

# Let's Stand Up

Activism

Interviews

Power

## Period Activists From Around the World!

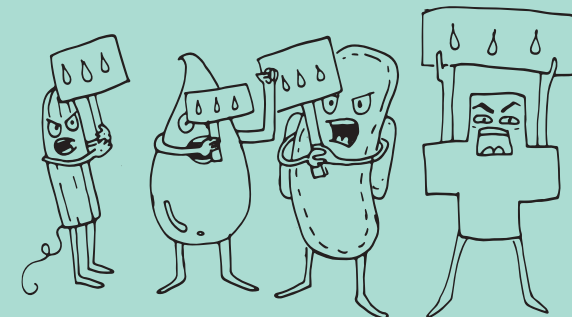
*We got the opportunity to interview activists from different countries to hear about their journeys and projects around fighting period poverty and stigma.*

We decided to interview period activists since we wanted to learn more about the ways in which period poverty and stigma can be tackled in many different ways and across different sectors. We also wanted to share with you all the inspiring people and stories behind these projects.

We reached out to **Mashiyat Rahman**, the founder of *Resurgence*, an NGO in Bangladesh focussing on creating sustainable pads out of water hyacinths, and **Theresa Nyava**, the founder of *Sanitary Aid Zimbabwe*.

We also got in touch with **Amika George**, the founder of *Free Period*, a campaign which successfully pushed the government to provide free sanitary products in schools in the UK, and **Radha Paudel**, the founder of *Global South Coalition for Dignified Menstruation* in Nepal.

From the film industry, we spoke to **Lauren Anders Brown**, the director behind 'WOMENstruate', a documentary following the menstrual experience of 7 women across Africa, and **Sophie Ascheim**, the co-executive producer of 'PERIOD. End of Sentence.' and co-founder of Pad Project in the US.



## Interview with Amika George



*We sat down with Amika George, founder of Free Periods which campaigns to end period poverty in the UK*

*Photo credit: Mollie Rose*

### **How did you become an activist?**

I became an activist quite by accident. I don't think I actually understood what the word meant when I first started Free Periods at the age of 17, but I did know what I wanted to achieve and why it was so important. I read an article about girls missing school because they were too poor to afford pads and tampons and the government didn't seem to want to help them. I felt really angry that this whole cross section of girls were being ignored as if they didn't matter and something kick started in me - I just felt that I had to do something.

I started a petition as the backbone to my campaign, asking for free pads and tampons to be made available in all schools, and started raising as much awareness around period poverty as I possibly could, talking to magazines and newspapers giving interviews about why we needed government intervention. When the government still didn't respond, we

organised a protest to make as much noise as possible. Our first success was in securing some money from the Tampon Tax fund to be given to charities tackling period poverty but our real success came in 2019 when the Chancellor pledged to end period poverty in schools and colleges by giving funding to all schools to offer pads and tampons to all students who need them. Now every primary and secondary school and college can access the products they need and no child needs to miss school because they are too poor to manage their period.

**Who are the most vulnerable when it comes to period poverty?**  
Everyone who's affected by period poverty is vulnerable, and period poverty touches people of all ages. We see period poverty affect women in prisons, the homeless and swathes of refugees. They are all being ignored by the government and continue to suffer in silence.

### **What are the biggest challenges with ending period poverty in both the UK and internationally?**

The taboo surrounding periods is a huge challenge, because we have been conditioned into feeling ashamed and embarrassed about issues that affect our bodies for generations. As soon as the subject of menstruation is mentioned, people close up, and that includes women. I think things are changing now but it's going to take time for us to change perceptions and attitudes. The conversations around periods and our bodies need to be turned on its head and only when women start to feel less ashamed will men feel they can join in the conversation.

**We would like to thank Amika George for her time and sharing with us her activist journey of tackling period poverty in schools in UK and beyond.**

# Interview with Sophie Ascheim



**SOPHIE ASCHEIM**

*We sat down with Sophie Ascheim, the co-executive producer of Oscar-winning film "Period. End of Sentence."*

## **How did The Pad Project come to be?**

I sort of stumbled into it through different personal inspirations. Perhaps most importantly, as I was growing up, my mom, a cardiologist, [working with] refugees seeking political asylum, looking for signs of torture... inspired me well before I understood the definition of inspiration.

I also attended an all-girls school in New York City that had no patience for misogyny, where the idea that girls should be seen and not heard was a myth we checked at the door. I learned to speak up and to trust my voice, well before I learned that there were those who would expect me to keep quiet.

I eventually moved to Los Angeles and started at a super liberal school. My passion for learning quickly turned into outrage at inequality and societal scars. My English teacher saw this while teaching us Ibsen's A Doll's House and pulled me aside to ask me to read up on period poverty. She then asked me if I wanted to get involved with a project she was slowly starting, and from there we built The Pad Project.

## **How did Period. End of Sentence. come to be?**

Period. End of Sentence. came about because we knew that isolated projects would not change the deep-rooted stigma surrounding menstruation that reached every corner of the globe. We didn't think that anything we did would reach all of those corners, but we thought that it was important to try and educate our own community, while working with the community in Kathikhera. We realised that though we were very privileged in many aspects of our lives, we were also some of the more "woke" kids in our school, and if we had never even heard of period poverty, it was doubtful anyone else had either. But we wanted to help start the conversation. We created a Kickstarter campaign and raised over \$45,000 which was enough to fund our first machine, a year of supplies to produce pads, as well as [a] documentary.

## **Why did you choose filmmaking as your medium to actively challenge period poverty?**

Though none of us were filmmakers ourselves, many of our parents worked in the film industry and had taught us the power of visual media. Realizing that we could be the ones to create impactful storytelling was super empowering. At the end of the day, our goal was to amplify the voices of the women in Kathikhera, and a documentary was the perfect opportunity to do so. Especially considering that much of the stigma surrounding menstruation keeps menstruators from seeing their experience and the experience of others, what better way to shock the system than to show periods on film?

The group that will most often be ignored when tackling period poverty are trans men, or non-binary individuals with uteruses. We have associated periods and menstruation with womanhood, which can be super alienating to the trans community.

**What barriers or struggles did you encounter when challenging and documenting period poverty?**

The biggest struggle is getting people to listen in the first place. It's hard to ask people to ignore everything society conditioned them to believe about periods, while simultaneously explaining that there is a whole other form of inequality in our society. Period poverty is inherently related to issues of class, race, and gender-identity, so if your audience is not willing to buy into those, it's hard to engage them on period poverty.

Another barrier we faced was that of acknowledging privilege head on. It's hard to deny that The Pad Project was founded by a bunch of white girls who were walking into a world they had had no previous exposure to. We felt super strongly that what we were doing didn't fit the trope of "white saviorism" but just because we felt that way didn't mean everyone else would. To combat this, we have had to continuously check our privilege and focus on partnering with organisations and communities, as opposed to speaking over them.

**What is the best way to talk about menstruation within the community, especially with children (both boys and girls)?**

The easiest way to tackle taboos is to be open to questions. Make sure to support them when and if they decide they want to talk about their own period. Allow their cramps to come up at the dinner table and push back if their dad seems uncomfortable with the conversation. If your child is in pain, or just uncomfortable, they should feel comfortable telling you! Also, include boys in the conversation. Let them giggle a bit, but also emphasize that periods aren't embarrassing, but perhaps annoying. Answer their questions!

**What would you say to other people who want to help eradicate or challenge period poverty?**

Talk about your period! Your words have power, and talking is the fastest way to break down barriers. Be unapologetic when others are uncomfortable with menstruation. And please work in your own communities! Contact local shelters and women's organisations, make sure they have menstrual products stocked! Work with your local school system to make sure that menstrual products are stocked in bathrooms, not just in the nurse's office. And be sure to work with communities rather than speaking over them, or assuming their needs.

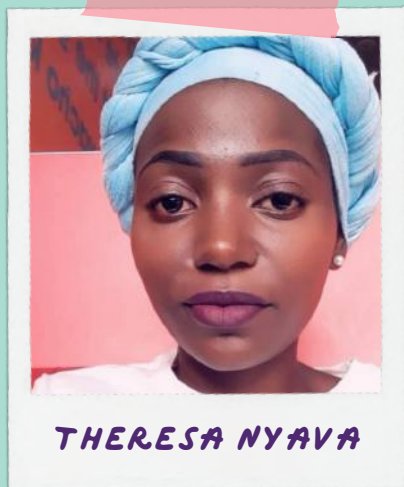
**What's next in your work?**

The Pad Project has some really amazing partnerships we are getting ready to announce. We are expanding into new regions and getting to work with amazing activists all over the world. The scope of our work has been a dream of mine since we ever started planning all those years ago, but never in a million years did I think we'd get here so soon and be nowhere close to stopping.

It's a really amazing feeling, and I couldn't be prouder of our ever-growing team. For me personally, I'm planning on finishing my time at Yale and soaking up as many experiences as I can. Not quite sure where I'll be after college, but I do know that The Pad Project will continue to be a part of my life, no matter what.

**We would like to thank Sophie Ascheim, for her time and sharing with us her activist journey of tackling period poverty in schools in UK and beyond.**

## Interview with Theresa Nyava



*We sat down with Theresa Nyava, the founder of NGO Sanitary Aid Zimbabwe (SAZT) to speak about her activism in tackling period poverty in Zimbabwe.*

### *How did you become an activist?*

I was born into a peasant family of five girls from the rural areas of Zvimba in Zimbabwe. We lived with other female cousins from the extended family. I experienced period poverty from the very first day I started menstruating, as my family was already struggling with school fees, food and other basic household necessities. I know what it feels like to walk a long distance to school while wearing pieces of cloth or mattress stuffing to try and manage the flow of blood, and coming back with bruises; and how it feels like to spend the whole day at school worrying about whether I have leaked and spoiled my uniform or the school chair. Many girls also missed school during their periods, during my adolescent days, with some being mocked when they start their periods unexpectedly at school. This lived experience, coupled with how incidences of period poverty remain prevalent in my country, albeit not being given attention, inspired me to start an initiative where we put a spotlight on these issues.

### *Who are the most vulnerable when it comes to period poverty?*

The most vulnerable are found in several traffic lanes of life. We have homeless girls and women who survive on begging and scavenging from the bins to find food. To them, period necessities like underwear, soap, sanitary wear and water are luxuries, and they struggle each month, and are forced to resort to newspapers, dirty rags, socks and free bleeding to manage their periods. Access to toilets is also a challenge as public toilets are locked at 6pm and only open in the morning. This means they have nowhere to go and have to take matters into their own hands. Further, we also have female prisoners who have to resort to tearing pieces of blankets to manage the flow of blood when they are on their periods, with some also lacking underwear and soap. Then we also have female refugees who live in overcrowded refugee camps, girls in children's homes, as well as rural school girls.

### *What are the biggest challenges with fighting period poverty (both in Zimbabwe and internationally)?*

The biggest challenge arises from failure by people to recognize period poverty as a humanity problem. But period poverty is still not even recognised as a problem, to begin with. Yet, this is actually a silent pandemic that is killing millions of dreams and destroying lives in the world. Some people think that we are whining when we are highlighting the challenges that people who menstruate face. They regard it as a light issue.

Then we have taboos hiding in the deep pockets of culture. In some rural communities, the custodians of tradition think that gathering people together to openly talk about periods is a breach of their culture, and they say this may result in rains not falling on their land or crops failing. Some religions also do not want their female congregants to be taught about menstruation or to receive period products.

**How do you try and demystify menstruation when stigma and shame is culturally ingrained within a community?**

The best way to discuss menstruation with communities is avoiding using a one-size-fits-all approach, but instead first take time to understand the cultural and religious dynamics of the specific community. You then have to ensure that you always begin with introductions and icebreakers that are appropriate. It is also vital to begin from neutral ground, like discussing what the menstrual cycle is. Then I have always found sharing personal experiences very effective. So for me and my volunteers, we always start by sharing about our first periods, our embarrassing period stories, as we teach them correct information about periods, so that they realize that whatever they might be ashamed to talk about is normal. Singing always helps; we sing a lot wherever we go. By doing this, you will realize that you can then engage with your audience better from a position of trust.

**What advice do you have for people who haven't got adequate access to water?**

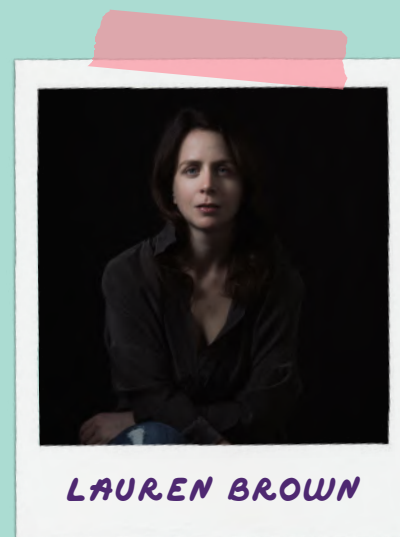
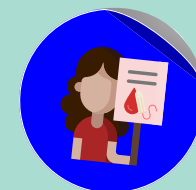
Never compromise when it comes to washing hands before and after changing sanitary wear or toilet use as well as before eating. Also, always ensure that you foster preservation in all activities that involve use of water.

**Tell us about any positive encounters through your activist work?**

Some of the major outcomes of our activism include: the removal of customs duty and value added tax on imported sanitary wear as well as raw materials used to manufacture sanitary wear; lobbying for the Education Amendment Act to include a clause providing for free allocation of menstrual products to all school girls; and increasing awareness about period poverty as well as widening knowledge about menstrual health.

**We would like to thank Theresa Nyava, for her time and sharing with us her activist journey of tackling period poverty in Zimbabwe.**

## Interview with Lauren Anders Brown



**We sat down with Lauren, a filmmaker who directed 'WOMENstruate', a documentary which follows seven women from across Africa and their experiences with menstruation.**

**How did you create WOMENstruate?**

WOMENstruate began after a lunch in South Sudan along the Nile river sharing a cup of coffee with Dr. Julitta Onabanjo—who had written an article on menstruation that resonated deeply with me. It made me question my own understanding of my menstruation, and if this was how silenced I felt about my menstruation at 33 years old what were other women and girls going through? Dr. Julitta is the Director of the Regional UNFPA office of East and Southern Africa, the hub of the menstrual health coalition. The team working with her, Puleng and Maja saw and understood my vision for WOMENstruate and were essential in gaining access and logistics to make most of the filming possible.

**Why did you choose filmmaking as your medium to actively challenge period poverty?**

I've always been a filmmaker, and have spent more than half my life around cameras so it was a natural format for me. I wanted my audience to really know and understand where these women came from, the barriers they faced, the way they lived, and when no one else was in the room and it was just them and the camera what they felt about menstruation and what they wanted others to feel. Filmmaking has a way of making all this possible in an hour.

**Who are the most vulnerable when it comes to period poverty?**

Women who have other human rights denied due to menstruation I feel are most vulnerable, and I think of Sunday the 17-year-old from South Sudan in a Protection of Civilians camp, which is a camp for displaced persons due to the conflict in South Sudan. When she menstruates, it's not just about shame or hygiene but her right to attend school and be safe from early marriage. Her story I think really highlights some of the people who are often ignored in the issue- the men. The shame and social norms that are associated with menstruation are perpetuated more often by men than women. Sunday knew her father plays an important role in her life, and so when a man wanted to marry her when her menstruation began at 16 she made a case to her father that she should finish her education first, be able to support herself and her parents, and then she could marry. Sunday's insight into understanding how important it was to approach her father and discuss these issues allowed her to continue her education. Men are important in changing this narrative.

**What barriers or struggles did you encounter when challenging and documenting period poverty?**

The biggest struggle was that I chose to make a film on an issue all women could relate to and men should be aware of, but one specifically focused on African women. As in a lot of

my work I am an outsider coming in, asking for someone to share something I even found hard to discuss. I always give my contributors the freedom to walk away and one nearly did, because she felt I could not understand her or her situation. I was upset, not for the project but for this misunderstanding and how it had upset her and was ready to leave when she asked if she could call her uncle and ask his advice (again- see men ARE important in this issue). After the conversation she changed her mind and wanted to share her story, and the film is all the better from it.

**What's next in your work?**

WOMENstruate was the first documentary I've ever done where it was focused primarily on the dialogue and my cinematic shots took a backseat. I'm so grateful to have had the opportunity to know I could create a documentary so far outside my comfort zone and have it resonate with others, it's given me the confidence to remotely direct a documentary on essential workers in my home city of New York. It's called 'When The Shifts Change' and focusing on having essential workers record themselves just before or just after their shift changes during COVID-19. It will cover issues of healthcare access, isolation, racism, and belief systems. It feels strange to be away from the frontlines when that's where I usually am, but I always focus on the safety of contributors and this time it's also the safety of the general public so having my contributors self-record their shift changes brings another interesting dynamic to what this film will become. I'm also doing a lot of virtual public speaking and hosting screenings. If you'd like to host a screening of WOMENstruate, please don't hesitate to reach out!

**We would like to thank Lauren Anders Brown a, for her time and sharing with us her activist journey.**

## Interview With Mashiyat Rahman



**MASHIYAT RAHMAN**

*We sat down with Mashiyat Rahman a Bengali activist and founded of social enterprise Resurgence, tackling the lack of affordable sanitary products by producing sustainable pads using the overgrowth of water hyacinth in Bangladesh.*

### **How did you become an activist?**

In terms of menstrual health, I found inspiration within my own life. When I had my first period at the age of 11, I thought I had contracted some kind of deadly disease! It was years later when I finally understood more about menstruation and the male/female reproductive systems. Consequently, when my sister (who is 7 years younger than me) was growing up, I made sure I did everything I could to make her more aware of socially stigmatised topics. The process got me more involved in the wider scale issues attached to menstruation and female health in low-income neighbourhoods, and encouraged me to conduct further research about the subject.

### **How did you create Resurgence?**

Resurgence was created when some of my friends and I teamed up to compete in our university's chapter of Hult Prize in 2016. The competition's prompt was to come up with a marketable and innovative product that would generate

employment for refugees, and as the team leader, I wanted to look more into menstrual health (as refugees have little to no access to menstrual health and hygiene products). After field trips to local refugee settlements, we found that most of them do not even have proper toilets. Sanitary napkins are expensive, so women mostly use cloth, leaves, or even ash while menstruating - and do not have access to proper washing facilities. This pushed us to look into cheap, accessible, and biodegradable menstrual sanitation options, and led us to experiment with a number of plant-based solutions. We eventually succeeded with water hyacinth (as the cotton-like pulp of water hyacinth plants allowed us to make absorbent layers), and received funding from BRAC University and social entrepreneurship accelerators to continue on with our innovation. We also hired workers from the refugee camps in Dhaka (also known as Bihar camp) for water hyacinth extraction, purification, drying, sanitary napkin production and sterilisation, and distribution processes. We began to train local community leaders on menstruation and reproductive health in order to make the knowledge more relatable. This helped us address three problems at once: the inaccessibility of sanitary napkins and reproductive health awareness, lack of employment opportunities for refugees, and the environmental nuisance caused by water hyacinth infestation in lakes.

### **Who are the most vulnerable when it comes to period poverty?**

In a country like Bangladesh, period poverty often transcends the boundaries of social class. The stigma is so apparent that most schools, regardless of their funding status, are unwilling to approach the topic of menstruation and reproductive health. However, the most vulnerable, in my opinion, would be those who are unable to financially afford sanitary care in the form of sanitary napkins or safe water. This is even more extreme in the case of women who are homeless, physically or mentally challenged, or have refugee status, as most people tend to forget that they menstruate too.

**What are the biggest challenges with ending period poverty (both in Bangladesh and globally)?**

The biggest challenge is definitely social stigma, shame, and sanction. Many governments all over the world still tax menstrual hygiene products as 'luxury' goods, or refuse to take initiative in subsidizing basic menstrual hygiene goods. As a result, people fail to perceive menstruation as an essential part of being human.

Additionally, many religious and community leaders press certain taboos upon their society, and these continue to worsen overtime. Superstitions are difficult to overcome in communities that do not have access to education. There is also a huge lack of platforms where women and men can discuss and learn about periods and reproductive health, allowing stigmas to continue.

**What struggles have you faced whilst being an activist within period poverty?**

A huge struggle that we faced collectively while conducting our awareness campaigns was repeatedly being branded as pro-Western radicals. Many of the communities that we have worked with have dealt with generations of period shame and superstitions, and this makes them less receptive to new knowledge. However, by training local community leaders over an elongated period of time and demonstrating real life case studies with the help of local gynaecologists, we have learnt how to overcome this challenge in most cases.

**What is the best way to talk about menstruation within the community, especially with children (both boys and girls)?**

All schools must have a mandatory reproductive health curriculum and there should be public platforms or even entertainment-style shows that openly discuss periods.

Usually, people are most perceptive and responsive to new information at a young age, and children and teenagers like to educate themselves through relatable content. As such, learning through school, social media and TV will help them broaden their minds. At Resurgence, we have developed period and reproductive health-related games and competitions in order to encourage discussion and enthusiasm about reproductive health education through positive reinforcement.

**What positive encounter did you have through your activism work?**

The most positive encounter I have had was when a group of teenage girls we worked with successfully managed to address being bullied in school due to their periods. Not only that, they also managed to conduct independent research projects on their own and destigmatise periods for young girls in their neighbouring communities!

**What's next in your work?**

We are currently trying to construct a text-bot that can help women access menstrual and reproductive health advice directly from their phones, by connecting them with gynaecologists free of charge.

**Is the low-cost biodegradable method pads replicable by using other products? Is it accessible for other people to try it out? In case our readers wish to replicate this in their own countries!**

Yes! Many activists are already experimenting with the use of other plant-based biodegradable alternatives, such as banana leaves and bamboo. Personally, however, we found water hyacinth the most feasible due to the highly absorbent and cotton-like consistency of its pulp.

**We would like to thank Mashiyat Rahman, for her time and sharing with us her activist journey.**

# Interview with Radha Paudel



**We sat down with Radha Paudel, author, Nepalese activist and founder of the Global South Coalition for Dignified Menstruation.**

**Trigger warning: This interview mentions suicide.**

## **How did you become an activist?**

I was deeply traumatised [as a child] when I saw the discrimination against my three sisters and mother because they were menstruating. I did not see any value for girls. I attempted suicide at the age of 9, somehow I survived. But I was living with the feeling of inferiority, dehumanisation, and profoundly thinking on ways of dying. At the age of 14, I had my first [period] and I ran away from home for five days in order to avoid all restrictions, which my three sisters, mother, and many more in my community experienced. But I became enlightened at nursing college where I saw menstruation with pride and power. Then, I started to speak up publicly about menstruation to seek dignity during menstruation.

But the journey was not easy due to deep silence, ignorance about menstruation, and the taboo around menstruation. I experienced all forms of challenges from accusations to death threats. No one liked to talk about it until 2017 here in Nepal. I started to speak aboard since 2008, I spoke in

more than dozens of countries, forums, and universities. I created the space for a conversation about menstruation globally by linking health, education, peace, empowerment, and the Sustainable Development Goals. I quit my job in 2009 and have since been working voluntarily to amplifying the conversation around dignified menstruation.

## **What part does dignity play within the conversation of menstruation?**

My position is always **dignity**. I strongly believed that in menstrual talk, dignity comes first because menstruation is very complex and multifaceted. No matter what project you are doing, for instance, if you are working on promoting use of the menstrual cup or school programme or constructing toilets or tax or anything related to menstruation, the conversation must start from dignity. Dignity during menstruation or dignified menstruation is very holistic approach to address all forms of abuses, discrimination, violations associated with menstruation. Each menstruator deserves dignity during menstruation.

## **How do you try to demystify menstruation when stigma and shame is culturally ingrained within a community?**

There are many ways and methodologies which vary from place to place but the commonalities among them are the Three Es': education, empowerment, and emancipation. I have worked with religious people, uneducated people, parliamentarians, academics, NGO workers, colleges, and so on, and I was amazed by their transformation. First, they worked at an individual level; they liberate themselves at first. Then, they work in a group and eventually transform the society.

## **How would you talk to a community about menstruation?**

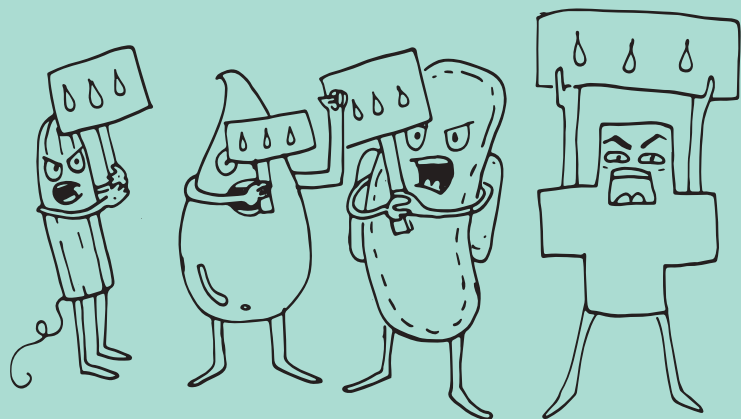
It is very easy to discuss menstruation with boys and girls in and out of school. It depends on the context, though usually

I use references of flowers in the garden or the biological development and difference between the mother and father. I use drama, story, songs or pictures to warm up and contextualise menstruation.

### ***What is the end goal to your activism?***

Activism for dignified menstruation is just beginning. I strongly believe that menstrual activism remains incomplete without dignified menstruation. The global human right and development discourse remained biased and did not prioritise the issue globally until 2014. Even after 2014 to date, the majority of activism has focused on hygiene or pads or tax. If this world is really seeking sustained peace, human rights, and empowerment, then dignified menstruation is pre-condition. The global community must redefine these elements and menstrual activism at large. The global community still does not know about the gravity and complexity of menstruation so it will take the next decade to secure dignity during menstruation.

**We would like to thank Radha Paudel for her time and speaking to us about her important work as a menstrual activist.**



## **Activists Fighting Period Poverty and Stigma in Africa**





### **Sister Philotte Mukashema**

Teaches youth in Burundi about sexual and reproductive health and how to make sanitary pads. This is because religious leaders are considered immoral for discussing this taboo topic.



### **Period Pride Campaign**

They want to remedy the negative social impact from period poverty among financially disadvantaged communities. The campaign aims to provide knowledge, education and raise awareness.

info@  
periodpridecampaign.org



### **Robert Mukondiwa**

A Zimbabwean journalist doing work on Menstrual health. As a television personality, he held a six episodes discussing Menstrual Health Management. He campaigns to end period poverty and for the government to provide sanitary pads to urban and rural school girls.

Twitter - @zimrobbie



### **Theresa Nyava**

She founded Sanitary Aid Zimbabwe Trust to try and fight period poverty in Zimbabwe and to educate girls and women about menstrual hygiene and health.

admin@sanitaryaid.co.zw



### **Mino Period**

A woman-owned menstrual health management social enterprise. They provide cost-effective sustainable solutions to period poverty in different parts of the world through the **Mino Menstrual Management Kits**.

ubuntu@minoperiod.com



### **Project Soar Morocco**

They work towards empowering teenage girls with weekly workshops on various topics including managing menstruation effectively and valuing health and wellness. They have also given out 850+ BeGirl menstruation kits.

giveback@projectsoar.org



### **Ecolibre**

A washable sanitary pad brand in Makther, a rural region of Siliana, which is managed by three seamstresses. Ecolibre represents a ray of hope for girls in need who can't afford to buy disposable pads in rural Tunisia. For every two pads that are sold, one pad is given to a girl in need.

office@TheCupEffect.org



### **Amos Eli Katsekor**

Amos believes men can play an important part in ending the taboo around menstruation. He is developing initiatives for menstrual hygiene in Ghana and expanding the conversation beyond young girls and women to include boys and men.

Twitter - @amblac

# Activist Fighting Period Poverty and Stigma in Asia



Let's stand up

Let's stand up



**Zuraidah Daut**

She created **Projek Oh Bulan!**, a movement to fight taboos and put girls back in schools. She placed boxes in grocery stores, salons and fitness studios, calling on people to donate a packet of sanitary pads to those in need.



**Resurgence**

A social enterprise by university students revolutionising menstrual hygiene in low-income communities through low-cost, biodegradable sanitary napkins and sexual and reproductive health education in Bangladesh.

[members@resurgence.org](mailto:members@resurgence.org)



**Aditi Gupta**

Co-creator of Menstrupedia, a friendly guide to periods which helps girls and women stay healthy and active during their periods. Menstrupedia aims to shatter the myths and misunderstandings surrounding menstruation.

[contact@menstrupedia.com](mailto:contact@menstrupedia.com)



**Free Periods HK**

Free Periods HK in Hong Kong providing support to low-income women through the supply of free sustainable menstrual products. It is run by Happeriod, MenstruAction and M Cup M Stuff, 3 groups that highlight the issue of menstrual stigma in Hong Kong since 2014.

[hello@freeperiods.hk](mailto:hello@freeperiods.hk)



### Freedom Cups

Based in Singapore, Paranjothy and her sisters sell menstrual cups and use the 'buy one, give one' scheme to donate to women in need. They are now trying to reach Rohingya refugee women and also run workshops with them.

Instagram - @freedomcups



### Happeriod

Founded by Zoe in 2014, she dedicates her hard work to empower women and menstruators, and provide them the tools including alternative menstrual supplies and knowledge to develop their confidence and body awareness.

Instagram - @happeriod



### Manjit K. Gill

She is the founder of Binti. They provide menstrual dignity to all girls, around the world. This means facilitating access to pads to ensure menstrual hygiene, educating girls about what menstruation is and what they can expect from it, and dispelling stigma, taboos, myths and negative perceptions around menstruation.

enquiry@binti.co.uk

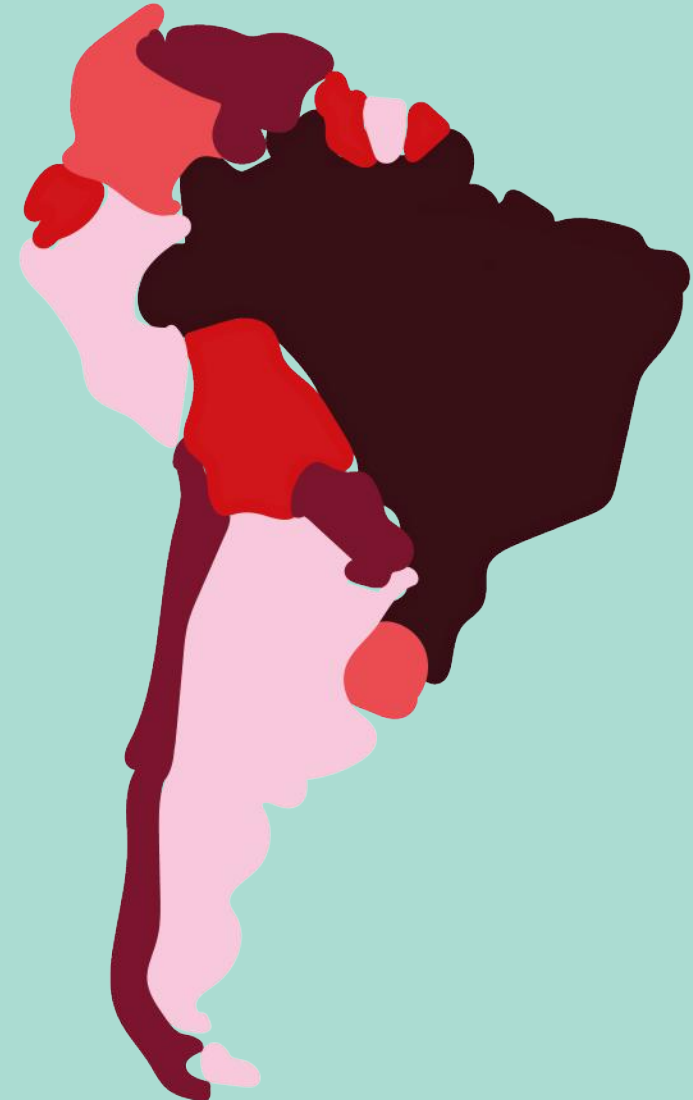


### Gyan Maharjan

Known as the "Nepali Padman", Gyan has been producing indigenous sanitary pads using cotton or flannel since the 2015 Nepal earthquake. The vibrant coloured pads are intended to break the taboo surrounding menstruation and celebrate womanhood.

Twitter - @MaharjanGyan

## Activists Fighting Period Poverty and Stigma in South America





### Proyecto Mujeres

A foundation that works for the empowerment of girls and young women by providing menstrual cups and reusable towels. They also host workshops and talks on gender, menstruation and sexual health for alumni, so that they can make safe and informed choices.

[proyectomdemujer@gmail.com](mailto:proyectomdemujer@gmail.com)



### Carina Úbeda

In "Cloths," exhibition, the artist put 90 used sanitary rags on display, each embroidered with words like "destroyed" and "production." Each embroidered rag is placed in an embroidery hoop and hung up, surrounded by dangling rotten apples symbolising ovulation. The artist stated, "Male blood is celebrated for being brave while ours is a shame".



### Pro Mujer

An initiative focused on de-stigmatising menstruation by providing menstrual hygiene education and access to free sanitary products. They also offer access to finance, health and educational services in Argentina, Bolivia, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua and Peru.

[communications@promujer.org](mailto:communications@promujer.org)



### Lahaie Luna Lezama NGO

They strongly believe that women deserve to menstruate with dignity, and menstrual hygiene is not a luxury but a fundamental human right. They help women get access to environmentally, economically sustainable and reusable feminine hygiene products.

[lahaielunalezamafoundation@gmail.com](mailto:lahaielunalezamafoundation@gmail.com)



### Carpa Roja Colombia

Red Tents are changing the lives of women around the world. These wonderful sacred spaces rescue the feminine ancestral traditions in which the wisdom of the Woman was passed from generation to generation and shared in brotherhood.

[www.carparojacolombia.com](http://www.carparojacolombia.com)



### #quericomenstruo

An art project and movement that seeks to eradicate the stigma surrounding menstruation by encouraging people to use red mediums like ink, fabric or beads and sequins on clothes to illustrate period stains.

[www.facebook.com/quericomenstruo](http://www.facebook.com/quericomenstruo)



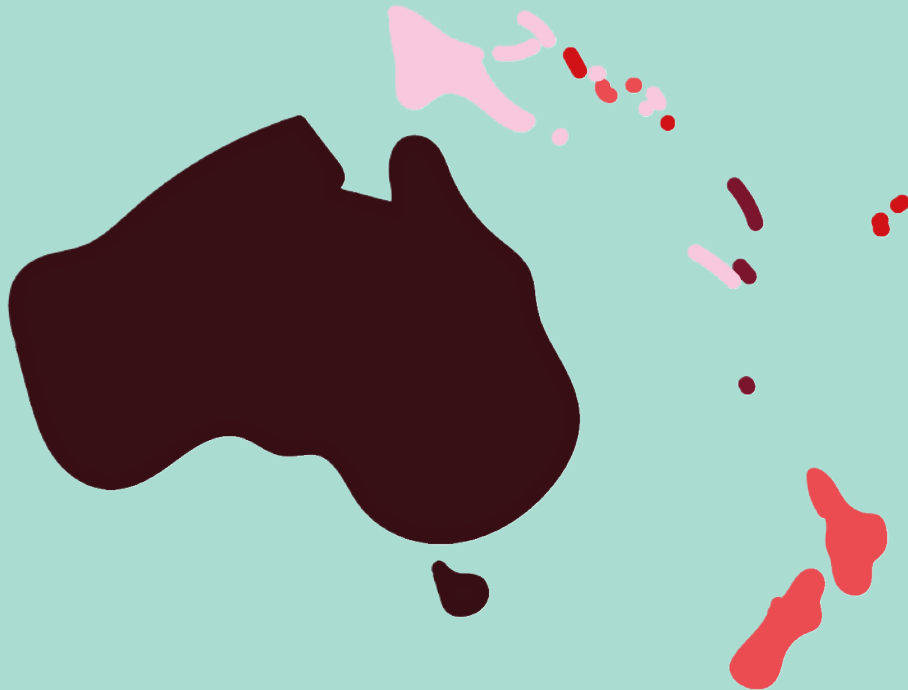
### Princesas Menstruantes

A pioneer in menstrual education in Latin America, proposes from emancipatory practices and pedagogies, academic and investigative spaces to politicise menstruation as a strategy of resistance of the bodies of women and girls.

[www.princesasmenstruantes.com](http://www.princesasmenstruantes.com)

# Activists Fighting Period Poverty and Stigma in Australia and Oceania

Let's stand up



## Mana Care Products

They aim to help give access to proper products to manage their periods by teaching refugees and remote communities how to hand sew and make reusable pads using readily available materials.

[www.facebook.com/manacareproducts](http://www.facebook.com/manacareproducts)



## Mammas Laef

Run by by Jack and Mary Kalsrap, Mammas Laef empower women in Vanuatu by providing sustainable menstrual products, creating social enterprise and breaking menstruation taboos.

[hello@lavkokonas.com](mailto:hello@lavkokonas.com)



## Dignity NZ

They support a buy one, give one model to provide sanitary items to girls in secondary school currently going without menstrual products. Their mission is to ensure women around New Zealand have access to free sanitary items.

[www.dignitynz.com](http://www.dignitynz.com)



## The Period Place

They aim to challenge conversations and education around periods for individuals and communities as well as changing how menstruators access period products in New Zealand.

[www.theperiodplace.co.nz](http://www.theperiodplace.co.nz)

Let's stand up



### Taboo

An Australian based company passionate about universal access to sanitary products, and empowering women and girls around the world with the knowledge and resources to safely manage their periods.

[communications@promujer.org](mailto:communications@promujer.org)



### Zillah Douglas

Zillah volunteers with young girls and women in remote communities in Fiji and the Solomons. She distributes re-usable sanitary pads to girls and women and provide basic medical care and education on women's health related issues, including menstruation and reproductive health.

[www.facebook.com/LolomaFoundation](http://www.facebook.com/LolomaFoundation)



### Kaleko Steifree

A locally made, quality and affordable menstrual hygiene product for women and girls. It provides a combination of products and services to address key challenges that women and girls experience in managing their menstruation in the Solomon Islands.

[kalekosteifree@gmail.com](mailto:kalekosteifree@gmail.com)



### Queenpads

They aim to produce and reach as many unemployed women with alternative reusable menstrual products. They also conduct awareness on Menstrual Health and MHM practices in schools, villages and workplaces.

[info@queenpads.net](mailto:info@queenpads.net)

## Activists Fighting Period Poverty and Stigma in Europe





### Lauren Anders Brown

Filmmaker and director of *Womenstrate*, a documentary about 7 women in Africa and their experiences with periods and menopause. When Brown set out to film it, she planned to do it in 4-7 days, the average length of a woman's period, as an ode to what a woman can achieve with the right resources and support.

[twitter.com/Womenstruated](https://twitter.com/Womenstruated)



### Red Box Project

The Red Box Project is a community-based, not-for-profit initiative, which aims to support young people throughout their periods by providing red boxes filled with free period products to local schools.

[redboxproject.org](http://redboxproject.org)



### Gabby Edlin

CEO and Founder of *Bloody Good Period*, Gabby wanted to create a sustainable flow of menstrual products for those who can't afford to buy them. They are now partnered with 40 asylum seeker drop-in centres, helping more people to have 'bloody good periods'.

[www.bloodygoodperiod.com](http://www.bloodygoodperiod.com)



### #nemluxustaska

A Hungarian social media campaign #non-luxury bag was launched by Szandra Cserta and Ági Huszka to encourage people to donate a bag of menstrual products and lingerie. With the help of the Hungarian Maltese Charity Service, they were donated to women in need.

<http://nemluxustaska.hu/>



### Kiran Gandhi

She had trained for a year for her first marathon but realised she was going to be on her period on the day of the 26.2-mile run in London. She almost backed out of the marathon, but then decided to run free-bleeding (using no the whole way through. Gandhi wrote about her experience on her personal site:

[madamegandhi.blog](http://madamegandhi.blog)



### Lola Hernández

Founded *La Caravana Roja* which runs projects, workshops and psychotherapeutic support. The Red Caravan is a menstrual culture movement to promote women's health from a cyclical, feminist and intercultural perspective.

[lacaravanaroja.com](http://lacaravanaroja.com)



### The Female Company

They sell tampons hidden in a book to avoid the unfair taxation of tampons as "luxury items". They also run a pad for girls scheme where women in India are supplied with washable cloth pads per pack sold.

[www.thefemalecompany.com](http://www.thefemalecompany.com)



### Mary Consolata Namagambe

An Afro-Danish law student, human rights activist and CEO of *She for She* - an NGO with the aim to equip and empower women in to produce and sell affordable and reusable pads to keep girls in school and offer affordable menstrual products.

[www.sheforshepads.com](http://www.sheforshepads.com)

# Activists Fighting Period Poverty and Stigma in North America



Let's stand up



## PERIOD

Founded by two 16-year-old high school students with the intention of distributing menstrual products to homeless people in Portland. Since then, the organization has addressed over 700,000 periods through product distribution.

[www.period.org](http://www.period.org)



## Barbados Association of Endometriosis and PCOS

A non-profit organization in Barbados, which seeks to educate citizens and advocate for those who have Endometriosis and Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome.

[endoandpcosbb.com](http://endoandpcosbb.com)



## The Period Purse

A non-profit, volunteer-run organization that provides hundreds of women living in Toronto shelters with menstrual products and wellness items.

[www.theperiodpurse.com](http://www.theperiodpurse.com)



## I Support The Girls

Dana Marlowe, founder of I Support the Girls, collects and distributes essential items, including bras, underwear, and menstrual hygiene products, allowing women experiencing homelessness, impoverishment, or distress to stand tall with dignity.

[isupportthegirls.org](http://isupportthegirls.org)

Let's stand up



### Be Girl

Be Girl is a mission-driven design company that creates innovative, beautiful, and affordable products for womankind. Be Girl works for a world where menstruation is considered beautiful and being a girl does not stand in the way of opportunities, health, and success.

[www.begirl.org](http://www.begirl.org)



### Rupi Kaur

Rupi Kaur is an Indian-born Canadian poet, illustrator, and author. 'period.' is a photo series developed by rupi for a visual rhetoric course in her final year at university. The goal was to challenge a taboo, tell a story without the use of words.

[rupikaur.com/period](http://rupikaur.com/period)



### Jen Lewis

Beauty in Blood is a photographic project devoted to subverting the stigma and shame that surrounds menstrual blood. Using the blood collected in a menstrual cup, she captures its movements on a camera. She experiments with different camera lens and lighting to find new dynamic textures, shapes, and color gradients.

[www.beautyinblood.com](http://www.beautyinblood.com)

### DEAR BIG SISTERS,

At the age of ten I really wanted to start menstruating because I was hearing it from my friends who had started already. In their sound, menstruation seemed like a very good thing and nobody talked bad about it. I felt left out in the circle of these friends who were menstruating when they talked about it because I had not started. My heart shed tears.

This prolonged and I had to endure the talking until I started menstruating at the age of 13. But I was frustrated on the onset to see blood shedding off from my genitalia. I quickly blamed my friends for giving me false impression towards menstruation. And I blamed myself as well for admiring a bad experience. Then I started isolating myself and spent most of the time in bed sobbing. But my mum came and comforted me. She told me her experiences and encouraged me to realise that I am a female person and my gender will not change anymore. Mum encouraged me that when I reach a certain age, menstruation will completely stop and this gave me some little hope.

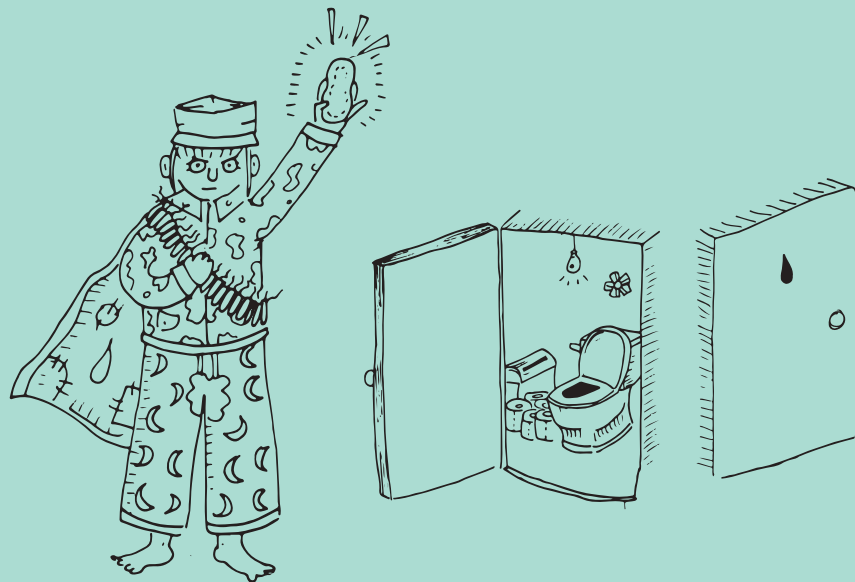
I was a happy person when the menses were over during that particular period and could work hard in school. However when my calendar was at it again I wished to not be seen at school because I felt like everyone knew I was in menses. This affected my studies. However,

I am learning to get used to it and shut ears from hearing discouraging insults from people, especially boys. I know their voices have nothing to do with my menstrual life because they too have sisters who are also menstruating, so we are equally the same.

Today I am used to my situation and feel empowered that I am indeed a female person. My menses make me stronger and drive me to stand against insults and I fight for menstrual rights through advocacy for sanitary pads provision and construction of changing rooms.

I hope I am making the difference.

**SUBMISSION BY**  
**CATHERINE BANDA, 14, MALAWI**



## Question Corner



**What can you do to break the stigma around menstruation?**

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**Think of family or friends who can help you change the world!**

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**Write down your ideas for activism here.**

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