

JOURNEY *of* CHANGE

Four Young Leaders, One Shared Path
of Courage, Action, and Hope.



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AYA BACKGROUND

What is AYA?
Why youth voices matter
AYA's vision and values

JOURNEY *of* CHANGE

Sa Mao, Nanda, Vanna, Chaw

ACTION TAKEN

Lao, Myanmar Peace
Cambodia GBV,
Indonesia
Myanmar Mandalay

PARTNER ACKNOWLEDGEE

Across the region, young people aren't waiting for change – they are **building it through solidarity, creativity, and compassion.**

Across Southeast Asia, young people are rising — not waiting for a seat at the table, but building their own pathways to change.

The AYA initiative creates spaces for young leaders to speak, organize, and spark change in their communities.



This book follows the journeys of four young leaders whose courage shaped new possibilities for peace, inclusion, and community-led change.



What is AYA?

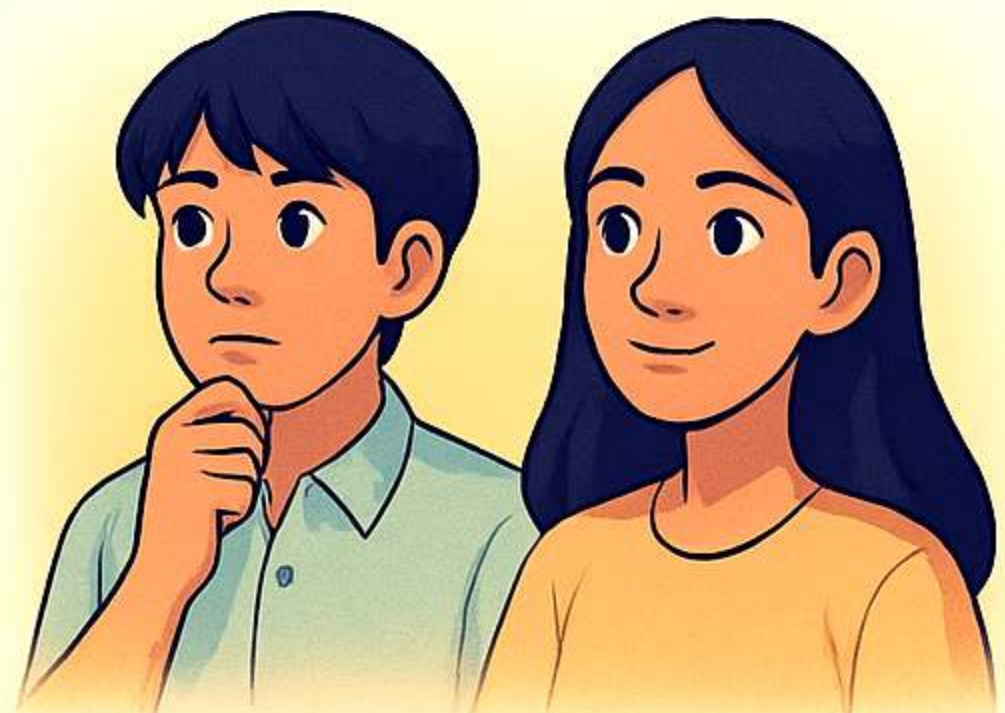
The Asia Young People for Action (AYA) initiative fosters peer-to-peer learning, transformative experiences, and collective action on structural peace-related issues.



Across Southeast Asia, struggles for power and resources often lead to human rights abuses, labor exploitation, and environmental degradation.



Yet young people are frequently excluded from decision-making due to hierarchical and patriarchal structures.



AYA was created to shift this reality – by opening space for youth voices.

How AYA Creates Change



The AYA initiative empowers young leaders to reimagine possibilities, build confidence, and enhance their capabilities to effect meaningful change.

AYA promotes feminist leadership and strengthens regional cooperation.



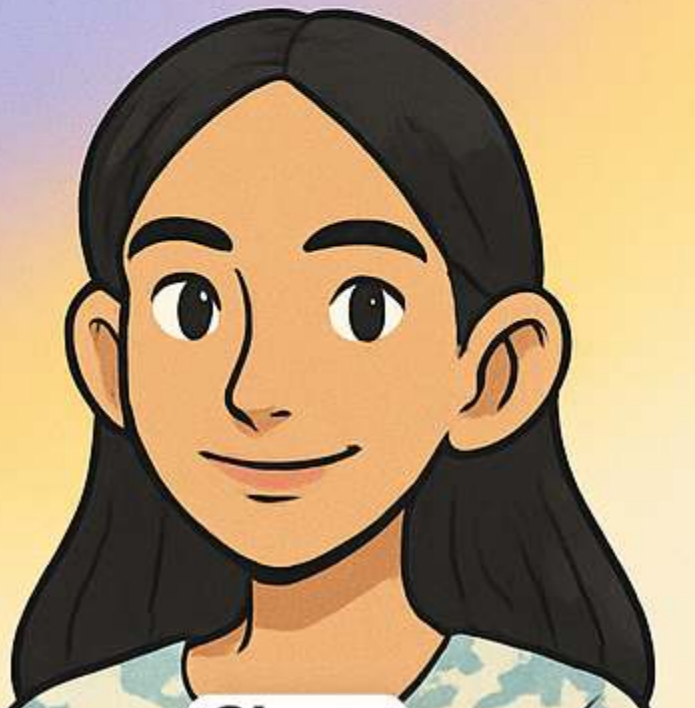
Through skill-building workshops, collaborative projects, and participation in regional and global forums, AYA supports young people in tackling critical challenges.



The Asia Young People for Action (AYA) initiative is supported by the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC). Guided by the Quaker belief in the divine light within each person, AFSC works with people of all faiths and backgrounds to challenge unjust systems and promote lasting peace.

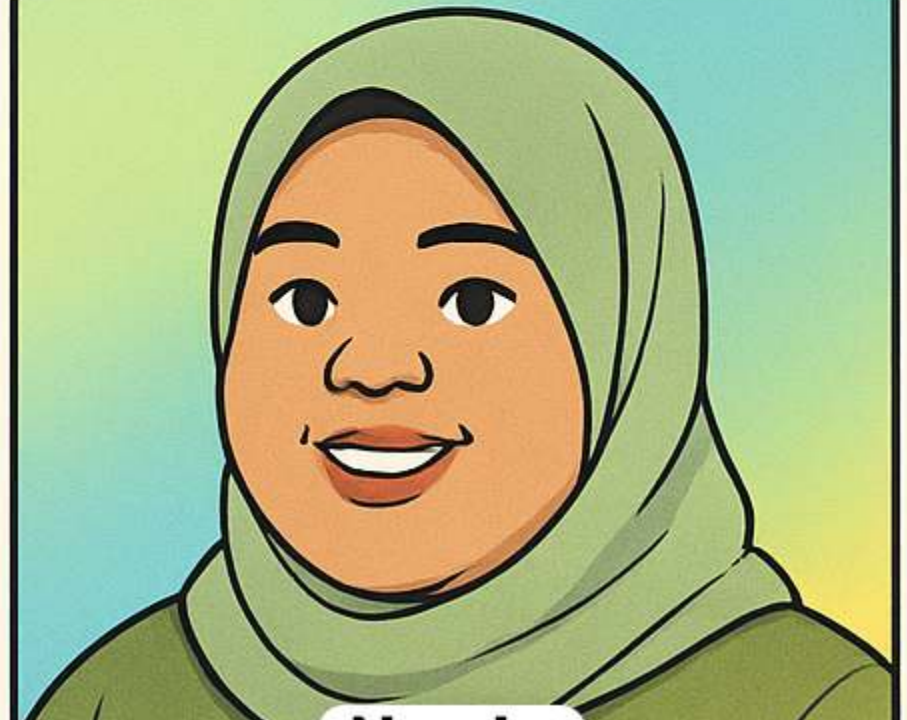


Journey of Change



Chaw

I thought fear made me small – but AYA taught me courage is something we grow.



Nanda

Through AYA, I found a safe space – and the confidence to use my voice.



Sa Mao

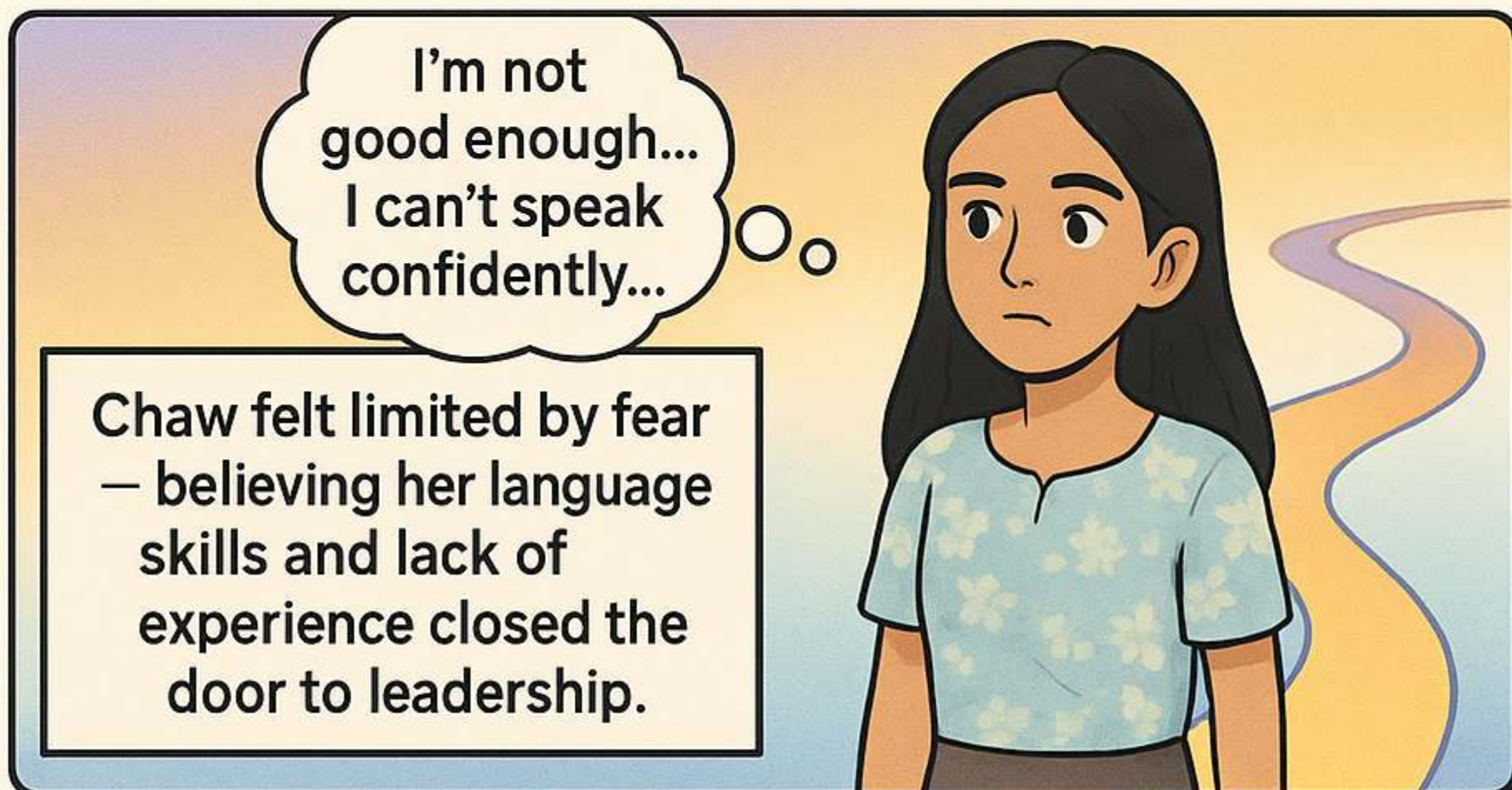
As a queer Cham youth, I wanted a platform... AYA made me feel seen.



Vanna

Leadership wasn't about being loud – it was about being real.

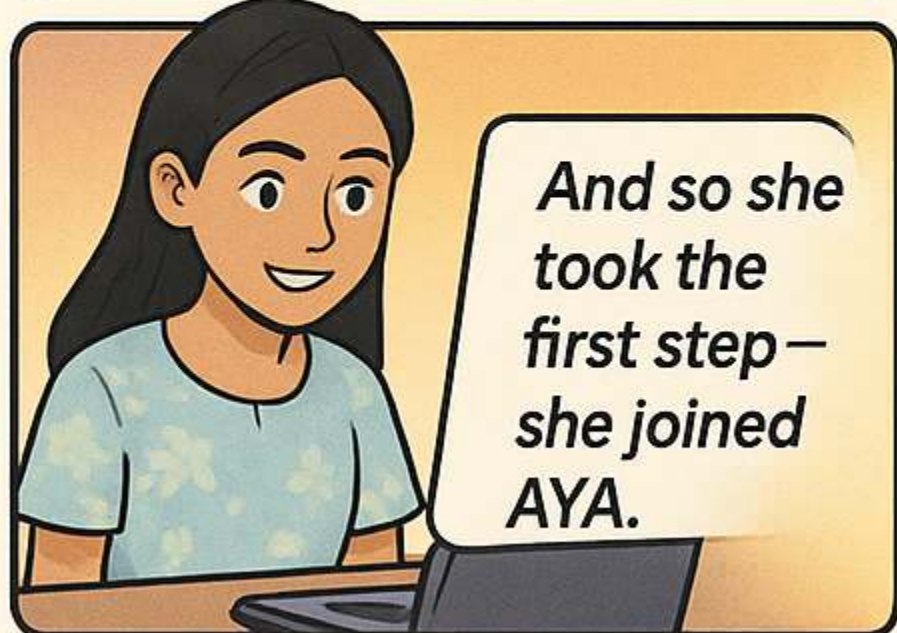
Chaw's Journey Begins



Chaw felt limited by fear — believing her language skills and lack of experience closed the door to leadership.

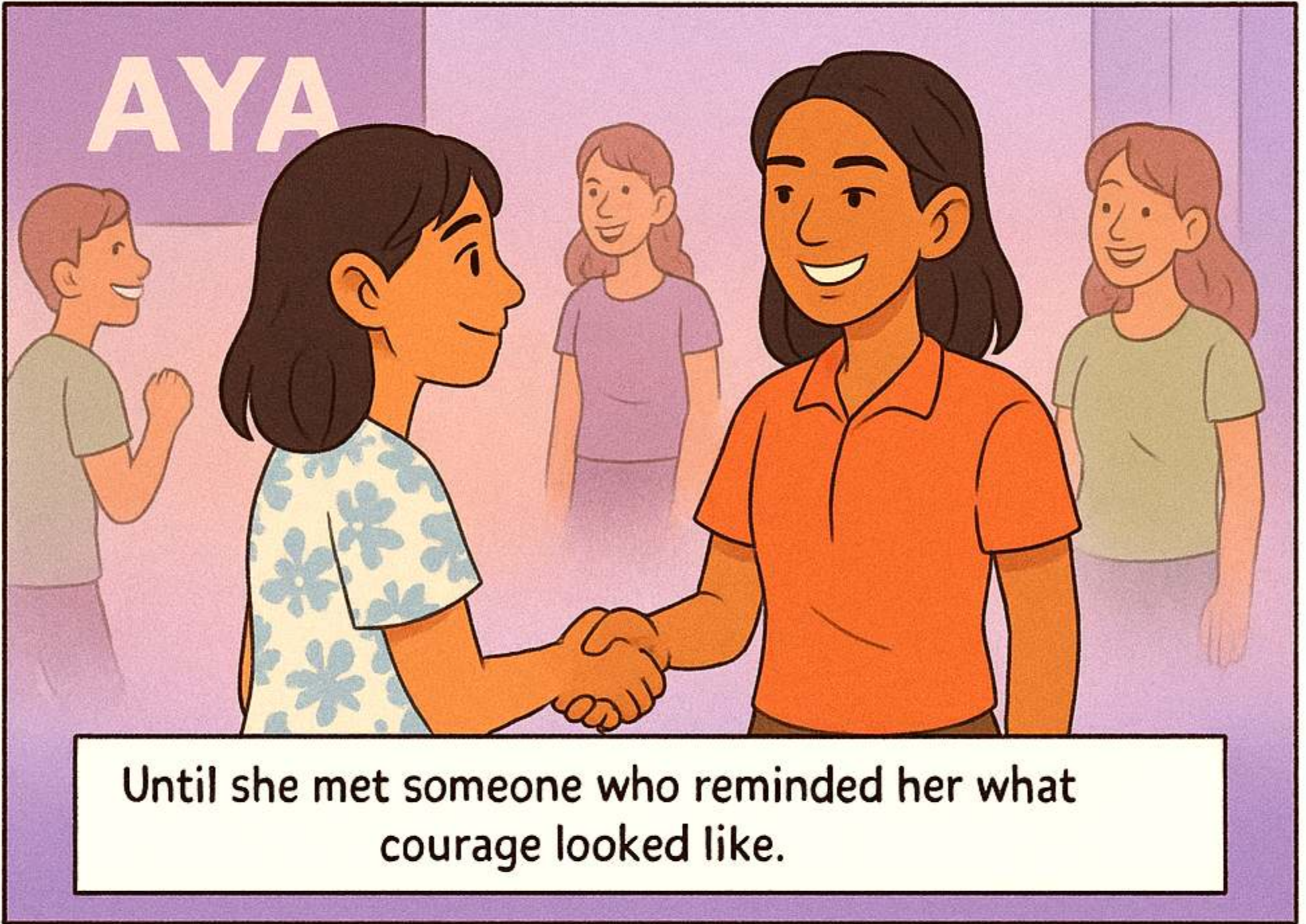


But meeting Win, an AYA alumna, changed something inside her.





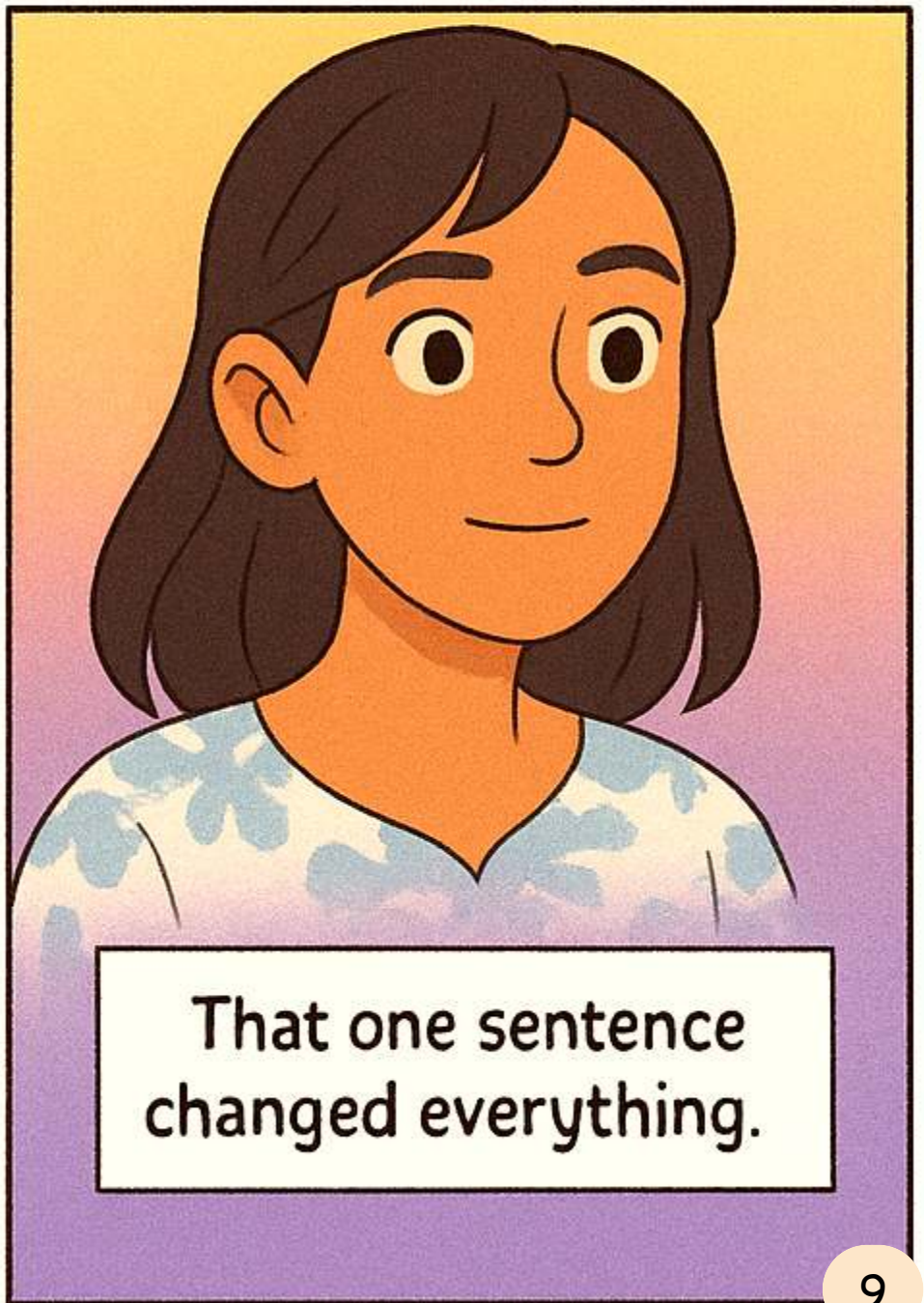
THE TURNING POINT



Until she met someone who reminded her what courage looked like.

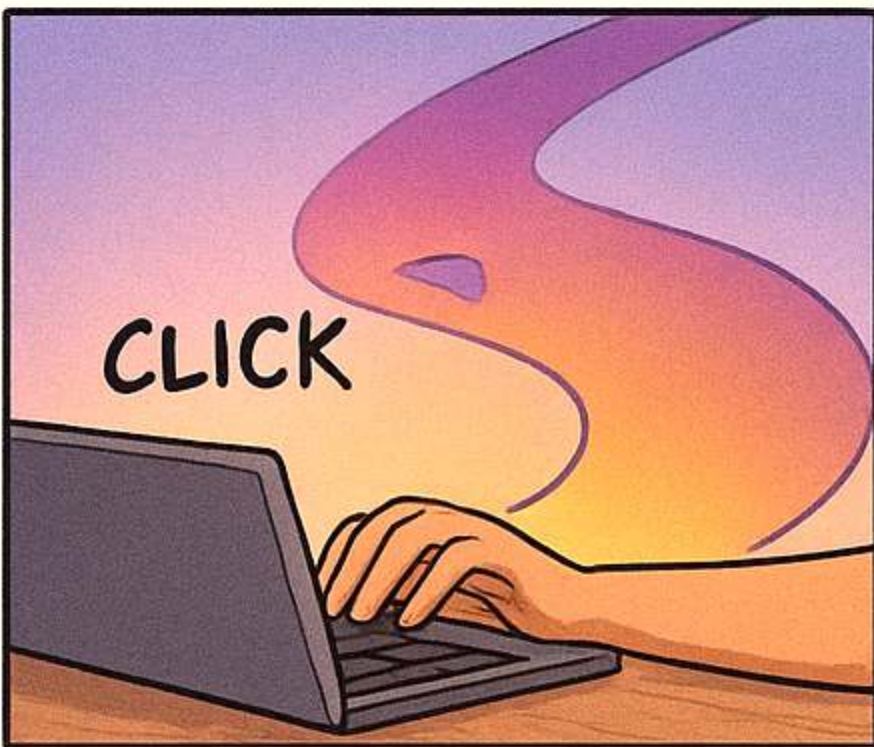


“Doing things I’m afraid of is the real battle I must win.”



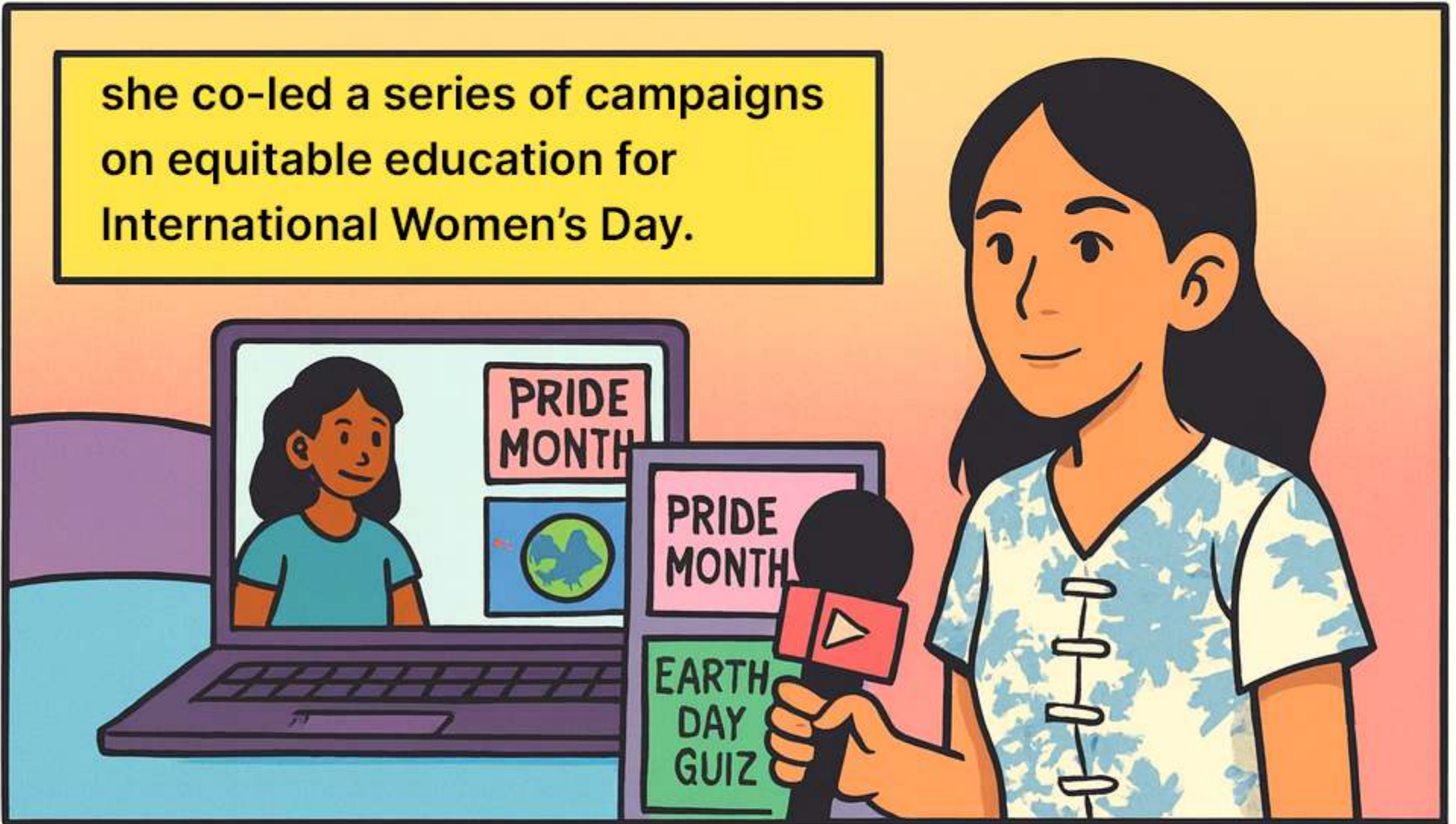
That one sentence changed everything.

Stepping Forward With AYA

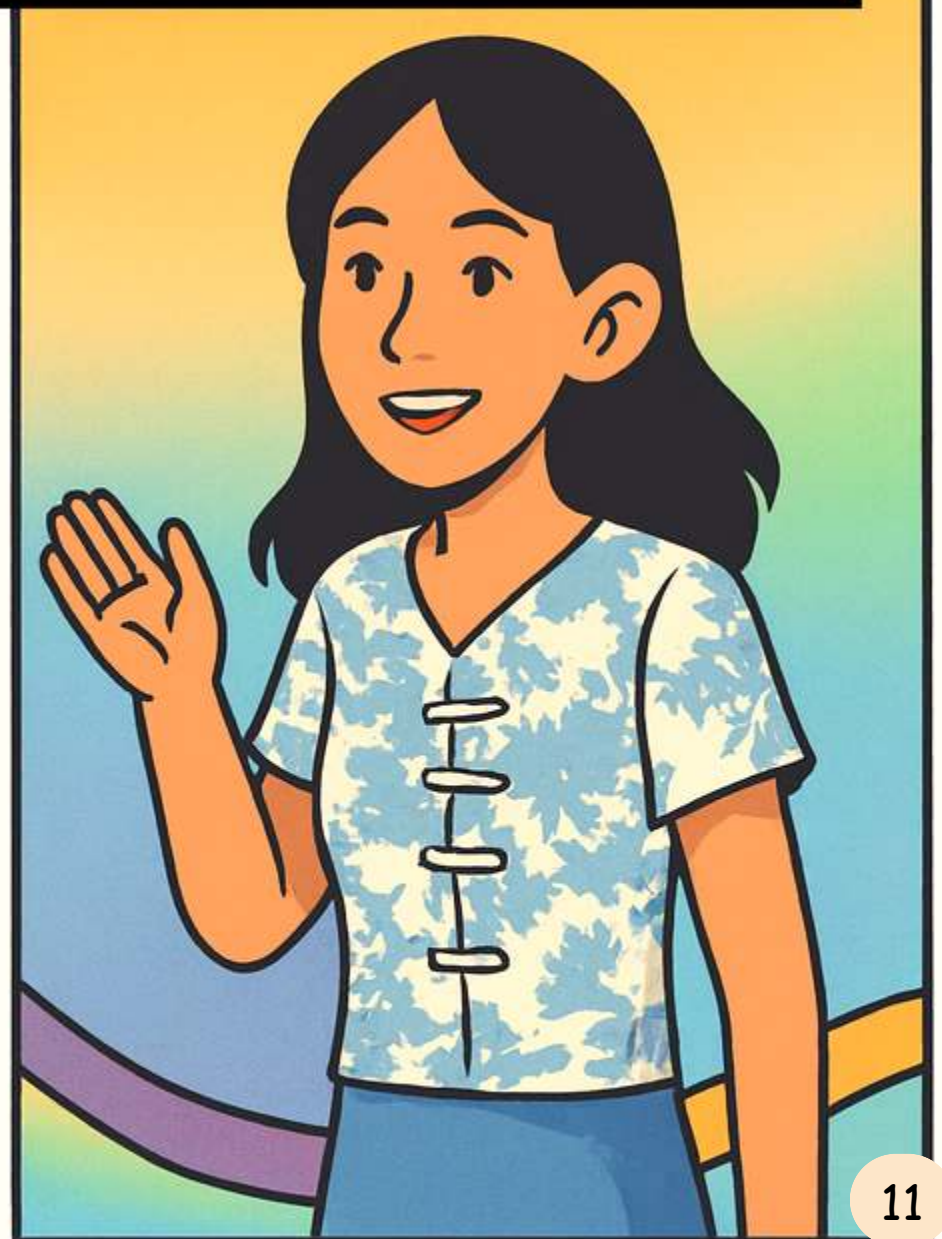


What Chaw Achieved

she co-led a series of campaigns on equitable education for International Women's Day.



After the 7.7 earthquake in Myanmar, she led a trauma-healing activity using pottery making to support affected youth and children.



BECOMING CHAW

AYA didn't change who she was – it helped her see who she could become.



Today, Chaw leads with clarity, courage, and kindness.



I'm ready now.



Scan to read Chaw's full story

She now helps others find their own voice and path forward.



FROM BANDA ACEH TO CAMBODIA

Nanda came to Cambodia representing Indonesian youth — expecting a training, not a transformation.



Wow... everyone is so open here.



She realized AYA wasn't just an event — it was a safe, inclusive space with interpreters and psychosocial support, where everyone felt heard, seen, and supported.



it was safe, inclusive space with interpreters and psychologists to ensure everyone felt seen.

I can express myself here.. I don't have to hide.



Finding Her Voice

Her commitment deepened when AYA invited her to represent Indonesia.



She stands in a circle with youth from Myanmar, the Philippines, and Laos.



We need spaces where young people can speak – truly speak.



"I never imagined I would lead. but here I am."



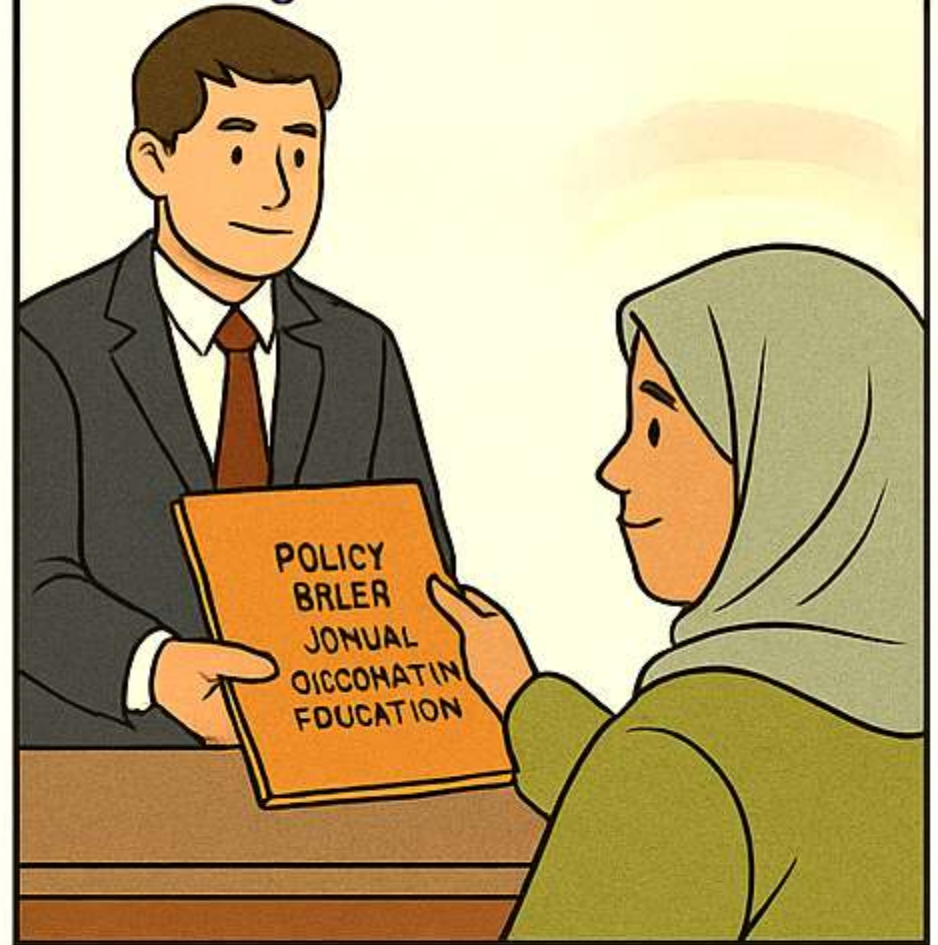
And she stepped forward with greater confidence, clear analysis of local issues, and the courage to act.

NANDA IN ACTION

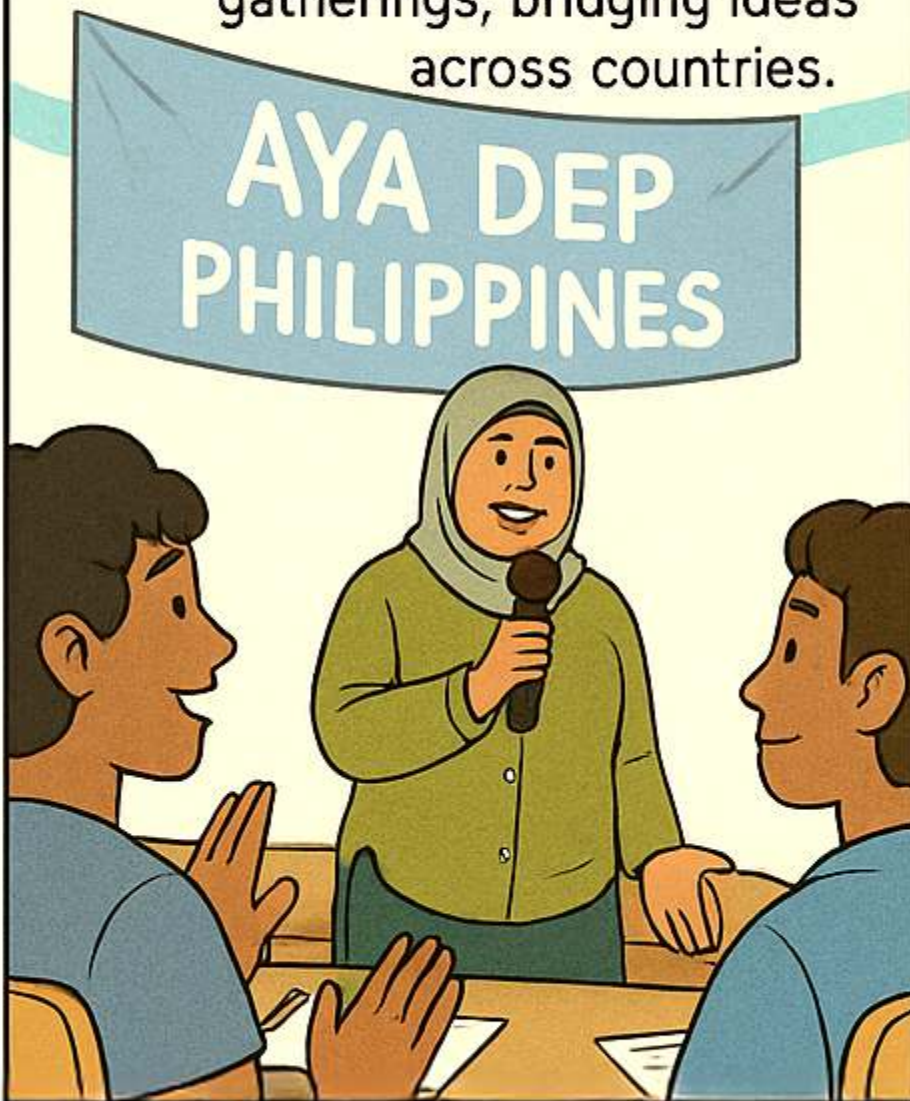
She led key advocacy efforts, including commemorating Hari Sumpah Pemuda (Indonesia's National Youth Pledge Day) a moment that celebrates unity, diversity, and youth leadership.



She submitted a policy brief on the prevention and response to sexual violence in education to government institutions.



She co-led major AYA regional gatherings, bridging ideas across countries.



I can do this.
I'm growing.



HER GROWTH AS A LEADER

Personal and technical development.



AYA sharpened her advocacy skills through deep context analysis.



She advocated strongly for inclusion and equal opportunity.



Her self-confidence grew – not from perfection, but from being trusted.



This is who I am now.

Nanda's New Belief

AYA showed me that my voice matters — and that I can help others find theirs too.



She now empowers others to speak, lead, and rise.



My story is still growing.



Scan to read Nanda's full story



A YOUNG QUEER CHAM VOICE

Growing up as a queer Cham youth, Sa Mao longed for a space where he could speak freely—and be heard.



Maybe this is where I can finally express myself.



“Let’s try,”



Finding His Strength in AYA

From the moment he joined, he found diverse community that understood him.



Sa Mao in Action

His major contributions.



He led data collection in Rattanakiri to highlight needs of minority communities.



He organized the 16 Days Campaign, producing podcasts, videos, and key messages.



He guides a group of young women planning for International Women's Day,



He transformed AYA's Facebook page into a dynamic hub for outreach.

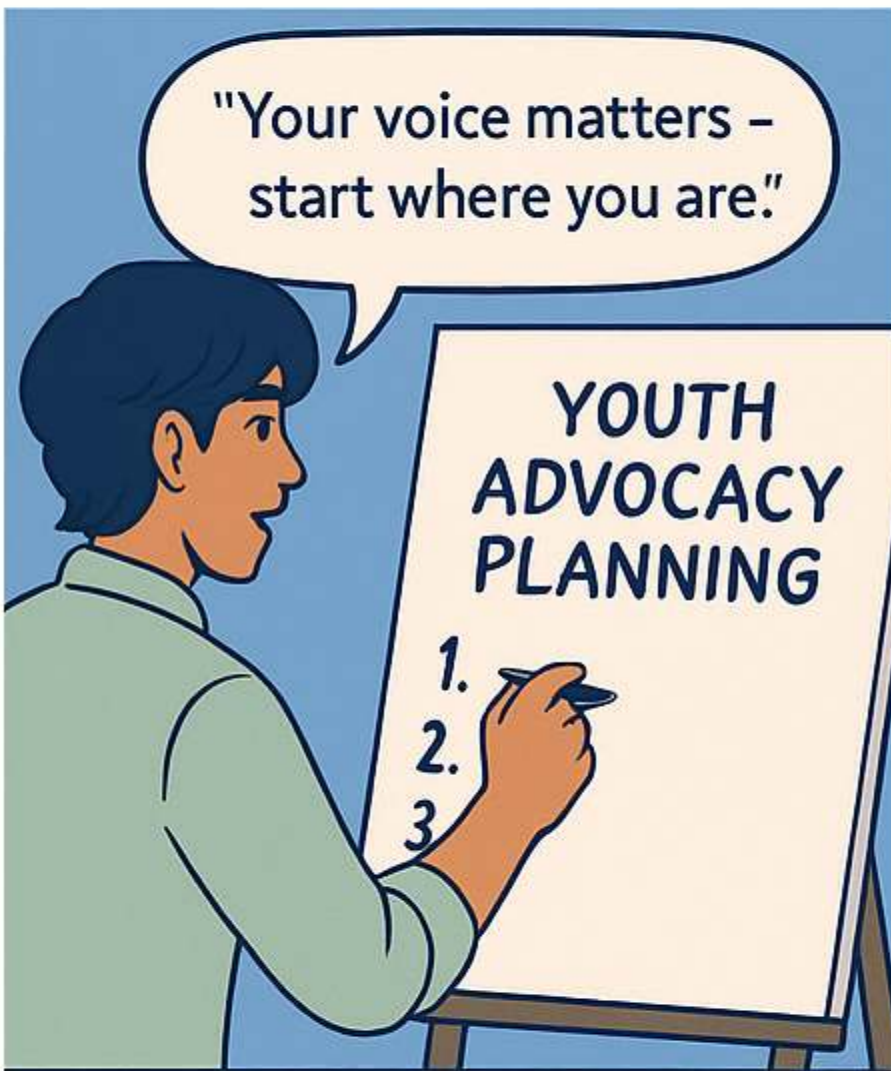
A Leader in His Community



Through AYA, Sa Mao learned how to speak with clarity, compassion, and strategy.



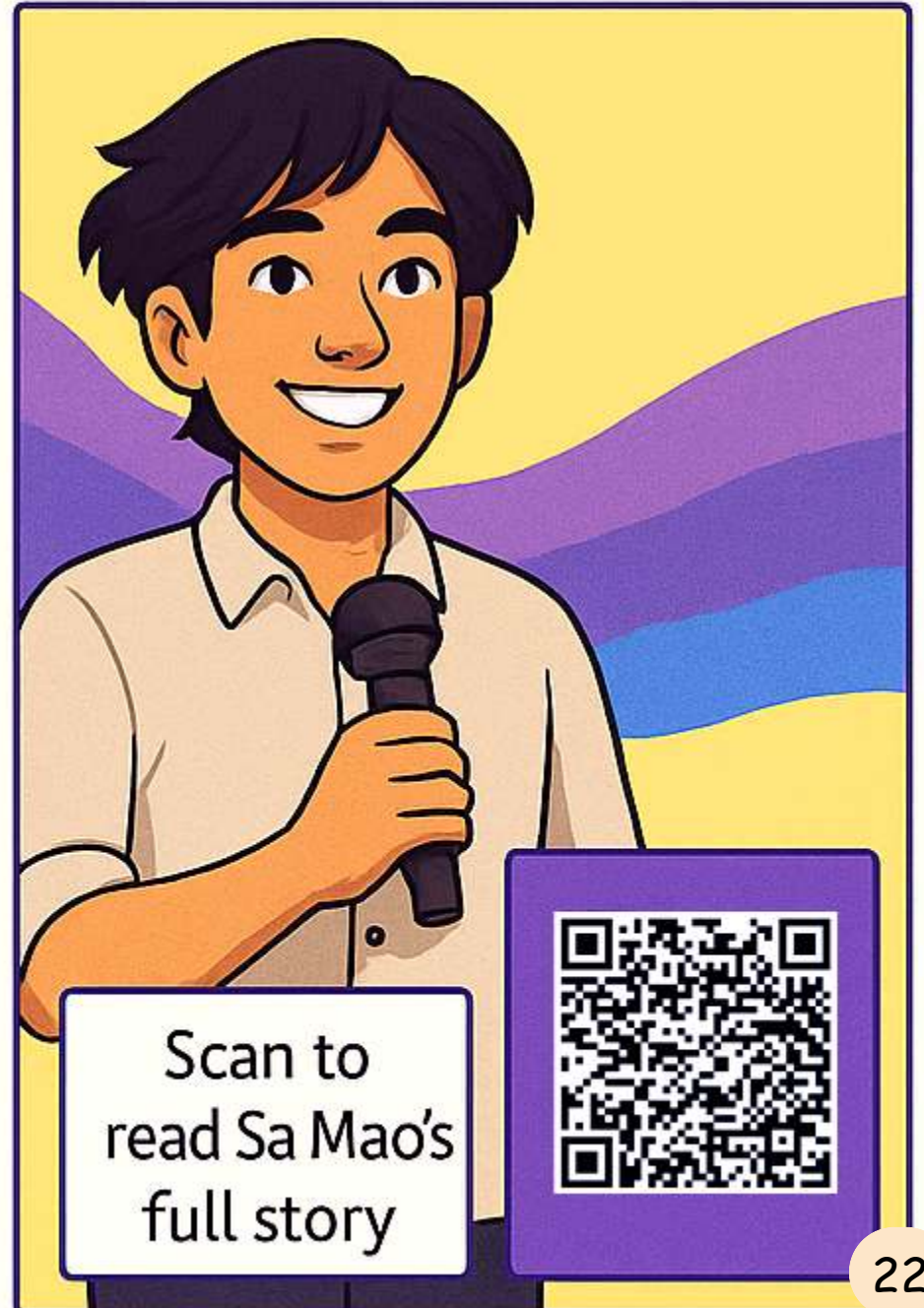
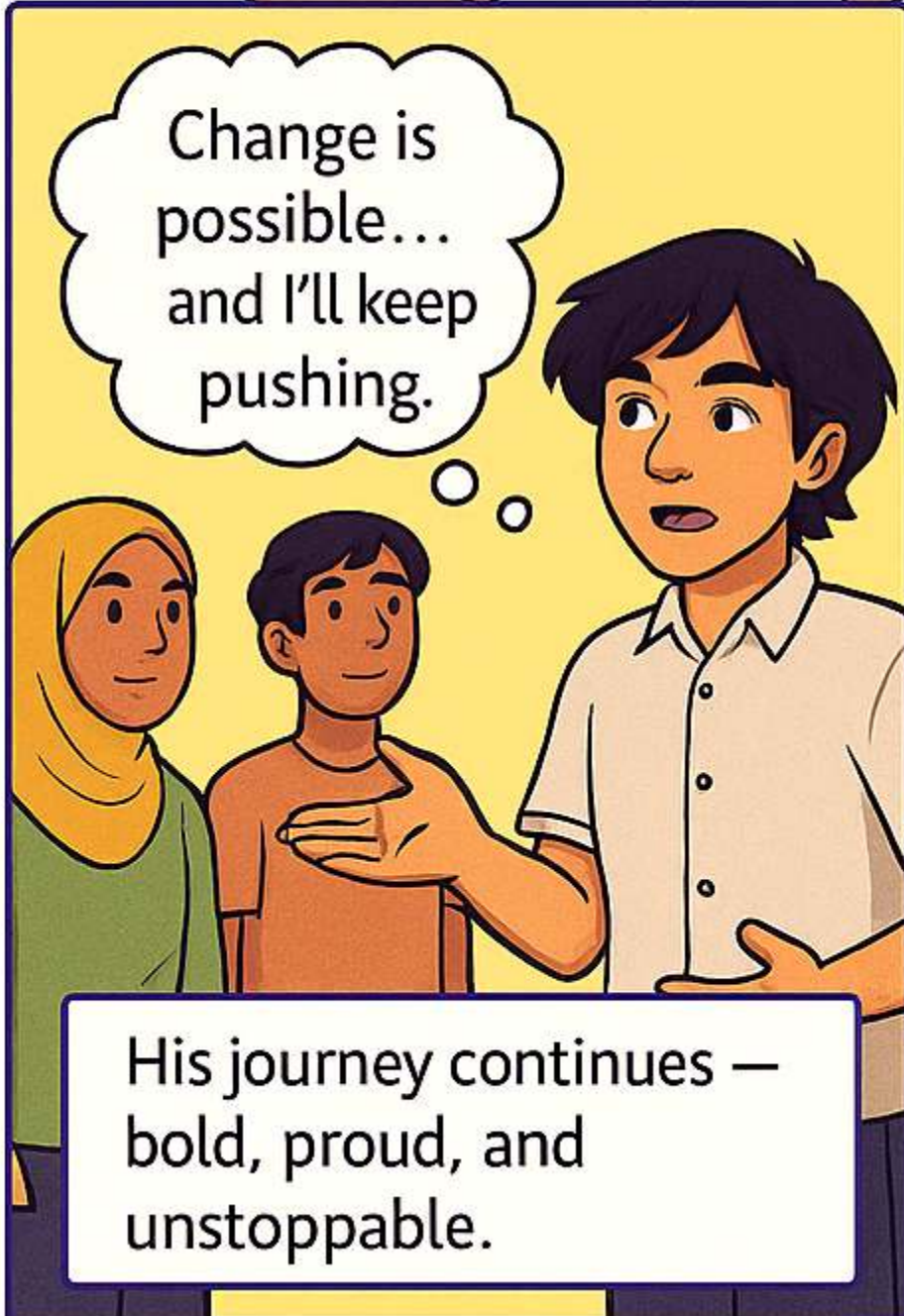
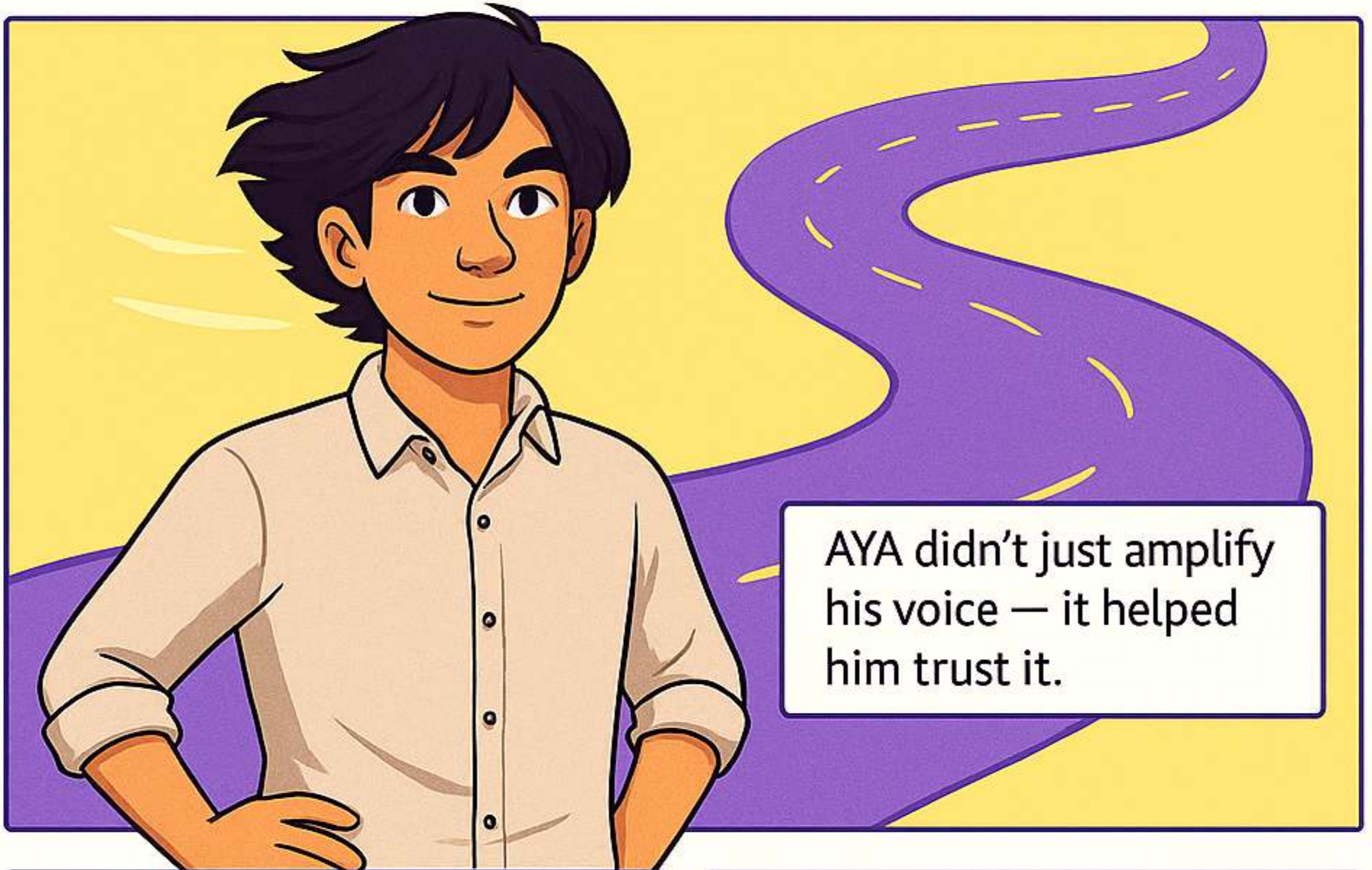
He became a bridge between local youth and regional platforms.



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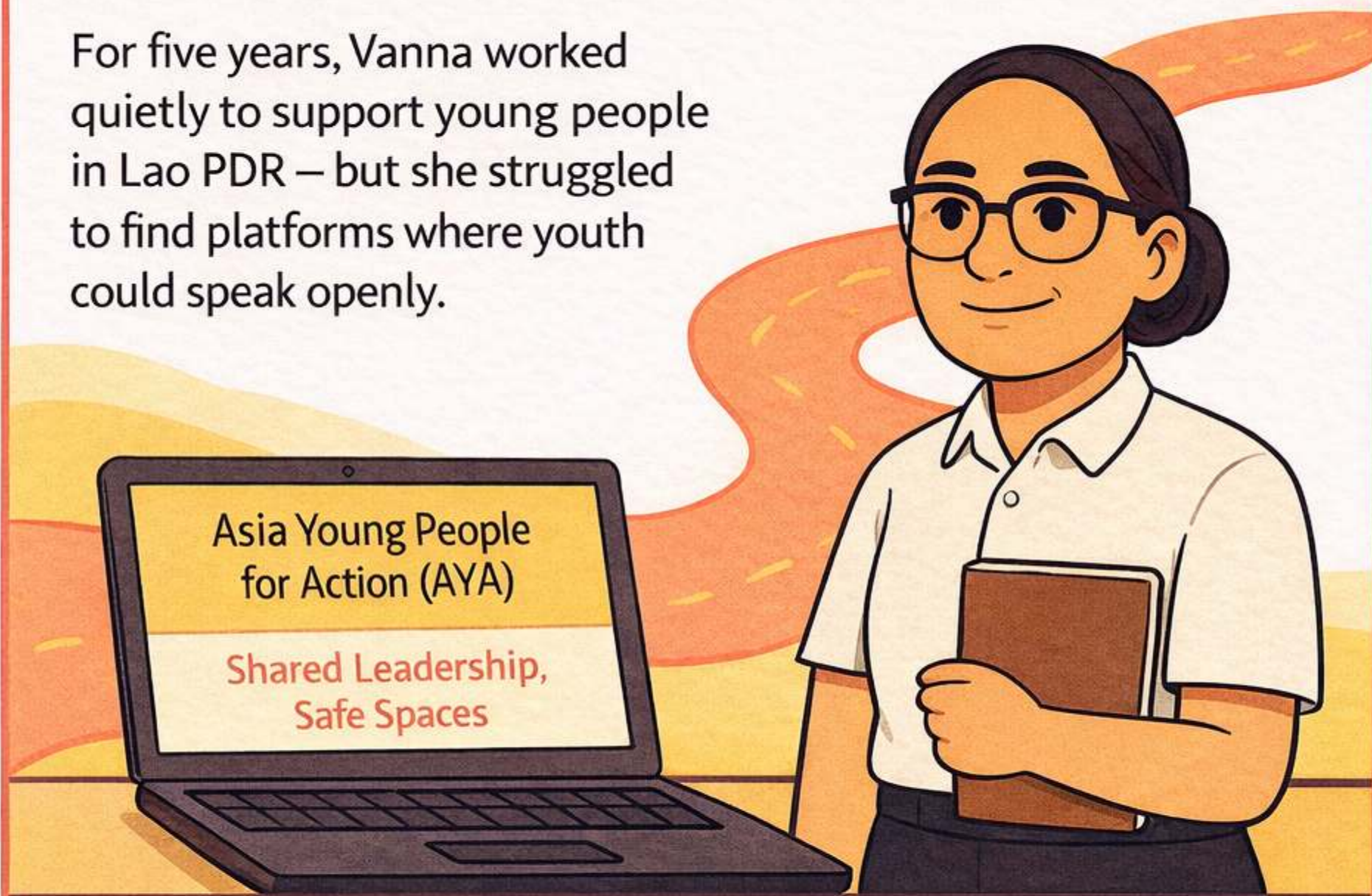


SA MAO'S ONGOING JOURNEY



A LEADER IN LAOS

For five years, Vanna worked quietly to support young people in Lao PDR – but she struggled to find platforms where youth could speak openly.



She decided to join – hoping to learn, and maybe to lead.



FINDING HER CONFIDENCE

Through AYA, Vanna found a space where young people could speak freely – without fear.



fear of being unheard, excluded, or reduced to passive participation.



Youth need safe places to process what this country is facing



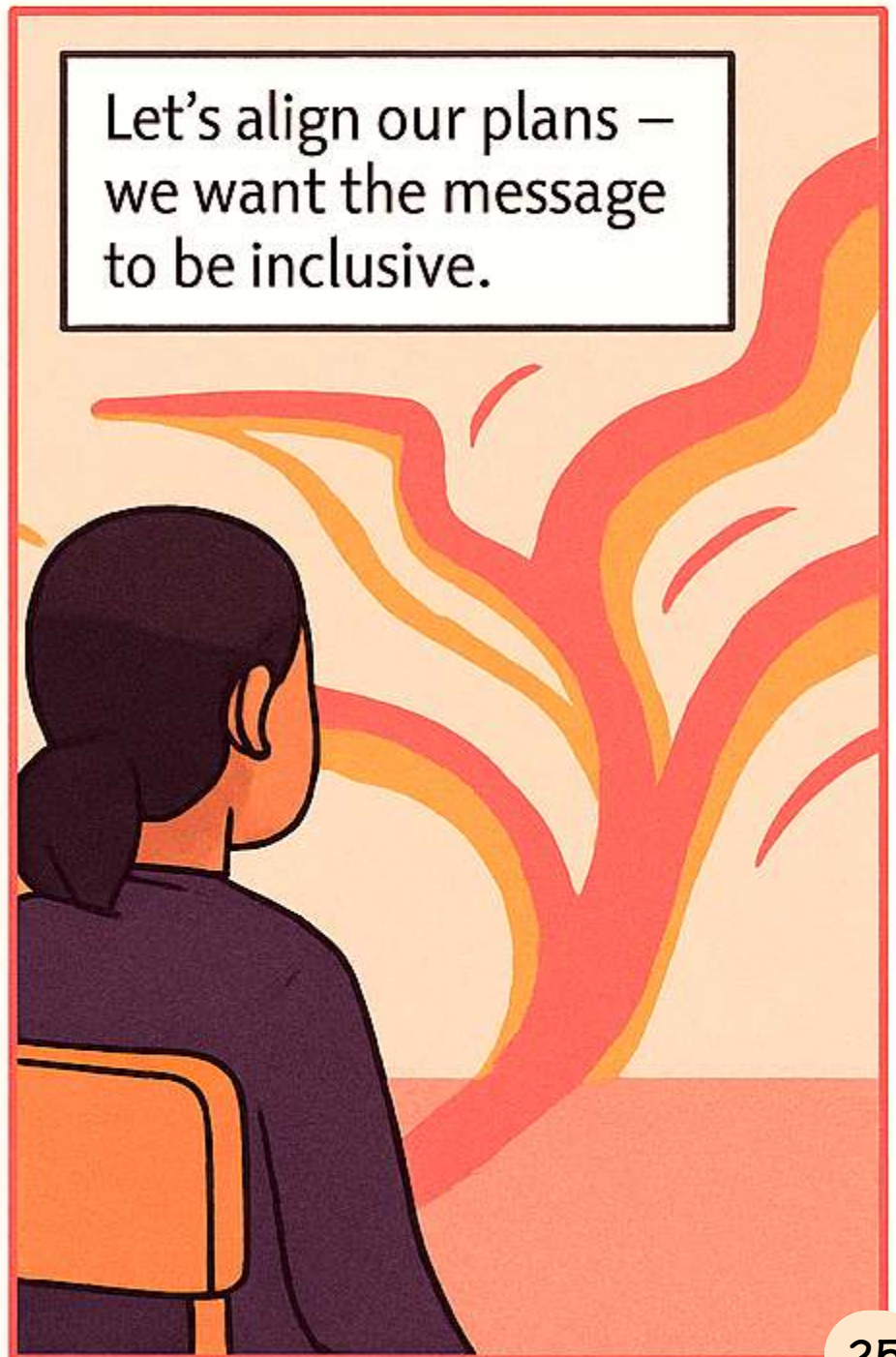
I can say this, I should say this.

LEADING INITIATIVES IN LAOS

She led research with 120 young people, gathering insights about life after COVID-19.

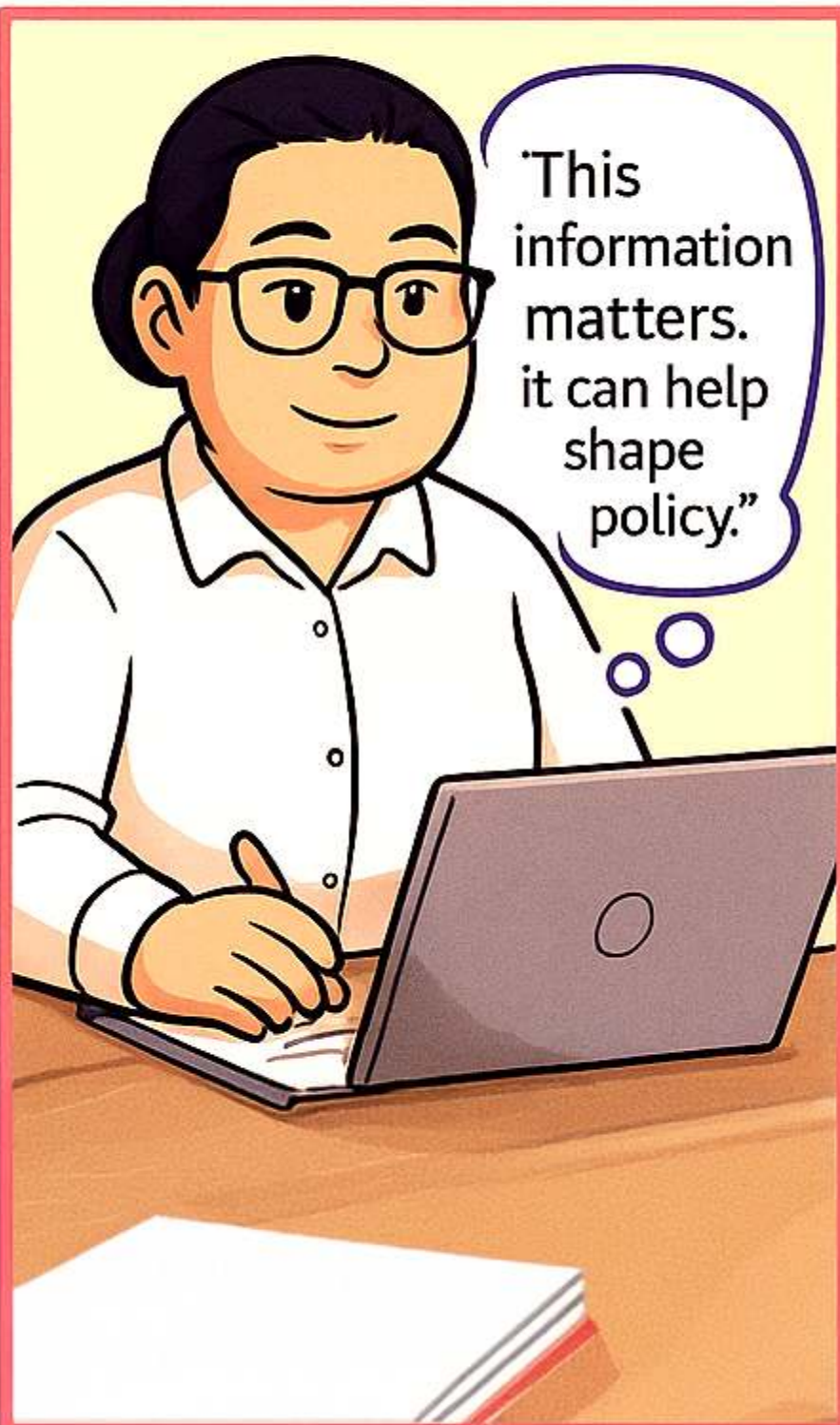


Let's align our plans – we want the message to be inclusive.



GROWING INTO A STRATEGIC LEADER

Working with youth from across Asia helped Vanna sharpen her communication skills and move forward with greater



The impact didn't stop with her – others found strength through her leadership.



AYA provided a space where Vanna and others could lead together.

VANNA'S COMMITMENT TO THE FUTURE

AYA supported her journey into a thoughtful, resilient leader - committed to inclusion and human rights.

I want them to feel safe... and strong.



She decided to join - hoping to learn, and maybe to lead.

She journey continues - guided by skill, empathy, and community.



Scan to read Vanna's full story



ACTION TAKEN ACROSS COUNTRY COLLABORATION



Climate action



Gender justice



Peace



Community healing



Youth advocacy



AYA youth across Southeast Asia are turning ideas into real action – pushing for climate justice, gender equality, human rights, safe spaces, and stronger communities.



Young climate activists in Yogyakarta pushed for inclusive environmental policies.

Youth in Myanmar used art to help children heal after the earthquake.

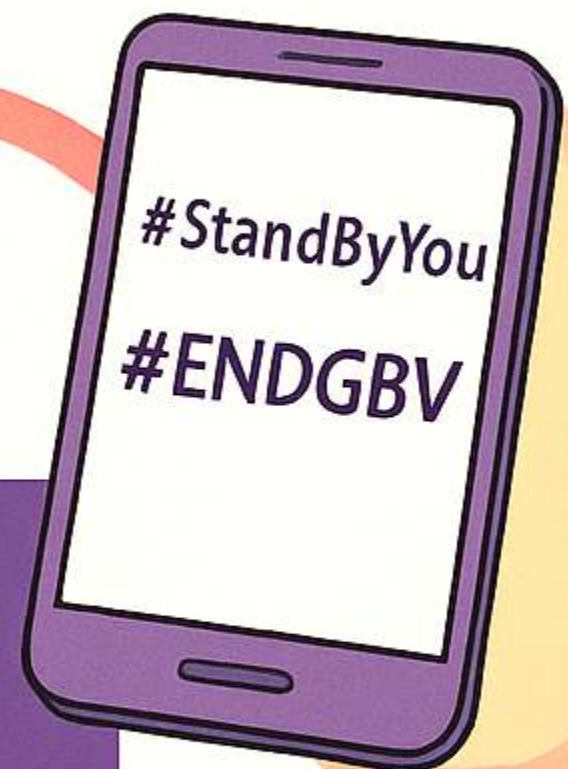
STANDING AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE



Through the “Stand By You” campaign, AYA youth united across borders to fight gender-based violence. With video, role-plays, podcasts, and survivor stories – they called for real support and an end to silence.

Nearly 5,000 viewers engaged with their content – a powerful regional push against GBV.

Nearly 5.000 viewers engaged with their content – a powerful regional push against GBV.



YOUTH STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES



Learning resilience from the stories of others.



Taking climate action at the community level.



Creating spaces to learn, share, and heal.



Across the region, young people aren't waiting for change – they are building it through solidarity, creativity, and compassion.

Regional Stories

Young Leaders Across Asia



**Myanmar Young Woman's
Peacebuilding Story**



**Healing Through Art After
the Earthquake (Myanmar)**



**Stand By You — Gender-Based
Violence Campaign**



**Youth Meet the Mayor —
Climate Advocacy (Yogyakarta)**



Scan to read full article
afsc.org



This comic book was inspired by the voices and journeys of young leaders across Southeast Asia.

Their courage, vulnerability, and commitment remind us that real change begins when someone chooses to speak – and someone chooses to listen.

The Asia Regional Office of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) extends its deepest gratitude to the youth partners, organizations, and communities who made the Asia Young People for Action (AYA) initiative possible.

Together, we continue building more peaceful, inclusive, and equitable societies.



Chaw



Nanda



Sa Mao



Vanna

Journey of Change — and this journey continues with you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Asia Regional Office of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) extends its profound gratitude to all the individuals and organizations that have generously contributed to the success of the Asia Young People for Action (AYA) initiative and to the development of this final report and comic book.

In 2023, the Asia Young People for Action (AYA) was launched and implemented across several Southeast Asian Countries. AYA represents a proactive and pertinent response to the critical demand for inclusive, youth-led peacebuilding within the region. With the support of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) and its partners, the initiative aimed to empower young people with the requisite skills, confidence, and networks to effectively address intricate social challenges and foster the development of more equitable, just, and peaceful communities.

Through skill-building workshops, collaborative regional projects, and engagement in both regional and global forums, AYA empowers young leaders with opportunities for growth, leadership, and influence. By prioritizing youth voices and actions, the initiative cultivates feminist leadership and advances social justice and equity, which are key pillars in building sustainable peace throughout Asia.

Over the years, AYA has evolved into a vibrant, dynamic, and growing network of youth leaders, civil society partners, and institutional allies. These changemakers not only advocate for inclusive policies and practices but also directly implement initiatives that promote dialogue, address systemic injustices, and reduce violence in their local contexts.

We extend our gratitude to the AYA Working Group members, whose leadership, commitment, and collaboration have provided clear guidance and purpose to the initiative. We also sincerely thank the technical experts, speakers, and supporters who have generously shared their knowledge and resources. The invaluable in-kind and financial contributions from our partners have been instrumental in enabling AYA to reach and empower more young people.

Looking ahead, sustained collaboration and strategic engagement will be vital to deepening and expanding this important work. The AYA initiative has demonstrated that when young people are meaningfully included, equipped with the right tools, and given the space to lead, they become powerful agents of peace, equity, and transformative change within their communities and beyond.

Guided by the Quaker belief in the divine light of every person, AFSC works with people of all faiths and backgrounds to challenge unjust systems and foster lasting peace. It is in this spirit that we invite continued partnership in amplifying the voices and actions of young people building a more just and peaceful Asia.

With gratitude and shared commitment,
AFSC Asia Regional Office