



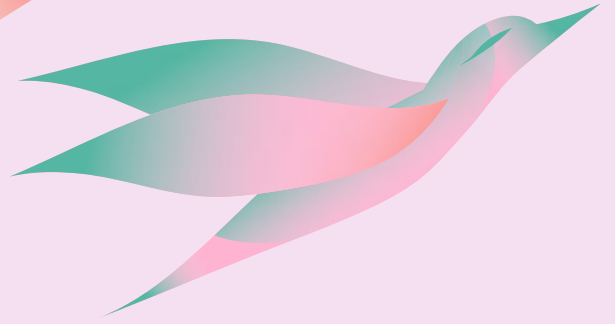
Scarlet Murmurations

Advancing Global Menstrual Justice

AN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Definition: a large group of birds, usually starlings, that fly and change direction together. Symbolising the powerful, interconnected and collective movement of individuals working toward menstrual justice, much like how starlings fly together in fluid, dynamic patterns. In this metaphor, each person's contribution to the cause — whether through advocacy, activism, sharing stories, research, implementation or policy work — creates a larger, synchronised movement driving societal change.



MENSTRUAL JUSTICE
can be understood as a
rights-based, intersectional
approach that seeks to
dismantle structural inequities
related to menstruation
and the menstrual cycle.



Scarlet Murmurations— Why this report and why now?

Menstruation affects more than 2 billion people globally, yet many still face barriers to managing it with dignity, essential resources, and social support. The concept of "menstrual justice" broadens the focus from individual challenges to systemic inequalities underlying these barriers, drawing on feminist thought and reproductive justice, especially influenced by Black feminist activism. It seeks structural change, emphasising the intersection of oppressions like racism, sexism, and classism, which further limits access to resources. Menstrual justice calls for intersectoral, community and governmental collaboration, addressing menstrual injustice by advocating for broader social change. This report amplifies the voices of those with lived experience and of grassroots activists, creating a unified call for a world where people who menstruate do so with dignity and equity.

The rights of girls, women, and people with diverse gender identities are increasingly under threat. Through this report, we explore how structural inequalities affecting menstruators are also affected by the constraints under which people, groups and organisations advocating for their rights are operating. A primary challenge is the scarce funding for feminist and grassroots movements, particularly in the Global South, with less than one percent of development aid and foundation grants allocated to women's rights organisations. This funding gap affects rights-focused initiatives, and often leads to burnout among activists working within intersecting oppressive systems. The report uses the menstrual justice lens to question and expand thinking on which perspectives are prioritised and resourced, highlighting how issues like racism, colonialism, and patriarchal norms centralise power in funding and decision-making systems and perpetuate menstrual injustice.

A justice lens explores how power and resources can be equitably redistributed and shared within the menstrual movement to support initiatives that seek to tackle systematic barriers.



Methodology

The report was commissioned by Irise International in partnership with the Global Menstrual Collective (GMC), and represents a call to support grassroots, lived experience-led approaches that confront systemic oppression. This report further advocates for practical resources and sustained donor support to drive transformative, structural change, centering the voices of those most impacted.

The report was shaped with critical inputs from an international Advisory Group and a hands-on Co-creation Group. Such a collaborative approach ensured the inclusion of cross-sectoral and globally diverse insights on menstrual justice. The methodology incorporates a desk-based review, individual interviews with grassroots and feminist leaders, group consultations, and activist-led case studies, amplifying often overlooked perspectives for advancing menstrual justice.

Limitations

- ✿ While the report seeks to present a comprehensive global perspective, it cannot fully represent the extensive efforts of the many organisations and activists working towards menstrual justice across the world.
- ✿ Many working to address the structural inequities that harm menstruators may use terms other than menstrual justice to describe their efforts.
- ✿ Key stakeholders, including governments and donors, were not involved in interviews or discussions. Their insights are essential for understanding how menstrual justice initiatives can be expanded, scaled and effectively supported through proper funding.



Evolution of the Movement

The menstrual movement has evolved, shaped by the actions of civil society (including activists), researchers, donors, governments, and the private sector. It has been conceptualised in the following ways:

Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM)

Focuses on providing access to clean materials, private spaces, water, soap, and safe disposal options for menstruators, primarily addressing hygiene needs in low-resource settings.

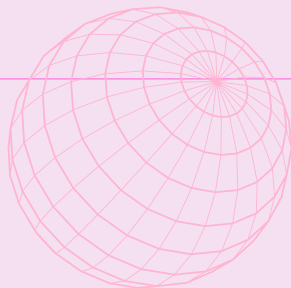


Menstrual Health

Focuses on the physical, mental, and social aspects of menstruation and the menstrual cycle.

Period Poverty

Emphasises the inability to afford essential period products.



Menstrual Equity

Promotes equitable access to menstrual products, education, and facilities - often pursued through legal reforms.

The menstrual justice lens draws from these conceptualizations, and seeks to inform them as well.

Menstrual justice is a rights-based, intersectional approach that seeks to dismantle structural inequities related to menstruation and the menstrual cycle. The framework expands the movement's toolkit by highlighting and tackling systemic elements that have received less programmatic, research and policy attention (though they may be acknowledged as barriers to menstrual health and wellbeing). Building on the foundations of feminist justice-oriented movements, several common principles of menstrual justice have been identified through discussions with activists and organisations:

Structural



Menstrual justice addresses social systems and structures (like harmful policies and social norms) that create disadvantages for those who menstruate, requiring changes in norms, laws, workplace practices, and education systems.

Intersectional



Menstrual justice is intertwined with other forms of oppression and an intersectional approach is necessary to dismantle connected inequalities and create meaningful and lasting change.

Centred on Marginalised Lived Experiences



It prioritises the voices and needs of the most marginalised menstruators, recognizing that relevant and meaningful solutions come from those directly affected by systemic harm.

A Communal Responsibility



Menstruation should not be hidden or treated as an individual issue and responsibility; it calls for collective support, stronger public policies, and greater representation of the voices of those impacted by menstrual injustice in decision-making to drive structural change.

Intersecting Justice Movements

Just as murmurations can merge to create larger, more powerful movements, menstrual justice inherently intersects with multiple forms of social justice, demonstrating how systemic oppression can be addressed through interconnected pathways. When we view menstrual experiences through a justice lens, we see how different forms of marginalisation combine to create compounded barriers. The menstrual movement is strengthened when working collectively with different social justice movements to break down all barriers to menstrual justice.

Social movements that intersect with menstrual justice in important ways include:



Gender justice

Cisnormativity and stigma exclude transgender and non-binary people, while reinforcing harmful expectations for cisgender women. A justice approach fosters inclusive and gender responsive education, healthcare, and WASH infrastructure that affirm diverse experiences and promote dignity, safety, and equity.

Economic justice

Financial barriers force menstruators to choose between their menstrual needs and other essential needs, or undermine their agency to make financial decisions about their health. Lack of financial decision making power within the family, workplace discrimination and stigma further deepen economic hardships, disproportionately impacting low-income groups and those in the informal economy. A justice approach calls for equitable economic opportunities, enabling people to make decisions about their basic menstrual needs and beyond.

Environmental justice

Honouring the interconnectedness of people and nature – an environmental justice approach advocates for a shift from extractive, polluting economies towards systems rooted in care and regeneration. All menstrual products have environmental implications across the value chain with single use products carrying the highest environmental burden. An environmental justice approach shifts the responsibility from individuals who menstruate to manufacturers, policy makers and regulators who design, produce and set quality standards, to enable access to a wider basket of quality products.

Disability justice

Advancing menstrual justice calls for actions that address the triple burden of having a disability, being female, and experiencing menstruation. Actions include tailored education, products, accessible infrastructure, and support to family and institutional caregivers that respect bodily autonomy, agency, and meet diverse needs related to different types of disabilities.

Racial and decolonial justice

A justice approach addresses the systemic racism and colonial legacies that disproportionately affect Black, Indigenous, and other people of colour. Centering community-driven solutions and integrating decolonial perspectives can disrupt these dynamics, honouring diverse cultural understandings of menstruation and fostering more context responsive menstrual health interventions.

Global Patterns

The initiatives highlighted here, while not necessarily claiming to be wholly justice-oriented, all play a vital role in challenging structural inequities tied to menstruation and the menstrual cycle. Together, they showcase global progress, from local grassroots movements and community organising to national-level change driven by policy transformation.

US

The organisation [No More Secrets](#) was started in Philadelphia to combat the systemic barriers that disproportionately affect Black, low-income communities, ensuring equitable access to essential menstrual products through direct-to-client distribution.

Scotland

The [Period Products Act](#) requires local authorities, educational institutions, and public services to provide free period products on their premises. Written in gender-neutral language, the act ensures inclusivity for women, transgender men, and non-binary people who menstruate.

Türkiye

The organisation [Konuşmamız Gerek](#) ('We Need To Talk') developed a [Menstruation Guide for Non-Menstruators](#) designed to help non-menstruators better understand the menstrual cycle, destigmatize and build collective support for those who menstruate.

Nepal

The [Bishesta Campaign](#) is a community-based intervention tackling menstrual stigma and supporting bodily autonomy for young people with intellectual disabilities – who might otherwise experience coercive practices such as sterilisation – as well as their caregivers.

West Papua

[Papua Partners](#) works in solidarity with Indigenous women through a community-led activism model, ensuring responses are rooted in local knowledge and lived experiences. Women organise by producing reusable menstrual products and distributing them through informal community networks.

Colombia

[Temblores](#) is led by the LGBTQ+ community and leads participatory research and advocacy projects that advocate for the realisation of menstrual rights of people with gender diverse identities and sexualities.

Uganda

The [Period Equality Network](#) network brings together 160 grassroots organisations, feminist and youth leaders across East Africa to share best practice and build collective action towards menstrual justice.

Australia

Researchers, activists, and policymakers collaborated to develop [policy guidance](#) for no-cost to low-cost changes that build on menstrual equity interventions, such as the elimination of menstrual product taxes, to dismantle stigma and discrimination experienced by people who menstruate. In Western Australia, activists and researchers came together to build "community conversations" around menopause for [women working in non-office, male dominated work settings](#).

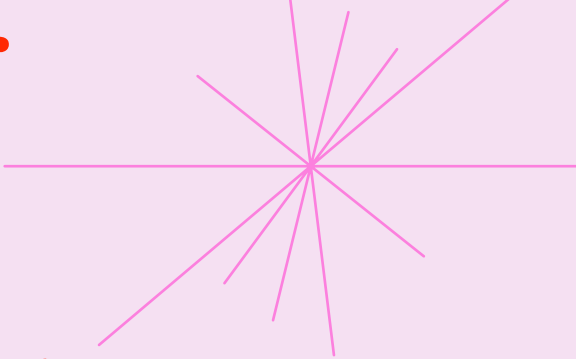
Pacific Islands

Drawing on oral storytelling traditions, the [Pacific Period Stories](#) project by the Pacific Menstrual Health Network celebrates indigenous cultures and challenges menstrual taboos across this often overlooked region.

Challenges and ongoing debates

- ↘ **Cultural responsiveness vs. universal rights:** Navigating cultural practices while promoting universal menstrual rights.
- ↘ **Inclusive language:** Balancing gender-inclusive language with the need to address gender-specific menstrual stigmas.
- ↘ **Knowledge democracy:** Bridging academic and grassroots knowledge systems through the redistribution of knowledge power.
- ↘ **Systemic change vs. immediate needs:** Meeting immediate menstrual needs (e.g., period products) while advocating for long-term structural change to enable equitable access to menstrual health (e.g., period products of choice).
- ↘ **Intersectionality:** While the importance of intersectionality in menstrual justice is acknowledged, implementing truly intersectional approaches remains complex.
- ↘ **Funding patterns:** Transforming resource distribution to ensure just and equitable funding practices.

The Power of Our Collective Flight: A Justice-Oriented Framework for Action



All stakeholders can consider their readiness and commitment to justice-oriented action through these foundational principles:

- ✿ **Power Analysis and Redistribution** - who currently holds decision-making power, and how and to whom are resources currently distributed?
- ✿ **Intersectional Impact Assessment** - does the work address multiple, overlapping forms of oppression and is it considering unintended impacts on marginalised groups?
- ✿ **Structural Change Commitment** - does the work address root causes or just symptoms of menstrual injustice and how is it connecting individual action to broader structural change? How are actions challenging and monitoring power structures and systems of oppression?

Why this matters?

- ✿ **Community Power:** Real change happens when those most affected by menstrual injustice lead the work
- ✿ **Cultural Systems:** Religious and cultural beliefs strongly influence menstruation perspectives - we must work respectfully with communities
- ✿ **Service Systems:** Healthcare, education, and humanitarian response must be transformed to serve all menstruators
- ✿ **Infrastructure:** Basic facilities must be accessible and dignified for everyone
- ✿ **Policy Framework:** Rights and protections must be enshrined in law and properly implemented
- ✿ **Movement Building:** Cross-cutting strategies must unite diverse voices and experiences

Menstrual justice considerations for stakeholders

1. ACTIVISTS AND GRASSROOTS ORGANISATIONS

BUILDING INTERSECTIONAL ALLIANCES

- ✎ Build local, regional and global and intergenerational alliances focused on addressing the social systems and structures that create and reinforce disadvantage for those who menstruate, centering the most marginalised voices.
- ✎ Participate in peer-to-peer education and research identifying intersecting oppressions and sharing impactful justice-focused initiatives.
- ✎ Develop collective advocacy platforms in the menstrual movement focused on structural and systemic change.
- ✎ Co-create advocacy campaigns with other social justice movements to highlight the intersectional nature of menstrual justice and foster solidarity across various justice-oriented initiatives, e.g. those focused on gender, environmental, economic, disability, and racial justice.

2. NGOS

SHIFTING FROM SERVICE DELIVERY TO SYSTEMIC CHANGE

- ✎ Transform internal power structures and address organisational inequities through establishing participatory decision-making approaches with those most impacted by menstrual injustice. This includes actively engaging local activists and communities in shaping interventions, ensuring their priorities are central to program development.
- ✎ Equitably redistribute resources and leadership to locally based organisations and grassroots organising and movement building activities, working from the principle that sustainable and impactful interventions are informed by lived experiences.
- ✎ Prioritise knowledge exchange, creating spaces where global south movements can come together to share insights and align around strategies. Identify and address any accessibility barriers for underrepresented groups, particularly those addressing intersecting inequalities linked to disability, race, gender, and income, amongst others.
- ✎ Place menstrual justice as a distinct advocacy need, and integrate it into broader strategies aimed at addressing intersecting injustices, framing it as a necessary step toward dismantling the structural barriers that perpetuate menstrual health disparities.

3. RESEARCHERS AND ACADEMICS

DECOLONISING RESEARCH AND CENTERING MARGINALISED KNOWLEDGE

- ✎ Investigate the long-term impacts of menstrual justice-focused initiatives to build a case for addressing underlying structural drivers of inequality impacting menstrual health and wellbeing. This could also include incorporating a justice lens into existing validated MHH indicators to track progress on social, economic, and health outcomes.
- ✎ Ensure that lived experience, community knowledge and activist scholarship are valued equally to academic knowledge in developing evidence-based policy and interventions.
- ✎ Prioritise community-based participatory research methodologies that involve diverse menstruators as co-researchers throughout the entire research process, and ensure equitable compensation and recognition for community researchers.
- ✎ Ensure research findings are shared widely, and are accessible to grassroots organisations and policymakers. Engage grassroots organisations and communities who participated in the research in developing dissemination strategies to share reflections and a way forward.
- ✎ Actively include disciplines often overlooked in menstrual health research, such as law and political science, development economics, and critical race theory to create new, integrated approaches to menstrual justice.

4. FUNDERS AND DONORS

TRANSFORMING TRADITIONAL FUNDING DYNAMICS

- ✎ Reimagine funding strategies to support a diverse range of menstrual health activities and organisations, prioritising grassroots movements driving justice-focused initiatives within their communities.
- ✎ Ensure participatory grantmaking by involving diverse activists and grassroots organisations in shaping funding agendas and decision-making processes.
- ✎ Invest in research that documents insights and lessons from menstrual justice work in the Global South, using this knowledge to inform current and future funding strategies.
- ✎ Provide multi-year, core funding to enable long-term, systemic change and support the sustainability of justice-driven initiatives.
- ✎ Fund advocacy and movement-building efforts, including initiatives that build solidarity with other justice-focused social movements, with a focus on prioritising leadership from the Global South to strengthen regional and local ownership of menstrual justice agendas.

5. POLICYMAKERS

MOVING BEYOND ACCESS TO ADDRESS STRUCTURAL INEQUITIES

- ✎ Incorporate a justice lens into menstrual health and hygiene policies by addressing intersectionalities, discrimination, and structural inequalities that affect menstruators within the specific country context.
- ✎ Create participatory policy-making processes by actively seeking out and including grassroots organisations and marginalised menstruators who have historically been excluded, recognizing their experiences and insights as essential to comprehensive policy development.
- ✎ Explore the role of grassroots movements in holding institutions accountable for their commitments to address social systems and structures that create disadvantages for those who menstruate.
- ✎ Shift towards rights-based approaches by using inclusive, rights-focused language and advocacy strategies in policy development, promoting comprehensive, structural solutions to meet menstrual health needs.



Cross-Cutting Strategies

Realising menstrual justice requires the fundamental transformation of power structures and systems of oppression, guided by the experiences and wisdom of communities worldwide.

1. **Building Movement Power:** Support coalition-building across regions and justice movements by creating physical and virtual spaces for collective strategies that incorporate diverse approaches, and enable knowledge exchange between different regional initiatives.
2. **Ensuring Accountability:** Develop community-led monitoring mechanisms, transparent reporting systems and collectively owned accountability frameworks that respect cultural contexts.
3. **Fostering Sustainable Change:** Support the preservation and application of traditional knowledge and implement proven community approaches. Incorporate climate justice considerations and learn from humanitarian settings.
4. **Measuring Progress Through a Justice Lens:** Capture shifts in decision-making power to marginalised communities and monitor the transformation of discriminatory systems and structures. Measure increases in community-controlled resources, evaluate the strengthening of movements, and assess improvements in accountability mechanisms.

Conclusion

Menstrual justice is more than an approach – it is a powerful collective movement that strengthens and amplifies voices across the globe. Like a scarlet murmuration painting bold patterns across the sky, our movement gains its strength through the harmonious flight of countless individuals, each contributing their unique perspective and expertise. Whether we are activists, researchers, policymakers, or funders, our individual actions create dynamic patterns of change that reshape the very structures that have historically reinforced barriers.

As our movement grows and evolves, we weave together with other justice movements – reproductive, sexual, racial, gender, economic, environmental, and disability justice – creating something far greater than the sum of our parts. Like starlings joining a murmuration, each new voice and perspective enriches our collective flight, making our patterns more complex, more inclusive, and more powerful.

Through this unified movement, we're not just changing policies or providing resources – we're fundamentally transforming the landscape of menstrual rights. Our collective journey calls for greater representation of community voices and lived experiences, especially those who have been historically marginalised. Together, we're ensuring that all people who menstruate can do so with dignity, support, and equity, creating lasting change for generations to come.



This is our scarlet murmuration — a bold, beautiful testament to the power of collective action and intersectional justice.



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