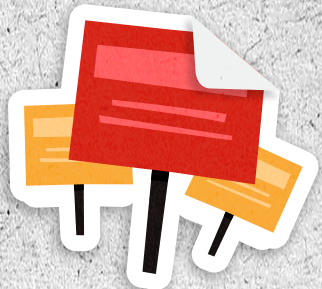


Community

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.

Introduction

Aroma

I'm thrilled to welcome everyone to this edition of the **Community Campaigner newsletter**. My name is Aroma (she/her), and I've been coordinating the newsletter working group behind the scenes since 2024.



I'm deeply passionate about social justice and the trends that shape majority opinion on socio-economic and political issues. You'll often find me engaged in debates supporting women's rights, trans rights and immigrant rights—and ActionAid has been the inclusive space I needed to express and advocate for these causes.

We begin this edition with a collective piece for World Menstrual Hygiene Day, compiled by Isobel, Jorja and Parthena from our Period Poverty working group. It explores and successfully debunks common myths around menstruation. If you're interested in more work related to menstruation and period poverty, feel free to join the working group via our [**Signal Chat**](#).

Next, our regular contributor Sarah shares a heartfelt piece on postpartum experiences, marking the close of her ongoing reproductive health series. Her story offers a vulnerable and open conversation about her personal journey and highlights how systemic gaps exacerbate the anxiety and stress many women face.

Finally, Fiona, representing the Climate and Gender Justice working group, recounts her experience at the Climate Justice Reception at the House of Lords, where ActionAid launched [**a powerful report on the climate damages caused by UK banks**](#) and how this disproportionately affects women and girls.



Our community campaigners

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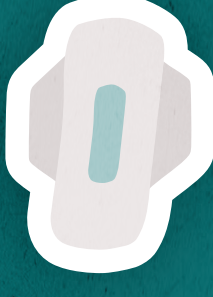
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Sparking open, honest and inclusive conversations:

Community Campaigners bust common period myths

Period Poverty Working Group

Isobel, Jorja & Parthena



Periods are a monthly occurrence for more than 2 billion people, roughly a quarter of the world's population. Yet, enduring myths, prevalent disinformation and a worrying lack of research mean many of us believe things about them which are simply not true!

Around the world, menstruating people face secrecy and discriminatory social sanctions, including practices like chhaupadi in Nepal. Limited access to period resources, alongside stigmatisation, impact access to education and work, with 1 in 10 girls in Africa missing school as a result. To counter harmful stigmatisation in the UK, for World Menstrual Health Day 2025, ActionAid Community Campaigners embarked on a mission to spark open conversations with colleagues, friends, family members, fellow students and even strangers, collecting common period myths along the way. These conversations created an enlightening list, ranging from seemingly innocent beliefs to dangerous, discriminatory views.

We're here to dispel some of these myths, reminding you that periods are normal. Let's get myth-busting!



A pack of reusable sanitary pads ready for distribution to school at the ActionAid Zimbabwe office in Rusape, eastern Zimbabwe

© Tendai Marima / ActionAid

Myth

'Periods are a personal issue which shouldn't be discussed publicly.'

Periods are often shrouded in taboos and myths, leading to feelings of shame and embarrassment for menstruating individuals, which perpetuates their stigmatisation. I recall from my own childhood a persistent veil around "period discussions", not only among peers but also within the wider community, regarding what is considered "normal and acceptable". Teasing and jokes frequently arise about the premenstrual phase, with comments like "It seems you're waiting for your period" or "You're overreacting now". Such remarks demonstrate a lack of empathy for personal experiences and amplify misogynistic stereotypes.

To dismantle menstrual stigma, we must break down the surrounding silence and create a safe, supportive environment. This requires promoting open communication and making menstrual education accessible to all communities. By doing so, we can actively challenge and redefine social norms from an early age. As social psychology suggests, social norms are not stable and immutable; instead, they can be influenced by group members. Therefore, encouraging open discussions within communities and empowering individuals to share their thoughts, emotions and personal experiences is vital to normalising menstruation and empowering those who menstruate.

Myth

'You can't swim or exercise on your period.'

Another myth that must be addressed is that you cannot exercise or swim during your period. This, along with many other myths, is purely based on lack of education. Learning more about women's bodies and the benefits of exercise, especially during this time of the month, has often been neglected, being viewed as non-essential. But it has been proven that exercise can be extremely beneficial for most people as it can help to alleviate cramps and, for some, improve their mood. This is because exercise releases endorphins

which have mood-boosting effects and can act as natural painkillers, therefore reducing cramps. Exercise will affect every person differently and some days it may be more beneficial than others; some days it may not help at all. It is best to listen to your body and try low impact workouts such as swimming or yoga and build up to high impact activities if this proves to have a positive effect on your body. However, the myth that you cannot exercise or swim during this time is just that, a myth.

Myth

'Having a period makes you a woman.'

Periods are often considered the ultimate manifestation of femininity, but they are not a singular experience. Some people who do not identify as women, including transgender and non-binary people, menstruate each month. Similarly, many people who identify as women, whether cisgender or transgender, do not experience periods for various reasons, including age, stress, low body weight, or not having a uterus. Gender identity is a personal self-identification, not linked to the functions of our bodies. It is vital to remember that real people are hidden, and their experiences erased, when we equate menstruation with womanhood. By dismantling this connection, we can create a more inclusive, kind world for menstruators and non-menstruators alike.

We must also strive to use trans-inclusive language, such as referring to those who experience periods as 'people who menstruate'. Gendered language like 'feminine hygiene products' can be replaced by neutral language which expresses the products' technical function, such as 'period products'. For people who do not identify as women, buying period products marketed specifically at women can feel exclusionary and may contribute to discomfort or gender dysphoria. Gender-neutral messaging can help to make essential period products and conversations accessible for all. Small changes in the language we use can be a massive step towards creating inclusive, equal, safe spaces for all menstruators.

Open and honest conversations about periods, like those our Community Campaigners sparked, are vital for breaking down harmful misinformation and normalising a deeply human, natural experience.

We invite you to consider:

What myths about periods have you heard, and what can you do to dispel them next time?

Find out more:

[UN Women, 'Period Poverty - why millions of girls and women cannot afford their periods', 24 May 2024](#)

[Actionaid, 'Period Poverty'](#)

Myth 1

Barrington, D. J., Robinson, H. J., Wilson, E., & Hennegan, J. (2021). Experiences of menstruation in high income countries: A systematic review, qualitative evidence synthesis and comparison to low- and middle-income countries. *PLoS One*, 16(7), e0255001.

Johnston-Robledo, I., & Chrisler, J. C. (2020). The menstrual mark: Menstruation as social stigma. In C. Bobel, I. T. Winkler, B. Fahs, K. A. Hasson, E. A. Kissling, & T.-A. Roberts (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of critical menstruation studies* (pp. [Page range if available]). Palgrave Macmillan.

King, S. (2020). Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS) and the Myth of the Irrational Female. In C. Bobel, I. T. Winkler, B. Fahs, K. A. Hasson, E. A. Kissling, & T.-A. Roberts (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of critical menstruation studies* (pp. 287–302). Springer.

Prentice, D., & Paluck, E. L. (2020). Engineering social change using social norms: Lessons from the study of collective action. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 35, 138–142.

Myth 2

Samantha Wild, How to exercise during your menstrual cycle, Bupa (2022)

Can & Should You Exercise During Your Period | Fitness First, Fitness First (2024)

Myth 3

Chloe Atkins, 'For transgender men, pain of menstruation is more than just physical', NBC news (2020)

Jane Connory & Shivani Tyagi, 'Helping to destigmatise the use of period products for trans, masculine presenting, non-binary and gender diverse (TMNG) consumers through an inclusive communication design framework', *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 27:3 (2024), 321-337

Lisa F., '3 reasons to ditch "feminine hygiene"', Aisle (2017)

Preeti Shakya, 'We Need to Talk About Periods in a More Inclusive Way', *Girls' Globe*, 2022

Postpartum

Sarah

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 affect women, especially women of colour and working-class women.



As this 6-part series on reproductive health comes to a close, I would like to add a more personal touch to this article on postpartum.

As I have mentioned in previous editions, I was inspired to write this series after suffering a miscarriage. It is common in the UK, and probably other cultures too, to keep a pregnancy secret until 12 weeks – when the risk of miscarriage decreases significantly. To me, this breeds a culture of silence and secrecy about our reproductive health, of shame even. Despite having studied biology and being intellectually curious, I have been shocked at how little I knew about so many aspects of reproductive health, including the intersectional issues that compound reproductive health further for marginalised communities, people of colour and the working class.

Only after having my second child and experiencing postpartum again have I realised I suffered with postpartum anxiety the first-time round. For months I frequently woke screaming thinking something terrible had happened to my baby. I panicked every day, I cried and my hair started turning grey. Even after 18 months I attended social situations I had once enjoyed and felt a crushing weight of panic, sadness and alienation. I thought it was all part of being a new mum. My antenatal care had consisted of several home visits from the midwife/ health visitor and the question: “How are you feeling in yourself?” My answer was always: “Fine.” I was on the lookout for postpartum depression; I never knew what other aspects of my mental health to think about.

Postpartum anxiety can affect **1 in 5 women**, yet the NHS doesn't even include it on their website. Other mental health concerns include postpartum depression, postpartum PTSD, postpartum psychosis and postpartum OCD. Shockingly, **40% of maternal deaths** within the first year of birth are caused by mental health conditions, with those from lower-income backgrounds more affected. Black women are also 3 times more likely to be affected than white women, and Asian women twice as likely.

Hormones postpartum go wild. Levels of hCG, estrogen, and progesterone drop dramatically immediately after giving birth while milk-producing hormones kick in and oxytocin (the happy hormone) fluctuates wildly. Newborn babies typically feed every 2 – 3 hours (hence why new parents don't get much sleep) and the placenta leaves a wound the size of a dinner plate inside the uterus. Fluid retention from pregnancy gets expelled during night sweats and caesarean incisions take 8 weeks to heal closed. The physical and mental toll is immense yet most mothers in the UK are sent home within 24 hours of giving birth.

The NHS advises it takes 6 – 8 weeks to heal after birth yet **studies** are now considering postpartum recovery may take up to 3 years. Only recently have we studied the **chemical changes** in a new mother's brain, such as the physical reactions mothers experience when hearing their baby cry. While there is far too much to cover in this article, I highly suggest you look further into postpartum for a fascinating insight into what mothers and birthing people experience, the resilience of the human body and the chronic lack of medical attention it has received.

This series has only scratched the surface of gynaecology, menstruation and period pain, contraception, conception, pregnancy and postpartum. I have tried to highlight the intersecting barriers we face in reproductive healthcare and the lack of medical and political consideration given to so-called “women's issues.” **More than anything, I hope to have shown you that you are not alone in any reproductive challenges you may face. I urge everyone to talk more about their reproductive health and to demand access to your sexual and reproductive rights.**



Launch event:

Who pays the price? The cost of HSBC's climate damage.

Fiona



ActionAid's much-anticipated and extensively researched report, [Who pays the price? The cost of HSBC's climate damages](#) was launched at a well-attended event at the House of Lords on Wednesday 2nd July. The event took place in the Cholmondeley Rooms and Terrace, overlooked by the majestic houses of parliament, with views over the Thames.

Despite the overcast and muggy afternoon, there was a great turnout, with a number of MPs, Peers and members of key organisations interested in social justice, women and girls and climate change. ActionAid community campaigners attended the event with the aim of lobbying MPs, encouraging them to read the report and get photographed with the ActionAid signage to demonstrate their support.

Hannah Bond, Co-CEO of ActionAid UK, passionately introduced the report and its findings highlighting that in just three years (2021–2023), HSBC channeled £153 billion to fossil fuels and industrial agriculture companies, which has generated 357 million tonnes CO_{2e} – almost matching the UK's entire 2024 emissions (371 million tonnes). These emissions have caused £128bn in climate damages, and the research has found that these damages have disproportionately affected women and girls. This is despite HSBC's supposed commitment to climate justice, and the government's target of reducing emissions to net zero by 2050.

There were some fantastic speakers at the event, although it was a shame not to hear from Baroness Natalie Bennett, who was sadly unable to make the event at the last minute. Nevertheless, Farah Kabir, CEO of ActionAid Bangladesh spoke movingly about the direct impact that HSBC's actions have had on the women and girls there. For example, in Bangladesh, HSBC has financed the United Payra Power Plant, a heavy fuel oil-based electricity unit

linked to significant social and environmental damage. Kabir described how water has become scarce, and the surrounding land is now covered in layers of dust and ash. This meant that the women and girls, mostly responsible for collecting the water, were being highly affected by these disastrous conditions. Kabir highlighted that the impact of the power plant exacerbated water scarcity and pollution, economic insecurity and heightened risk of gender-based violence (GBV).

We also heard from the interim CEO of ActionAid Kenya, Samson Orai, who spoke about the impact of HSBC's investments in Kenya and highlighted the adverse impact on women in girls across communities there.

During the event, I was lucky enough to get involved in encouraging people to have their photographs taken with messages supporting ActionAid's work. I spoke directly to a couple of MPs, including Chris Law (Dundee West). They told me that this issue was extremely important to their constituents and they would be reporting back to them the findings of the report and would be promoting the recommendations in parliament. Chris Law was also extremely encouraging of the report and made an excellent model for the photographs promoting justice for women and girls.

It was impressive to see so many different agencies and organisations attend the event and show so much interest in the report. I spoke to many people from charities and NGOs who were keen to read the report in full, to disseminate the findings to their organisations and also connect directly with ActionAid to further the reach of the report. **The report has started to make an impact, and a question about the report has already been raised in parliament, which is extremely good news.**





Conclusion

Aroma



And... that's a wrap!

We hope you enjoyed reading this edition of the Community Campaigner newsletter.

I often find myself saying how turbulent the political climate has become. While change seems constant, it's increasingly difficult to stay still when so many of our sisters around the world remain unsafe.

ActionAid's report on the long-term response in Gaza is available [here](#). You can also support our [Gaza appeal](#) to respond to the severe humanitarian crisis there.

On a more hopeful note, our HSBC report has been raised in Parliament — an important step toward holding financial institutions accountable for the harm they've caused. It's a reminder that advocacy works, and that our voices matter.

I want to encourage each of you to speak out and speak up. Rest is essential, but self-care is also rooted in the strength of our communities. Whether it's writing to your MP (we've got tips in our Signal chat!), attending an event or simply saying hello—start small. Small actions lead to meaningful change.

I'll leave you with this:



**Let's keep building a future where we all stand on equal footing;
where success is measured not just in metrics, but in the **care,**
courage, and community we nurture along the way.**