



# Scarlet Murmurations

*Advancing Global Menstrual Justice*





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# Acknowledgements



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Just like the murmuration of starlings coming together in beautiful, synchronised flight, this work represents the collective voice, vision and action of a dedicated and diverse community, compelled to challenge the world they see around them.



Deepest gratitude to the co-authors of this report, Ingrid Lynch and Abigail Solomons. Your tireless devotion and unwavering commitment to upholding the feminist and collective values of this work have brought the menstrual movement to life in ways that far exceed the original scope. With wisdom, depth, purpose and attention to power, you have crafted something truly extraordinary.

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To the Co-Creation Group, the Advisory Committee, and each Case Study Lead - thank you for joining this murmuration with your insight, wisdom, and passion, bringing depth and authenticity to every page. To every single critical friend who reviewed drafts, offered feedback, shared resources, and contributed ideas, thank you for weaving together the threads of this movement with such care and generosity.

Finally, to each person around the world working tirelessly for menstrual justice every day—you are the heart of this movement, the pulse that keeps it alive. This report is a tribute to your resilience and courage, and it is through sharing your stories that we hope to inspire and unite others in building a more just world for all.

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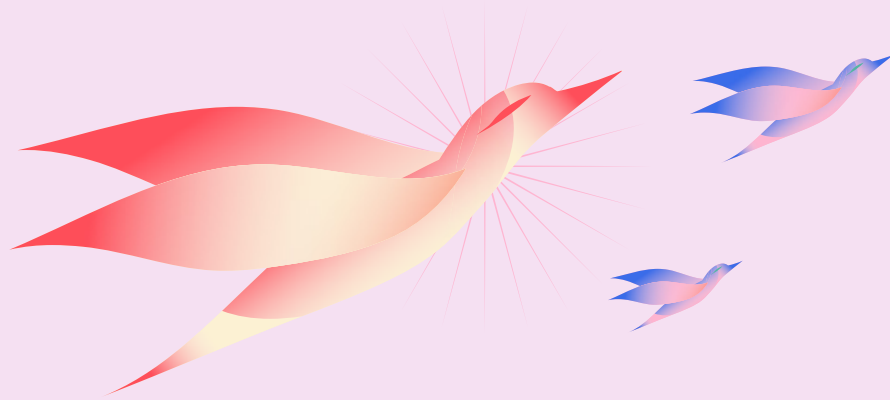
# *01.* Introduction



# Scarlet Murmurations.

## 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, or policy work — creates a larger, synchronised movement driving societal change.



In the vast skies of social change, a remarkable phenomenon is taking shape. Like the mesmerising dance of starlings at dawn and dusk, individuals across the globe are coming together in a powerful, synchronised movement to advance menstrual justice. This report, "Scarlet Murmurations: Advancing Global Menstrual Justice," explores this growing collective action — a movement that is transforming isolated efforts into a coordinated force, challenging deep-seated inequities, and reimagining a world where menstruation is embraced as a normal, natural and healthy aspect of human experience.

Menstruation is experienced by close to 2 billion people worldwide (UNICEF & WHO, 2023). Yet, in many places, those who menstruate still struggle to manage their menstruation with dignity, comfort, and the resources they need. Increasingly, menstruation is being understood beyond a health issue, as a matter of human rights and social justice (Bagala et al., 2023; WHO, 2022).

The concept of menstrual justice emerged to describe a desire for longer-term, structural change that transforms the deep-rooted inequalities surrounding the menstrual cycle (Johnson, 2021; Manorama & Desai, 2020). It draws on several strands of feminist thought, particularly the reproductive justice movement, borne from the grassroots activism and scholarship of Black feminists (Geledés, 1993; Ross & Solinger, 2017). Bringing the concept of menstrual justice into our work broadens our focus from the individual to the systems and structures that shape their experiences. This expanded perspective helps us identify solutions that address both individual needs and the broader systemic changes needed to create a socio-cultural and socio-political environment that supports menstrual justice (Winkler, 2020).

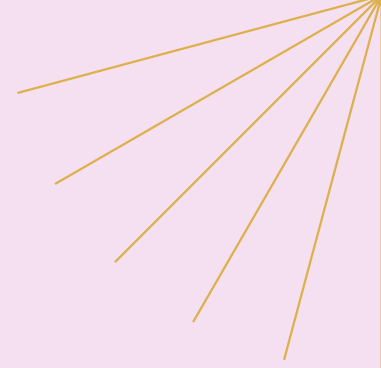
Structural change is especially urgent for individuals who face multiple, overlapping forms of oppression – like racism, sexism, and classism – which limit their access to resources, information, and decision-making power (Crenshaw, 1991). A menstrual justice approach combines an understanding of the importance of health, hygiene, and access to products, toilets, water and disposal facilities, and health services, with the recognition that broader economic and social structures shape menstrual experiences. As such, menstrual justice calls for intersectoral and collective action, with support from communities, organisations engaged in program implementation, advocacy, and research, donors, and governments (Amery et al., 2023; Bagala et al., 2023; Hennegan et al., 2021). Rather than replacing other frameworks, menstrual justice adds to the growing diversity of approaches available to the menstrual movement, especially in pushing for systemic change.

This report seeks to amplify the diverse voices within the menstrual justice movement by weaving together insights from grassroots activists, researchers, and individuals with lived experiences, much like how each starling's call contributes to the flock's collective song and movement.

#### A NOTE ON INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE:

Historically, menstruation has been discussed primarily in relation to cisgender women and girls, which excludes some people who menstruate - like transgender men and non-binary individuals. To be more inclusive, terms like "menstruators" and "people who menstruate" are now widely used (Tomlinson, 2024). This shift hasn't come without debate. Some believe it erases the gendered stigma surrounding menstruation, while others worry it might alienate conservative audiences (Higgins, 2022). Many organisations adjust their language based on context, using "women and girls", where non-binary and transgender identities may not be acknowledged, and more inclusive terms in other settings. In this report, we use "people who menstruate" unless we are explicitly discussing the experiences of women and girls.

# Why this report and why now?



The rights of girls, women, and people with diverse gender identities are increasingly under threat (Equal Rights Coalition, 2022). Through this report, we explore how structural inequalities that limit the choices and freedoms of menstruators also impact the organisations advocating for their rights. A significant challenge is the lack of funding for initiatives that can bring about meaningful, lasting change. Funding for feminist and grassroots movements, particularly in the Global South, is scarce and continues to dwindle. Less than one percent of development aid and foundation grants goes directly to women’s rights and feminist organisations (AWID, 2021). In a movement where social change is frequently led-by those with lived experience, this funding shortfall contributes to burnout, especially among individuals and organisations working at the intersection of multiple oppressive systems.

Looking at the menstrual movement through the lens of menstrual justice encourages us to ask important questions about how the ecosystem operates. For instance, whose perspective is being centred, and whose is resourced? Why is there often a lack of trust among donors in supporting feminist, grassroots, and lived experience-led efforts, especially in the Global South (The Systems Sanctuary, 2022). What persistent forces – such as patriarchy, racism, colonialism, white supremacy, sexism, and ableism – centralise power in funding systems and reinforce menstrual injustice? And how can we inspire donor investment that recognises that dismantling these forces is essential for progress? This report takes a feminist approach to explore these questions, helping us understand the system more holistically and pinpoint some of the critical changes needed to propel the menstrual movement forward.

The need to shift power and resources and to expand our toolkit for doing so has never been more urgent. A significant catalyst for this report was the Women Deliver 2023 conference, where a diverse group of stakeholders – including youth activists, grassroots movements, UN agencies, international NGOs and donors – issued a new global [Call to Action to Accelerate Menstrual Justice](#). Building on this momentum, this report seeks to consolidate and expand existing menstrual justice efforts and provide practical resources to support the movement. By centering the voices of those most affected, we can begin to drive the work toward the structural and systemic changes needed to create a more equitable environment for all people who menstruate.

## Purpose and intended audience of the report

"Scarlet Murmurations" aims to amplify diverse voices in the menstrual justice movement and address the complex, interconnected challenges faced globally by people who menstruate. The report compliments and builds on work that has already been done to:

- Define menstrual injustice, and its global scale and impact
- Outline opportunities for governments and other stakeholders to address menstrual health through a justice lens
- Showcase examples of progress towards menstrual justice globally
- Identify common principles that inform a menstrual justice approach
- Recommend actions to accelerate progress towards menstrual justice for all

The primary audience for this report includes grassroots advocacy groups, national and international non-profit organisations, funders and donors, researchers, and UN agencies advocating for menstrual health needs and broader gender equality agendas. It is designed as a resource to support these groups in advocating for commitments from states and other stakeholders that ensure not only essential access to information, menstrual products, and toilet facilities but also goes further to dismantle structural barriers to menstrual equity.

## Methodology

The report was authored by Ingrid Lynch and Abigail Solomons, and developed with guidance from an international Advisory Group of key stakeholders from the GMC, alongside a smaller, more hands-on Co-creation Group. Their involvement was crucial in ensuring the report offers cross-sectoral and globally diverse perspectives on menstrual justice. It draws on insights from rich sources – including a desktop review, individual interviews, group consultations and compelling activist-led case studies – to bring together fresh insights to drive menstrual justice forward.

The desktop review focused on existing research, policies, programming, advocacy strategies and frameworks relevant to menstrual justice. We reviewed literature from a wide range of country contexts, spanning Global South and Global North settings.

Through interviews and group discussions with menstrual advocates, we uncovered a range of creative and meaningful ways to advance menstrual justice in policies, programmes, and everyday practice. These conversations paid particular attention to shared principles and actionable ideas that can be adapted to different local contexts.

A series of case studies by activists in the menstrual health movement illuminate how menstrual health intersects with crucial justice issues, including sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), gender equality, mental health, climate change, and humanitarian crises. These stories highlight different strategies for advancing justice-centred responses to menstrual health.


## Limitations

The report has some 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. For instance, some advocate for menstrual equity, other initiatives emphasise destigmatisation of menstruation and menstruators, and still others leverage human rights principles for menstrual health.
- ✎ Stakeholders such as governments and donors were not included in interviews or group discussions. Their insights are essential for understanding how menstrual justice initiatives can be expanded, scaled and effectively supported through proper funding.

As we embark on this journey of exploration, we acknowledge that the path to realising true menstrual justice is complex and non-linear. Yet, like the breath-taking murmuration of starlings, when we move together with purpose and synchronicity, we create something beautiful, powerful, and transformative. May this report serve as a call to action, to take flight and join the flock, applying a rights-based and intersectional lens to our work and advance global menstrual justice for all.





# *Unspoken needs, unbreakable bonds: Menstrual care's hidden role in disaster recovery*

In this case study, Bahar Aldanmaz Fidan of the [Konuşmamız Gerek Association](#), explores how feminist organisations in Türkiye applied a menstrual justice lens to a disaster response after the devastating 2023 earthquakes. Bahar highlights how centring menstruators' needs and voices fosters collective healing and resistance against systemic oppression during crises.







## The crisis of erasure

When two major earthquakes struck Kahramanmaraş, Türkiye, in February 2023, affecting 11 provinces and resulting in over 55,000 deaths, the patriarchal structure of disaster response became glaringly apparent. While citizens shared "needs lists" on social media, menstrual care products were systematically erased from these male-dominated relief efforts. This erasure represents a form of gender-based violence, denying menstruators their fundamental right to dignity and bodily autonomy during a crisis.

## Moving beyond the product

At Konuşmamız Gerek Association, we confronted this erasure by implementing a radical menstrual justice approach that went beyond only distributing supplies. Conveying the image of a woman bleeding without access to a pad or tampon is often the most effective way to highlight the importance of our work. It resonates with nearly everyone, even those who are usually indifferent. Combined with a disaster's context, it becomes even more impactful. However, this portrayal has a challenge - many funders, sponsors, and field coordinators may mistakenly believe that the issue is resolved simply by distributing a pack of menstrual products. Our insights from our fieldwork in the disaster zone show why that is inadequate:

- ✿ Organisations involved in the official disaster response typically distribute sanitary pads only to accredited tent cities, neglecting unofficial communal living spaces where the need for menstrual care is often greater.
- ✿ Camp leaders, mostly men, were often unaware of the need for comprehensive menstrual care, assuming a single pack of disposable pads sufficed. During our first visit to a camp run by a well-known international NGO, a male leader interrupted our introduction to say, "Oh yes, we've already distributed 1,000 sanitary pads. I don't think there will be much need for that." This comment reflected the patriarchal assumption that menstrual care is solely about product distribution.
- ✿ Most fieldworkers had no experience or training in providing menstrual care, so they required guidance and practical knowledge to support menstruators in the field effectively.





In response to these insights, we developed a liberation-focused strategy that included:

- ✿ Centring survivor feedback in our disaster response
- ✿ Providing comprehensive menstrual care kits with essential items
- ✿ Producing multilingual educational materials for NGOs operating in the field
- ✿ Creating feminist spaces for collective healing through women's circles

## Creating spaces for collective liberation

Our women's circles became sites of resistance and healing. In Türkiye, women are expected to prioritise their children's needs, and it is more socially acceptable to start a conversation about emotions through the emotional impact on their children. It was tough not just to jump in and ask them, "But what about you?". We broadened the conversation beyond their children's needs by introducing the topic of menstruation. Discussing menstrual care after the earthquake helped women reconnect with their bodies and emotions, fostering intergenerational connections. Laughter broke out as we demonstrated using a sanitary pad, and mothers and grandmothers emphasised the importance of teaching younger girls proper disposal methods.

These circles built solidarity and created a safe space for survivors to share their experiences, including violence, that might otherwise be ignored. They also allowed us to learn about women's own menstrual care practices and preferences, ensuring we supported their autonomy instead of imposing unsuitable solutions.

Through discussions of menstruation, women found the power to:

- ✎ Share earthquake trauma and emotional impacts
- ✎ Address menstrual changes as bodily responses to trauma
- ✎ Raise awareness of the lack of reproductive healthcare access
- ✎ Build intergenerational solidarity
- ✎ Expose hidden forms of sexual violence in unsafe conditions





## The path forward: Menstrual justice as disaster justice

With the frequency and severity of disasters projected to increase globally, centring menstrual justice becomes increasingly crucial and a powerful tool for transforming unequal norms and practices in crisis responses. Our experience demonstrates that menstrual care in emergencies is not just about products – it's about:

- ✿ Creating feminist spaces for healing and resistance
- ✿ Challenging patriarchal power structures
- ✿ Building community solidarity networks
- ✿ Securing fundamental rights to dignity and autonomy
- ✿ Transforming disaster response through radical inclusion

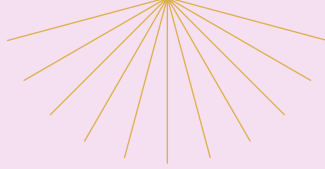
This work proves that when we centre menstruators' voices and rights in crisis response, we create powerful opportunities for collective healing, resistance, and transformation toward a more just world.





*02.*

# First flights: The evolution of the menstrual movement



Over the past few decades, the concepts and frameworks within the menstrual movement have changed and grown significantly. This evolution showcases the hard work of activists and organisations to bring attention and resources to essential but often overlooked issues surrounding menstruation. For instance, the push to include menstruation in the water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) sector highlights the urgent need for infrastructure and facilities that support those who menstruate. This focus is captured in the term "menstrual hygiene management." Similarly, by defining concepts like "menstrual health," "period poverty," and "menstrual equity," the movement has been able to call attention to other critical aspects of meeting the needs of persons who menstruate.

This evolution of concepts and frameworks is not linear, and not shaped by activists and social sector organisations alone; it is also strongly influenced by other key stakeholders, including development donors, governments, and the private sector, who have the power to drive investment in this space. Funding for this essential work remains limited and falls far short of what is needed to address the diverse challenges faced by those who menstruate (The Case for Her, 2021). This requires activists and organisations to continually find frameworks that not only deepen their own understanding of the challenges they are addressing, but also offer compelling arguments to stimulate much-needed donor investment. As this report will unpack, a menstrual justice framework highlights priorities within the menstrual movement that are partially addressed by current frameworks and could be strengthened.

## **Menstrual hygiene management (MHM)**

In 2012, the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) set out a foundational definition of menstrual hygiene management (MHM), emphasising clean menstrual management materials, private changing spaces, access to soap and water, and safe disposal options (WHO/UNICEF, 2012). This approach – focused primarily on hygienic management of menstruation in low-resource settings – was significant in that it aimed to weave menstrual needs into the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

### **DEFINITION OF MENSTRUAL HYGIENE MANAGEMENT (WHO/UNICEF, 2012):**

Women and adolescent girls using a clean menstrual management material to absorb or collect blood that can be changed in privacy as often as necessary for the duration of the menstruation period, using soap and water for washing the body as required, and having access to facilities to dispose of used menstrual management materials. They understand the basic facts linked to the menstrual cycle and how to manage it with dignity and without discomfort or fear.

## Menstrual health

In 2021, a more holistic, multi-sectoral conceptualisation that builds on and expands the WASH-focus in MHM was captured in a comprehensive definition of menstrual health published by the Terminology Action Group of the GMC (Hennegan et al., 2021). This definition includes the bodily process of menstruation and its hygienic management and further encompasses physical, mental and social well-being aspects across the menstrual cycle. Reinforced by the WHO Statement on Menstrual Health and Rights in 2022, this framing gives the menstrual movement shared language to prioritise menstrual health in public health research, policy, practice and funding (WHO, 2022).

### DEFINITION OF MENSTRUAL HEALTH (HENNEGAN ET AL., 2021):

Menstrual health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, in relation to the menstrual cycle. Achieving menstrual health implies that women, girls, and all other people who experience a menstrual cycle, throughout their life-course, are able to:

- ✿ access accurate, timely, age-appropriate information about the menstrual cycle, menstruation, and changes experienced throughout the life-course, as well as related self-care and hygiene practices.
- ✿ care for their bodies during menstruation such that their preferences, hygiene, comfort, privacy, and safety are supported. This includes accessing and using effective and affordable menstrual materials and having supportive facilities and services, including water, sanitation and hygiene services, for washing the body and hands, changing menstrual materials, and cleaning and/or disposing of used materials.
- ✿ access timely diagnosis, treatment and care for menstrual cycle-related discomforts and disorders, including access to appropriate health services and resources, pain relief, and strategies for self-care.
- ✿ experience a positive and respectful environment in relation to the menstrual cycle, free from stigma and psychological distress, including the resources and support they need to confidently care for their bodies and make informed decisions about self-care throughout their menstrual cycle.
- ✿ decide whether and how to participate in all spheres of life, including civil, cultural, economic, social, and political, during all phases of the menstrual cycle, free from menstrual-related exclusion, restriction, discrimination, coercion, and/or violence.



## Period poverty

In recent years, the term period poverty gained traction as a way to highlight the struggle to afford menstrual products. Defined as "the state in which people who menstruate find themselves without the financial resources to access suitable menstrual products" (Vora, 2020, p. 32), period poverty gained visibility when the financial shocks of the pandemic made it even harder for many to access these essential items (Hunter et al., 2022). Although it is a global issue, the concept has helped raise awareness in high-income countries where the financial and accessibility challenges faced by socio-economically disadvantaged groups are often underestimated (Briggs, 2021; Hunter et al., 2022). Efforts to combat period poverty have often focused on donating products or providing them for free through government programs. While these responses offer some relief, they leave the bigger issue of economic inequality – and its impact on access to menstrual products – largely unaddressed (De Benedictis, 2023; Vora, 2020).

## Menstrual equity

The term menstrual equity began to gain momentum around 2015, especially in the US, as a framework for driving change through law and policy (Weiss-Wolf, 2020). The term is defined as the imperative to achieve equitable access to menstrual products, education and facilities. In the US, equity-based arguments often appear in litigation aimed at dismantling sex-based discrimination in public policy (Crays, 2023). Menstrual equity campaigns have focused on reforms such as eliminating menstrual product taxes, providing free products in schools and other public institutions, and including menstrual products in social assistance programs (Weiss-Wolf, 2020).

Similar to the concept of period poverty, a limitation of menstrual equity is that it does not adequately capture efforts to transform the underlying socio-economic conditions that shape experiences of managing menstruation (Crays, 2023). Moreover, litigation strategies that focus solely on countering sex-based discrimination tend to narrow policy responses to the needs of cisgender women, thereby excluding transgender and non-binary individuals who menstruate (Johnson, 2019).





# *Waves of change: The Pacific Period Stories campaign*

The [Pacific Period Stories](#) campaign, by the Pacific Menstrual Health Network, harnesses the power of Pasifika storytelling to amplify Indigenous voices and promote menstrual health awareness across the Pacific region. This case study, authored by Hannah Tamata, showcases how the campaign uses cultural storytelling as a powerful tool for challenging colonial narratives and breaking down stigma.





## The birth of an idea

In the Pacific, people who menstruate often face fear, shame, and practical challenges in managing their periods. Addressing these issues is crucial for advancing gender equality, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and other key outcomes. Yet, menstrual health remains a neglected priority across the region.

The Pacific Period Stories campaign emerged from the Pacific Menstrual Health Network's Strategy Workshop in May 2023. This gathering brought together menstrual health advocates from Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Fiji, and Vanuatu. Drawing on the region's rich tradition of oral storytelling, participants envisioned a campaign to amplify menstrual health experiences through this culturally resonant medium.

## Decolonial roots

To ensure authenticity and cultural relevance, the project adhered to two key principles:

- **Pure Pacific:** Pacific Islanders handled all aspects of the campaign, from production to illustration.
- **Women-led:** The majority of the project was spearheaded by women, with strategic male involvement to promote inclusivity.



## The storytellers



**Laisa Bulatale** is a vibrant Fijian woman living with albinism. Laisa has spoken publicly about being bullied, how this affected her self-esteem and how she overcame it to be the confident, full-of-life person that she is today. She is passionate about raising awareness of human rights issues and menstrual health, and [shares](#), “I hope that no young girl experiences the things that I went through. I want young girls to know that the period cramps and the discomfort that you are feeling is valid. And that if you need to take rest to manage the pain better, it doesn’t make you weak”.



**Leilani Konjib** is a youth advocate from Papua New Guinea. She is an unstoppable force, currently studying for a law degree. She is also an aspiring accountant, model, entrepreneur, and, most importantly, a respected female advocate for menstrual health. She [shares](#), “Even before I got my first period, I would see the struggle through my late mother’s eyes, as she and my dad would get into a disagreement about prioritising groceries over pads.”



**Zita Martel** is a powerhouse Samoan mama. Zita is a prominent female leader and is famed for being the only female skipper of traditional long-boat (fautasi) racing, a role previously only for men, and has won multiple fautasi races in Samoa. Zita continues her legacy of breaking taboos by speaking candidly about her experience of menstruation and menopause. “It is something that we don’t talk about. There is a cultural hush over it, not just in Samoa, pretty much everywhere”.





**Tema Wickham** is a young, vibrant female leader from the Solomon Islands. She is a strong advocate and a passionate practitioner in the water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) space, where her work takes her into remote communities. Tema [shares](#) her story of the challenges she faced as a young girl in boarding school and how fortunate she was to be empowered by her mother and grandmother with information about her body. “Menstruation is normal. It is natural. It happens to every woman and it should not be something that we are ashamed to talk about”.



**Sandra de Araújo** is a former female Chief of Village at Leorema in Timor-Leste and a positive force for change in her community. As village leader, she was involved in campaigning to end violence against women, installing clean water extraction, electricity and other community resources. Sandra is a strong advocate for using reusable pads and [shares](#), “My first period came during the Indonesian occupation. At that time, it was very difficult to move from the village to the city to get pads. So, I just used a towel to manage my menstruation. The towel was very helpful because we could use it, wash it, and use it again at another time.”



**Aminio David** is a male advocate from Vanuatu, where he is a well-known local figure and role model in his village. He is the father of three girls and works in the Vanuatu Cultural Centre to protect and preserve the local customs and culture. Aminio is the only male storyteller in the campaign. He breaks the taboo about talking about menstruation to groups of men, weaving in his personal experiences with traditions surrounding menstruation to normalise these conversations. He [shares](#), “I have been able to welcome this idea and insert it into the work that I do, and I encourage men with daughters to start to speak openly about menstruation”.



## Behind-the-scenes impact

The campaign's production process itself became a powerful tool for change. Gina Ishmael, a videographer, noted: "I am really looking forward to seeing the positive impact in our communities. It was really encouraging to witness a man talking to other men in the community about menstruation." Joshua Tukana, the only male videographer, shared his transformative experience: "I learned a lot being part of the campaign and understanding what women go through. I have sisters, and when I heard of Laisa's story, it really opened my mind to what they have experienced. I hope that everybody sees this video, both women and men."

## A model for grassroots-led change

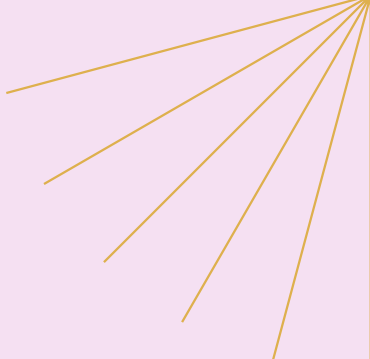
The Pacific Period Stories campaign demonstrates the power of culturally relevant storytelling in addressing sensitive topics like menstrual health and justice. By amplifying diverse voices from across the Pacific, the campaign has initiated meaningful conversations, challenged taboos, and paved the way for greater menstrual health awareness and support in the region. This innovative approach is a model for other regions seeking to address menstrual health challenges through culturally resonant and community-driven initiatives.







*03.*  
Choreographing  
change: Defining  
menstrual  
justice

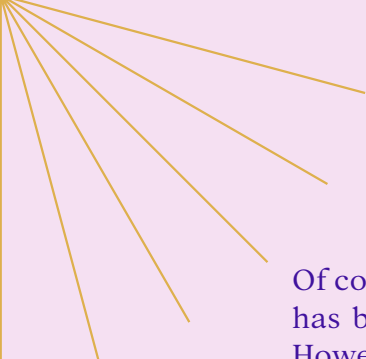


A menstrual justice framework expands the movement's toolkit by highlighting elements that have, to date, received less attention. Menstrual justice draws significant influence from broader feminist movements, especially the reproductive justice movement.

### The foundational influence of reproductive justice

Rooted in Black feminist scholarship, critical race theory, and feminist theory, the term reproductive justice emerged in the 1990s from the activism of Black-led feminist movements with the goal of centering Black women's unique needs and lived experiences (Geledés, 1993; Ross & Solinger, 2017). At the time, mainstream feminist activism – particularly in the Global North – largely reflected the concerns of white, middle-class women, often assuming that all women shared similar experiences. This perspective overlooked the ways in which social and structural factors impose specific barriers on marginalised women, limiting their reproductive freedom. In response, Black women-led movements established their own grassroots initiatives (Geledés, 1993; Ross & Solinger, 2017). By incorporating the concept of justice into reproductive advocacy, they created space to explore the connections between reproductive health and other critical issues, such as racial and economic justice (Geledés, 1993; Roberts, 1998; Ross, 2017).

Since then, the reproductive justice movement has expanded to address how reproductive rights are intertwined with other justice issues (Morison & Mavuso, 2022). By deliberately connecting individual rights with social justice, the movement has fostered an understanding that feminist activism must extend beyond bodily autonomy to address the systems and environments that shape people's reproductive choices.



Of course, the fight for reproductive justice, including menstrual justice, has been ongoing for centuries, long before these terms were coined. However, articulating a menstrual justice framework and identifying its key principles is valuable, as it offers clear tools and direction for activists and organisations dedicated to these issues.

## Principles of menstrual justice

Building on the foundations of feminist justice-oriented movements, menstrual justice can be understood as a rights-based, intersectional approach that seeks to dismantle structural inequities related to menstruation and the menstrual cycle. While the activists and organisations adopting a menstrual justice framework are diverse, several common principles of menstrual justice can be identified. Menstrual justice is:



### **Structural.**

A menstrual justice framework recognises that the challenges experienced by those who menstruate are kept in place by social systems and structures – such as harmful policies and social norms – that create a range of disadvantages (Johnson, 2019; Manorama & Desai, 2020). To achieve menstrual justice, we need to change these foundational systems and structures that impact people who menstruate (Bagala et al., 2023). This includes (but is not limited to) actions such as reforming laws and policies to account for menstrual needs, ensuring workplace practices are fair to those who menstruate, and improving education systems to tackle stigma and better support menstrual health (Johnson, 2021).



### **Intersectional.**

Menstrual justice is intertwined with other forms of structural oppression, including racism, sexism, classism, ableism, homophobia and transphobia (Johnson, 2020) (see box 2). A person's ability to access the resources they need to manage menstruation often depends on how these overlapping oppressions impact their lives (Bagala et al., 2023; Crays, 2023). An intersectional approach highlights that we cannot dismantle one type of inequality without addressing the others (Matsuda, 1991). To create meaningful change, it is essential to work collectively with different social justice movements to break down all barriers to menstrual justice.



## Centred on the lived experiences of the most marginalised menstruators.

A menstrual justice framework, rooted in intersectionality, emphasises the importance of amplifying marginalised voices. By placing those who face multiple, overlapping forms of oppression at the centre, it aims to develop solutions that address their specific needs - benefiting everyone who menstruates (Crays, 2023). Recognizing that the most impactful and sustainable solutions often come from those directly affected by systemic harm, this framework underscores the value of prioritising lived experiences and nurturing community leadership (Bobel & Fahs, 2020).




## A communal responsibility.

Despite progress, menstruation is still seen as shameful and taboo, with a burden on individuals to keep it hidden (Wood, 2020). This stigma isolates people who menstruate as they are expected to be “solely and invisibly responsible for their menstruation without it being recognised as part of the necessary reproductive life cycle” (Johnson, 2019, p. 2). A menstrual justice framework challenges this expectation, highlighting that meeting menstrual needs is a collective responsibility. It calls for stronger government commitment and public policies that actively support menstrual justice (Amery et al., 2023; Manorama & Desai, 2020). It also calls for representation of people who menstruate in democratic systems, to hold policymakers and legislators accountable for driving structural change.

### WHAT IS INTERSECTIONALITY?

Intersectionality illustrates how various forms of oppression - such as racism, sexism, classism and ableism - intersect, creating unique and complex experiences of discrimination (Anzaldúa, 1987; Combahee River Collective, 1983; Crenshaw, 1991). The concept highlights that efforts to address discrimination often isolate issues, like race or gender, rather than considering them together (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1991). Intersectionality recognizes that individuals experience multiple forms of oppression simultaneously. For instance, a woman from an ethnic minority in a low-income community may face multiple layers of inequality, including financial barriers to accessing menstrual management products, racial discrimination when seeking healthcare, and stigma around menstruation due to her gender. These intersections not only create distinct challenges but also have compounding effects. A menstrual justice framework advocates for interventions that disrupt these interconnected structural inequalities.



# *Sacred cycles: Unravelling Sikenge and the quest for menstrual justice in Namibia's Zambezi region*

This case study, authored by Munukayumbwa Mimi Ellis-Mwiya from the Zambezi Girl Child Foundation in Namibia, explores the complex convergence of cultural traditions and menstrual justice in Namibia's Zambezi Region. It examines how activists navigate the delicate balance between honouring ancient customs and advocating for menstruators' fundamental rights to dignity, education, and bodily autonomy.





My name is Mimi, and I've dedicated my life to fighting for menstrual justice in Namibia. It's a battle that takes me from the bustling streets of the capital city Windhoek to the remote villages of the Zambezi Region, where ancient traditions like Sikenge still shape the lives of young girls. Let me take you on a journey through the complexities of menstruation in my country - a journey of resistance, cultural preservation, and the sacred nature of our cycles.

## Breaking the chains of menstrual oppression

In Namibia, menstruation has long been weaponized as a tool of gender oppression, wrapped in silence and shame. Our movement for menstrual justice combines creative activism with grassroots education. We host fundraisers, awareness campaigns, and community dialogues - each event a deliberate act of resistance against the systemic forces that have kept our menstruators marginalised.

## Sikenge: Where tradition meets reproductive justice

In the Zambezi Region, Sikenge marks a girl's entry into womanhood. This tradition, as ancient as the river itself, exemplifies the complex intersection of cultural practices and menstrual rights.

Valentina's story illuminates this tension: "I was 13 and in eighth grade," she shared. "When I got my first period, I was terrified. Not just of the blood, but of what would come next - the isolation, the rituals, the expectations."

Sikenge involves isolating girls for up to three months, during which they undergo various rituals, including controversial practices that raise significant reproductive rights concerns. As menstrual justice advocates, we face the challenge of honouring cultural heritage while fighting against practices that violate bodily autonomy and educational rights.







## Reimagining tradition through a justice lens

Our approach centres on transformative dialogue rather than outright rejection of traditions. We recognise that our ancestors understood menstruation's sacred nature, with traditional practices often providing menstruators with time for rest and reflection. However, we must critically examine how these practices align with fundamental human rights and modern realities.

*"We need to honour the wisdom in our traditions that recognised menstruation as sacred," I explain in community meetings. "But we must also acknowledge that reproductive justice demands we protect girls' rights to education, health, and bodily autonomy."*

## Building a movement for menstrual liberation

Our work extends beyond providing menstrual products - it's about dismantling systemic barriers and building collective power. To do this, we:

- ↘ Educate all genders about menstrual health as a fundamental right
- ↘ Challenge discriminatory practices that exclude menstruators from public life
- ↘ Advocate for free menstrual products as a basic human right
- ↘ Fight for policies that protect menstruators' dignity and autonomy
- ↘ Create spaces where menstruation is celebrated, not stigmatised

## The sacred path forward

Our vision of menstrual justice recognises cycles as a source of power, not shame. We're working toward a future where:

- ↘ Every menstruator has access to menstrual products, education, and support
- ↘ Cultural practices honour bodily autonomy and human rights
- ↘ Menstruation is celebrated as a sacred aspect of human experience
- ↘ Systems of oppression that stigmatise menstruators are dismantled
- ↘ Traditional wisdom about menstrual cycles is preserved while harmful practices are transformed

*This is our story - Namibia's fight for menstrual justice. It's a story of resistance against oppression, of honoring tradition while demanding change, and of reclaiming the sacred nature of our cycles. Will you join us in this revolution?*





The background is a vibrant red with various abstract elements. On the left, there are overlapping, curved shapes in shades of yellow, green, and blue. In the center-right, there is a white wireframe globe. To the right of the globe, there are several white starburst or sunburst patterns. A small, solid white circle is located in the lower right quadrant. The overall aesthetic is modern and energetic.

*04.*  
Joining  
the larger  
murmuration:  
Intersecting  
justice  
movements



GENDER JUSTICE

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

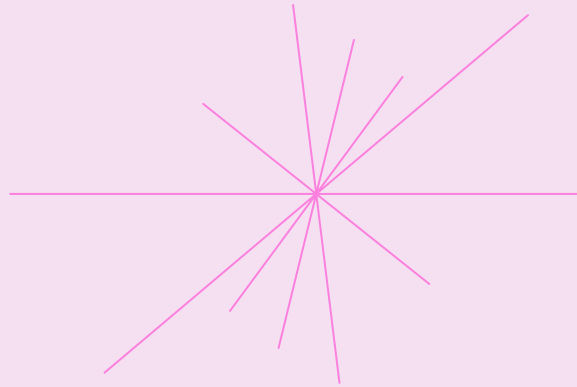
ECONOMIC JUSTICE

DISABILITY JUSTICE

RACIAL AND DECOLONIAL JUSTICE

*"You know, [people] talk about social justice, food justice, environmental justice. But because women always see their needs as less than, they would never think of their basic needs as a justice issue"*

- Naomi Sosa, Papua Partners Director, West Papua



Just as murmurations can merge to create larger, more complex patterns, menstrual justice inherently intersects with multiple forms of social justice, demonstrating how systemic oppression operates through interconnected pathways. Simultaneously, it also presents the opportunity for social justice movements to collaborate to tackle these intersecting systemic oppressions. When we view menstrual experiences through a justice lens, we see how different forms of marginalisation combine to create compounded barriers.

For instance in India's sugarcane belt, some women undergo hysterectomies to deal with menstrual challenges that are seen as obstacles to performing daily heavy physical labor (Rajagopalan & Inzamam, 2024). However, these often unnecessary procedures can result in severe health complications, sometimes even leaving women unable to continue working. This underscores the powerful interconnections between economic injustice and health inequalities (Rajagopalan & Inzamam, 2024).

Understanding these intersections is essential for crafting comprehensive solutions that tackle root causes rather than merely addressing surface-level symptoms. In this section, we explore social movements that intersect with menstrual justice in important ways. Collaboration with broader social justice movements strengthens the impact of the menstrual movement, creating opportunities to collectively dismantle barriers and advance menstrual justice.



## Economic justice

Economic justice aims to ensure that all people, regardless of background or status, have equitable access to resources necessary for dignified living (Corkery et al., 2022). For people who menstruate, economic justice is integral to menstrual justice, as financial barriers often determine whether someone can manage their menstruation with dignity and comfort (Aldanmaz, 2024). Further, the needs of people who menstruate are not always supported as they engage in the workforce, whether formal or unorganised, causing discomfort, anxiety, and even missed workdays and loss of income (Gaybor, 2019; Sommer et al., 2016; USAID, 2019).

*"In many areas, parents are farm workers or migrant workers without regular income. Access to products becomes a significant challenge when income is irregular"*

- Munukayumbwa Mimi Ellis-Mwiya from the Zambezi Girl Child Foundation, Namibia

**Cascading impacts of period poverty:** For many people who menstruate, economic precarity forces impossible choices between purchasing menstrual products and meeting other essential needs. Economic inequality, however, impacts more than product access to restrict access to menstrual education, healthcare services, and safe, private WASH facilities (Rossouw & Ross, 2021). Moreover, financial barriers create cascading impacts in people's lives. Low-income menstruators often delay or avoid seeking medical care for menstrual health conditions due to cost concerns, leading to increased emergency department visits and perpetuating cycles of economic hardship (Marí-Klose et al., 2023). Striking evidence from Kenya finds that girls and women may engage in transactional sex to buy essential period products, enhancing their risks for sexually transmitted infections, including HIV (Phillips-Howard et al., 2015).

**Shame and stigma exacerbate economic barriers:** Financial constraints and stigma often lead to menstrual needs being deprioritized in household budgets (Hennegan et al., 2019). The stigma surrounding menstruation

can pressure individuals to hide these needs from family members and make it challenging for them to advocate for menstrual-related expenses within the household (Hennegan et al., 2019; Mohammed & Larsen-Reindorf, 2020). This interplay of shame, stigma, and economic hardship underscores how these factors collectively deepen menstrual injustice. Workplace discrimination amplifies injustice: Inadequate workplace policies and discriminatory practices can intensify menstrual stigma, limit access to necessary resources, and deepen economic hardship for people who menstruate (Bloody Good Periods, 2021; USAID, 2019). Many employers deny accommodations for menopause symptoms or time off for menstruation-related care, creating significant barriers to workplace equality (Karin & Widiss, 2024; Levitt & Barnack-Tavlaris, 2020). In some workplaces, people who menstruate may be denied restroom breaks, harassed, or even fired over issues like menstrual blood leaking through their clothing (Johnson, 2019). Workers in the informal sector face particular challenges in managing menstruation, with limited access to sanitation facilities, irregular schedules, and a lack of social protection mechanisms compounding these barriers (Shahida, 2024).



## Environmental justice

Environmental justice emphasises the interconnectedness of people and nature, advocating for a shift from extractive, polluting economies towards systems rooted in care and regeneration (Turquet et al., 2023). It calls attention to the unjust burden placed on marginalised communities, especially in countries in the Global South, which contribute less to climate change than the Global North but bear disproportionate impacts (Deivanayagam et al., 2023). Menstrual justice intersects with environmental justice, as the production, use, disposal, and waste management of menstrual products contributes to ecological harm, often affecting marginalised communities the most (Elledge et al., 2018).

**The product problem:** Single-use menstrual products create significant environmental challenges, with disposable pads estimated to take 500 to 800 years to decompose (Flamand, 2018). Structural inequalities exacerbate these issues, as inadequate disposal and waste management infrastructure disproportionately impact low-income and marginalized communities (Khorsand et al., 2023). In such areas, the lack of proper facilities often forces communities to burn used products in poorly functional incinerators or in the open, contributing to air pollution and health risks (Elledge et al., 2018). Additionally, menstrual pads discarded in the open or buried can contaminate soil, posing risks in agricultural

regions, while chemical-laden disposable products contribute to water pollution, harming communities that depend on local water sources (Khorsand et al., 2023). Communities near disposal sites frequently experience higher rates of environmental health problems (Elledge et al., 2018). Moreover, people from low-income and marginalised backgrounds are disproportionately tasked with collecting, sorting, and disposing of waste, increasing their exposure to health risks and perpetuating social stigma (Lopez, 2020). While public narratives often place the burden on menstruators to switch to reusable products to mitigate environmental harm, the responsibility must shift to manufacturers, policymakers, and regulators. These stakeholders must prioritise creating sustainable products, improving waste management systems, and ensuring access to affordable, high-quality menstrual products to support informed and equitable choices (Pednekar et al., 2022; Rana & Pandey, 2024).

*“Sometimes women aren't given a choice in how they manage their menstruation. People come into the community and they just distribute pads that are bought, you know, the ones that you need to dispose of, and it might impact the environment. And what was happening was that younger women were just throwing them away, like rubbish. And then the older women, who are more aware of the environmental impacts, were coming to them and saying, you can't do that. You can't just throw it out”*

- Yepina Matuan, Papua Partners Church and Community  
Mobilisation and GBV coordinator, West Papua

**Period poverty limits choice:** While there is growing awareness of the need for sustainable alternatives to single-use menstrual products, reusable options like menstrual cups and period underwear remain out of reach for many low-income and marginalised groups (Gaybor, 2019). Further, communities may lack access to sufficient water, private toilet and bathing facilities, that challenge the use of reusable products. These findings highlight how environmental and economic injustice intersect to limit choices for marginalised communities. It is also essential to recognise that various factors, including socio-cultural norms, influence product decision-making. For example, in some cultural contexts, insertion or internally worn products like tampons and menstrual cups are considered taboo (Fourcassier et al., 2022). To address the impacts of these intersections, we need to develop programs



that make quality, reusable menstrual products accessible to all while creating an environment that supports choice and agency for all people who menstruate.

**Climate change creates new patterns of menstrual injustice:** As climate-driven extreme weather events such as droughts and floods become more frequent, managing menstruation becomes increasingly difficult (Deivanayagam et al., 2023). Droughts and severe storms limit access to clean water for personal hygiene, laundering cloth pads, and washing reusable products like menstrual cups (Khorsand et al., 2023). People taking refuge in camps or crowded communal spaces lack the privacy and safety required to manage menstruation (Oneya, 2024). Additionally, extreme weather disrupts supply chains, restricting access to menstrual products (Deivanayagam et al., 2023). The intensifying climate crisis can also lead people who may prefer reusables to rely on single-use products, if they lack clean water, functional toilets, and private spaces for washing and drying reusables (Harrison & Tyson, 2023; Rana & Pandey, 2024).

*“When providing menstrual care in our disaster relief efforts, there was a lack of safe toilets and clean water in the humanitarian tent cities. We learned that many women burned their pads inside their tents as a common practice without access to the knowledge that certain components can become toxic when burned”*

- Bahar Aldanmaz Fidan, Konuşmamız  
Gerek Association, Türkiye

**A need for systemic solutions:** While promoting reusable menstrual products is a step toward sustainability, it is not a complete solution. For example, in LMICs, where large percentages of populations lack reliable, sufficient and safe water and sanitation services, advocating for reusable products without addressing local realities can unfairly burden menstruating individuals (UNICEF & WHO, 2023). Effective interventions require comprehensive global and national policies that support sustainable practices (Rana & Pandey, 2024). Further, there is a notable gap in policies addressing both menstrual health and hygiene and environmental sustainability. Many countries still lack product quality standards, menstrual waste management guidelines, and protections for sanitation and waste workers to safeguard their health and dignity (Elledge et al., 2018).



Addressing these gaps requires solutions that enhance corporate accountability by establishing global and national standards and guidelines for the range of menstrual products and waste management solutions and technologies. Governments must also hold manufacturers and marketers accountable for adhering to these standards (Elledge et al., 2018). Additionally, a shared understanding of menstrual health within the context of climate change is essential, especially as climate impacts increasingly affect communities already facing structural challenges in managing menstrual health (Deivanayagam et al., 2023).



## Disability justice

Disability justice advocates for dismantling systems that devalue and marginalise the experiences of people living with disabilities (Berne et al., 2018; Chin, 2021). Menstruators with disabilities often face a triple burden of discrimination - of having a disability, being female (or being non-binary/transgender), and experiencing menstruation - all three of which combine to challenge their menstrual management, health and wellbeing (Phillips-Howard, 2022; Wilbur et al., 2022; Singhanian et al., 2022). Social stigma, discrimination, and taboos further increase isolation and restrict the agency of persons with disabilities (Phillips-Howard, 2022).

Disability justice calls for dismantling systems that devalue and marginalise the experiences of people with disabilities (Berne et al., 2018; Chin, 2021). Menstruators with disabilities often face a compounded burden of discrimination - living with a disability, being female (or non-binary/transgender), and experiencing menstruation. These intersecting forms of discrimination significantly impact their ability to manage menstruation, as well as their overall health and well-being (Phillips-Howard, 2022; Wilbur et al., 2022; Singhanian et al., 2022). Social stigma, pervasive discrimination, and entrenched taboos further exacerbate their isolation and restrict their agency (Phillips-Howard, 2022). Disabilities are diverse (e.g., locomotor, intellectual, hearing, visual, or a combination), and each presents unique needs (Wilbur et al., 2019). Recognising this diversity is essential, not only between different types of disabilities but also among individuals with similar disabilities living in different socio-economic contexts (Singhanian et al., 2022).

**Bodily autonomy and self-determination:** Ableism continues to restrict the bodily autonomy and self-determination of menstruators with disabilities, contributing to harmful practices like forced menstrual

suppression and sterilisation (Rodgers, 2001; Steele & Goldblatt, 2020; Wilbur et al., 2019). People with disabilities may be excluded from decisions about their menstrual management, experience inadequate support for independent menstrual care, and violations of privacy (Nair, 2021; Steele & Goldblatt, 2020). In some cases, hysterectomies are performed on people with disabilities so they longer experience menstruation, often without their understanding or consent (Márquez-González, Valdez-Martinez & Bedolla, 2018).

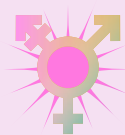
*“I had a stroke a few years back, and lost the use of the right side. The most humiliating thing is when I have my period. The anxiety. Who is going to clean me? I only used to wear tampons, but now for ease, they put me in adult diapers. It is humiliating”*

- Carla, Disability Rights Advocate, Namibia

**Inclusive products and menstrual education:** Menstrual products lack accessible labelling and easy-open packaging for users with various disabilities. Sensory sensitivities to product packaging and materials can also pose challenges for neurodivergent persons (Steward et al., 2018; Tomlinson, 2024). Physical and financial accessibility of inclusive products and educational resources is critical given the heightened economic exclusion experienced by people with disabilities. Tomlinson (2024) highlights substantial gaps in the accessibility of menstrual education, with the majority of menstrual educational materials failing to accommodate diverse abilities. Disability justice calls for educational materials that are available in accessible formats and tailored to different needs and capabilities, such as Braille, audio, and easy-read versions (Patkar, 2020; Tomlinson, 2024). Since many people with disabilities in low-income communities lack opportunities to learn Braille or sign language, more tactile materials (e.g., a uterus model) and visual aids can support inclusive menstrual education (Singhania et al., 2022). Additionally, caregivers such as family members and institutional staff are essential to inclusive interventions and should be engaged in menstrual education as participants and collaborators (Singhania et al., 2022).

**Physical accessibility and WASH infrastructure:** Public facilities often fail to meet basic accessibility standards for menstruators with disabilities. WASH facilities in homes, schools, worksites, and public spaces - are typically not designed to accommodate the needs of persons with disabilities (Phillips-Howard, 2022). Common barriers

include inadequate access for wheelchair users, insufficient space for caregivers to assist with toilet use and menstrual care, and a lack of accessible features like grab bars and low sinks. This systemic exclusion reflects broader patterns of ableism in infrastructure design and public policy (Nair, 2021).



## Gender justice

Gender justice envisions a world where all individuals, regardless of their gender identity, are recognised, respected, and supported to live free from discrimination and oppression. While menstruation is often associated with cisgender women and girls, people of other gender identities, including transgender men, non-binary, and other gender-diverse individuals, also experience menstruation. Patriarchal norms and cisnormativity – the assumption that all people are cisgender – shape societal attitudes toward menstruation, leading to stigma, exclusion, and unequal access to menstrual health resources. Addressing these injustices requires creating environments where everyone, regardless of their gender identity, can live authentically and with equal access to resources and rights, including those related to menstrual health (Wesp et al., 2019; Trans Justice Project, 2023).

**The gendered assumptions surrounding menstruation create challenges for both cisgender and transgender individuals:** For cisgender girls and women, social norms about menstruation being a private or taboo subject feed stigma and inadequate support in homes, as well as in educational, professional, and public spaces (Chrisler et al., 2016; Lane et al., 2022). This stigma is deeply intertwined with social and cultural expectations of femininity, where menstruation is often viewed not only as a biological function but as a defining characteristic of womanhood. Such cultural framing pressures cisgender women and girls to conform to narrow gender norms, positioning menstruation as something inherently "female" and aligning it with notions of modesty and shame (Johnson, 2019). These restrictive expectations contribute to inadequate menstrual education, unequal access to necessary products, and a lack of inclusive workplace policies, all of which hinder the well-being and participation of cisgender women and girls in both public and private spheres. Through their research in Nepal, Amery and colleagues (2023) highlight that menstrual stigma can have harmful effects on mental health. Similarly, Manorama and Desai (2020) examined physical and mental health policy in India over time. They found that women's health is mainly considered in terms of reproduction, with policies focusing on

population control and lacking a menstrual justice approach. This focus has led to the neglect of mental health and other health and wellbeing needs related to menstruation and the menstrual cycle.

**Gendered assumptions surrounding menstruation create unique challenges for transgender men and non-binary persons who menstruate:** This gendered view of menstruation – where it is socio-culturally tied to womanhood and femininity – also impacts transgender men and nonbinary individuals who menstruate, where navigating menstruation in a cisnormative society can be profoundly isolating (Frank, 2020; Lane et al., 2022). This framing, reinforced by menstrual products marketed as "feminine hygiene" and linked exclusively to "women's health," can create discomfort and alienation for those whose menstruation may be at odds with their gender identity (Kosher et al., 2023). WASH infrastructure often compounds this exclusion. For example, "male" bathrooms typically lack menstrual products and disposal options such as bins, forcing transgender men and nonbinary persons to risk leaks, embarrassment, or violations of privacy (Frank, 2020; Tomlinson, 2024). Recognising menstruation as a concern for transgender men and nonbinary persons could shift to policy proposals that ensure menstrual products are available in all bathrooms, not just cisgender women's (Johnson, 2019). Furthermore, depending on the context, measures such as single-occupant gender-neutral bathrooms or bins and basins in the cubicles of "male" bathrooms can offer essential support for transgender men and nonbinary individuals in managing menstruation (Babbar et al., 2023).

#### **WHAT DOES 'CISGENDER' AND 'CISNORMATIVITY' REFER TO?**

'Cisgender' refers to individuals whose gender identity aligns with the gender they were assigned at birth. 'Cisnormativity' is the belief that everyone identifies with the gender they were assigned at birth (thus, that everyone is cisgender) and that there are only two genders – male and female. This belief system ignores gender diversity and marginalises those who are transgender, non-binary, or gender non-conforming, making their experiences, including around gendered issues like menstruation, seem invalid or unimportant (Lowik, 2020).

**Addressing gender injustice goes beyond products and facilities:** It requires efforts to challenge stigma and create environments where transgender individuals feel safe and affirmed. For many transgender men and nonbinary persons, managing menstruation in private, accessible spaces is not just a matter of hygiene but also of safety (Lowik,

2020). Transphobic violence is widespread, such that a lack of safe, private bathroom access increases the risk of "outing" someone through the visibility or sound of unwrapping menstrual products, leaving them vulnerable to harassment, discrimination, or physical harm (Bigalky et al., 2024; Gallardo-Nieto et al., 2021; Walters, 2024). Zhange and Mohangi (2024) found that while gender-inclusive bathrooms in South African schools improved access, in the absence of other interventions, transgender and non-binary students continued to experience transphobic bullying. In a WASH project in India, efforts to ensure the safety of transgender students sparked implementation of gender-inclusive facilities in public institutions (Boyce et al., 2018). Crucially, these efforts were complemented by socio-cultural initiatives aimed at addressing the root causes of transphobia to create more supportive and affirming environments for transgender youth (Boyce et al., 2018).

**Harmful gender norms and biases in healthcare and educational biases hinder inclusive menstrual care:** Gender bias in healthcare systems often results in menstruators being gaslit by providers who dismiss or minimise their pain, discomfort, or concerns related to menstrual health. This perpetuates a culture in which symptoms are downplayed or ignored, and contributes to the underdiagnosis and inadequate treatment of menstrual health conditions, such as endometriosis, polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), and premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD) (Eder & Roomaney, 2024; Rowe et al., 2021).

For transgender and non-binary menstruators, these barriers are compounded by fears of transphobic treatment from healthcare providers, often resulting in delayed healthcare seeking or avoiding care altogether (Lane et al., 2022; McLachlan, 2019). One transgender man in a study by Chrisler and colleagues (2016) described accessing healthcare as “stressful, humiliating, and easier to just not go at all” (p. 1247). Menstruation can also trigger intense gender dysphoria for some transgender men and non-binary individuals, leading to profound discomfort and a sense of disconnection from their bodies (Frank, 2020; Kosher et al., 2023; Lane et al., 2022). Compounding these challenges, healthcare providers often lack adequate education on affirming care for gender-diverse populations. This gap leaves menstrual care and education ill-equipped to provide guidance on managing dysphoria or addressing barriers to accessing gender-affirming hormonal therapies that can suppress or stop menstruation if desired (Lowik, 2020; Schwartz et al., 2023). Ultimately, for both cisgender and transgender menstruators, the absence of holistic and empathetic care creates significant obstacles to accessing appropriate health services.

*“I can't bring myself to talk about [menstruation] to anyone at all, because I'm then perceived as a cisgender female instead of the transgender man I am. I get enough backlash from just about everyone I know for being myself as it is, and I don't need to be even more dysphoric just because I can't afford hormones quite yet”*

- Blue, transgender man, United States (in Armitage, 2017).

**Trans-inclusive menstrual education and infrastructure foster broader societal benefits:** Tackling the stigma, cisnormativity, and transphobia that put transgender individuals in vulnerable situations also benefits cisgender women, girls, and society as a whole. Menstrual education often neglects the needs and experiences of transgender youth, yet expanding this education offers significant advantages for everyone (Stubbs & Sterling, 2020). By providing menstrual information to all learners, we reduce menstruation-based social stigma and shame, breaking down barriers created by sex-based segregation in sexuality education (Crays, 2023). Sharing medically accurate information about menstruation with all students tackles stigma and fosters open dialogue, creating a more supportive and inclusive environment for everyone, regardless of gender identity. Expanding menstrual education beyond cisgender girls benefits all, including cisgender boys, by advancing menstrual justice and encouraging empathy and understanding. Similarly, inclusive WASH facilities – such as single-occupant, gender-neutral bathrooms with sinks in cubicles – meet the needs of transgender individuals while improving safety, accessibility and privacy for all menstruators, regardless of gender identity (Chrisler et al., 2016; Lane et al., 2022). These inclusive approaches benefit everyone who menstruates, creating more equitable and supportive spaces for all.

*“[W]hat I realised is that it's not my body that is the issue, but rather how people see that body [...] What would be really exciting for me is not necessarily that it [menstruation] would stop, but that it would be thought of differently. At the moment menstruation is seen as something that only women go through. It would be awesome for me if people could see how many other different kinds of people actually go through menstruation, and perhaps see that the process is affecting them in different ways”*

- Siv, nonbinary person, South Africa (in UNFPA, 2024).





## Racial and decolonial justice

Achieving racial and decolonial justice necessitates dismantling systemic racism and structural oppression by addressing the historical and institutional forces that sustain racial inequalities (Turner, 2019). This struggle is deeply intertwined with menstrual justice, as Black, Indigenous, and other people of colour disproportionately face menstrual inequities (Cardoso et al., 2021; Menegotto & Ribeiro, 2024; Soolman, 2023). Applying a decolonial lens helps us to examine how colonial histories, power dynamics, and knowledge systems continue to shape the marginalisation of racialized and Indigenous communities.

With crises such as the economic impact of the pandemic, rising cost-of-living and food insecurity, “[w]e have a whole new wave of individuals who need menstrual products, because [...] everything is rising and they’re not setting up systems to help our communities. Then our communities who are suffering the most are just devastated,” Lynette Medley, co-founder of The Spot Period, a menstrual hub offering a safe space and free menstrual products for Black and Brown communities in the US (in Durham, 2022).

**Racial injustice intersects with a range of menstrual injustices, including access to and quality of menstrual healthcare:** In many Global North contexts, histories of racial oppression and ongoing structural inequalities perpetuate these disparities. For example, Martinez (2020) highlights how institutionalised racism and sexism intersect to shape healthcare experiences for women of colour in the United States. Similarly, systemic racism in healthcare delivery is evident in menstrual health disparities, as reflected in the lack of funding and research dedicated to the menstrual health needs of marginalised racial and ethnic communities (Perro et al., 2022). Addressing these inequities often falls on community-led initiatives driven by individuals with lived experience, yet these efforts frequently rely on voluntary and unpaid labour. To disrupt this extractive dynamic, there is an urgent need for greater funding support for grassroots movements working in marginalised communities, alongside stronger collaboration with allies in the menstrual health space (Perro et al., 2022).

**Racial injustice is also evident in the ways menstrual activism 'travels' from the Global North to the Global South:** Development actors often approach interventions in the Global South with pre-determined priorities, focusing predominantly on the distribution of menstrual



products without also engaging with the perspectives and needs voiced by local activists (Aldanmaz, 2024; Bobel, 2019). This dynamic reflects the entwined legacies of racism and colonialism, which continue to silence the lived experiences of menstruators in the Global South (Bobel & Fahs, 2020; Winkler & Bobel, 2021). For instance, research in South Asia and parts of Africa highlights a disconnect: while many programs emphasise menstrual product provision, schoolgirls frequently cite menstrual pain as their most pressing concern, an issue often overlooked (Bobel, 2019). Similarly, a study with adolescent girls and young women in Nepal reports that “young women repeatedly stated that they would like to see medication offered in schools” (Amery et al., 2023, p. 7).

**Colonialism and racism have profoundly disrupted the menstrual knowledge systems of Indigenous and racialized groups, replacing them with colonial and Western health narratives:** Bhandal (2021) describes how menstrual cycles – referred to as *mahwari* in Punjabi – once held significant meaning as tools for both self- and collective care. These Indigenous understandings of menstrual health were largely erased under colonial rule, supplanted by "modern" approaches to managing menstruation (Bhandal, 2021). This shift reframed menstruation as something to be hidden, stigmatised, and controlled, often through the use of commercial products. Indigenous knowledge, traditionally passed down through matrilineal systems, was dismissed as inferior, while colonial medical discourses of cleanliness delegitimised culturally appropriate methods of managing menstruation. Yet, traditional or alternative practices can often be equally effective and better suited to specific social, cultural, or environmental contexts, challenging the reliance on profit-driven menstruation management systems (Lahiri-Dutt, 2015).

**Menstruation can serve as a powerful site for cultural reclamation and resistance against colonial domination:** Global menstrual activism can be strengthened by adopting decolonial approaches to research and advocacy, which actively challenge colonial and misogynistic views of menstruation (Cleaver, 2023; Murphy, 2011). For instance, research on pre-colonial Māori cosmologies and tribal histories reveals how Indigenous perspectives on womanhood disrupt colonial notions of female inferiority and menstrual pollution (Murphy, 2011). These alternative views provide a foundation for reimagining menstruation in ways that challenge and transform dominant colonial interpretations, and celebrate its diverse meanings within different cultural contexts.



# 05. Local flights, global patterns: Snapshots of progress worldwide

## 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.

## UK

The initiative [Bloody Good Employers](#) addresses menstrual stigma by fostering social norm change within workplaces.

## Kenya

The country was the first to eliminate taxes on menstrual products in 2004. This milestone not only advanced menstrual equity but also carried significant symbolic value. By recognizing menstrual products as essential, this step helped normalise their use and contributed to breaking down the stigma and taboo surrounding menstruation.

## India

A [conference](#) on menstrual justice, hosted in 2024, explored the intersections between caste and menstruation, highlighting how beliefs around menstrual impurity interact with caste-based untouchability to profoundly stigmatize Dalit women in India. The conference concluded with a powerful call to action through the 'Delhi Declaration for Menstrual Justice'.

## 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.

## 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.



# *Breaking the corporate ceiling: Menstrual justice as workplace revolution*

This case study explores how the [Period Positive Workplace](#) initiative challenges menstrual oppression in the workplace through systemic intervention. It documents the transformation of corporate cultures in 199 certified workplaces across 42 countries, advancing menstrual justice for working menstruators. It is authored by Jess Strait, Diana Nelson, Renjini Devaki, and Tanya Mahajan from Days for Girls: The Period Positive Workplace Initiative.





## The crisis of workplace menstrual injustice

While most menstrual health interventions focus on schools, workplace menstrual justice has largely been overlooked, perpetuating systems of oppression that disproportionately affect menstruating workers (Sommer et al., 2016). The private sector's absence from these discussions represents a form of institutional violence against menstruating employees. Research in the UK reveals the devastating impact of this systemic neglect (WaterAid UK, 2023):

**43%** of workers  
live in fear of menstrual leakage.  
**31%** resort to makeshift materials,  
violating their dignity.  
**Only 3%** feel supported  
by employers.  
**80%** experience career barriers  
due to menstrual stigma



## "Asking the menstruation question"

Menstrual justice scholar Margaret Johnson emphasises the importance of "asking the menstruation question" in all contexts and dimensions to create a world where menstruation is no longer a barrier (Johnson, 2021). Johnson (2019) highlights that workplace menstrual injustice stems from discrimination, harassment, and lack of access to menstrual hygiene management (MHM) resources. Organisations must not only address their employees' menstrual needs but also recognise menstrual health as a critical component of a safe and just workplace. The Period Positive Workplace initiative is an entry point for organisations to begin "asking the menstruation question," thereby sparking a paradigm shift that acknowledges menstrual health in the workplace as essential.



## Inspiring incremental change

Launched in May 2023, the Period Positive Workplace initiative focuses on the private sector's potential to drive large-scale change. Recognising that structural change is often incremental, the initiative outlines three key actions that organisations can take to become certified as a Period Positive Workplace, laying the groundwork for further transformation:

1. Provide free access to period products: Readily available in or near every bathroom used by employees who menstruate;
2. Ensure adequate bathroom facilities: Each bathroom must be equipped with a pit latrine or toilet in a well-lit, well-ventilated, safe area with a locking mechanism; a hand-washing facility with clean water and soap or sanitiser; toilet paper; and a waste bin; and
3. Notify employees: Formally communicate the availability of period products.

Menstrual justice requires both material support and social norm change. Beyond these three basic requirements, the Period Positive Workplace implementation guide and optional resources support cultural paradigm shifts. These resources highlight the connection between menstruation and gender inequalities in the workplace and society, offer strategies to address ableism in menstrual products and facilities, and provide tools to promote conversations that destigmatise menstruation and foster a supportive workplace environment.

## From oppression to opportunity

Our research demonstrates that challenging menstrual oppression not only advances a justice agenda but also strengthens workplace objectives. The majority of both employer and employee respondents reported that becoming a Period Positive Workplace improved the experience of managing menstruation at work. Employers reported the following:

**94%** report improved menstrual management accessibility.

**88%** note increased employee satisfaction.

**69%** experience enhanced public perception.

**47%** see improved productivity.

**78%** report increased menstrual dialogue.





The impact on menstruating workers demonstrates the power of systemic action:

- 84% reported awareness of workplace menstrual rights.
- 67% report improved menstrual experiences.
- 52% previously faced work disruption due to menstruation.

Qualitative insights reinforce these findings. An employee shared, "One day, I unexpectedly started my period while at work... In the past, this situation would have been incredibly stressful and embarrassing. But thanks to the organisation's new approach, I was relieved to find free menstrual products readily available in the restroom." An employer noted, "male colleagues, who initially felt uncomfortable discussing menstruation, have undergone a transformative shift. They not only engage in open dialogue but also actively support and assist female staff and the girls they work with."

## An attainable first step in a transformation journey

The Period Positive Workplace certification is the first step in an organisation's commitment to advancing menstrual justice for its employees and the communities it serves. The initiative has been embraced by organisations across every inhabited continent, spanning both majority and minority world nations. The requirements to become a Period Positive Workplace have proven achievable across various industries, organisation sizes, and revenue levels. Survey data from employers in certified workplaces highlight how easy it is to implement the initiative. Notably, nearly half of the managers who implemented the initiative reported that they do not menstruate. This shows that the initiative's accessible and low-barrier approach engages a diverse audience. While the required interventions are material, their implementation sparks cultural change within organisations by fostering open dialogue about employee needs and experiences. These conversations are helping to destigmatise menstruation and encouraging organisations to engage more deeply in menstrual justice work.





*06.*  
Navigating  
turbulence:  
Challenges  
and ongoing  
debates



Like a murmuration adapting to changing winds, the menstrual justice movement continuously evolves in response to emerging challenges and critical debates.

This section examines key areas of tension that require careful navigation to maintain the movement's momentum while ensuring its commitment to justice.



### Cultural responsiveness and universal rights

**Complexities of cultural practice:** The movement faces the delicate task of promoting universal menstrual rights while honouring diverse cultural practices. Bobel and Fahs (2020) explore this tension through the example of menstrual seclusion practices, which some communities view as restorative rest periods while others identify them as discriminatory restrictions. This complexity requires nuanced approaches that resist both cultural imperialism and cultural relativism.

**Community-led solutions:** Justice-oriented responses to this tension emphasise the leadership of affected communities in defining what menstrual justice means in their context. For instance, Indigenous-led initiatives in the Pacific region demonstrate how traditional cultural practices can be honoured while addressing harmful restrictions (Bobel & Fahs, 2020). These approaches show how cultural preservation and rights advancement can work in harmony when marginalised communities lead the way.



## Language evolution and strategic communication

**Inclusive language development:** The movement grapples with balancing inclusive language and specific advocacy needs. Gender-inclusive language can both challenge discrimination and potentially obscure gendered aspects of menstrual stigma (Manorama & Desai, 2020; Tomlinson, 2024). This tension particularly affects regions where gender-based discrimination remains a primary barrier to menstrual justice.

**Context-sensitive approaches:** Successful initiatives demonstrate how language choices can adapt to different contexts while maintaining commitment to justice. For example, organisations in conservative settings might strategically use traditional gendered terminology while still ensuring their programs serve all menstruators. This flexible approach recognizes that language should serve justice goals rather than impede practical progress.



## Knowledge democracy and academic engagement

**Bridging knowledge systems:** As the field develops more nuanced theoretical frameworks, a growing challenge is maintaining connections between academic discourse and grassroots wisdom. Academic language can potentially alienate community activists who often possess the deepest understanding of local needs and effective solutions (Bobel, 2019).

**Redistributing knowledge power:** Justice-oriented responses to this challenge focus on democratising knowledge production. This includes validating community expertise and insights alongside academic research, making complex concepts accessible, ensuring research benefits flow back to communities, and supporting community-led knowledge creation.



## Systemic change and meeting immediate needs

**Beyond product-based solutions:** The menstrual justice movement continues to navigate tension between addressing immediate needs and pursuing systemic change. While improved access to menstrual products provides crucial immediate relief, focusing solely on product provision can reinforce existing power dynamics and market-based solutions, and overlook choice and agency (Bobel, 2019).

**Integrated approaches:** A "beyond the product" approach addresses immediate needs while building toward systemic change. For instance, community-led initiatives can successfully combine sustainable product access programs with advocacy for structural changes, demonstrating that these goals can be complementary rather than competing (Aldanmaz, 2024).



## Implementation of intersectional approaches

**Practical challenges:** While the importance of intersectionality in menstrual justice is gaining recognition, implementing truly intersectional approaches remains complex. Hennegan et al. (2021) document how organisations struggle to address multiple, overlapping forms of marginalisation in practical program design and implementation.

**Emerging solutions:** Justice-oriented responses focus on building diverse coalitions throughout programmatic research, design and implementation, ensuring that lived experience of different intersecting oppressions is represented. They also involve creating flexible funding mechanisms that support intersectional work, allowing for adaptation to the needs of marginalised communities. Developing evaluation tools that capture intersectional impacts is key to assessing the effectiveness of these efforts, while supporting leadership from marginalised communities ensures that those most affected are guiding the work.



# *Crushing the crimson silence: East Africa's journey to menstrual justice*

This case study documents the transformative work of [The Period Equality Network](#) in East Africa. It illustrates how collective feminist organising is dismantling systemic barriers to menstrual justice and catalysing policy change across Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, and Tanzania. It is authored by Lillian Bagala, Regional Director of Irise International, East Africa.



## A hidden crisis

In the heart of East Africa, a silent crisis unfolds each month. As 1.8 billion women and girls worldwide experience their menstrual cycles, a staggering number in this region face an uphill battle to manage this natural process with dignity and care. The story of menstrual injustice in East Africa is one of missed school days, shattered dreams, and persistent stigma – but it's also a tale of resilience, grassroots activism, and the dawn of a new era in gender equality.

Consider Agnes, a 14-year-old Ugandan girl, forced to miss up to 20% of her school year due to inadequate menstrual supplies and facilities. Her story is not unique. Across Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, and Tanzania, millions of girls face similar challenges:

In Uganda, **65%** of girls and women can't fully meet their menstrual health needs  
(Ministry of Education and Sports, 2021)

Kenya reports that **54%** of women and girls can't afford period products  
(NBS Kenya, 2022)

Rwanda sees **15%** of girls missing school due to periods  
(National Institute of Statistics, 2020)

Tanzania grapples with **42%** of girls lacking access to menstrual products  
(NBS Tanzania, 2016)

These aren't just statistics; they're dreams deferred and potential unrealised. But in the face of these challenges, a powerful movement is taking root.



## The rise of the Period Equality Network

Enter Lillian Bagala and the Irise Institute East Africa. Recognising the need for a coordinated approach to tackle menstrual injustice, the Institute spearheaded the creation of The Period Equality Network (TPEN) – a coalition of 160 organisations united in their quest for menstrual justice (Irise Institute East Africa, 2023).

"We needed to shift the narrative," Lillian explains. "It's not just about hygiene; it's about justice, dignity, and fundamental human rights." TPEN's approach is revolutionary in its simplicity: bring together grassroots feminists, policymakers, academics, and funders to address menstrual health through a feminist lens (Period Equality Network, 2022). By centring the voices of those most affected, they're catalysing a social norm shift that promises lasting change.

### From taboo to policy: A regional transformation

The impact of this collective effort is already visible across East Africa:

- ✎ Uganda has integrated Menstrual Health and Hygiene (MHH) into its national curriculum.
- ✎ Kenya is implementing its menstrual health management policy.
- ✎ Rwanda and Tanzania are seeing increased awareness and community-led initiatives.
- ✎ Tax exemptions on menstrual products have been won through sustained advocacy.

Yet challenges persist. In Uganda's Busoga region, menstruating women are still forbidden from crossing gardens, which is believed to affect the harvest. "These beliefs aren't just inconvenient," Lillian notes. "They're actively harmful, leading to forced marriages, school dropouts, and the exclusion of women from public life."







## The road ahead

TPEN envisions a future where:

- ✿ Every school has adequate sanitation facilities and menstrual supplies as a right
- ✿ Menstrual health is fully integrated into public health systems
- ✿ Cultural stigma around menstruation is eliminated
- ✿ Women and girls can participate fully in education, work, and community life

"This isn't just about periods," Lillian concludes. "It's about unlocking the full potential of half our population. When we achieve menstrual justice, we take a giant leap towards true gender equality."

As the sun sets over East Africa, a new dawn is breaking for millions of women and girls. The silence around menstruation is being broken, one conversation, one policy, and one empowered girl at a time – proving that collective feminist organising can transform deeply rooted injustice into powerful change.





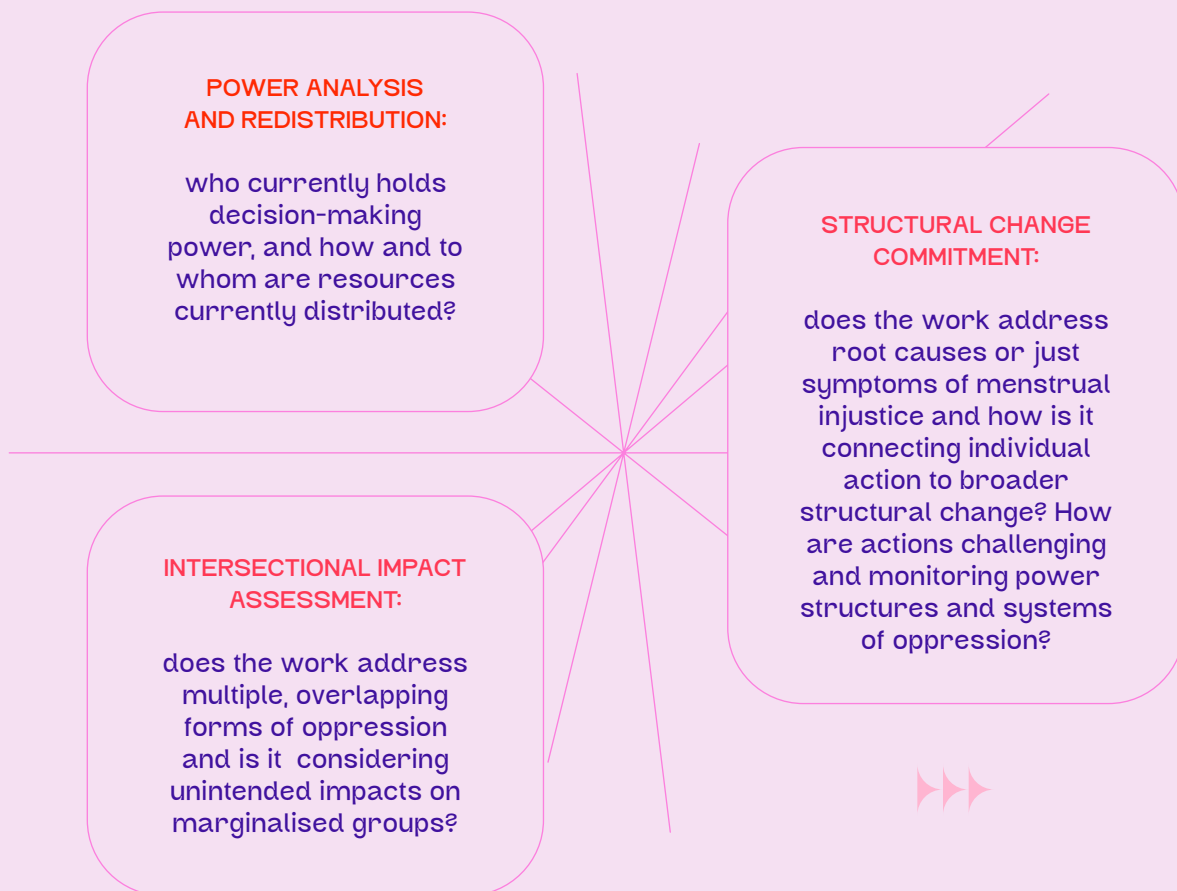
*07.*

The power  
of our collective  
flight: A justice-  
oriented  
framework  
for action

Like the synchronized movement of starlings in a murmuration, effective change requires coordinated action across multiple stakeholders, with each participant's contribution creating a larger pattern of transformation.

This framework for action presents how diverse actors can move together to create powerful, collective change, centering justice at every level.

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



## 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 experiencing 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.

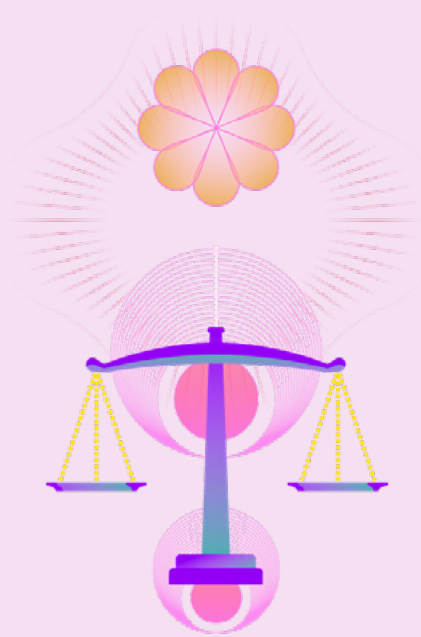


# Conclusion


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.*



# *Rising tides: Menstrual justice in the face of the climate crisis*

This case study, authored by Abigail Solomons, a human rights practitioner and activist based in Namibia, draws on insights shared during the "Weathering the Cycle: Exploring Menstrual Health in the Context of Climate Change" webinar on September 11, 2024. The webinar was an initiative by the Menstrual Health Hub and the Global Menstrual Collective.





Climate justice and menstrual justice are inextricably linked in the struggle for human rights and environmental sovereignty. The climate crisis, perpetuated by wealthy nations and corporations, disproportionately impacts menstruators in low and middle-income countries, deepening existing inequities and creating new barriers to menstrual dignity. This intersection demands solutions centred on community power and resistance rather than top-down approaches that further marginalise those most affected.

## Rising tides of injustice

In the Pacific region, climate change manifests as a form of gender oppression, where rising seas and extreme weather events compound existing menstrual inequities and cultural taboos. Viva Tatawaqa, a grassroots feminist mobiliser from Diverse Voices and Action for Equality (DIVA for Equality) in Fiji, exposes how corporate exploitation intersects with climate violence:

"We have women who have lost their homes overnight," she recounts, "and the very next morning, they are expected to be doing communal work, bringing back and putting together a whole village." Meanwhile, corporations like Fiji Water extract precious freshwater resources, leaving local communities struggling to meet basic menstrual hygiene needs – a stark example of how capitalism intensifies climate-related menstrual injustice.

## Resistance and community power

Lady Lisondra from the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) ESEAOR brings attention to the systemic erasure of menstrual needs in climate disaster response. "The issue of having underwear after a disaster is greatly underrecognised," she notes, highlighting how basic menstrual necessities become luxuries under climate apartheid.

Yet communities are fighting back. In the Philippines, grassroots organising has secured reproductive justice policies ensuring menstrual health services during emergencies. This victory recognises menstrual rights as fundamental as food and shelter in disaster response.





## Building revolutionary solutions

The Cocoon Project in Uganda's Bidi Bidi refugee settlement demonstrates the power of community-led resistance. This initiative, developed through collective organising and participatory design, created the "Cocoon Mini" – a private structure with latrines, washing areas, and waste disposal specifically designed for menstrual dignity.

"95% of our users reported it made managing their menstruation much easier," reports Aly Beeman from YLabs. The project challenges menstrual stigma by involving men in construction while centring menstruators' needs and autonomy.

## Confronting corporate power

Environmental lawyer Stella James challenges individual blame narratives around menstrual products' environmental impact. She argues that focusing on personal carbon footprints deflects attention from corporate responsibility and systemic change. "We need to move away from this idea of having a carbon footprint for menstrual products," she insists, highlighting how this framework perpetuates both climate and menstrual injustice.

## A call for radical change

The fight for menstrual justice in the climate crisis demands systemic transformation:

1. Centre menstrual justice in climate adaptation policies and resistance movements
2. Build collective power through integrated organising for gender, reproductive, and climate justice
3. Dismantle menstrual stigma through radical education and community dialogue
4. Invest in community-controlled infrastructure that prioritises menstrual dignity
5. Challenge corporate exploitation of water resources and environmental destruction

As Viva reminds us, "We are doing this work together because we care." This care manifests as resistance against interconnected systems of oppression, fighting for a world where climate justice and menstrual justice are inseparable parts of our collective liberation.



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# Glossary





**Ableism:**

Discrimination and social prejudice against people with disabilities, manifesting in menstrual health through inaccessible products, facilities, and educational materials (Steele & Goldblatt, 2020).

**Cisgender:**

Term describing individuals whose gender identity aligns with their sex assigned at birth (Kosher et al., 2023).

**Cisnormativity:**

The assumption that all people are cisgender, leading to exclusionary menstrual health practices and policies that particularly affect transgender and non-binary individuals (Lane et al., 2022).

**Gender-inclusive language:**

Terminology that avoids bias towards particular genders, crucial for inclusive menstrual health discussions. Examples include "people who menstruate" rather than "women" (Lowik, 2020).

**Intersectionality:**

Framework examining how different forms of social categorization and discrimination intersect to create unique experiences of oppression. Coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw and essential to understanding menstrual justice (Crenshaw, 1991).

**Menstrual activism:**

Advocacy and action challenging menstrual stigma and promoting equitable access to menstrual health resources. Encompasses various approaches from policy reform to grassroots organizing (Bobel & Fahs, 2020).

**Menstrual equity:**

Framework focused on achieving equitable access to menstrual products, education, and facilities through policy change and institutional reform (Weiss-Wolf, 2017).

**Menstrual health:**

State of complete physical, mental, and social well-being in relation to the menstrual cycle, not merely absence of disease or infirmity (Hennegan et al., 2021).

**Menstrual justice:**

Rights-based, intersectional approach addressing structural inequities related to menstruation. Goes beyond access to challenge systemic barriers and discriminatory practices (Johnson, 2019).

**Period poverty:**

Inability to access menstrual products and facilities due to financial constraints, often intersecting with other forms of economic marginalization (Vora, 2020).

**Reproductive justice:**

Framework originated by Black feminist movements connecting reproductive rights with social justice, emphasizing bodily autonomy and addressing systemic oppression (Ross & Solinger, 2017).

**Sustainable menstrual products:**

Reusable or environmentally conscious menstrual products designed to reduce environmental impact, including menstrual cups, reusable pads, and period underwear (Khorsand et al., 2023).

**Transgender, nonbinary and gender diverse:**

Umbrella terms describing individuals whose gender identity does not align with their sex assigned at birth (McLachlan, 2019).



# Scarlet Murmurations

*Advancing Global Menstrual Justice*

