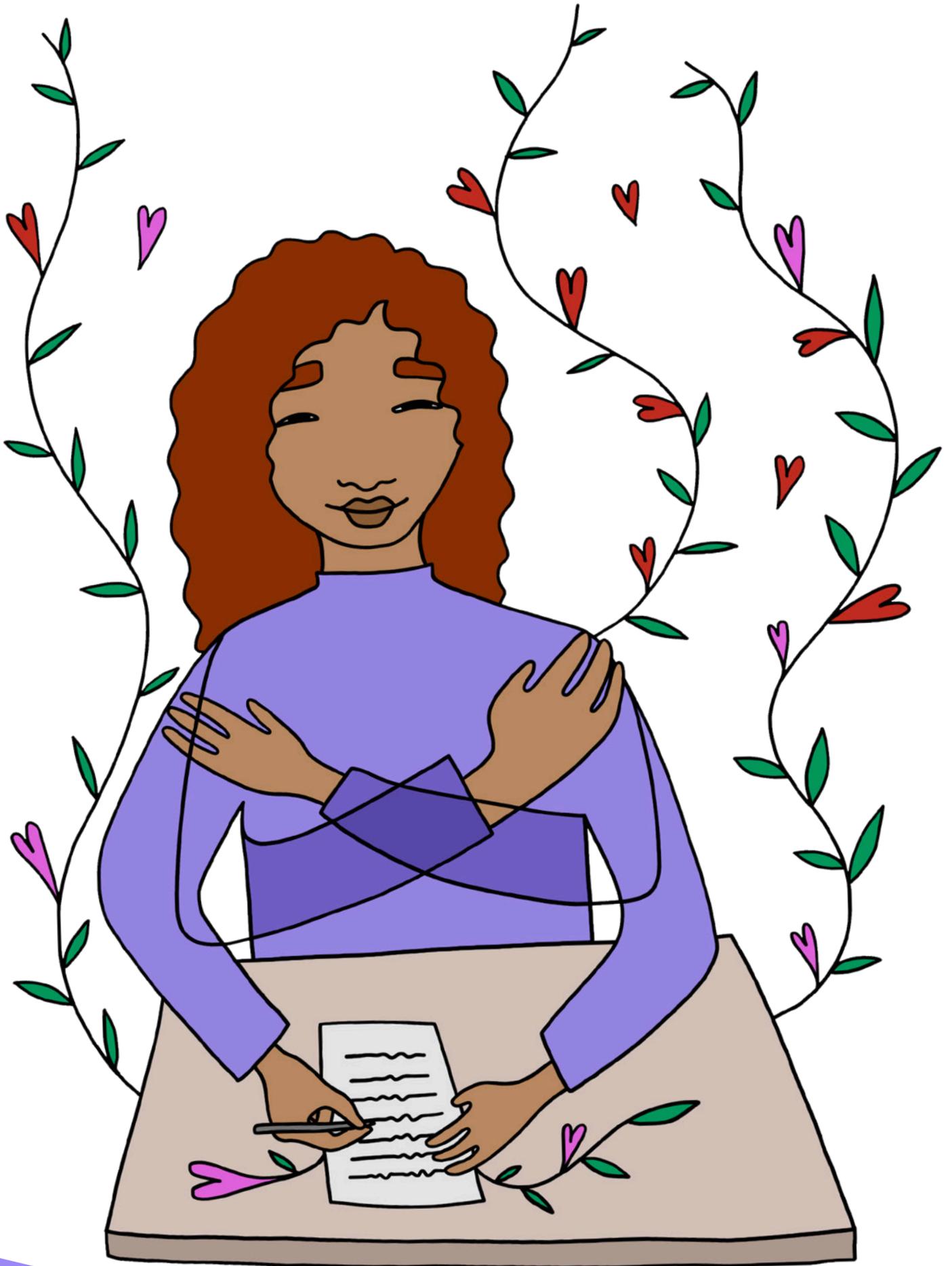
## 5.4 ADDITIONAL SELF-CARE AND SAFETY MEASURES NEEDED BY YOUNG FEMINISTS

In the global context, survey respondents significantly valued having more mental health resources and support (71%) alongside a greater emphasis on work-life balance to prevent burnout (66%). **Additionally, they considered digital safety and privacy measures (56%) relatively effective in promoting self-care and safety.** In comparison, a slightly smaller proportion of respondents (49%) acknowledged the efficacy of enhanced security measures for physical gatherings and events.

Further analysis of the self-care and safety measures valued by different genders within the survey data revealed notable preference differences. **Most female respondents (70%) expressed a higher emphasis on the importance of maintaining a strong work-life balance and actively avoiding burnout.**

### MOST EFFECTIVE ADDITIONAL SELF-CARE AND SAFETY MEASURES







# 6- UNLOCKING THE POWER OF STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS IN YOUNG FEMINIST MOVEMENTS

## 6.1 SECTION SUMMARY

This research underscores **the critical role of training young people in areas such as financial management, organisational development, and resource mobilisation.** It also highlights **the value of consistent and sustainable funding** in enhancing the effectiveness of young feminist movements, emphasising the importance of placing trust in young people. **Respondents suggested more inclusive and less document-centric funding processes** and emphasised **the importance of training and access to unrestricted funds.** Lebanon's feminist history, evolving over four waves, demonstrates the intersectionality and complexities of feminist activism influenced by various socio-political factors. However, recent crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic and economic collapse, have raised questions- about the effectiveness of the current NGO model and the reliance on external donor funding. This challenged young feminists to envisage alternatives that move away from bureaucratic procedures and donor-driven agendas. **Supporting young feminists necessitates a targeted approach that reduces bureaucratic barriers and allows for greater adaptability to promote broader involvement in feminist work.**



## 6.2 THE STATE OF FUNDING AMONGST YOUNG FEMINIST MOVEMENTS

The experiences from the spotlight countries all underscore a universal narrative: a profound disconnection between donor strategies and the genuine needs of feminist grassroots movements. This disconnect is primarily linked to a system built on rigid restrictions, complex application procedures, and a focus on projectbased funding, often proving inflexible and inaccessible to these movements.: "They gave us a fund, told us to build a movement in 6 months...We live in a crisis context, and it just doesn't work. This system...always wants everything fast...this is not how things work." A respondent from Lebanon. Such sentiments indicate the need for more flexible and inclusive funding structures that appreciate the nuances of each country and social context.

**"I self-fund in all the activities I do. I take care of my own costs, so it becomes hard. My parents, who give me the money, do not know I use it to do this work. The money I use is part of my pocket money for my personal needs. These bureaucratic expectations create a barrier to accessing funds, revealing a systemic gap between the objectives of donors and the realities of grassroots activists."**

**- Respondent from Uganda**

**Another prevalent theme across all four countries is the scepticism and distrust activists face when securing funds.** "The challenge is that whenever I meet prominent people, especially men, for support, they try to take advantage of me before helping me." Similarly, activists from India echoed the sentiments of feeling distrusted and dismissed:

**"As a young person, no one trusts you. They say it is a blood rush."**

**- Respondent from Sierra Leone**

Another respondent raised an issue about harassment:

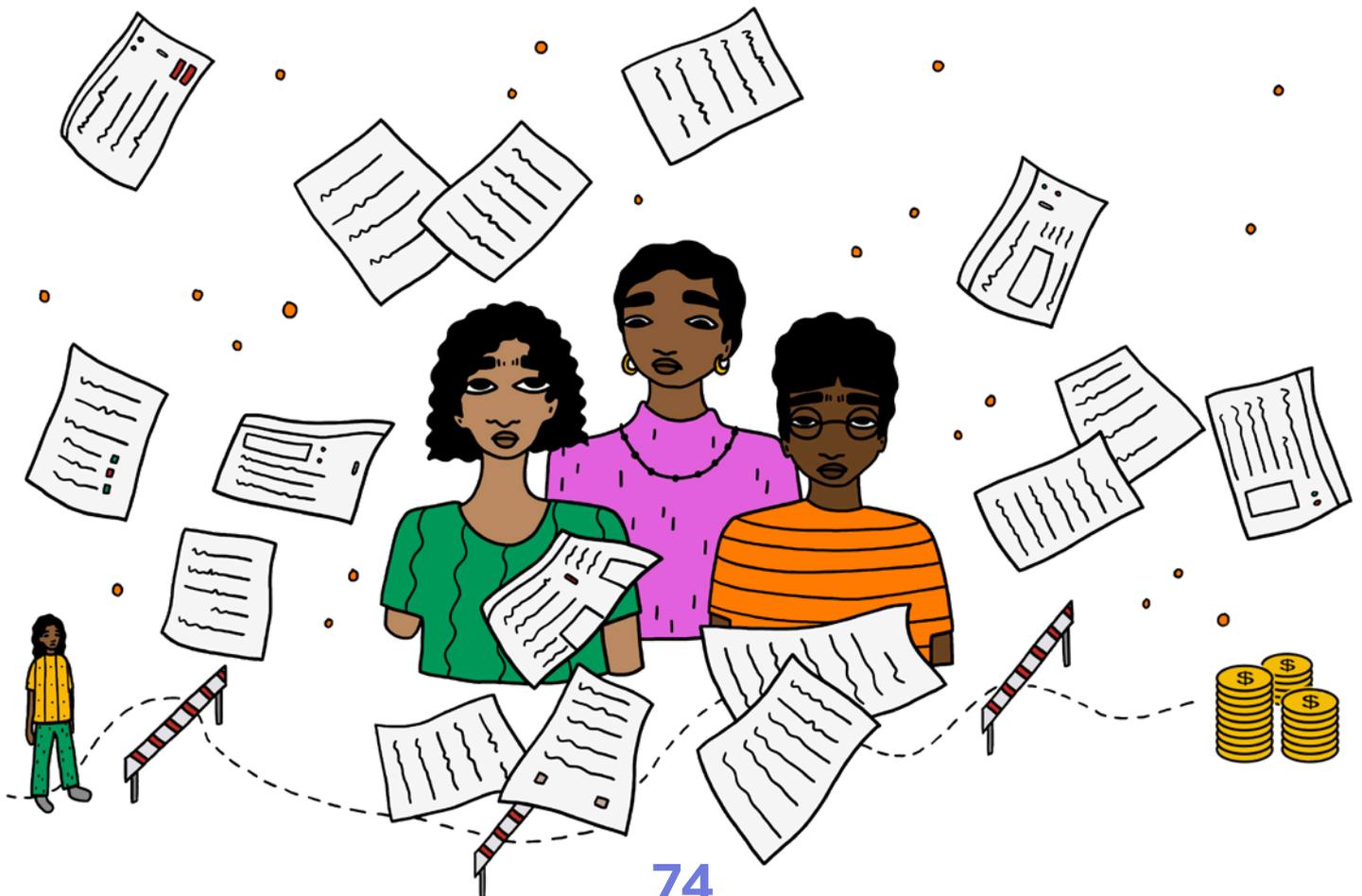
**“Even government officials would expect things from me that aren’t comfortable for me. Physical harassment and gestures are common. They don’t look at my proposal- they look at me as a body”**

**- Respondent from India**

These quotes shed light on the prejudices and exploitation young activists must navigate when soliciting support.

Finally, a critical issue raised is the need for language and communication inclusivity in donor relations. This includes recognising proposals in native languages or video or audio formats, making it easier for activists who may not be comfortable with English. **The need for such reformative measures resonates with the plea from Lebanon: “[Donors need] to let us set the agenda, and not vice versa.”** In essence, there’s a loud call for rethinking funding strategies, emphasising more empathetic, contextual, and inclusive approaches to enabling grassroots movements.

**However, there is some hope as more established and registered young feminist groups and organisations have successfully secured funds from flexible donors such as FRIDA and MAMA Cash,** indicating an increasing recognition of the need for more feminist driven flexible funding structures.



## 6.3 REDEFINING FUNDING PRACTICES FOR YOUNG FEMINIST MOVEMENTS: A CALL FOR CHANGE

It is evident that the **continuity and sustainability of funding is a key factor in enhancing the effectiveness of young feminist movements**. Participants voiced concerns over funding partners focusing largely on projectspecific objectives while disregarding the broader aspects of campaigns and advocacy, which are vital to reach target groups. **The importance of changing the perspectives of funding bodies is stressed**, particularly emphasising more trust in young people and their ability to lead and implement projects effectively.

To improve funding practices, participants propose involving the target audience in program planning, focusing on pressing community issues and establishing new impact measurement criteria that account for intangible outcomes achieved by movements. Furthermore, **respondents proposed numerous strategies for funders, transnational movements, and other allies to adopt**. Active participation and involvement of the target audience in planning and designing programs is essential. Funding should focus on pressing issues that benefit the community directly. Respondents also advocate for establishing collaborative platforms involving various stakeholders, including funders, governments, and public activists. **A critical call for intersectionality is made for the adoption of an intersectional approach in funding projects**, considering variables like caste, gender identity, and religion. It is suggested that funding processes should be more flexible, less document-centric, and more inclusive of non-English applications, which would allow grassroots activists who may not be comfortable with English to apply. The model of mentor-guided funding applications could be adopted as a successful approach.

Consistently, **survey respondents highlighted certain factors as crucial for enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of feminist movements**. These factors included training, access to unrestricted funds, and the amplification of campaigns and activities. Globally, 67% of survey respondents emphasised the importance of training, followed by 65% identifying access to unrestricted funds as vital, and 50% recognising the significance of amplifying campaigns and activities.

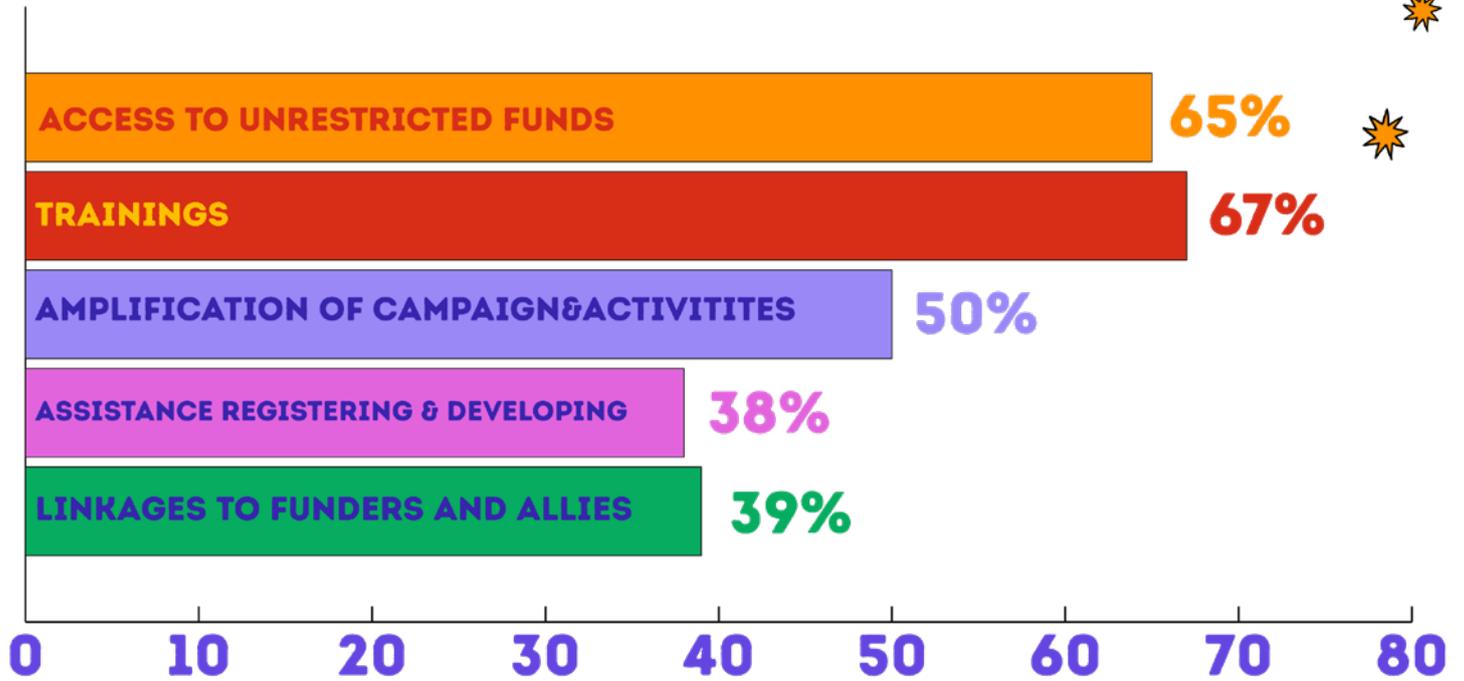
While training was an important need that young people identified in the quantitative data, it often was brought up with regards to developing funding applications during the interviews. **Respondents reported hiring people to apply for grants and submit reports for the grants but would rather have the training to apply for the funding themselves if the requirements remain the same**. This further emphasises the root issue of access to funding opportunities.

These perspectives were echoed within the spotlight countries, **where 68% of survey respondents prioritised training**, 65% mentioned access to unrestricted funds, and 51% emphasised the amplification of campaigns and activities as key factors to increase the effectiveness and sustainability of feminist movements.

A smaller proportion of survey respondents in the spotlight countries noted assistance with registering and developing organisational policies (40%) and linkages to funders and allies (39%). While these factors were not as commonly emphasised compared to training, access

to funds, and campaign amplification, they still support the effectiveness and sustainability of feminist movements within the surveyed countries.

## MOST IMPORTANT FACTORS NEEDED TO INCREASE THE EFFECTIVENESS AND SUSTAINABILITY OF FEMINIST MOVEMENTS



## 6.4 LEBANON'S FEMINIST MOVEMENT: A JOURNEY THROUGH CRISIS AND EVOLUTION

The feminist movement in Lebanon has faced a significant setback over the past four years due to an ongoing crisis that began in 2019. This crisis emerged after a period of dormancy that lasted for 30 years, following the end of the Civil War in 1990. Unfortunately, discussions about the history of feminism in Lebanon often overlook the political, social, cultural, and economic factors that shape it. This oversight leads to a lack of attention and marginalisation of the feminist movement's discourse, with limited discussions occurring only within feminist circles or for political purposes.

Lebanon's feminist history spreads over four waves that Rita Stephan outlines in a 2014 publication. The first wave of feminism started in the 1920s. It was influenced by the Enlightenment in Europe, struggles with colonialism, and the changes in the social fabric as Western missionaries entered the region. It included elite women, and even men, who gathered around the "woman question", and therefore, consequent action involved charity organisations to promote women's education and to improve their role as mothers.

That era largely echoed the liberal ideology and religious reformism at the time and ended with the establishment of the First Lebanese Republic in 1943. A few years later, the influx of Palestinian refugees into the country following the Nakba in 1948 marked the beginning of the second wave. Lebanese feminist groups were formed but were representative of two camps: Arab nationalists and leftists, and Christian elites and bourgeoisie. In 1952, both sides formed the Lebanese Council for Women, and instated voting rights for women in 1953. In the 60s, feminism in Lebanon became largely influenced by socialism, which was the prevalent ideology in the Arab region at the time, amidst resistance against Israeli settlements.

Feminist action turned into an activist intervention to promote and negotiate peace, especially with the eruption of the Civil War in 1975. The same feminist organisations, later, became relief agencies for refugees and victims of the war. With the Civil War ending in 1990, and with more international interest in women's voices in the Global South, the third wave of feminism in Lebanon began, marked by the institutionalisation of women's organisations and groups and with more mainstreaming of the conversation on gender in the Arab world. By that time, women's organisations converged their work around advocacy to lobby for reforms of Lebanese personal status laws, and labour laws that discriminated against women. Other organisations tackled issues of violence against women and sexuality more visible in the public arena, and with this, the fourth wave of feminism in Lebanon was launched. Being the most diverse one in terms of actors, causes, and feminist cultures, it tackled issues such as the different forms of violence against women, LGBT rights, migrant domestic workers, and sexuality, using different tools in its practice, mainly social media, and street protests.

The 2019-2023 period has tipped the scale. When it comes to feminist organising, people find themselves increasingly asking "So what is feminism now?", in light of the oppressive violence seen in the October 17th protests that lasted for months, the scarcity and precarity everyone has faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, the rapid decline in the national currency reaching high levels of hyperinflation, the 4 August explosion whose deaths are still being counted, and the gradual lifting of subsidies in the summer of 2021 that left everyone queuing for gas, medicine, and bread. Residents of Lebanon have witnessed repetitive ends of the world

in broad daylight, and while some have been outspoken about it, others have suffered in silence. For young women, queer persons, and allies, there is a sense of probing what it is to be a feminist today in Lebanon, bringing into question the 'NGOization' of the struggle amidst the local economic collapse and worldwide economic changes in recent years. With realities continuously changing, young feminists find themselves forced to engage in a long-overdue reflection where a lot has been revealed. A ghost of the fourth wave of feminism endures until this day, with an NGO hegemony over feminist work, due to, among other reasons, economic scarcity, lack of government function, therefore, a subsequent dependency on foreign money. In a sense, and this is a recurrent saying, NGOs keep Lebanon afloat. This renders the feminist movement in Lebanon stuck within the boundaries of the non-governmental industrial complex ruled by donor funding, rigid criteria, external agendas, and technical terminology that are alien from the systemic realities that women, queer persons, trans persons, migrant and refugee women, and women with disabilities in Lebanon live daily. Furthermore, newly founded organisations and initiatives in Lebanon following the 4 August Blast have compromised the credibility of that model as a whole, with doubts expressed by residents in affected areas on the source, nature, and magnitude of the funding that flooded the city at the time, in comparison to the fragmented impact on the ground.

While we effortlessly narrate a bleak image describing the current situation in Lebanon and how it sidelined feminist struggle and organising, young feminists direct their efforts into imagining alternatives and organising outside of a system that has governed their lives and livelihoods for decades. Convening, talking, and listening to each other describe experiences, needs, obstacles, and failures has set in motion the desire to move away from the NGO way of doing things, to challenge the obsession with momentum, deadlines, reports, agendas, and doing what donor institutions want to see. For young feminists, being with the people regularly expands feminist discourse towards universalisation that involves and includes everyone, instead of confining it within measurable identity particularities imposed by donor criteria and checklists.

Supporting young feminists in Lebanon requires a nuanced and context-specific approach. This constitutes prioritising the engagement of individuals whose expertise was developed by their lived experience of being members of a community and working to serve it. There is a need for less preoccupation with technical demands and criteria that form significant bureaucratic obstacles to meaningful work and movementbuilding.

A more flexible approach is a more inclusive one, and one that invites more people from all backgrounds to imagine how they can be involved in feminist work. And while the global push is always leaning towards expanding, capacity strengthening, and working to become a bigger and more established organisation, young feminist movements insist that the work they do on a smaller scale is more impactful because it keeps the community's interests as the utmost priority.



# 7- ENVISIONING THE FUTURE: A MIXTURE OF ANXIETY AND HOPE

**Young Feminist movements show a mixture of anxiety, hope, and resilience in the face of complex sociopolitical and economic circumstances.** For example, In Lebanon, young feminists express fear and uncertainty about the future but also show determination in their activism, even resorting to digital platforms as a primary medium of activism. They aspire to create a more diversified and holistic movement, and there is a strong call for internal solidarity, decreased dependence on external donors, and inclusion of marginalised voices.

In Uganda, there's a collective vision for a future where the movement is inclusive, transparent, and principled. **The participants see the power of creativity in shaping the future of feminism and envisage an inclusive movement that leaves no woman behind.** Similarly, in Sierra Leone, activists express optimism for a future that continues to uphold and advocate feminist ideas, emphasising encouraging women to express their thoughts freely and actively participate in decision-making processes. In India, the activists show optimism, acknowledging the upcoming generation as a promising force for change. **They also highlight the importance of networking and collaboration and creating safe spaces for young feminists.** Despite the optimism, there are concerns about the lack of information among a section of the population, the potential loss of freedom postmarriage for female activists, and the current political environment. However, their vision remains one of intersectionality, resilience, and constant progress toward social change.

**Overall, an emerging sentiment among these young feminists is the desire to decrease dependence on external donors, asserting that external funding should merely supplement their work rather than dictate it. Moreover, there is a clear call for solidarity and the inclusion and representation of voices, especially those from rural areas, advocating for a more diversified and holistic feminist movement.**



## IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT DOES THE FUTURE OF FEMINISTS LOOK LIKE?

A UNICEF report, *Prospects for Children in the Polycrisis*, remarks that **social movements, particularly those led by young people and women, are likely to counteract negative trends in democracy and access to basic freedoms and rights**<sup>27</sup>. This recognition of youth-led and feminist movements as a force for change highlights the importance of engaging young people, particularly young feminists in the democratic process. We sought to capture **the perspectives of young people first hand to uncover their perspectives about the future.**

We asked all the interviewed young feminists to tell us what the future looks like for them:



**"Anxiety"**

- Respondent from Lebanon



**"In terms of my activism, the future looks bright because I believe in the potential of young people. I believe that I can contribute to creating a positive and impactful future."**

- Respondent from Sierra Leone

**"I am afraid and I don't know."**

- Respondent from Lebanon

**"If it puts your life in danger, think twice before you do it. It is okay. It is not betrayal; you've done your part. There is always another woman willing to carry on."**

- Respondent from Uganda

27 UNICEF Innocenti. (2023). *Prospects for Children in the Polycrisis: A 2023 Global Outlook*. United Nations Children's Fund. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/globalinsight/media/3001/file/UNICEF-Innocenti-Prospects-for-Children-Global-Outlook-2023.pdf>

**"I hope people will be more open-minded.  
And the government will open for more  
consultation [from youth]"**

- Respondent from India

**"So, for me the future looks hopeful because  
the girls are no longer afraid to talk about  
their bodies and they are also interested in  
organising themselves, in training"**

- Respondent from Honduras

**"My feelings towards the future  
are blurry but I am hopeful."**

- Respondent from Lebanon

**"[I envision] a feminist future where every individual  
is welcome and appreciated. But it's about any  
oppressed group on appearance. Feminism is for all.  
It should be a ground for all. No ifs and no buts"**

- Respondent from Honduras

**"It's hard to imagine the future now with  
everything going on...I hope for the future that  
I can be part of something more organised and  
directed, but until then, I am committed to a  
more digital kind of "activism""**

- Respondent from Lebanon

# ANNEX 1: ABOUT THIS REPORT

## WHAT IS THE STATE OF YOUTH CIVIL SOCIETY REPORT?

**The State of Youth Civil Society report is a global, youth-led publication that explores the realities of youth civil society and social movements.** It reflects upon the global circumstances of young people over the past year that has shaped the collective experiences of youth civil society groups. **The COVID-19 pandemic has had a lasting impact on democracy around the world.** Rapid response mechanisms created to stop the spread of the pandemic have resulted in worsening democratic deficits and helped to fuel rising authoritarianism in many countries. There is a visible curtailment of fundamental freedoms, including free speech and expression, association, and assembly.

**Despite these increasing threats to democracy, young feminist movements worldwide are continuing to hold the line.** From driving constitutional reforms in Chile, to challenging anti-LGBTQI+ populism in Colombia, to standing up for abortion rights across the United States of America, to pushing for a sex offender registry through the #NameandShame movement in Nigeria, young feminist movements are standing up to the increasing threats to democracy. **This year's report; 'Young, Feminist and Fearless: Holding the Line' celebrates the creative strategies used by young feminists and documents the most significant issues facing feminist youth movements on the frontlines of democratic struggles around the world.** This research showcases the specific tactics and strategies used by young people that have spurred change within communities and nations, focusing on exploring the resistance, creative strategies, and transnational alliances of these movements in the face of rising authoritarianism, shrinking civic space, and democratic backsliding.

## HOW WAS THIS REPORT CREATED?

**This report is created based on content from in-depth research involving 1097 young people.** Of these, 837 individuals responded to our global survey, while the remaining 260 participated in intensive interviews and focus group discussions. These explorations spanned a total of 82 countries, thereby presenting a broad representation of young feminists across the world.

**The data collated for this report was meticulously collected by a team of 6 researchers, each from a different country, ensuring diversity in perspectives and approaches.** Their joint effort has resulted in the creation of an in-depth and multi-faceted report, which is segmented into seven distinct chapters. The first six chapters discuss the study's key findings, encapsulating the current state and challenges faced by young feminists.



# ANNEX 2: A GUIDE TO OUR RESEARCH DESIGN AND PARTICIPANT PROFILES

## 1.1 SECTION SUMMARY

**This research employed a multi-method approach to examine the experiences of young feminists globally.** It included desk-based research, in-depth interviews, focus groups, and a global survey conducted in multiple languages, to gather data from 847 respondents in 82 countries. The findings focus on **seven spotlight countries - India, Iran, Lebanon, Uganda, Honduras, Brazil, and Sierra Leone** - selected due to Restless Development's established networks and their varying levels of democracy. The respondent profiles reflected a substantial representation from Africa (64%), with Asia and the Americas accounting for 16% and 15%, respectively. Notably, no responses were received from Iran, and Lebanon's representation was less than 1% due to current political and economic challenges being faced in both countries. Gender distribution showed most female respondents (71%), and most were aged between 25-34 years (59%).

## 1.2 MULTILINGUAL, MULTI-METHOD APPROACH: AN INCLUSIVE METHODOLOGY TO EXPLORE YOUNG FEMINIST MOVEMENTS

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the perspectives and experiences of young feminists in the contemporary global context. Our methodology comprised four main components: desk-based research, in-depth interviews with young feminists, focus group discussions, and a global survey. This multi-pronged approach allowed us to obtain rich and varied data to answer our research questions and achieve our study objectives. To ensure inclusion, all interviews were conducted in the languages the interviewees felt most comfortable in, including, but not limited to, Luganda, Hindi, Portuguese, French, Arabic, English, and Spanish and the survey was available in English, Spanish, Hindi, Portuguese, French and Arabic. Most respondents (70%) indicated English as their primary language. French (9%) and Portuguese (9%) were the participants' next most commonly mentioned languages. In contrast, Hindi and Arabic were each selected by only 3% of the survey respondents.

Utilising local support played a crucial role in this research. The researchers' understanding of cultural nuances, local dialects, and community-specific issues significantly enhanced the authenticity of the data collected. It fostered a comfortable environment for participants to openly share their experiences, thereby leading to a more accurate and comprehensive representation of the diverse feminist perspectives.

We employed our youth-led research approach, which involves partnering with young people to collect, record and organise the data, acknowledging that youth can inspire more genuine

responses when interviewing their peers. Youth-led research is a youth engagement strategy used to elevate young voices when influencing policies.<sup>28</sup> Youth-driven research effectively dismantles substantial social, psychological, economic, and cultural obstacles between study participants and investigators, enabling young individuals to have a strong impact on the results derived from their research discoveries.<sup>29</sup> For this research, we went a step further and invited young feminists to take part in the report by writing reflective country spotlights after the completion of the data collection. This served as an opportunity to collect more youth-source data and develop the young researcher’s skills.

Combining these four methodological components allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the experiences, perspectives, and challenges faced by young feminists engaged in contemporary feminist movements. By employing this mixed-methods approach, our study aimed to provide a holistic understanding of the issues at hand, thereby contributing to the ongoing discourse on feminism and youth engagement.

Method	Total conducted	Number of respondents	Sample Selection Criteria
Interviews	127	127	- Aged below 35 years; - Self-identified as a feminist; - Actively engaged in feminist causes/movements;
FGDs	20	133	- Ideally, a member or active supporter of a feminist movement
Global Survey	847	839 *viable	- Self- Opt-in

## 1.3 GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES, LOCAL INSIGHTS: SPOTLIGHTING YOUTH CIVIL SOCIETY IN SEVEN COUNTRIES

**The State of Youth Civil Society critically examines the circumstances influencing youth civil society groups worldwide.** Drawing on a global survey reaching 847 respondents across 82 countries, we gathered a wealth of insights reflecting the unique opportunities and challenges experienced by diverse youth civil society groups. However, to delve deeper, we strategically selected seven countries - India, Iran, Lebanon, Uganda, Honduras, Brazil, and Sierra Leone - to explore the experiences and perspectives of young feminists through qualitative data.

Chosen for their established youth networks and hubs under Restless Development, **we were**

28 TeamScope. (n.d.). Youth-Led Research: The Key to Catalysing Sustainable and Long-Term Change. TeamScope. Retrieved from <https://www.teamscopeapp.com/blog/youth-led-research-the-key-to-catalysing-sustainable-and-long-term-change>

29 Delgado, M., 2006. Designs and methods for youth-led research. Sage.

able to leverage Restless Development’s local presence and connections, to access and engage with a diverse range of young feminists in these regions, enabling the implementation of youth-led research methodologies. The inclusion of Iran offered a unique perspective due to its distinctive socio-political context. In addition, while these countries were of strategic interest, **we observed their performance on two democratic indices, Democracy Index 2022<sup>30</sup>, and Freedom in the World<sup>31</sup> 2021**, to assess the level of democracy in these countries, ensuring they reflect varied democratic experiences or democratic backsliding from 2006 to 2022. By focusing on these spotlight countries, in conjunction with our global survey, our research captures diverse perspectives while ensuring an effective data collection process.



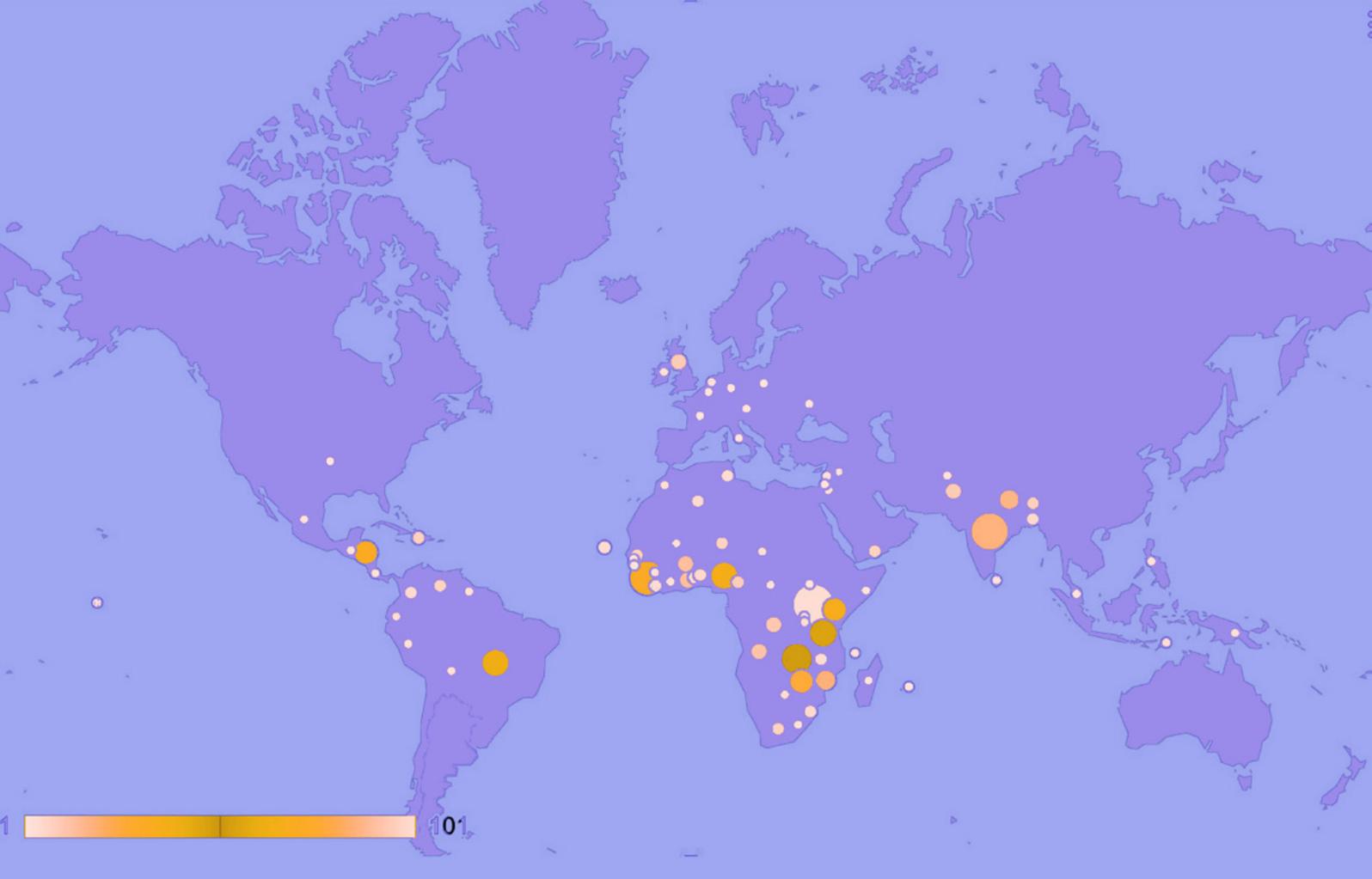
## 1.4 GEOGRAPHICAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

### 1.41 Geographical Distribution

The African continent had the highest representation, accounting for 64% of the participants. Asia followed with 16%, while the Americas (North America, Latin America, and the Caribbean) accounted for 15% of the respondents. In contrast, Europe, the Middle East, and Oceania each represented less than 2% of the survey participants.

30 The Economist Intelligence Unit. (2023). Democracy Index 2022: Frontline democracy and the battle for Ukraine. Retrieved from [https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/DI-final-versionreport.pdf?mkttok=NzUzLVJJUS00MzgAAAGLZjisJpQaDDvh7pzdgdqRgawdpsM843b4FjZsc\_P\_ep6LPNi56lawnTINLEakAKdZdcs7wl0aKpgGOP4s20HXFEbFcxZuEOKRBz\_8InIdnMcw ]

31 Freedom House. (n.d.). Countries and Territories. Available at: https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-world/scores (Accessed: 7 June 2023)



Out of the 839 respondents who participated in this global survey, a substantial portion, accounting for at least 40%, represented the five spotlight countries: Brazil, Honduras, India, Sierra Leone, and Uganda. Uganda had the highest proportion of respondents among the five spotlight countries, making up 30% of the total sample. India followed closely with 26%, and Sierra Leone accounted for 22% of the respondents. In addition to the spotlight countries, several other noteworthy countries demonstrated relatively high response rates, including Tanzania (6%), Zambia (6%), Kenya (4%), Nigeria (4%), and Zimbabwe (3%). No responses were received from Iran, and respondents from Lebanon were less than 1%. These countries present unique challenges for data collection. **The current political and economic issues in these regions significantly impeded access to potential respondents. Moreover, the censorship prevalent in these nations further compounded the difficulty in reaching likely respondents.** For example, Iran ranked very low on the Freedom House's Freedom on The Net Index, scoring 16 out of 100 points based on restrictions on social media and website restrictions as well as users' arrests<sup>32</sup>. Lebanon ranks 52 out of 100 total points in the same index, however, since 2017, there has been a significant crackdown on online freedom of expression. Moreover, the current economic downturn has imposed significant financial challenges on both internet service providers and their customers.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, **the survey data from Lebanon was considered statistically insignificant and insufficiently representative to be included in the analysis due to these barriers.**

32 Freedom House (2022) 'Freedom on the Net: Iran', Freedom House. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/iran/freedomnet/2022> (Accessed: 19 June 2023).

33 Freedom House (2022) 'Freedom on the Net: Lebanon', Freedom House. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/lebanon/freedom-net/2022> (Accessed: 19 June 2023).

## 1.42 Gender and Age Distribution

Out of the 839 respondents who participated in our global survey, the majority (71%) identified as female, while 26% identified as male. **Approximately 1% of respondents identified as non-binary, and 2% preferred not to disclose their gender.** Within the spotlight countries, Brazil (95%) had the highest proportion of female survey respondents, followed by Honduras (94%), India (68%), Uganda (64%), and Sierra Leone (51%).

**In addition, most survey participants were young, within the age range of 25-34 years (59%).** A significant proportion consisted of respondents under 25 (27%), indicating a substantial representation of the younger demographic. A small percentage of respondents were categorised as middle-aged, with 2% falling within the 45-54 age bracket. <2% comprised respondents aged 55 years and above and those that preferred most their age. To offer a critical comparison, we analysed all the data, including that submitted by older respondents, although this data set was minimal.

### GENDER OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS



**71%**  
WOMEN



**1%**  
NON-BINARY



**26%**  
MEN

**2%**  
PREFER NOT TO SAY

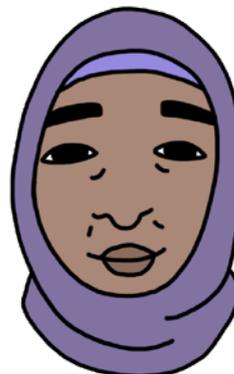
### AGE DISTRIBUTION OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS

**27%**  
UNDER 25

**59%**  
25-34 YEARS OLD

**11%**  
35-44 YEARS OLD

**2%**  
45-54 YEARS OLD



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**RESTLESS  
DEVELOPMENT**  
POWERED BY YOUNG PEOPLE

SUPPORTED BY

 PORTICUS