

community

CAMPAIGNERS

Newsletter



Community Campaigners are supporters of ActionAid based in the UK. They volunteer some of their spare time to learn campaign skills, build their own feminist leadership and come up with creative ways to challenge injustice. From resisting the global patriarchy to advancing systemic change – there are so many ways you can be involved with what they do, and writing is just one of them.

Community Campaigners share their individual opinions in this newsletter. These are not reflective of the opinions or official stance of ActionAid as a whole.

“Hi there, I’m Sienna (she/her) and I became an ActionAid Community Campaigner after doing some fundraising. ActionAid’s focus on women and girls is one that’s very close to my heart, and after finding out I could play a more active role through campaigning, I knew this was something I had to do!



SOLIDARITY

Welcome to ActionAid UK’s first newsletter of 2024! My name is Sienna, and it is my pleasure to introduce this edition of our Community Campaigner newsletter. Since the start of 2023 I have been a Community Campaigner with ActionAid UK. This is something I am extremely proud of; the sense of togetherness amongst the campaigners drawn from our desire to work with women and girls living in poverty all over the world.

We are still urgently calling for an immediate cessation of hostilities and the protection of civilians in Gaza. Keep talking about it to the friends, family and your parliamentary candidates and sign the [#CeasefireNow petition](#) if you haven’t already.

We also have recently introduced a campaign to stop banks from financing the climate crisis. [Banks like Barclays and HSBC have profited from the two biggest causes of climate change](#) - financing the extraction of fossil fuels and industrial agriculture companies. We will be starting to make plans for COP29 in November this year, if you’re keen to support then keep an eye on our Signal chat as we will be reigniting our Climate and Gender Justice group.

With this in mind, this Community Campaigner newsletter has very insightful pieces by those who are part of the Newsletter Working Group:

Marietta has written a wonderful piece about Barbie (2023) healing the female experience. Marietta has followed on from Numra’s critique of the film in the [last newsletter](#) with another thoughtful view.

Numra’s piece in this edition reflects on International Women’s Day by discussing two female trailblazers in Pakistan - Mahrang Baloch and Sister Zeph, who have fought back against a patriarchal government.

Then we have Mishita’s piece on Liberal Feminism and the “Girl Boss” attitude and why it perhaps isn’t the best way to empower women.

Finally, Sarah continues her series on reproductive health by discussing periods and the stigma around menstruation by delving into the dismissal of women and the overlooking of women’s menstrual pain.

To conclude this newsletter, I will be discussing World Menstrual Hygiene/Health Day and the UK General Election. Until then, please enjoy reading these tremendous pieces from Marietta, Numra, Mishita and Sarah!


- Sienna

Changing the world

Contents

Healing the female experience - the “Barbie” movie	2
Spotlight on Mahrang Baloch and Sister Zeph	3
Liberal Feminism	4
Menstrual pain	5
Join our Ending Violence Working Group	6
Conclusion	7

“It’s not an easy task to find a way to make an impact in this world and to find the right cause to put your efforts in. After doing my research and after years of following ActionAid’s news, I knew I found a charity and cause of supporting women’s rights and socioeconomic equality that really resonated with me, and I am grateful for being part of this community.





Healing the female experience - the “Barbie” movie - Marietta

SPOILER ALERT!
You have been fairly warned.

When the “Barbie” movie was released in the UK in July 2023, people were unsure of what the movie would be truly about , besides knowing that it’s about Barbie the doll. Very limited information was released or talked about in interviews. And once it was out, so many people went out to see it - with many divided views of course. Barbie is a plastic doll created by Ruth Handler, a business woman and inventor, and was released in 1959 by Mattel, an American multinational toy manufacturer. It is a doll used by so many little girls to play with through the years. The movie includes many topics, and the one that stood out for me the most is how it connects with the female experience and I will share a bit about how I felt impacted by the movie.

So, I think it’s really important to address which generations played with Barbies the most, and even though I didn’t research this in an academic manner, I think the generations most influenced were the baby boomers, generation X and millennials. Moreover, I think from the next generation, gen Z and onwards, playing became more digital and less about physical toys.

During the film, America Ferrera, who plays the character of Gloria, very skillfully delivers a monologue about the female experience – which we need to talk about. A monologue about the female experience, which can feel so incredibly contradictory and confusing at times. There has been and still exists pressure to look, behave and be a certain way. The monologue is in my view a discussion about generational trauma and a nod to the gender-biased and sexist ways many of us as women have been raised with and still deal with on a day-to-day basis.

I would also recommend reading this incredible piece by Camille Rainville named “Be a Lady they said”, which you can find [here](#). To note, it is acknowledged that there are difficulties, gender stereotypes and expectations that men also experience as a result of the patriarchy, and that these connect directly with the female experience.

What really stayed with me from the Barbie movie is that I felt seen, understood and part of the female collective through that monologue. I felt connected in that a lot of us share the same or similar wounds and through camaraderie and personal development we make so much progress. I experienced those feelings in the part of the movie where the character of Gloria and her daughter Sasha, played by Arianna Greenblatt, decide to return back and help save Barbieland and build a very intelligent plan together.

Now, I understand as people, everyone will connect with this movie differently, and although I felt seen this is a feeling that not everyone may have had. As intersectional feminists we know that we have multiple identities and lived experiences, which is why I would like to express my respect and appreciation for Numra’s piece on the Barbie movie as well, which she wrote in connection to her experiences and which you can read [here](#).

In conclusion, by each of us individually healing, supporting each other and making active changes for our present and future, as well as for the future generations is the right way forward. I feel this through being active in our Community Campaigner network through the support of other amazing women making active changes collectively.

“ Hi, my name is Numra. I recently joined ActionAid because I have a strong dedication to stand with women leading the way. Education is a deep commitment of mine as I feel everyone, including girls across the world, should have access to a quality education



Spotlight on Mahrang Baloch and Sister Zeph - Numra

I wanted to write a piece that would give you the opportunity to pause, introspect, and commemorate the essential contributions of two resilient women who against all odds have found ways to excel in a society governed by a patriarchal system.

The two women I will spotlight are from Pakistan and they are resilient, fighting for the right to education or inspiring strength to an entire province with their voice. Every woman in Pakistan has a story of courage to tell.

A longstanding narrative in Pakistan is that women are expected to embody silence and patience to be regarded as “good.” In Balochistan, older mothers remain silent after their sons’ become victims of alleged extrajudicial killings or enforced disappearances. The cry or voice of a woman who has lost her son, brother or husband is forbidden. Silenced by patriarchy, they suffer alone. The women of Pakistan have decided to abolish this absurd long-standing narrative. Mahrang Baloch is a human rights activist who has awakened a voice for the people of Balochistan. She encouraged women to stand against enforced disappearances. Mothers, daughters and sisters, were silenced to the extent that they couldn’t even question the disappearance of their loved ones. Mahrang, and the women have strength and solidarity in coming together to challenge the oppression they face. The voices of Pakistani women are being heard.

Another individual whose story that I want to celebrate is Sister Zeph. I had the privilege of engaging with Sister Zeph personally to discuss her remarkable achievements. Sister Zeph, a dedicated educator who established a tuition-free school in her residence to combat the prevalent issue of illiteracy in Pakistan. Commencing her career at the young age of 12, she embarked on a mission to challenge the societal stigma attached to education in Pakistan, particularly for women.

Sister Zeph is steadfast in her pursuit to dismantle this perception and empower women through education, offering them a path to break free from poverty and oppression. Sister Zeph has explained how systematic barriers such as underfunding, negative portrayals of education in the media and societal values are hindering the progress of education in Pakistan. However, Sister Zeph also mentioned how the resilience and determination of educators and women in Pakistan are shifting attitudes towards a more positive change.

By advocating for women across Pakistan, emphasising that education is their fundamental right, we affirm that education is inclusive and not exclusive to any particular gender, socio-economic class, or age group. Education is a universal entitlement accessible to all.

It is imperative to acknowledge the inspiring and hopeful prospects that lie ahead for women globally, including those residing in marginalised communities and under patriarchal systems, that we should celebrate all year round. Despite the persistent presence of patriarchy, its influence diminishes each time a woman resists its oppressive dominance. The future is promising.



Image by **Ranta Images** / Shutterstock

“ Hi! I’m Mishita (she/her) and I joined ActionAid because it felt like an opportunity to make an impact in the lives of countless women, especially those under-represented, that I grew up with. I wanted to go beyond just being aware of different issues and make active efforts, no matter how small, to better those conditions.



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Liberal Feminism - Mishita

An opinion piece

Liberal feminism, more colloquially termed ‘girl-boss’ feminism, is the co-opting by capitalism of a movement intended to collectivise the masses in order to emancipate women. Instead, it is turned into a politically deflated and hyper-consumerist competition of who can best pull themselves up by their bootstraps.

But what is liberal feminism exactly?

The main tenet of liberal feminism is the superficial representation of women, but not women’s interests. A female CEO is seen as an accomplishment even if the company manages to worsen the working and living conditions of the women it employs. It is admirable for multi-millionaire fast-fashion corporations to launch an ‘I’m a feminist’ campaign, while they refuse to pay their workers (often women in sweatshops) fair wages and instead fuel the climate crisis, which also disproportionately affects women.

Liberal feminism is the belief that a female politician, regardless of her actions, can be paraded around as the pinnacle of women empowerment. Even if she does not aim to overthrow the current societal order which disadvantages women and strips them of their reproductive rights, or remove taxes on reproductive health items. Let alone be concerned about the dire situation of thousands of women with no access to healthcare or food, suffering an ongoing genocide.

Empowerment for whom?

Empowerment is not new legislature as long as the legislature itself stands on a foundation as precarious as that of abortion “rights” that currently face abolishment owing to ridiculous prejudice and overwhelming misinformation spread by thousands across the globe. Empowerment is not the ability to buy expensive clothing of your own free will or perform wasteful ‘clothing hauls’ when it comes at the cost of the uncompensated labour of thousands of disenfranchised and abused women. Empowerment is not the acquisition of power if it only seeks to benefit one sector of society while it actively oppresses others. The people often empowered by liberal feminism are white, cis-gendered and heteronormative. This does not dismiss their own struggles but it does highlight how women of colour, queer and trans-women, and many others, end up sidelined. Liberal feminism may readily seek to put these women in a position of power but it fails to deconstruct the class barriers that they encounter in the journey to reach that position, the microaggressions that they subsequently face, and

how their power actively obstructs the emancipation of millions of other women that do not look or live like them. It is this blatant disregard that leads to liberal feminism often being termed as ‘White Feminism’. Liberal feminism seeks to empower women (only) through economic independence. After all, financial dependence on men and other male members of the family had been one of the most crucial modes of oppression of women for centuries. However, it does not really give women financial independence. It only pretends to. What it does give is the illusion of power as long as women can morph themselves into cogs for the grand but utterly broken machine called capitalism. And it is only through their success in a capitalist world which entails the financial exploitation of many beneath them, that women are finally able to be ‘on par’ with men (who, not so coincidentally, have also only succeeded by failing to compensate women for their domestic labour for decades). A working woman may be the ideal ‘girl-boss’, however this inclusion within the capitalist framework does not guarantee that the woman is treated as an equal to man.

Liberal feminism sells the idea that in the current world, with its anti-discriminatory laws, women hold power and agency. But at the end of the day, for all its supposed ‘support’ for the emancipation of women, it seeks to work (and indeed it thrives) within a system that provides no compensation for social reproduction thereby inherently disadvantaging women in one of the key (and frankly, only) avenues for them to achieve liberation, as per this ideology. Conversely, this makes liberal feminism a most perfect ‘socially good’ cause to be paraded around by capitalism since it fits within its economic and social framework whilst contributing nothing to the cause of women’s emancipation itself.

So, what is the solution?

In addition to striving for a more inclusive, intersectional feminist framework, corporations need to be held accountable for their deceptive virtue signalling. They cannot be rewarded for doing (less than) the bare minimum. A feminism limited to such a surface level treatment of women’s struggle is incapable of producing real change. Especially change for women who are oppressed the most under our current system. Ultimately, the point is not to have a bigger seat at the table but to abolish an exclusionary table altogether.

“Hi! I’m Sarah Yung and I was born in Liverpool to a working-class family of Chinese and Irish immigrants. I joined ActionAid as I am passionate about driving change and challenging all systems that disproportionately effect women, especially women of colour and working-class women



Menstrual pain - Sarah

[Welcome back to our series on Reproductive Health.](#) In this issue we will be discussing menstruation and menstrual pain.

Over a lifetime, people who menstruate will experience around 450 periods, or 3500 days on their periods, over an average of 40 years. (1) For many of us “that time of the month” is accompanied by symptoms including mood swings/ irritability, tiredness, bloating, cramping, breast tenderness, skin breakouts, headaches and changes in appetite. We are encouraged to continue our daily routines, perhaps taking a mild painkiller or having a warm bath.

This “get on with it” attitude of menstrual symptoms looks very different when you consider that in a 2023 survey by Wellness By Women, 59% of the 3000 women interviewed classified their menstrual pain as severe and a further 51% said they felt healthcare professionals did not take their concerns seriously. (2) Just as male doctors pioneered early gynaecology, women have historically been excluded from scientific knowledge production on the medical basis that they are inferior to men (Aristotle considered the female form that of a mutilated male). What we have today is a healthcare system, diagnostics and treatments made by men for men, including mostly male cells and animals in scientific studies. Women have only been included in pain experiments since the mid-1990s and even then, the data has not always been differentiated by gender. (3)

There are several conditions that may cause chronic pain during menstruation such as Fibroids, Pelvic Inflammatory disease, and contraceptives such as an IUD (Intrauterine device); but the two most serious are Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) and Endometriosis. PCOS affects between 8-13% of people who menstruate worldwide yet 70% of cases go undiagnosed. Symptoms include multiple cysts on the ovaries, high levels of androgens causing excess hair growth and weight gain, and irregular menstruation. PCOS is one of the leading causes of infertility worldwide and is also linked to serious long term health conditions such as diabetes and hypertension. There is also evidence that PCOS runs in families and has a higher prevalence and more severe symptoms in women of colour. Research on PCOS is chronically underfunded compared to other disorders with a similar morbidity and there is no known cause or cure (4).

Endometriosis affects around 10% of women worldwide and takes an average of 8 years to be diagnosed. Cells similar to the lining of the uterus grow elsewhere in the body yet behave like uterus cells – thickening and shedding every monthly cycle – but the blood released remains trapped internally. This causes debilitating chronic pain, inflammation, internal scar formation and has a major impact on the mental and physical wellbeing of sufferers. (5) There is no known cause or cure for endometriosis, but treatments can include pain management, hormone treatment and surgery.

In February 2023 Spain became the first European country to implement paid menstrual leave, where those who need it can take between 3 and 5 days every month. Other countries with menstrual leave policies (though with varying degrees of utilisation) are Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Zambia. The Soviet Union was the first country to implement menstrual leave in 1922 though it was revoked in 1927 due to discrimination against female workers. Menstrual leave is a hot topic, with opinions divided on the potential stigma and discrimination it could create in the workplace. However, with an estimated 6.2 million people experiencing severe period pain every month in the UK, it is clear that for many, menstrual care is woefully insufficient.

(1) [What’s a Normal Menstrual Period? \(webmd.com\)](#)

(2) [Millions of women in UK face severe period pain but symptoms dismissed, survey finds | Menstruation | The Guardian](#)

(3) [The female problem: how male bias in medical trials ruined women’s health | Women | The Guardian](#)

(4) [Polycystic ovary syndrome \(who.int\)](#)

(5) [What is endometriosis? | Endometriosis UK \(endometriosis-uk.org\)](#)

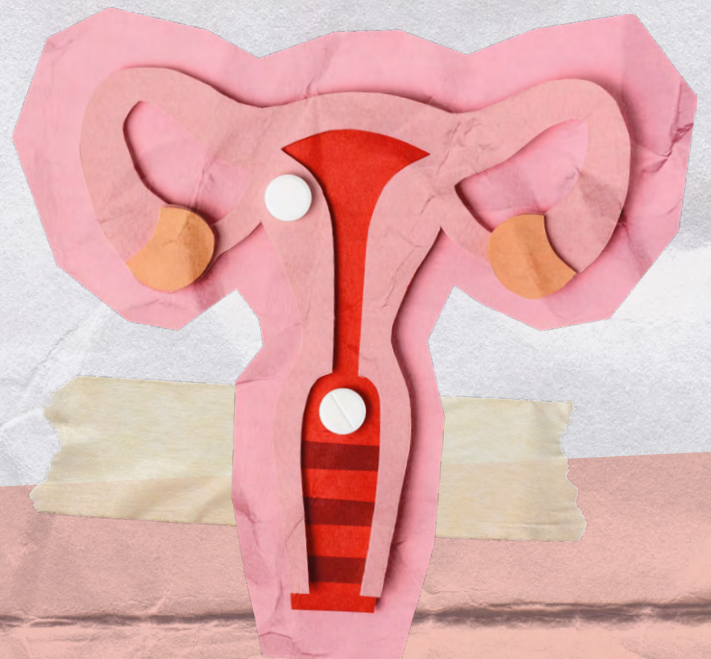


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Join our **Ending Violence Working Group**



Gender-based violence (GBV) remains a pervasive global issue, affecting one in three women worldwide. This is why we set up our Ending Violence Working Group, and after meeting remotely over the past year, they met for the first time in person last April at ActionAid UK's office in London.

This working group has been busy behind the scenes leading a project that aims to proactively challenge attitudes, particularly among young people, to build their confidence, skills and understanding of GBV to foster a culture of empathy, equity, and solidarity through a workshop they are creating.

This was inspired by ActionAid's 'Building power together: a girl-led research project' and its Feminist Research Guidelines that focus on how deconstructing negative and positive forms that exist in our lives can form a basis for our collective action.

Want to know more about this exciting project?

Email Esme Roslin-Sprason:
esme.roslin-sprason@actionaid.org

to be added to our Signal group and find out how to get stuck in.



community

Conclusion - Sienna

During the planning of this newsletter, when we had the pitch meeting, I was so blown away by the knowledge and strength of those involved in the Newsletter Working Group. I came away from the meeting with so much insight, and it just reminded me that you can never learn enough and that we are so much stronger together. Being in a space with others who share your opinions is so empowering, and I strongly encourage anyone who is thinking about becoming a Community Campaigner to take the leap! You can read more about this [here](#).

World Menstrual Hygiene/Health Day took place on May 28 it's a day for us to break the silence around periods and tackle the stigma often associated with them. Sarah's piece on periods highlights the insufficient care that is given to people who menstruate, last year [Sharvari wrote a piece following her work on busting period myths and breaking the stigma](#). This year, ActionAid shared the experiences of [three women in Gaza who have described how difficult it is to manage their periods without sufficient period products, water, soap or access to toilets, as conditions worsen and little aid trickles in](#).

Hopefully by the time the next newsletter comes around, we won't still be demanding an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, and to make that happen, the more of us who continue to use our voices to keep talking about what is happening and pressure decision makers, the better. Again, if you haven't already, please sign our [petition](#) and keep reading ActionAid's [press releases](#).

Finally, you may have seen that UK General Election has been announced to take place on July 4. [We're calling on the next UK Government to show political courage and take a radically different approach to address the root causes of injustice and build a fairer world](#). Want to be involved? Pop Esme an email and she'll update you on our general election plans.

Sometimes, it can be frustrating not to see change, but I promise that with time and commitment, we will reach our goals. Every little helps, even if you feel like you should be doing more, if we all put our minds together, we can continue to rebuild a better world.

**"I cannot do all the good that the world needs.
But the world needs all the good that I can do."
- Jana Stanfield.**

Thank you for reading!