



WHRDHUB
WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS HUB

2025

ANNUAL REPORT

**PROTECTING THE WOMEN
WHO DEFEND RIGHTS**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Message from The Board Chair	3
About the Hub.....	5
Who We Are.....	5
Our Vision	5
Our Mission	5
Our Approach.....	5
Why the work matters	8
Safety & Wellbeing.....	12
Livelihoods pillar-Ustawi	13
Femtorship.....	15
Movement Building	17
Communication	19
Institutional Building	21
Partnerships & Collaboration.....	22
Learning, Reflection & Adaptation	17
Challenges.....	24
Financial Overview	24
Looking Ahead: 2026 Priorities	25
1. Femtorship Pillar (Ushauri)	25
a) Deepening Femtorship and Intergenerational Learning.....	25
b) Strengthening Storytelling, Documentation, and Narrative Power	25
a) Scaling Movement Building and Cross-Movement Solidarity.....	26
b) Policy Advocacy and Strategic Engagement	26
3. Safety and security Pillar (Usalama)	26
a. Strengthening Feminist Collective Protection Systems for WHRDs (2026–2027).....	26
4) Livelihoods pillar (Ustawi)	26
a) Strengthening Livelihoods and Economic Resilience.....	26
5) Institutional building Pillar (Nguzo ya taasisi)	26
a) Strengthening WHRD Wellbeing and Sustained Feminist Practice	27
Appreciation	28

MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR

2025 was a defining year for the Women Human Rights Defenders Hub. Across Kenya and the region, Women Human Rights Defenders continued to navigate increasingly complex realities marked by shrinking civic space, escalating gender-based violence, economic uncertainty, and heightened digital and physical security threats.

Against this backdrop, the Hub remained steadfast in its commitment to ensuring that women defenders are not only protected but are able to sustain their activism and thrive. Throughout the year, we strengthened holistic protection systems that combined safety, wellbeing, livelihoods, femtorship, and movement building at the county, national and regional level.

We are particularly proud of the progress made in expanding wellbeing programming, strengthening intergenerational feminist leadership, deepening regional collaboration, and laying the foundation for economic resilience through our Livelihoods Pillar.

As a Board, we recognize that protecting women human rights defenders requires more than responding to crises. It requires investing in the long-term conditions that allow defenders to continue leading social transformation. This belief continues to guide our vision and strategic direction.

The period saw the board meet four times as stipulated in the governance manuals, offer strategic direction to the secretariat, ensured financial accountability through steering for three consecutive years, flawless and independent external audits, and Seamless transition and onboarding of two new board members.

The Hub successfully expanding grassroots protection and transnational advocacy through:

- ▶▶ **Global & Regional Influence:** Elevated the voices of women human rights defenders (WHRDs) through strategic advocacy and high-level participation at the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) and the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).
- ▶▶ **Grassroots Footprint:** Scaled localized protection, reaching over 2,000 women defenders across diverse and complex contexts through targeted, context-specific programs including trainings and network strengthening.
- ▶▶ **Bridging the Gap:** Successfully connected international policy spaces with on-the-ground realities, ensuring global decisions directly reinforced and strengthened frontline resilience.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

As we reflect on the past year, I am proud of the collective achievements that have strengthened the Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRD) Hub's role as a feminist platform for protection, organizing, and movement building. Despite an increasingly constrained civic space in Kenya, we have expanded our reach, deepened our programming, and strengthened systems of collective care and protection. Key milestones include the growth of our femtorship work across counties, enhanced rapid response and referral pathways for WHRDs at risk, strengthened livelihoods and wellbeing initiatives, and increased engagement in policy and advocacy spaces at national and regional levels.

These achievements have been made possible through the unwavering commitment of our staff, WHRD networks, and partners who continue to show up with courage, solidarity, and dedication. I extend my deepest appreciation to our teams across all counties, our Board, grassroots defenders, and our allies in feminist, human rights, and social justice movements. Your work has not only sustained the Hub but has also strengthened the broader ecosystem of WHRD protection and solidarity in the region.

This year has also offered important lessons. We have learned that protection must remain collective, adaptive, and rooted in everyday relationships of care and trust. We have seen the importance of investing not only in response systems, but also in prevention, wellbeing, and long-term movement resilience. At the same time, we have recognized the need to strengthen our internal systems, deepen intersectional inclusion, and continue evolving our approaches to match the shifting realities faced by WHRDs, particularly in moments of political transition and heightened risk.

Looking ahead, our strategic direction is clear: to deepen and scale our feminist collective protection model, strengthen movement infrastructure across counties, and invest in the sustainability and wellbeing of WHRDs as a foundation for long-term activism. We will continue to prioritize adaptive, flexible, and feminist ways of working that respond to emerging risks while building lasting systems of solidarity. As we move toward the 2027 electoral cycle, our commitment remains unwavering—to ensure that WHRDs are not only protected, but supported to thrive, lead, and transform their communities.

ABOUT THE HUB

Who We Are

The Women Human Rights Defenders Hub (The Hub) is a feminist initiative led by Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) who have been in the forefront advocating for rights, giving safety and support to women defenders in Kenya and the East African Region.

The Hub exists to secure the well-being of WHRDs and respond to the challenges they face in the course of their work. The Hub envisions a world in which basic rights, fundamental rights, and freedoms are universally recognized and respected by all.



OUR VISION

An empowered, just, and equitable society where women human rights defenders thrive to their full potential.



OUR MISSION

To amplify and enhance holistic protection programs that invest in femtorship and economic empowerment of networks of women human rights defenders.



OUR APPROACH

Our work is grounded in a feminist and intersectional approach that centers care, collective power, and long-term movement

building. Through this holistic programming, we recognize that protection is not only physical; it is emotional, social, and economic. The Hub engages through the following programmatic pillars:

- ✓ Safety & Security Pillar
- ✓ Wellbeing & Wellness Pillar
- ✓ Livelihoods Pillar
- ✓ Mentorship Pillar
- ✓ Movement Building Pillar

STRATEGIES APPLIED IN 2025



✓ Safety and security trainings that strengthened defenders' capacity to respond to physical, digital, and operational risks, including risk assessment, threat analysis, and the development of context-specific safety and mitigation plans.

- ✓ Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) trainings to enhance rights awareness, advocacy skills, and accountability-centered engagement.
 - ✓ Wellbeing and wellness clinics that provided safe spaces for psychosocial support, healing, reflection, collective care, and conversations addressing burnout, trauma, and emotional exhaustion within activist spaces.
 - ✓ Intergenerational cafés and femtorship spaces that fostered knowledge transfer, feminist leadership, and solidarity between emerging and experienced defenders.
 - ✓ Collective dialogues and movement-building convenings that strengthened collaboration, peer support, and coordinated advocacy among WHRDs and allied actors.
- 2025 at a Glance (County coverage map, Infographic, Photos).

In 2025, The Hub advanced its mission to protect those who protect others by delivering an integrated, intersectional safety and sustainability ecosystem that directly reached over 2,000 Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs).

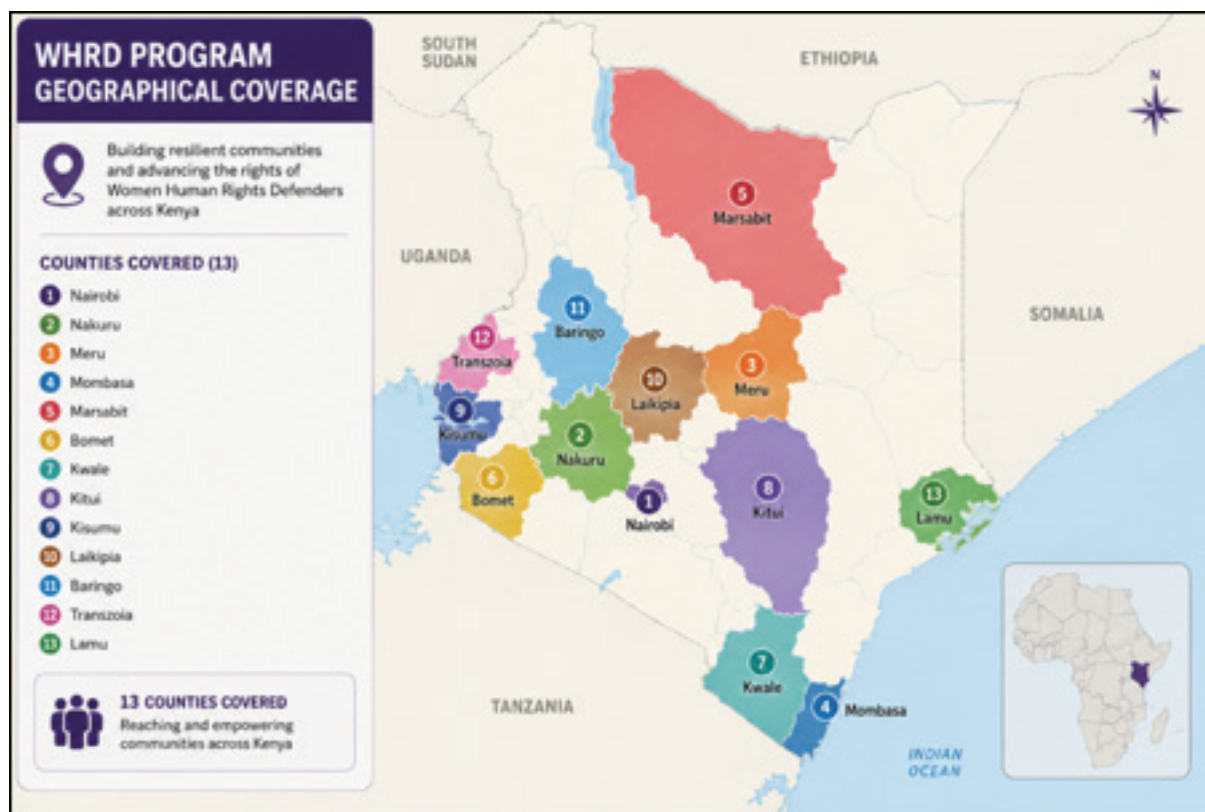
Recognizing that frontline activism cannot survive on reactive measures alone, The Hub successfully bridged the gap between physical protection and long-term resilience. By conducting 4 targeted safety and security trainings, which integrated legal literacy and digital defense, alongside 4 dedicated wellbeing and trauma-informed psychosocial sessions,

the organization directly combated acute activist burnout. Concurrently, The Hub secured the future of the movement by launching the groundwork for the Livelihoods Sustainability Pillar to combat the economic marginalization of women defenders while delivering 2 strategic femtorship fellowships to foster seamless intergenerational leadership. Additionally, amplified by 3 strengthened strategic partnerships that unlocked vital community and policy dialogues, The Hub's 2025 interventions successfully shifted the paradigm from mere survival to a thriving, self-sustaining, and fortified feminist movement.

WHRD PROGRAM IMPACT DASHBOARD		
500 WHRDs reached directly and over 2000+ WHRDs reached indirectly Resulted in expanding access to protection resources, knowledge, solidarity networks, and advocacy opportunities, enhancing defenders' capacity to safely and effectively advance human rights and gender justice agendas	150 femtorship participants strengthened their leadership skills, increased confidence, enhanced well-being, and improved access to peer support networks. This investment in feminist leadership development contributed to building a stronger pipeline of resilient women leaders capable of influencing community and national-level change processes.	9 community dialogues held: This created critical spaces for engagement between WHRDs, community members, and duty bearers, fostering greater awareness of human rights issues, reducing stigma against women defenders, and promoting collective action to address gender inequalities and protection concerns at the grassroots level.
440,000 online reached. This significantly amplified awareness of WHRD issues, gender justice, environmental rights, and civic participation, helping to shape public discourse and increase visibility of defenders' contributions and challenges.	1 donor round table held Where 10 funders participated. This strengthened organizational sustainability and resource diversification, reducing vulnerability to shrinking civic space and funding uncertainties.	5 strategic partnerships initiated MOUs signed The establishment of three new funders and 2 strategic partnerships enhanced collaboration, collective advocacy, and access to expertise, thereby increasing the program's influence and effectiveness

One annual status report developed and four knowledge products. This production generated critical evidence on the experiences, challenges, and contributions of WHRDs, informing advocacy efforts, policy engagement, programming, and movement-building initiatives. These resources also contributed to documenting trends and strengthening accountability among stakeholders.	13 counties reached Geographic expansion across 13 counties—Nairobi, Nakuru, Meru, Mombasa, Marsabit, Bomet, Kwale, Kitui, Kisumu, Laikipia, Baringo, Trans Nzoia, and Lamu—broadened the reach of protection and empowerment initiatives, ensuring that WHRDs from diverse contexts, including marginalized, rural, coastal, and frontier communities, could access support and participate in national conversations on rights, governance, climate justice, and gender equality.	Overall outcome: Collectively, these achievements contributed to a stronger, more connected, and more resilient ecosystem of Women Human Rights Defenders in Kenya, characterized by enhanced leadership, increased public visibility, stronger community support, improved evidence generation, expanded partnerships, and greater organizational sustainability. The program laid a foundation for long-term feminist movement building and strengthened the capacity of WHRDs to influence social transformation, policy change, and accountability processes at local, county, and national levels.
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2,000+ Women Human Rights Defenders reached, 250 supported through femtorship, and 30 community dialogues facilitated, generating an online reach of 440,000 people. The program strengthened sustainability through engagement with 13 donors, establishment of 3 strategic partnerships, production of 1 annual status report, 4 knowledge products developed and expansion of Hubs work across 13 counties of Nairobi, Nakuru, Meru, Mombasa, Marsabit, Bomet, Kwale, Kitui, Kisumu, Laikipia, Baringo, Transzoia and lamu



Counties covered in 2025 through different projects

2025 Context & Why the Work Matters

The operating environment for Women Human Rights Defenders in 2025 remained complex and, in many cases, increasingly restrictive. Defenders faced heightened risks, including threats to their safety, targeted harassment, and limited access to sustainable resources. Some of the risks included

1. Femicide and the national response

Kenya entered 2025 in the shadow of a deepening femicide emergency. In 2024, at least 170 women were killed, the highest annual toll on record, representing a 79% increase from the 95 cases recorded in 2023. Between September and November 2024 alone, law enforcement recorded 97 femicide cases, averaging more than one woman killed every day.

Data from the National Police Service and the National Crime Research Centre show that between January and March 2025 alone, 129 women were killed, 43 in January, 42 in February, and 44 in March. Half of the murders were linked to domestic disputes,

and women aged 18 to 35 formed the largest demographic of victims, making up 59% of all recorded femicide cases.

In direct response to public pressure, on 10 January 2025, President William Ruto appointed a 42-member task force to address the high rates of femicide and gender-based violence across the country. The taskforce was mandated to assess legal and policy gaps, identify trends and hotspots, and recommend measures to strengthen institutional responses to GBV and femicide. The task force was chaired by former Deputy Chief Justice Nancy Baraza. In April 2025, the Kenyan Judiciary also launched a specialized task force on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, with Chief Justice Martha Koome calling for a justice system that “listens, responds, and restores dignity to survivors.” A key delivery under this initiative is the rollout of specialized Gender Justice Courts, first piloted in Shanzu in 2022 and now expanded to 12 courts across the country.

Despite these steps, women's rights activists ended the year demanding the immediate release and implementation of the GBV Taskforce's report, with frustration mounting over delays and calls for femicide to be recognized as a distinct crime treated with urgency.

Source: *Nation Africa – Femicide 2025: A Year of Bloodshed, Taskforces and Broken Promises* |



Missing Perspectives – Kenya's Femicide Taskforce

Women Human Rights Defenders in the streets of Nairobi demanding action against the rising femicide crisis

2. The Gen Z Protests & the State's Response to Youth Activism

2025 marked the continuation of Kenya's most significant youth-led protest movement in a generation. In June 2025, one year after the initial Gen Z protests of June 2024, Kenyans returned to the streets in their thousands, demanding better governance, an end to the rising cost of living, and accountability for the killings and enforced disappearances that had gone unaddressed in the year prior. The protests were led once again by young human rights defenders who refused to accept silence as a substitute for justice. Amnesty International documented that across both protest cycles, excessive use of force by security agencies resulted in at

least 128 deaths, 3,000 arrests, and 83 enforced disappearances since June 2024.

The state's response, however, did not stop at physical force. Coordinated digital campaigns, driven by state-sponsored trolls, deployed online threats, abusive language, smearing, and targeted disinformation to silence young activists and discredit their work.

Source: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/11/kenyan-weaponized-social-media-and-digital-tools-to-suppress-gen-z-protests/>



Gen Z on the streets of Nairobi continuing the fight for justice, accountability, and better governance

3. Shrinking Civic Space & the Direct Targeting of Women Human Rights Defenders

The operating environment for WHRDs in Kenya in 2025 was not merely difficult; it was actively hostile. The CIVICUS Monitor downgraded Kenya's civic space rating to "repressed" following the violent crackdown on protesters. The Kenya National Commission on Human Rights reported at least 60 people killed by 31 October 2024 and 82 cases of enforced or involuntary disappearances by the end of December 2024, with bodies of missing people surfacing in forests, abandoned quarries, rivers, and mortuaries, some showing signs of torture and mutilation.

Civil society groups raised alarm over what they described as deliberate targeting of vocal WHRDs. In Nakuru, Youth Bila Noma co-founder Maimuna Munyi reported that HRDs were increasingly being profiled and questioned for demanding accountability from the government. Two women HRDs were arrested during the Saba Saba demonstrations in what was described as deliberate

intimidation. Human rights defender Richard Otieno was shot dead a few meters from his home in Molo.

In June 2025, women human rights defenders issued a statement demanding the release of Rose Njeri, a civic activist arrested after she created a digital platform for citizens to email Parliament about the Finance Bill. Njeri was held for 90 hours before being brought to court. It was noted that her treatment mirrored that of other WHRDs, including Martha Karua, Lynn Ngugi, Gloria Kimani, and Ugandan activist Agather Atuhaire, who were ill-treated while engaging in constitutionally protected advocacy.

The enactment of the Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes (Amendment) Act in October 2025, signed by President Ruto despite mounting civil society opposition, has given the state even greater power to monitor, silence, and potentially endanger citizens who criticize the government online. Rights defenders have since gone to court to challenge its constitutionality.

Source: Standard Media – Civic Space 2025
CIVICUS – Civic Freedoms Report

Why the work matters

The crises that documented the femicide epidemic, the violent suppression of protest, the legal harassment of defenders, and the weaponization of digital platforms were not background events to the Hub's work in 2025. They were the direct operating conditions within which the women human rights defenders we support lived and worked.

WHRDs in Kenya in 2025 were simultaneously first responders and targets. They documented killings, provided support to GBV survivors, organized community mobilizations, and challenged institutional failures, while facing arrest, enforced disappearance, online smear campaigns, and sustained psychological pressure. Many carried this load without formal protection, consistent funding, or access to mental health support.

This reality shaped the Hub's work in three concrete ways.

It increased demand. As civic space contracted and physical and digital risks to defenders intensified, more WHRDs required urgent safety support, legal accompaniment, and psychosocial care. The volume and complexity of cases the Hub responded to in 2025 reflected the severity of the environment, not a widening of scope.

It raised the cost of doing the work.

Supporting defenders in a context where state repression is active and documented requires more than standard programme delivery. It requires rapid-response capacity, secure communications infrastructure, trauma-informed care, and the ability to adapt when defenders are forced to step back from public-facing roles.

It confirmed that sustainability cannot be separated from safety. A defender who is harassed into silence, arrested on fabricated charges, or pushed into burnout is not a programme gap ; she is evidence of a system that has not invested enough in her long-term protection.

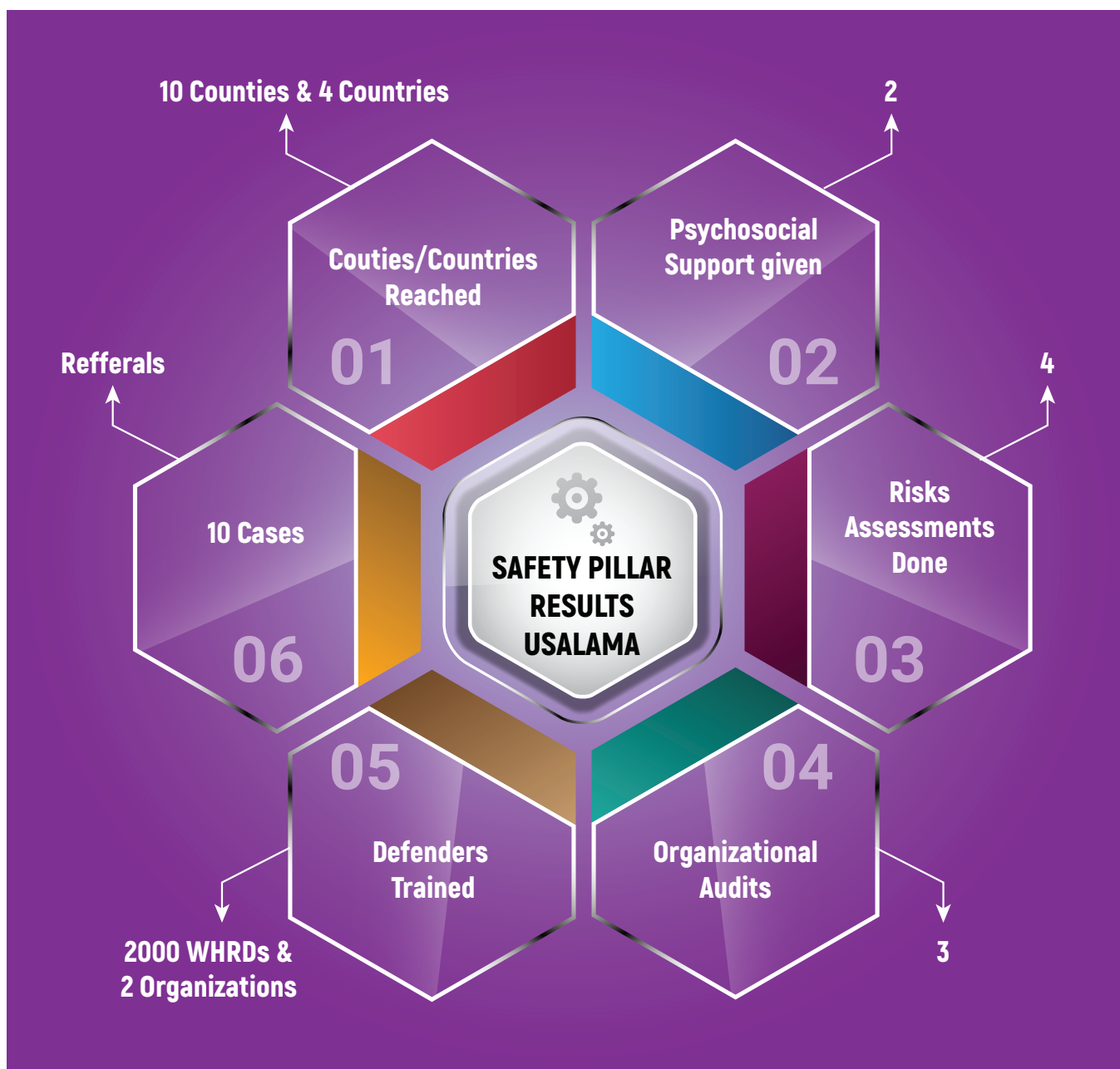
The Hub's model, which integrates safety, well-being, femtorship, and livelihoods, is a direct answer to what 2025 made undeniable: that WHRDs cannot sustain their work unless the conditions that sustain them are also treated as urgent.

Programmatic Work Safety & Wellbeing

In 2025, the Hub strengthened its integrated protection model to respond to the increasing physical, digital, legal, and psychosocial risks facing Women Human Rights Defenders. Recognizing that safety extends beyond immediate risk mitigation, the Hub invested in approaches that combined security capacity strengthening with wellbeing and collective care.

Through safety assessments, trainings, digital security awareness sessions, and trauma-informed wellbeing initiatives, defenders were equipped with practical tools to anticipate risks, strengthen resilience, and sustain their activism in increasingly restrictive environments.

Particular attention was given to Women Environmental Defenders and Indigenous Women Defenders, who continue to face heightened risks linked to environmental justice advocacy and land rights struggles.



Usalama highlights for the year
 Produced an annual status report on WHRDs to inform advocacy and programming
 Supported well-being initiatives promoting mental health and resilience
 Strengthened protection approaches for environmental and indigenous defenders

Impact Story

Collective Protection in Practice – Emergency Relocation Support

In 2025, the Safety pillar strengthened collective protection mechanisms by facilitating access to emergency support for Women Human Rights Defenders at heightened risk.

Through coordinated fund management and partner collaboration, the Hub supported defenders facing immediate threats, including harassment, intimidation, and unsafe working environments, to access safe relocation. One such defender, operating in a high-risk

context, was able to temporarily relocate to a safer environment, allowing her to stabilize, access support, and plan for the continuation of her work.

Beyond immediate safety, this intervention reduced the risk of harm, preserved the defender's ability to continue her advocacy, and reinforced trust in collective protection systems.

This support underscores a critical principle: movement sustainability depends not only on advocacy and visibility, but on the ability to respond quickly and effectively to protect those at greatest risk.



Safety and security sensitization forum in Nairobi for indigenous human rights defenders

Livelihoods pillar-Ustawi

In 2025, the Hub advanced its Livelihoods pillar as part of a growing commitment to supporting the economic resilience of Women Human Rights Defenders. Recognizing that financial insecurity remains a key vulnerability, the pillar focused on laying the foundation for sustainable and collective economic empowerment.

Efforts centered on mapping existing livelihood initiatives, identifying gaps, and exploring models for organizing WHRDs into structured, county-level networks. This approach aims to strengthen collaboration, resource sharing, and access to opportunities while linking economic empowerment to protection and sustainability.

Economic insecurity remains one of the most overlooked threats facing WHRDs. Many defenders operate without stable income while

simultaneously responding to community crises, providing support to survivors, and engaging in advocacy. Economic vulnerability often increases exposure to risk, limits participation in movement spaces, and contributes to burnout. By integrating livelihoods into its protection framework, the Hub recognizes

economic resilience as a core component of defender protection and sustainability.

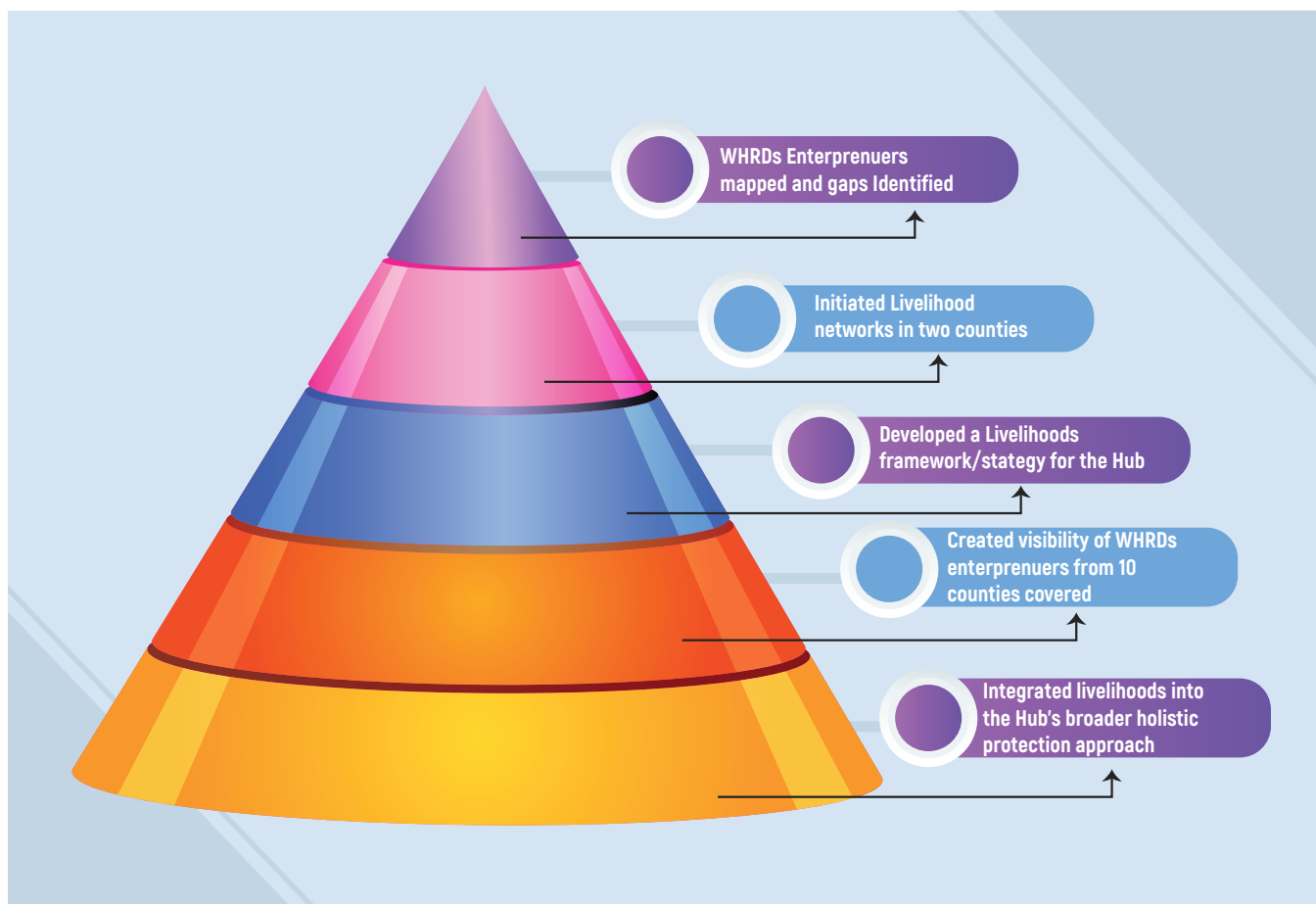
This work highlights an emerging priority for the Hub: ensuring that defenders are not only safe and supported but also economically resilient.



Display of bags produced through a network of women human rights defenders in Nairobi, supporting their economic empowerment.

Key achievements

- » Mapping of viable livelihood initiatives was conducted in three counties of Bomet, Mombasa and Marsabit respectively. The process entailed conducting focus group discussions with 45 women defenders who were able to highlight some of the Income Generating Activities being undertaken in their respective counties.
- » The livelihood initiatives being implemented vary depending on the context, these include: small-scale farming (maize, tea, vegetables, and bee-keeping), artisanship (beadwork), livestock (dairy, poultry rearing), and water vending. Some of these IGAs are being implemented collectively by groups of women defenders while others are by individuals.



IMPACT STORY

Ecological Justice Training – From Learning to Community Action (Nairobi County)

Through participation in a week-long ecological justice training under the Femtorship pillar, a Woman Human Rights Defender in Nairobi gained knowledge on environmental advocacy and community-based resilience.

Following the training, she initiated local environmental actions focused on restoring green spaces and promoting tree planting in schools and public areas. Her efforts have since expanded to support approximately 15 community groups engaged in awareness creation and environmental action.

Her work illustrates how targeted capacity strengthening can translate into tangible, community-level impact. It also highlights the growing role of Women Environmental Defenders in advancing climate justice while

strengthening community resilience.

Femtorship

In 2025, the Femtorship pillar strengthened intergenerational leadership, solidarity, and skills transfer among Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs). Through structured engagements, the Hub created safe feminist spaces where emerging defenders could learn directly from seasoned activists while building confidence and collective power.

These efforts contributed to stronger grassroots organizing, increased participation of young defenders in leadership spaces, and the nurturing of a growing pipeline of feminist leaders. The work also reinforced a critical insight: sustainable movements require intentional investment in relationships, mentorship, and shared leadership.

Key Achievements:

- » Six intergenerational dialogue forums (2 virtual and 4 physical) were convened in Mombasa, Nairobi, Bomet and Naku-

ru Counties, reaching over 250 WHRDs.

- ▶ Established peer-to-peer support groups to strengthen solidarity and emotional resilience. A total of 100 young women defenders across six counties (Meru, Nakuru, Kisumu, Kitui, Nairobi, and Mombasa) have been linked with seasoned women activists who have continually been involved in coaching in their respective human rights work.
- ▶ Delivered capacity strengthening in fundraising, documentation, and human rights programming. A total of 4 youth-led initiatives were supported in Nakuru, Mombasa, Nairobi and Kisumu counties.
- ▶ The Hub supported WHRDs to access fellowships, and leadership opportunities. Four young women defenders from Marsabit, Mombasa, Nairobi, and Kisumu counties were supported through the fellowship application process through written recommendation letters.
- ▶ Advanced storytelling initiatives, supporting defenders to document and share their experiences. Three trained story crafters in Kisumu, Kitui, and Mombasa counties have been supporting at least 3 other women defenders in documenting their stories of resilience.
- ▶ Strengthened partnerships with state and non-state actors at county and national levels. On a regular basis, both seasoned and young women defenders have been seconded to participate in various stakeholder forums at different levels. These have contributed to enhancing their capacities to deliver impactful human rights services.

Key results of the femtorship pillar

- ▶ Young WHRDs assuming leadership roles and able to mobilise resources for their initiatives
- ▶ WHRDs accessing fellowships.
- ▶ Increased participation in county advo-

cacy platforms.

- ▶ Improved documentation and storytelling skills.

Impact story

Intergenerational Dialogues – Strengthening Emerging Leadership (Bomet County)

“ I feel honoured to be a woman defender fighting for the rights of women and girls in my community. ”

During the 2025 intergenerational dialogues convened under the Femtorship pillar, emerging and seasoned Women Human Rights Defenders came together to share experiences, challenges, and strategies for advocacy. In Bomet County, one young defender entered these spaces with limited exposure to structured mentorship and leadership platforms.

Through these dialogues, she gained practical knowledge on key issues, including mental well-being and digital security, while also building relationships with experienced defenders. The space enabled her to reflect on her role, strengthen her confidence, and engage more actively in community advocacy.

Her experience reflects a broader shift observed across the programme: when intentional spaces for exchange are created, emerging defenders move from participation to leadership, strengthening continuity within the movement.

Storytelling for Advocacy – Building Narrative Power (Nairobi & Kisumu Counties)

“ After participating in the story writing training... I am now able to express myself more effectively in advocating for social change. ”

Under the Femtorship pillar, the Hub trained Women Human Rights Defenders as Trainers of Trainers (ToTs) in storytelling and documentation. This initiative aimed to strengthen the ability of defenders to capture and communicate their lived experiences.

Following the training, one participant began supporting other WHRDs to document their stories of change, guiding them through a reflective and structured storytelling process.

What started as a skills-building intervention evolved into a peer-led approach to documentation, with defenders mentoring each other across counties.

This initiative has contributed to a growing culture of storytelling within the movement, where WHRDs are not only advocates but also authors of their own narratives, strengthening visibility, learning, and collective memory.



WHRDs Training of Trainers on storytelling and documentation

Movement Building

The Movement Building pillar focused on strengthening collective power, solidarity, and coordinated advocacy among WHRDs at national, regional, and international levels. In a shrinking civic space, the Hub prioritized convening, alliance-building, and strategic engagement with human rights mechanisms.

Policy and Advocacy Influence

The Hub continued to strengthen its policy and advocacy influence by actively engaging in key national, regional, and local policy spaces focused on gender-based violence (GBV), human rights, and the protection of

Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs). At the national level, the Hub contributed to policy discussions through the submission of a memorandum to the Presidential Taskforce on Gender-Based Violence, ensuring that the experiences, safety concerns, and recommendations of WHRDs informed ongoing policy and legislative reform processes. The Hub also collaborated with Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition (WHRDIC) and other partners to issue a joint statement condemning transnational reprisals against WHRDs, amplifying calls for accountability and stronger protection mechanisms for defenders facing cross-border threats and intimidation.

The Hub further advanced advocacy efforts through participation in strategic convenings exploring universities as cities of protection for Human Rights Defenders, contributing to discussions on creating safe and enabling environments for defenders within academic institutions. Through its engagement with national duty bearers and county governments, the Hub facilitated dialogue on GBV prevention and response, as well as the safety, wellbeing, and protection of WHRDs.

These engagements strengthened relationships with policymakers and government actors, increased awareness of the unique risks faced by defenders, and promoted the integration of WHRD protection concerns into county and national policy frameworks. Collectively, these interventions enhanced the visibility of WHRD issues within policy spaces and contributed to advancing a more responsive and protective environment for women defenders and survivors of violence.

Through these efforts, WHRD voices were elevated in key advocacy spaces, cross-movement alliances were deepened, and recognition of defenders' issues increased among duty bearers and partners. The pillar also strengthened movement infrastructure and collective protection mechanisms, reinforcing the role of solidarity in sustaining activism.

Key Achievements:

- ▶ Supported WHRDs to participate in regional and international fora, including African human rights mechanisms and the commission on the status of Women
- ▶ Convened national and regional WHRD spaces to strengthen shared advocacy agendas with other WHRD consortia.
- ▶ Strengthened alliances with climate justice, indigenous, and feminist actors
- ▶ Engaged duty bearers, diplomatic actors, and donors to advance protection and resourcing

- ▶ Established and expanded a WHRD database to support coordination and referrals
- ▶ Facilitated emergency support, including safe relocation for at-risk defenders

Impact Story

Strengthening Regional Solidarity – The EA Protection Network

In 2025, the Hub deepened its role within the East Africa Protection Network, bringing together Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) from Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania to strengthen collective protection and regional solidarity.

Through this collaboration, the Hub co-convened the Annual East Africa Consortium meeting, creating a space for WHRDs across the region to share experiences, analyze risks, and align advocacy priorities in response to shrinking civic space. Building on this momentum, the Hub hosted a Joint Donor Round Table (DRT), bringing together 13 donors alongside WHRD networks and consortium partners.

The Donor Round Table marked a significant milestone. It provided a platform for direct dialogue between donors and WHRD-led organizations, shifting engagement from transactional funding conversations to strategic partnership and co-creation. As a result, partners committed to strengthening collaboration, including joint resource mobilization efforts, with the consortium successfully developing and submitting a joint proposal.

This initiative not only strengthened regional coordination but also reinforced a key lesson: sustainable protection for WHRDs requires collective action, shared resources, and long-term investment in movement infrastructure.



East Africa Protection Consortium meeting with WHRDs from Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania

Communication

In 2025, communication played a central role in amplifying WHRD voices, strengthening advocacy, and documenting the Hub's impact. Operating within a sensitive and often restrictive environment, the Hub adopted ethical, security-conscious, and trauma-informed approaches to storytelling.

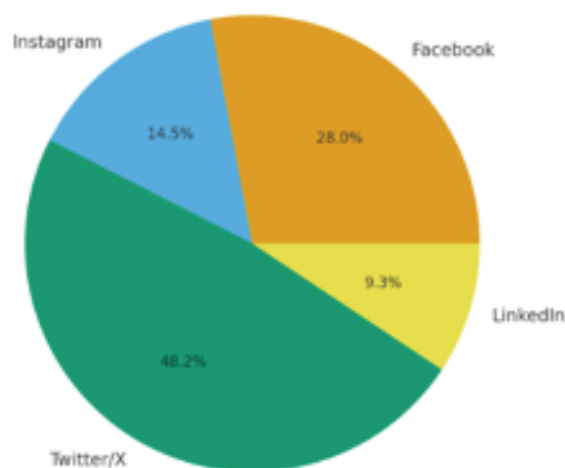
Communication efforts significantly increased visibility, public engagement, and recognition of WHRD leadership across multiple platforms. By documenting lived experiences and advocacy efforts, the Hub strengthened its positioning as both a movement actor and a thought leader.

Beyond increasing visibility, communications contributed to shaping public discourse on the protection and wellbeing of Women Human Rights Defenders. Through strategic storytelling, digital campaigns, and documentation, the Hub amplified defender voices, increased awareness of emerging risks, and strengthened public recognition of WHRD leadership.

Key Achievements:

- » Reached over 440,000 people across digital platforms through strategic content and campaigns
- » Documented over 30 community dialogues on GBV awareness and response
- » Amplified WHRD participation in county and national advocacy spaces
- » Produced high-impact storytelling products, including visual documentation and publications
- » Strengthened media engagement and partner visibility
- » Supported cross-country and regional documentation of programmes and convenings

Distribution of Social Media Reach (2025)



Indicator	Result
Social reach	Over 440,000 combined (Facebook >123k reach, Instagram 64k, Twitter/X 212k impressions, LinkedIn 41k impressions)
Stories produced	Documented 35-50 community dialogues on GBV awareness and survivor referrals Specific high-engagement wellbeing stories (Rooted in Courage launch, Mental Health Month, Wellness Clinic, Tigoni healing). Also stories across pillars (femtorship journeys, safety assessments, livelihoods, anti-femicide, movement building). PhotoBook highlights storytelling sessions and compiled narratives.
Videos produced	8-15 videos produced Event coverage (WHRD convenings, wellness clinic, exhibitions, and regional forums) generated multiple short videos/clips for social media.
Publications	15-20 publications produced Hub's Photobook (2024–2025) - Rooted in Courage (collection of WHRD stories, launched 2025) Training guidelines/manuals (safety-security-wellbeing), and donor/partner e-newsletter including photostories.

Media features	Media relations, amplification during political unrest/GenZ protests, anti-femicide campaigns, county marches. Regional/continental coverage (African Commission in Banjul, cross-country work). Digital Resilience Webinar and partnerships. Social media mentions (1,080+ on X) and donor visibility efforts indicated solid media pickup.
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Institutional Building

The Institutional Building pillar focused on strengthening the Hub's governance, management, and organizational resilience to ensure sustainable, high-quality support for WHRDs. The Hub prioritized institutional systems, capacity development, financial sustainability, and strategic partnerships to enhance accountability, efficiency, and visibility.

Through these efforts, the Hub strengthened internal structures, professionalized operations, and expanded its ability to deliver impactful programs. This pillar also enhanced strategic engagement with donors, partners, and networks, positioning the Hub as a leading WHRD organization nationally and regionally.

Governance strengthening:

During the reporting period, the organization continued to strengthen its governance systems to enhance accountability, strategic oversight, and institutional sustainability. The Board comprises members with diverse professional backgrounds and expertise in human rights, gender justice, governance, finance, legal affairs, community development, and organizational leadership, providing a strong foundation for informed decision-making.

The governance structure was further reinforced through clear delineation of roles and responsibilities between the Board and management, ensuring effective oversight

and operational independence. Key Board committees, including the Finance and Audit Committee, Programs and Strategy Committee, and Governance and Human Resources Committee, remained active in providing specialized guidance and monitoring organizational performance as well as extending support to individual members of staff assigned for coaching and guidance.

Through regular meetings and committee engagements, the Board made critical strategic decisions on organizational growth, resource mobilization, risk management, partnership development, and implementation of the strategic plan. These efforts contributed to improved governance effectiveness, strengthened institutional resilience, and enhanced the organization's ability to deliver on its mission and objectives.

Key Achievements:

- » Strengthened the Programs Department through recruitment of a Programmes Coordinator and an intern
- » Developed a comprehensive MERL plan to guide program implementation and measure long-term outcomes
- » Fully constituted and oriented a five-member board with pillar-specific oversight responsibilities
- » Hosted the 3rd Annual Donor Round Table and regional EAWHRD Consortium convening to enhance collaboration and strategic partnerships

- » Completed organizational and project audits for 2023–2024, demonstrating financial transparency and accountability
- » Secured funding through proposals, consultancies, and office hosting, ensuring diversified financial streams
- » Improved office infrastructure and data security, enhancing staff efficiency and well-being

Impact Story

Strengthening the Foundation – Building Systems for Sustainability

In 2025, the Hub took significant steps to strengthen its institutional foundation, reinforcing its commitment to accountability, transparency, and long-term sustainability.

A key milestone was the successful completion of the Hub’s first comprehensive institutional audit, which not only reviewed 2024 operations but also retrospectively covered 2023. This process provided critical insights into financial management, compliance, and organizational systems, strengthening donor confidence and internal accountability.

Alongside this, the Hub invested in developing and refining institutional policies and systems, creating clearer structures for program implementation, financial management, and governance. The full constitution and orientation of a diverse Board further enhanced strategic oversight, with regular board meetings and a joint board and staff retreat creating space for alignment, reflection, and long-term planning.

These efforts mark an important shift from a growing organization to a more structured, accountable, and resilient institution. They demonstrate that strong internal systems are not just administrative requirements but essential tools for sustaining impactful work and supporting Women Human Rights Defenders effectively.

Partnerships & Collaboration

In 2025, the Hub strengthened and expanded its partnerships as a core strategy for advancing protection, advocacy, and sustainability for Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs).

The year marked important growth in programmatic and funding partnerships, with new collaborations supporting the expansion of key areas of work, including safety, well-being, livelihoods, and movement building. These partnerships enabled the Hub to deepen its reach, respond to emerging needs, and pilot new areas such as livelihoods.

At the national and county levels, the Hub strengthened engagement with duty bearers and constitutional bodies, creating pathways for dialogue, collaboration, and increased recognition of WHRDs’ work. These engagements contributed to more enabling environments and strengthened accountability mechanisms.

The Hub also expanded technical partnerships, including collaborations on training and capacity strengthening. For example, partnerships with institutions such as Coady Institute and academic actors created opportunities for knowledge exchange, joint learning, and skills development, including in areas such as safety and security.

At the movement level, the Hub continued to build and sustain alliances with regional and international networks, climate justice actors, and feminist organizations. These collaborations strengthened collective advocacy, solidarity, and shared strategies in response to a shrinking civic space.

Together, these partnerships reflect a holistic and ecosystem-based approach, where protection, learning, and movement building are strengthened through collaboration.



The Hub strengthened strategic partnerships through engagement with funding partners, technical collaborators, movement actors, county governments, and national institutions. These partnerships enhanced resource mobilization, technical capacity, policy influence, protection mechanisms for women human rights defenders, and coordinated responses to gender-based violence and civic space challenges. Collaboration with county governments and national duty bearers further strengthened accountability, advocacy, and the localization of human rights and gender equality commitments.

Learning, Reflection & Adaptation

Throughout 2025, the Hub continued to reflect on its approaches and adapt its programming in response to emerging needs and a rapidly shifting operating environment.

A key learning was the importance of localized and context-specific organizing. Experiences from county-level engagements highlighted the need to strengthen sub-county networks, enabling WHRDs to organize

within familiar contexts and build trust-based relationships that support sustained collective action.

The Hub also recognized the value of peer-to-peer learning and femtorship as effective strategies for building leadership and strengthening community-based advocacy. Femtorship approaches demonstrated that knowledge transfer is most impactful when it is continuous, relational, and grounded in lived experience.

Additionally, the integration of well-being, safety, and livelihoods reinforced the need for a holistic model of support. Protecting defenders requires going beyond immediate risk mitigation to address long-term sustainability, including mental health and economic resilience.

These reflections continue to shape the Hub's approach, ensuring that programming remains responsive, grounded, and aligned with the realities of WHRDs.

Challenges

The operating environment in 2025 presented significant challenges that affected both Women Human Rights Defenders and the Hub's programming.

Shrinking civic space remained a major concern, characterized by increased surveillance, arbitrary arrests, judicial harassment, and restrictions on peaceful assembly. These conditions not only heightened risks for defenders but also limited the scale and visibility of some programme activities.

Resource constraints also affected programme reach and duration, limiting the number of WHRDs who could be engaged despite growing demand for support. In some cases, this meant difficult decisions around prioritization.

Additionally, the nature of the work, particularly documentation of gender-based violence and high-risk cases, placed emotional strain on staff and required careful, trauma-informed approaches.

Financial Overview

	Donor	Grant 2025	Expenditure 2025	Balance@ Dec 2025	Burn rate	Notes
1	11th Hour	8,481,964.00	2,623,920.70	5,858,043.30	31%	Project Ends March 2026
2	AJWS	2,570,000.00	2,526,677.20	43,322.80	98%	Project Ends March 2026
3	CIV Fund	1,534,629.00	1,534,629.00	191,375.64	100%	Complete assignment
4	CHRIPS / Consultancy	710,719.00	632,683.10	147,193.90	89%	Balance for Income filling for '25
5	FIDDH	3,542,642.00	669,900.00	2,872,742.00	19%	Protection Money Dec 2025 to March 2026
6	Ford Foundation	17,475,370.00	8,063,265.70	9,552,904.30	46%	Funds Received for period Aug '25 to July '26
7	HIVOS	958,677.00	958,677.00	921,932.25	100%	Project Completed
8	Individual Donors	88,066.00	88,066.00	-	100%	Project Completed
9	KIOS	3,006,412.00	3,468,383.00	(461,971.00)	115%	Project Completed. Ksh. 461,971.00 withheld to be released after audit
10	PWC Support	60,000.00	60,000.00	60,000.00	100%	Project Completed
11	Patra Research	180,899.00	180,899.00	180,899.00	100%	Project Completed
12	UAF Protection	1,280,000.00	-	1,280,000.00	0%	Money received in December

13	UNDP Environment	3,869,700.00	1,868,950.50	2,000,749.50	48%	Project End Date June '26
14	UNDP GBV	2,442,303.00	2,397,151.70	45,151.30	98%	Project Completed
15	We Effect	1,772,573.00	832,769.80	939,803.20	47%	Funds received for period Dec - March '26
16	Wellsprings Foundation	11,657,671.00	5,540,127.24	6,117,543.76	48%	Funds Received for period Aug '25 to July '26
	Total	59,631,625.00				

Security considerations further influenced programme implementation, requiring adjustments to timelines, formats, and communication strategies to ensure the safety of participants. Despite these challenges, the Hub remained adaptive, continuing to deliver impactful programming while prioritizing the safety and wellbeing of WHRDs.

2025 Risk management table both WH

Challenge	Impact	Response
Shrinking civic space	Increased risk to WHRDs	Enhanced security protocols
Funding constraints	Limited reach of Hub's work	Diversified fundraising
Staff wellbeing	Burnout risks	Wellness support/flexi working hours
Digital threats	Security concerns	Digital security training/fundraised for organisational security enhancement

Looking Ahead: 2026 Priorities

As the political and civic environment in Kenya and the wider region continues to evolve, the Hub remains firmly committed to strengthening holistic, responsive, and survivor-centred support systems for Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs). The year 2026 presents both heightened risks and critical opportunities to consolidate gains, deepen impact, and strengthen the sustainability of WHRD movements.

1. Femtorship Pillar (Ushauri)

a) Deepening Femtorship and Intergenerational Learning

In 2026, the Hub will prioritize the expansion and institutionalization of its femtorship programming. This will include structured matching of femtors and femtees, strengthening onboarding and accompaniment pro-

cesses, and developing standardized guidance to ensure consistency, safety, and quality of engagement. The Hub will also expand inter-generational learning spaces across counties, fostering knowledge exchange, solidarity, and leadership development among WHRDs at different stages of activism.

b) Strengthening Storytelling, Documentation, and Narrative Power

The Hub will invest in strengthening peer-led storytelling and documentation as a key pillar of movement building and protection. This will involve enhancing WHRD-led content production, strengthening ethical and secure documentation practices, and amplifying lived experiences through trusted platforms. Special focus will be placed on documenting reprisals, including transnational and digital threats, to strengthen advocacy and early warning systems.

2. Movement Building Pillar (Harakati)

a) Scaling Movement Building and Cross-Movement Solidarity

Movement building will be expanded through deeper sub-national organizing across priority counties and strengthened coordination among WHRD networks. The Hub will also deepen alliances across intersecting movements, particularly climate justice, land rights, and digital safety. Engagement with regional and international human rights mechanisms will be strengthened to ensure WHRD voices are reflected in broader policy and accountability spaces.

b) Policy Advocacy and Strategic Engagement

The Hub will continue to engage strategically with duty bearers at county, national, and regional levels to influence policies affecting WHRDs and civic space. This will include participation in relevant consultations, contribution to policy dialogues, and engagement with regional and international human rights mechanisms. The Hub will prioritize translating WHRD lived experiences into actionable policy influence and accountability frameworks.

3. Safety and security Pillar (Usalama)

a. Strengthening Feminist Collective Protection Systems for WHRDs (2026–2027)

In response to the increasingly constrained civic space in Kenya and the wider region, and in preparation for the heightened risks associated with the 2027 electoral cycle in Kenya, the Hub will prioritize strengthening protection mechanisms for Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) through its Feminist Collective Protection Model. This model is grounded in the understanding that WHRDs are safest when they are embedded in strong networks, resilient organizations, and collective systems of care, solidarity, and protection, rather than relying on individual security approaches alone.

The model advances a shift from reactive protection to a holistic and preventive approach that addresses both immediate risks and the

structural conditions that produce insecurity. In 2026, the Hub will focus on strengthening referral pathways for legal, psychosocial, and security support, and improving organisational digital safety infrastructure. These efforts aim to ensure timely, coordinated, and context-responsive protection for WHRDs facing risks and reprisals, while also strengthening long-term movement resilience to sustain activism and organizing in an increasingly volatile civic space.

4) Livelihoods pillar (Ustawi)

a) Strengthening Livelihoods and Economic Resilience

The Hub will continue to advance its Livelihoods pillar with a focus on strengthening county-level networks and promoting collective economic organizing models. This includes deepening solidarity-based economic initiatives, strengthening savings and support systems, and integrating financial resilience into broader protection strategies. The aim is to reduce vulnerability and enhance the sustainability of WHRD engagement in civic space.

5) Institutional building Pillar (Nguzo ya taasisi)

a) Resource Mobilization and Financial Sustainability

In response to a constrained and increasingly unpredictable funding landscape, resource mobilization will remain a strategic priority for the Hub in 2026. The Hub will pursue a deliberate shift toward a more diversified, resilient, and values-aligned funding base, including strengthening engagement with strategic partners, feminist funds, and long-term allies committed to WHRD protection and movement building. Priority will be placed on securing flexible, multi-year funding that can sustain core functions such as protection, rapid response, wellbeing, and organizing infrastructure, rather than short-term project-based support.

In addition, the Hub will strengthen its positioning as a trusted feminist platform for coordination, accompaniment, and protec-

tion of Women Human Rights Defenders. This will include deepening visibility of its impact, strengthening donor stewardship, and building stronger alignment between funding streams and the realities of WHRD needs, particularly in contexts of escalating risk and shrinking civic space in Kenya.

b) Strengthening Internal Systems and Adaptive Feminist Governance

The Hub will continue to invest in strengthening its internal governance, coordination, and learning systems to ensure effective, accountable, and responsive delivery across all programmatic pillars. This will include deepening collective and participatory decision-making structures, strengthening transparency and accountability mechanisms, and enhancing coordination across teams and counties.

A key focus will also be the strengthening of monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning (MEAL) systems to better capture both quantitative results and qualitative feminist change, including wellbeing, protection outcomes, and movement strengthening. The Hub will further prioritize adaptive governance approaches that enable real-time learning, flexibility, and rapid response to emerging risks and opportunities, ensuring that institutional systems remain aligned with the evolving needs of WHRDs and the broader movement.

6) Wellbeing Pillar (Jitunze)

a) Strengthening WHRD Wellbeing and Sustained Feminist Practice

In recognition that sustainable activism depends on the wellbeing of Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs), the Hub will prioritize strengthening holistic wellbeing systems as a core pillar of its 2026 work. This priority is grounded in the understanding that wellbeing is both a protection strategy and a movement-building necessity, particularly in the context of increasing pressure, burnout, and exposure to risk within constrained civic spaces in Kenya. The Hub will therefore advance a feminist approach to wellbeing that centers collective care, emotional resilience, and sustainable organizing practices.

In 2026, the Hub will focus on integrating structured psychosocial support, peer wellbeing circles, and healing-centered practices into all programmatic work, ensuring that care is not treated as an add-on but as an essential part of movement infrastructure. This will include strengthening referral pathways for mental health support, building facilitator capacity for trauma-informed engagement, and promoting rest, reflection, and care practices within the Hub and in the WHRD networks. By embedding wellbeing into organizing structures, the Hub seeks to reduce burnout, strengthen retention of defenders, and ensure that WHRDs are able to sustain their activism and leadership over time, including in the lead-up to the 2027 electoral cycle.

Appreciation

2025 has demonstrated the power of collective action, resilience, and strategic collaboration. Through the Hub's programmes, Femtorship, Movement Building, Safety & Wellbeing, Communication, and Livelihoods, Women Human Rights Defenders have grown in leadership, strengthened their networks, and increased their visibility and impact.

The Hub extends heartfelt appreciation to all those who contributed to a successful 2025.

- ▶▶ Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs): Your courage, resilience, and dedication remain the heartbeat of our work. The Hub is inspired daily by your commitment to justice, equality, and collective action.
- ▶▶ Board and Secretariat: Your professionalism, innovation, and unwavering commitment have enabled the Hub to deliver impactful programmes despite challenging civic and political contexts.
- ▶▶ Partners and Collaborators: Funders, technical partners, and networks, your trust, expertise, and resources have strengthened our ability to respond to

emerging challenges, build capacity, and amplify WHRD voices. Special recognition to our funding partners in the year including, Wellspring Philanthropic Fund, Ford Foundation, 11th Hour, UNDP, AJWS and We Effect.

- ▶▶ Community Stakeholders and Duty Bearers: Thank you for engaging in dialogue, supporting collaborative initiatives, and fostering environments that recognize and uphold the rights of WHRDs.

Together, you have made the successes of 2025 possible, and your support continues to strengthen the Hub as a centre of learning, solidarity, and protection for women defenders across Kenya and the region.

As we look to 2026, the Hub remains committed to sustaining and expanding these efforts, ensuring that WHRDs are not only protected but empowered to lead change, amplify their voices, and shape a more just and equitable society. Together, we move forward, resilient, connected, and unstoppable.



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