

IMPACT REVIEW RESEARCH



Dignified Menstruation

Dignified Menstruation Movement in Nepal and Beyond

Research Conducted By
Research and Innovation Center,
Kathmandu University School of Education

for Global South Coalition for Dignified Menstruation (GSCDM) / Radha Paudel
Foundation (RPF) under **Sang pour Sang: uni.e.s pour la Dignite**

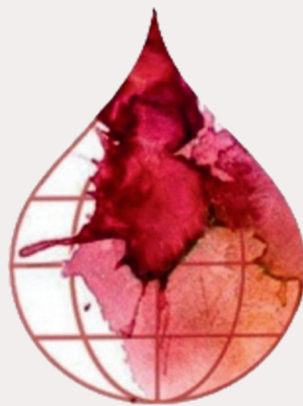
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Research and Innovation Center Kathmandu University School of Education

Dignified Menstruation

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AHF	AIDS Healthcare Foundation
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DM	Dignified Menstruation
DMC-Nepal	Dignified Menstruation Campaign -
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GESI	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
GoN	Government of Nepal
GSCDM	Global South Coalition for Dignified
ICPD	International Conference on Population
IDI	In-depth Interview
INGO	International Non-Government
KII	Key Informant Interview
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender,
MOEST	Ministry of Education, Science and
MoWCSC	Ministry of Women, Children, and
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NHRC	Nepal Human Rights Commission
RPF	Radha Paudel Foundation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
SMCR	Society for Menstrual Cycle Research
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and

SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and
ToT	Training of Trainers
UNDP	United Nations Development
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WHO	World Health Organization

Dignified Menstruation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Menstrual discrimination encompasses a wide range of silence, taboos, shyness, stigma, restrictions, violence, abuses and denial of resources and services that menstruators face throughout their lives. It is complex, multifaceted, globally practiced in different forms which perpetuate power relations and patriarchy. It is also the violation of human rights and sexual and gender-based violence. Despite growing awareness on human rights, women's rights, feminism, menstrual rights, menstrual discrimination remains inadequately addressed. To address such inadequacies, the Dignified Menstruation (DM) movement has emerged as a survivor-led, decolonized, and holistic human rights framework aimed at eradicating all forms of menstrual discrimination across the life cycle in all diversities. It is not a one-off, time-bound, dedicated funded project, but a voluntarily growing initiative, led by Dignified Menstruation Campaign-Nepal (DMC-Nepal), and Global South Coalition for Dignified Menstruation (GSCDM) – both steered by the Radha Paudel Foundation (RPF). Against this backdrop, reviewing the impact of this movement is crucial to understand its achievements and challenges. Thus, this study examines the impact of the DM movement in Nepal and beyond.

The study employed a qualitative research design structured around two primary components: an extensive document review and in-depth interviews with over 60 diverse stakeholders to capture the movement's multifaceted outcomes.

Some of the key findings of the study include:

1. Coining of key concepts

The DM movement has strongly established some key concepts like menstrual discrimination, DM, menstruator and non-menstruator, symbol of DM, which symbolize life-cycle approach and beyond menstrual management and infrastructure. Moreover, such concepts are established through various knowledge products.

Additionally, it also offers pragmatic DM indicators for DM-friendly schools and workplaces, menstrual products, WASH initiatives, and menstrual leave. DM approach also addresses the inadequacy of the intersectional approach, and is inclusive of people with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ individuals.

2. Missing Menstrual Discrimination Across Prominent Global Discourses

Human rights, women rights, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), feminist agenda have discussed much on power and patriarchy, however, they have largely missed the role of menstrual discrimination in the construction and reinforcement of power and patriarchy. Additionally, they have missed the dimension that menstrual discrimination is a human rights violation, gender-based violence (GBV), and a causal factor of GBV.

Moreover, global menstrual movement also fails to recognize the complex and multifaceted nature of menstrual discrimination.

3. Gradual Rise of DM Movement

Despite all challenges, DM movement is gradually taking shape through over 55 organizations in Nepal and 95 members from across the globe. This signifies the recognition of DM as a missing agenda.

4. DM Impact on Individual Level

Menstrual discrimination is pervasive across cultures and contexts. Yet, individuals have started practicing DM values at individual, family and community levels. DM champions, fellows, interns, faith-healers, non-menstruators, have transformed themselves and become the agents of change to diffuse DM values.

5. DM Impact on Educational Institutions

It is still a missing agenda in educational institutions (primary to higher education), however, a few institutions and individuals have adapted DM-friendly indicators and initiated discourse on DM.

6. DM Impact on I/NGOs

Development sector and funding agencies have prioritized Global North and colonized agenda and thus menstrual discrimination has been misinterpreted and majority of them (exceptionally, Amplify Change, SETI Foundation, AHF, AFD) have misled the menstrual movement.

A few local NGOs which are members of DMC-Nepal and GSCDM have adapted the DM-indicators and values in their policies (esp. GESI policies) and programs.

7. Parliamentary Engagement on DM

Often, the parliamentarians and politicians are found to be disassociated with menstrual discrimination. However, a few have started to be vocal on it, primarily focused on menstrual management. Very few parliamentarians such as from Sri Lanka, Scotland, and Nepal have explicitly advocated on the urgency of DM. In particular, Nepal's National Assembly has recently unanimously passed a historic resolution motion on dignified menstruation.

8. DM Impact on Governments

Despite having the obligation to implement the human rights frameworks, most of the governments have not prioritized menstrual discrimination as an urgent call. A few have worked on menstruation, but are focused on menstrual management. Exceptionally, Government of Nepal and Sri Lankan government, including local governments, have started formulating DM policies and programs.

9. Engagement of Non-Menstruators

There is a deep level of silence and ignorance around menstrual discrimination and its impact among the organizations and networks of non-menstruators. Though few in number, non-menstruator allies, teachers, religious leaders, and politicians are becoming allies and advocating for DM, challenging menstrual discriminatory norms.

At the global level, MenEngage Alliance (Global) has been extending solidarity since the beginning of the GSCDM.

10. Impact on Media

With poor media literacy on DM, the existing media outlets often end up covering menstrual management. Very few national and global media have recently started recognizing the urgency of DM as a human rights concern. However, they severely fall behind in incorporating DM indicators in their institutional policies and workplace environments.

11. Endorsement of International DM Day

Despite resistance among the actors, the International DM Day (December 8) has been observed since 2019 by growing number of national and global actors, including governments, I/NGOs, schools, and private organizations.

12. Relevance and Sustainability of DM Movement

Despite the DM movement being highly relevant to national and international contexts and coherent with global human rights frameworks, its financial sustainability is challenging. Its sustainability partly rests on donor community's commitment to decolonize knowledge and resources, and partly on national governments and local actors' ownership.

Recommendations

Based on the key findings, some strategic recommendations are drawn for different stakeholders:

- DMC-Nepal, RPF and GSCDM should expand their networks and strengthen collaborations with both funding and non-funding partners to broaden the movement's reach and resources.
- DMC-Nepal, RPF and GSCDM should disseminate DM knowledge products with diverse audience, including menstruators with disability, LGBTQIA+.
- GSCDM needs to gradually build a multi-country, diverse team to enhance regional and global coordination so as to build South-South collaboration, conduct participatory action research and applied projects to generate evidence and inform policy and practice in partnership with academia and I/NGOs.
- Development community and funding agencies need to support DM campaigns by shifting resources for South-South research and collaboration; taking immediate actions to inculcate DM framework in sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), child rights, human rights, women's rights, politics and feminist agenda; and incorporating DM as a crosscutting theme across sectors and levels.

- Governments should formulate independent policy on DM and develop strategic costed programs for its implementation. Moreover, it is important for governments to collaborate with local DM coalitions to leverage their expertise, grassroots reach, and indigenous knowledge for effective DM programming.
- Academia can mobilize resources for promoting DM scholarship and discourse as well as policy advocacy. Likewise, they need to incorporate DM in curricula to make menstruation dignified.
- Media should actively serve as watchdogs against misinformation on menstrual discrimination and also implement DM-friendly policies within media houses.

Dignified Menstruation

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces the foundational concepts central to understanding the Dignified Menstruation (DM) movement, beginning with an exploration of menstruation, menstrual discrimination, and the DM itself. It emphasizes that DM transcends conventional hygiene and product access narratives by positioning menstruation as a critical human rights and gender equity issue. The chapter provides a rapid review of key national policies in Nepal and situates DM within international human rights frameworks, highlighting ongoing advocacy efforts. It also traces the origins and growth of the DM movement under the leadership of a prominent Nepali activist, noting the diverse activities undertaken to challenge menstrual stigma and discrimination. Finally, it delineates the objectives of this impact study, setting the stage for a comprehensive assessment of the movement's influence.

Concept of Menstruation

Menstruation is a natural developmental milestone experienced by all menstruators (individuals born with a uterus and ovaries). Typically, menstruation begins between the ages of 10 and 16 and continues until menopause, which usually occurs between 45 and 55 years of age. Various biological and environmental factors influence both menstruation and menopause. Importantly, menstrual blood is clean and pure; it is not a sign of illness or weakness (Dignified Menstruation Campaign – Nepal [DMC-Nepal], 2025; GSCDM, 2019). However, some medical conditions related to menstruation and menopause can cause significant physical and emotional challenges for menstruators.

In the Nepali language, menstruation is referred to by over 50 different names, with "Mahinawaari" (महिनावारी) being the most commonly used and regarded as a respectful term (DMC-Nepal, 2025). Despite this, menstrual blood is often viewed as 'impure,' 'dirty,' or a sign of 'weakness' (FOS FEMINISTA, 2024). These beliefs have given rise to numerous myths and socio-cultural and political practices that perpetuate discrimination against menstruators.

Menstrual Discrimination

Perceptions and practices around menstruation have existed since the dawn of civilization, varying widely across individuals and cultures. Among these, socially and psychologically constructed undignified perceptions and practices have been identified and collectively categorized under the concept of menstrual discrimination. This term serves as an umbrella encompassing silence, taboos, shame, stigma, abuse, violence, restrictions, and deprivation of services and resources related to menstruation throughout the life cycle of menstruators (GSCDM, 2019).

Menstrual discrimination is recognized as a critical mechanism in the construction and perpetuation of power relations and patriarchy, influencing menstruators' experiences across their lifespan (Paudel, 2023). While numerous studies have examined menstruation, many focus primarily on medical or commercial aspects, including menstrual stigma or specific restrictions. In response, the RPF has advocated for a comprehensive reconceptualization of menstrual discrimination, proposing it as an inclusive framework that captures nearly all forms of undignified menstrual practices worldwide (Goldblatt & Steele, 2019; Paudel, 2020).

The visibility of menstrual discrimination varies significantly across cultures and contexts; it may be overt in some societies while more subtle or invisible in others. Importantly, menstrual discrimination is not a linear phenomenon but rather a complex and multifaceted issue. It underpins the formation and socialization of hierarchical power structures and patriarchal norms (Paudel, 2023). Paudel (2023) further emphasizes how societal norms position non-menstruators as strong and superior, while menstruators are often labeled impure and subjected to restrictions, thereby reinforcing systemic gender inequality from an early age.

The GSCDM also highlights that a single discriminatory act related to menstruation can violate multiple human rights, including the rights to health, education, participation, freedom, equality, dignity, etc. Practices that isolate or restrict menstruators constitute forms of violence (GSCDM, 2019). These practices limit access to essential services and deepen societal marginalization (Regmi et al., 2020). Paudel (2020) describes menstrual discrimination as a life-course issue, spanning from “womb to tomb,” affecting all dimensions of social, economic, cultural, and political life. Whether manifesting as sex-selective abortion, school absenteeism, workplace exclusion, or child marriage, the consequences of menstrual discrimination are profound, long-term, and systemic.

Dignified Menstruation

Dignified Menstruation is a comprehensive framework conceptualized by Radha Paudel and subsequently promoted by the RPF and the GSCDM. It is defined as a state in which menstruators live free from all forms of menstrual discrimination—including shame, stigma, taboos, abuse, restrictions, violence, and denial of services—across all spheres of life (GSCDM, 2019). It encompasses an innovative, holistic, and decolonized life-cycle approach that addresses the multifaceted nature of menstrual discrimination (Paudel, 2020).

This approach emphasizes the importance of fostering open dialogue about menstruation at homes, schools, communities, workplaces, and political arenas, all through the lens of human rights. By doing so, DM challenges entrenched political and social norms and systemic inequalities that marginalize menstruators and restrict their access to resources, education, and opportunities (Obol, 2023).

The framework explicitly includes all individuals who menstruate—girls, women, trans men, and non-binary people born with a uterus and ovaries—affirming their right to manage menstruation with dignity, free from fear, exclusion, or discrimination (GSCDM, 2019). Moreover, DM underscores the broader implications of menstrual discrimination, which extend beyond health to impact self-esteem, educational attainment, employment, and fundamental human rights (Matteson et al., 2020).

Ultimately, the goal of DM is to ensure that menstruators can live with full dignity throughout their entire life course—from birth to death—by eliminating all barriers related to menstrual discrimination and advancing menstrual justice as an integral component of gender equity and human rights (GSCDM, 2019).

Policies of Dignified Menstruation in Nepal

The Government of Nepal has made significant strides in institutionalizing DM through a series of coordinated policies and legal frameworks. The 2015 Constitution of Nepal provides a robust foundation for DM by enshrining principles of equality, non-discrimination, dignity, and freedom. The preamble rejects all forms of discrimination, and multiple fundamental rights directly support menstrual dignity. These include the Right to Dignity (Article 16(1)), Right to Equality (Article 17(1)), Right to Freedom (Article 18(1-3)), Right against Exploitation (Article 29(1-3)), Right to a Clean Environment (Article 30(1)), Right to Food (Article 36(1-2)), Right to Housing (Article 37(1)), Right to Safe Motherhood and Reproductive Rights (Article 38(3-4)), Right to Children (Article 39), and Right to Social Justice (Article 42). Together, these provisions create a comprehensive human rights framework that supports the elimination of menstrual discrimination across individual, familial, community, educational, and workplace settings.

In 2017, the Ministry of Water Supply and Sanitation, in collaboration with the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens (MoWCSC), Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST), and Ministry of Health and Population, drafted the National Policy on Dignified Menstruation. That same year, the Civil and Penal Code was amended to criminalize menstrual discrimination as a social offense under Articles 168 (3, 4, 5), marking a critical legal milestone.

Subsequently, MoWCSC developed the Dignified Menstruation Guidelines in 2021 to replace the Chhaupadi guidelines 2008 and integrated DM into the Gender Policy Act 2021. Furthermore, the National Planning Commission incorporated DM into the 16th Five-Year Plan (2024–2029), reflecting its prioritization in national development agendas.

A landmark achievement occurred in March 2025 when the National Assembly unanimously endorsed a Resolution Motion on Dignified Menstruation underscoring the government's commitment to addressing menstrual inequities at all levels. This resolution explicitly recognizes DM as a fundamental human right and calls for legal and institutional measures to eliminate menstrual discrimination in all its forms—including silence, stigma, taboos, restrictions, abuse, violence, social exclusion, and deprivation of services throughout the life cycle of menstruators.

Additional legislations, aligning with DM, also complement these constitutional guarantees. For example, the Domestic Violence Crime and Punishment Act 2009 and the Sexual Harassment at the Workplace Act 2015 address forms of violence and discrimination that intersect with menstrual discrimination, which encompasses physical, emotional, sexual abuse, and denial of essential services during menstruation and menopause. Collectively, these policies and legal instruments reflect Nepal's progressive approach to DM, acknowledging menstrual discrimination as a multifaceted human rights violation and embedding menstrual dignity within broader frameworks of gender equity, health, and social justice.

Dignified Menstruation in International Human Rights Frameworks

Dignified menstruation is fundamentally linked to basic human rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) emphasizes dignity, equality, freedom, and non-discrimination for all individuals. Therefore, when people experience silence, stigma, shame, abuse, violence, or exclusion due to menstruation, their human rights are being compromised (GSCDM, 2019; Subedi & Parker, 2021). This infringement extends beyond social exclusion to limit access to education, healthcare, economic opportunities, and personal autonomy, thereby perpetuating systemic inequalities and reinforcing gender-based discrimination (Olson et al., 2022).

Although key international agreements—such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989), and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs, 2015)—champion gender equality – in fact, they address gender equality and about 32% of indicators are gender-relevant (United Nations Development Group, 2017), they rarely address menstrual discrimination explicitly. Nonetheless, the core principles of dignity and equality embedded in these frameworks strongly affirm that menstruators deserve respect, protection, and full societal participation.

Movement Around Dignified Menstruation

For a long time, menstruation remained a largely misunderstood and taboo subject worldwide. The biological function of the ovary was only discovered in 1930 (Bhartiya & Patel, 2021). The menstrual movement began gaining specific momentum in 1974 with the formation of the Society for Menstrual Cycle Research (SMCR), which played a key role in advancing menstrual discourse (Bobel, 2020).

Menstrual health has been defined in various ways over time. According to UNICEF and WHO (2012), good menstrual health management means that people who menstruate use clean materials to absorb or collect menstrual blood, can change these materials in privacy, and have access to soap, water, and disposal facilities for used materials such as menstrual pads. Similarly, UNESCO (2014) defines menstrual hygiene management as encompassing accurate and timely knowledge, availability of safe and affordable materials, informed and comfortable healthcare professionals, access to health services, sanitation and washing facilities, positive social norms, safe disposal, advocacy, and supportive policies. In 2021, the definition of menstrual health was expanded to emphasize “a state of complete physical, mental, and social wellbeing, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, in relation to the menstrual cycle” (as cited in Hennegan et al., 2021).

In Nepal, government-level conversations on menstruation began during the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) era, primarily through safe motherhood programs that also exposed visible forms of menstrual discrimination, especially in western Nepal. Legal milestones followed, including the 2005 Supreme Court order and the introduction of Chhaupadi Guidelines 2008.

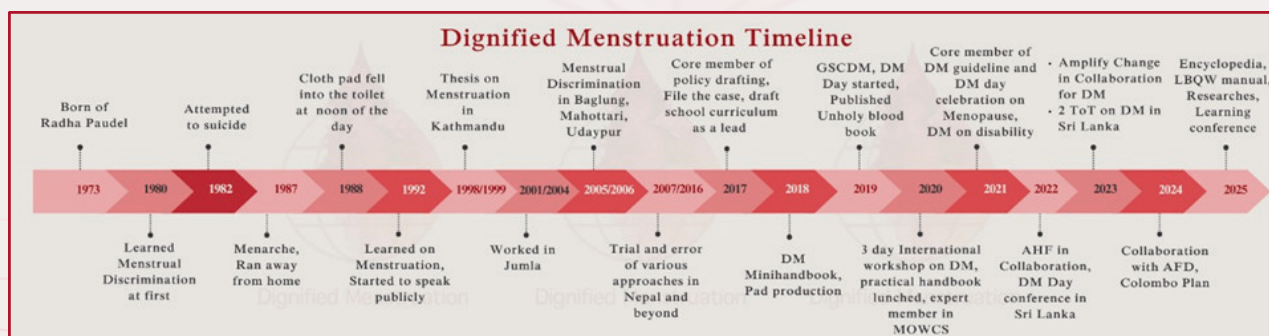
A pivotal figure in Nepal’s DM movement is Radha Paudel, a Nepali activist whose personal experiences deeply shaped her advocacy. Born in 1973 in Bharatpur, Chitwan, as the fourth daughter in her family, Radha was shocked when she first saw her mother’s menstrual blood. Her mother described it as sinful and impure, a message that traumatized Radha and exposed her to various discriminatory practices such as food restrictions, prohibitions on touching certain places or people, and exclusion from cultural activities. At the age of nine, overwhelmed by this oppression, Radha even attempted suicide (Paudel, 2019).

When Radha experienced menarche at 14, she ran away from home for five days. Her traumatic experiences continued at school, where she used traditional cloth pads and suffered in silence. A turning point came when she enrolled in a nursing school in Pokhara, where she learned the biological and socio-political aspects of menstruation and began speaking publicly about it. Despite facing threats to her life, she persevered, conducting her bachelor’s thesis on menstrual discrimination in Kathmandu, where she uncovered even more subtle and pervasive forms of stigma in urban and educated settings (Paudel, 2019).

Radha's professional career gave her opportunities to travel extensively across Nepal, including rural, conflict-affected, and geographically isolated regions like Karnali. There, she witnessed both visible and invisible menstrual discrimination. She also explored the eastern and Terai regions, where hidden forms of stigma were widespread. Starting in 2008, Radha traveled internationally and learned that the term "Chhaupadi"—a word from Achhami Nepali dialect simply meaning menstruation—had been misinterpreted and misused by academics, donors, and media to label and sometimes sensationalize the menstrual movement abroad. Though frustrated, she continued her work undeterred.

Since 2009, she left her job to dedicate herself fully to address menstrual discrimination through activism, writing, and academic work. She sought to raise awareness about DM and menstrual discrimination at various international forums, connecting these issues with peacebuilding, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and her own authorship. Despite facing a lack of external support, she persevered by launching a project under the same name, confronting personal feelings of guilt along the way. In 2017, after more than three decades of confronting menstrual discrimination, struggles, and accomplishments, she founded the RPF. These experiences ultimately sparked a broader movement advocating for the dignity of menstruation (Parker et al., 2024).

Radha's story stands as a testament to the progress of the DM movement. The figure below outlines the key milestones in her tireless efforts to promote DM discourse and advocacy.



(Source: RPF, 2025)

Radha Paudel Foundation

The establishment of the Radha Paudel Foundation was a challenging journey, driven entirely by the voluntary dedication of Radha Paudel herself. From the beginning, she faced hardships, setbacks, and isolation but remained inspired by the very challenges she encountered, even when struggling in the darkest moments (RPF, 2025).

This foundation was created with the vision that “menstruators and non-menstruators live with dignity in regenerative society”. Its mission focuses on “advocating for gender justice, peace, and human rights while empowering menstruators and non-menstruators, eradicating menstrual discrimination, and strengthening stakeholder capacity for DM and justice”. The foundation aims to mobilize allies for justice, foster dialogue on DM, and inspire hope during natural and human-made crises (RPF, 2025).

RPF collaborates extensively with various government ministries in Nepal, including the MoWCSC, Ministry of Water Supply, Ministry of Health and Population, Ministry of Forest and Environment, and Ministry of Education. Together, they developed the National Policy on Dignified Menstruation (2017), advocated for DM, and provided training programs. Besides, other contributions include Free Menstrual Pad Distribution Guidelines (2019), DM Guideline (2020). In fact, Radha also has served as an expert committee member for the MoWCSC.



DM policy drafting workshop at Ministry of Water Supply (2017)

She has played a vital role in integrating DM into school health nurse programs and menstrual pad distribution policies. The foundation has trained numerous groups across districts in producing reusable menstrual pads, along with the 3P (Person, Planet, Pocket) approach aligning with the DM-focused menstrual products. It has also advocated for quality standards of menstrual goods through the Office of the Prime Minister and served as a member of the menstrual pad quality assurance group in 2019. Furthermore, RPF regularly organizes webinars, trainings, and conferences addressing various aspects of DM.

Under Radha's leadership, two key menstrual movements have emerged: DMC-Nepal (Nepal focused) and GSCDM (globally focused). RPF is active in research, publications, training, media mobilization, and advocacy. She has also played a vital role in promoting entrepreneurship through Nepal's first biodegradable menstrual pad factory. In 2019, RPF founded the GSCDM and initiated the observance of International DM Day on December 8.



Provincial Assembly, Karnali, Declaring Menstrual Hut Dismantling for DM)

In 2020, as MoWCSC undertook the demolition of menstrual huts in line with the enforcement of Nepal's Penal Code 2017, Radha urgently advocated for DM from federal to provincial assemblies. She championed the cause under the motto: "Ending of menstrual huts; promoting DM." That year, in partnership with MoWCSC and the National Human Rights Commission, RPF hosted the world's first three-day international workshop on DM, which concluded with 12-point declarations. The foundation regularly held annual conferences (at national level) and also collaborated with global partners in hosting global seminars. Meanwhile, active discourse and training with a wide range of stakeholders continued throughout.

On 22 January 2025, Radha also filed a case in five parliamentary committees—including Legislative Management Committee; Women and Social Affairs Committee; Law, Justice, and Human Rights Committee; Development, Economic Affairs, and Good Governance Committee; and Public Policy and Delegated Legislation Committee of the House of Representatives—to address menstrual discrimination through effective legislation, implementation, and the establishment of DM.

Objectives of the Study

The study had the following key objectives:

1. To examine the impact of the dignified menstruation movement in Nepal
2. To explore the impact of the dignified menstruation movement in the regional and global level
3. To identify the challenges while initiating the dignified menstruation movement in Nepal and globally
4. To identify ways to amplify the movement around dignified menstruation.

Dignified Menstruation

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research design to explore the impact of the DM in Nepal and internationally. The methodology was structured around two primary components: an extensive document review and in-depth interviews with diverse stakeholders – both from Nepal and abroad.

Document Review

A comprehensive document review formed the foundation of the study. Key documents related to DM were systematically identified, compiled, and analyzed. Sources included national and international policies, publications by GSCDM and RPF, academic articles and books, as well as informal publications such as blogs, handbooks, newsletters, and social media posts. Search terms included “menstruation,” “menstrual dignity,” “menstrual discrimination,” and “dignified menstruation.” Both print and digital materials, manuscripts, etc. were reviewed, with particular attention to content produced about the DM movement. Content analysis was employed to identify recurring themes, narratives, and representations of menstrual discrimination and DM across these materials.

In-Depth Interview

To capture the lived experiences and perspectives of those engaged with the movement, in-depth interviews were conducted with a diverse group of stakeholders (n=60) from Nepal and beyond. Participants included members of RPF/GSCDM, government officials at various levels, DM fellows, representatives from civil society organizations, journalists, teachers, students, health workers, sexual and gender minorities. Most of the interviews (68%) were held online, whereas a few interviews with Nepali stakeholders (32%) were held in a physical set up, depending on participant location and preference. These conversations provided rich, narrative data on how the DM movement has influenced health, education, socio-cultural and political norms, human rights issues, and policy frameworks. The diversity of interviewees ensured a multi-dimensional understanding of the movement’s reach and impact. The details of participants are provided in Annex I.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Qualitative data from documents and interviews were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis (Patton, 2014). This approach allowed for the identification of key themes, patterns, and insights aligned with the study’s objectives. Content from social media and informal publications was analyzed alongside formal documents to capture both institutional and grassroots perspectives. The findings were organized thematically to reflect the movement’s influence on policy, social norms, and stakeholder experiences. Additionally, the movement was evaluated using the OECD DAC criteria for program and project assessment, considering aspects such as relevance, coherence, effectiveness, impact, efficiency, and sustainability (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2019).

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to rigorous ethical standards to ensure the protection and dignity of all participants. Ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of Kathmandu University School of Education (Approval number 250404-2). Informed consent was secured from all interviewees, who were fully briefed on the study's purpose, their rights, and the confidentiality of their responses. Participation was voluntary, and cultural norms were respected throughout the research process. Permission was obtained before recording interviews. Overall, key ethical values of fairness, respect, care, and honesty (TRUST Project, 2018) guided us to act ethically in our research work.

Dignified Menstruation

CHAPTER III**IMPACT OF THE DIGNIFIED MENSTRUATION MOVEMENT IN NEPAL**

This Chapter explores the multifaceted impact of the DM movement in Nepal, tracing its evolution from a largely taboo subject to a vibrant, inclusive social and policy movement. It also examines the development of DM indicators, key publications, and the expanding networks that have fueled advocacy and action across Nepal.

Drawing on data from desk reviews and participatory consultations with stakeholders, the chapter highlights the movement's wide-ranging effects at multiple levels. These include changes at the individual and family level, shifts in schools and communities, increased media engagement, and growing allyship from non-menstruators. It further assesses institutional impacts, including government policies, parliamentary actions, and integration into NGO programs, as well as the movement's resonance within diverse sectors such as universities, private organizations, sports, disability groups, and the queer community. The chapter also reflects on Nepal's leadership in global DM advocacy, including the establishment of International DM Day, illustrating a comprehensive picture of ever-growing momentum of the movement.

Key Concepts Around DM Movement**Menstruation, Not Chhaupadi**

The DM campaign in Nepal marked a historic shift by identifying over fifty euphemisms in Nepali language, which are used to describe menstruation, reflecting deep-rooted cultural sensitivities. Desk reviews of documents produced by the RPF revealed terms such as *chhui-chhau*, *chhaupadhi*, *panchhieko*, and *maharani bhayeko* among others (Paudel, 2019; DM Practical Handbook, 2020). Despite this diversity in colloquial language, formal discourse increasingly favors the use of the term “*mahinawaari*” (meaning “menstruation”). This shift is reinforced by policy and advocacy efforts, such as the 90th session CEDAW shadow report (2025), which urged media outlets and social platforms to adopt the terms “menstruation” in English and “*mahinawaari*” in Nepali as respectful and standardized expressions nationwide (DMC-Nepal, 2025). The National Assembly's Resolution Motion on Dignified Menstruation (2025) further institutionalized this language, aligning with the campaign's goals.

The research participants, including DMC-Nepal team members, often retrospectively looked into the socio-cultural and political practices of menstruation and how such practices are deeply embedded in their cultural roots. However, participants noted a gradual but significant shift in public perception and everyday language use. They observed that “*mahinawaari*” has become the preferred term, widely adopted in mainstream media and school textbooks. This linguistic normalization has positively influenced how menstruation is conceptualized, with both menstruators and non-menstruators among school students using “*mahinawaari*” comfortably, signaling progress toward destigmatization and menstrual dignity.

Menstruators and Non-Menstruators

The DM framework intentionally adopts the terms “menstruators” and “non-menstruators”. Desk review of policy documents and advocacy materials shows that these terminologies are gaining acceptance beyond traditional gender binaries. Organizations (for example, Unity for Change in Nepal) working on the rights of lesbians, transmen, queer women, etc. have embraced these terms in their advocacy efforts to ensure dignity across diverse identities and contexts—including humanitarian settings and pandemics.

Interviews with research participants from various sectors—including government officials at local, provincial, and federal levels, civil society organization (CSO) workers, political and social activists, and the DM fellows—confirmed widespread use of “menstruators” and “non-menstruators” in both formal and informal discourse. Notably, the National Assembly’s Resolution Motion on Dignified Menstruation explicitly references these terms, reflecting their institutional acceptance and reinforcing the movement’s commitment to inclusivity.

Menstrual Discrimination

The DM movement has not only provided a clear definition of menstrual discrimination, as outlined in the concepts section above (chapter I), but has also documented a wide range of discriminatory practices occurring throughout Nepal (DM Practical Handbook, 2020). Empirical evidence from field studies, especially, stakeholder interviews, reveals a significant shift in understanding over time. According to a health worker from Kanaka Sudari Rural Municipality, Jumla, “Initially, menstrual discrimination was largely perceived as a problem confined to indigenous communities in western Nepal. Many individuals from the Terai region, eastern Nepal, urban areas, and among educated populations denied the existence of such practices within their communities.” Now, most of the actors including government agreed that the menstrual discrimination has been practicing across the country in various names, forms, magnitude regardless of class, caste, religion, region, education or wealth. The GSCDM (2019) defines menstrual discrimination as an umbrella term encompassing silence, taboos, stigma, shyness, abuse, violence, restrictions, and denial of access to services and resources related to menstruation throughout the life cycle of menstruators.

Further analysis highlights menstrual discrimination plays a significant role in constructing and socializing power relations and patriarchal norms. Children between ages 6 and 9 begin internalizing social attitudes about menstruation (Paudel, 2023), learning to associate it with stigma and exclusion that persist throughout their lives. Menstrual discrimination is not limited to the days of bleeding but is a lifelong experience shaped by power structures that position menstruators as disadvantaged while privileging non-menstruators (GSCDM, 2019; Paudel, 2023). This cyclical process constructs and reinforces power relationships and patriarchal norms by maintaining silence, shame, and unequal social status.

The term has gained traction among researchers, NGOs, and government bodies, including its formal recognition in the National Assembly's Resolution Motion on Dignified Menstruation. Notably, the term "menstrual discrimination" was explicitly mentioned in Nepal's Budget Speech for Fiscal Year 2025/26 (Ministry of Finance, 2025), signaling increasing governmental acknowledgment of the issue's severity and the importance of addressing it in policy and practice.

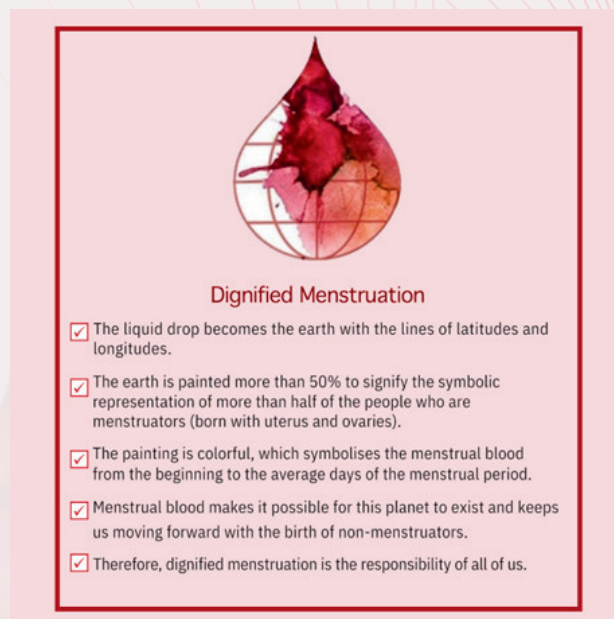
Dignified Menstruation

Research participants widely recognized DM as both a human right and a constitutional right. Representatives from the DMC-Nepal noted that "even individuals and organizations not formally involved in the DM movement have begun integrating the concept into their policies and programs." Many participants reflected that, although they may not fully grasp all the values and principles underlying DM, they have nonetheless started adopting the term and its associated practices. A staff of RPF remarked that "The concept is viewed as innovative, holistic, and decolonized in its approach." Furthermore, the Government of Nepal has incorporated DM into various national policies and programs, as highlighted by the National Planning Commission (2024).

The research participants acknowledged the concept of DM as human right and constitutional rights. As per DMC-Nepal representatives, "the people and organizations who never participate in formal program of DM movement in Nepal, they have also started incorporating the DM in their policy and programs". This is an innovative, holistic, decolonized concept, too. In Radha's words, "DM is more than a result – it is not just dignity, but is the composite outcome of the values of equality, freedom, dignity, non-discrimination, which are the basic principles of human rights." This understanding was common among the DMC-Nepal team members. Of late, the Government of Nepal has started using the term 'dignified menstruation' in various policies and programs (National Planning Commission, 2024).

Symbol of Dignified Menstruation

Participants from the GSCDM and the RPF described the symbol of DM as deeply organic and spiritual, reflecting the natural and sacred aspects of the menstrual cycle. This symbolism resonates with many as it honors menstruation not as a source of shame but as a vital and empowering part of life. Members of the DMC-Nepal echoed this sentiment, noting that stakeholders from diverse backgrounds and sectors embrace the symbol with pride and enthusiasm.



Symbol of DM and its meaning (RPF, 2024)

A university faculty member (non-menstruator) shared that he places the symbol's sticker on his work desk, which often sparks meaningful conversations with students who notice it during their visits. Its widespread acceptance across different communities and organizations highlights its role in fostering unity and collective identity within the movement. The symbol serves not only as a visual representation but also as a powerful tool to challenge stigma, promote awareness, and inspire respect for menstruators everywhere.

Menstrual Pad/Products

We also explored that many documents and programs used the menstrual pad/product to make the menstruation dignified in daily life instead of sanitary pad/products. Participants familiar with the DM movement often expressed pride in emphasizing that menstrual blood is pure and natural, requiring thoughtful management rather than being treated as a hygiene issue akin to child vaccination. Reflecting this collective understanding, a civil society organization (CSO) worker from Bagmati province explained, "We prefer to use the terms menstrual pad/products instead of sanitary pad/products because, as feminists, we affirm that menstrual blood is clean and pure." This indicates a gradual shift in the language use as well as people's attitude towards menstruation.

Menstrual Health and Management

Similar to the shift in terminology around menstrual products, participants have increasingly adopted the terms “menstrual health” or “menstrual management” in place of “menstrual hygiene.” A DM Champion reflected that many believe the phrase “menstrual hygiene” unintentionally reinforces menstrual discrimination. Reflecting this evolving perspective, many organizations, activists, and government stakeholders now observe International Menstrual Health Day on May 28, rather than International Menstrual Hygiene Day, signaling a broader and more respectful understanding of menstruation

Development of DM Indicators

Drawing on years of expertise in the field of DM, RPF has developed some pragmatic indicators to assess the alignment of policies and programs with DM values. These indicators serve as practical tools for evaluating progress and ensuring that initiatives genuinely uphold the principles of DM in menstrual movement. The key indicators include: indicators for DM friendly schools, indicators for DM friendly workplace, indicators for Menstrual Leave, indicators for DM friendly Menstrual Products (three ‘P’ approach : P-Person, P-Planet, P-Pocket) (DMC-Nepal, 2025). For a detailed list of indicators, please refer to the Annex III.

A participant engaged in the production of DM friendly menstrual pad reported that The ‘3P’ approach ensures that menstrual products are free from all forms of menstrual discrimination, environmentally sustainable, and affordable. As reflected by DMC-Nepal team members, stakeholders at different levels, including schools, municipalities, CSOs have passionately used the indicators for DM friendly schools and municipalities, and DM friendly workplace. Stakeholders shared positive feedback on the practical application of these indicators. For instance, representatives from Diwakar Memorial Secondary School (Chitwan), Lalbandi Municipality (Sarlahi), Madi Municipality (Chitwan), and PACE Nepal (Jumla) reported that the indicators provided clear guidance and measurable benchmarks for fostering DM practices within their institutions. Their experiences underscore the indicators’ effectiveness in translating DM values into actionable steps, leading to tangible improvements in their respective contexts.

Publications

As of May 2025, there has been a significant increase in the availability and utilization of publications focused on DM in Nepal. Empirical data indicate that these resources are widely adopted by organizations working in the field, serving as foundational texts for advocacy, training, and program implementation.

A review of published materials revealed that the first generation of DM-specific books in Nepal includes: Training Manual on Dignified Menstruation (2024); Mini Handbook: DM is Everyone's Business (2018); Unholy Blood (2019), Dignified Menstrual: A Practical Handbook (2020), Dignified Menstruation for Neurodevelopmental Disability Adolescent Girls (2021), Surgical Menopause (2021), Mariam Manchhe Bhai (2023), Utsav (2024), and Menstrual Anthology (2024).

Quantitative analysis of DM-related literature, as illustrated in the accompanying graph, shows that books constitute the majority of published resources (55%, n=40), followed by book chapters and journal articles. This trend underscores the central role of comprehensive texts in shaping the discourse and practice around DM in Nepal.

In addition to standalone books, DM-related articles have been published in various government and academic journals. A landmark historical book, *Nepali Women's Historical Movement: A Century* (Women Pressure Group, 2020), also features a dedicated article on DM by Radha, highlighting the integration of DM into broader narratives of menstruators' rights and social change.

Academic research, such as "Menstrual Discrimination in Ilam—A Case from East Nepal" (Paudel, 2023), provides further empirical evidence of the challenges and progress in DM at the local level.

The evolution of the DM movement in Nepal is also reflected in the creative arts. Since the movement's inception, literary works—including poems, novels, songs, and storybooks—have increasingly incorporated DM values, both explicitly and implicitly. For example, singer Rekha Joshi has been commissioned to produce DM-themed songs for awareness campaigns, and the film *Basanta* has addressed DM issues in its narrative. In 2025, the Mandala Theatre awarded a DM-related drama, signaling growing cultural acceptance and mainstreaming of DM themes. Collectively, these publications and creative works provide robust evidence of the expanding acceptance, ownership, and institutionalization of the DM movement across multiple sectors in Nepal.

Networking and Movement

Empirical evidence from participant reflections and organizational reports highlights that RPF has strategically mobilized both formal and informal networks to unite individuals and organizations in DM advocacy. This approach has led to the formalization of DMC-Nepal in 2017 (which was informally working previously), which began its work with deliberate focus and inclusivity.



DMC-Nepal's core objectives, as articulated by its founding members, include identifying and dismantling diverse forms of menstrual discrimination, advocating for legislative reform, and promoting an inclusive culture that integrates DM values across all sectors and government tiers (DMC Nepal, 2025). A National DM Committee member emphasized the network's commitment to representation, noting, "It has an inclusive executive committee, representing members from all seven provinces of Nepal and including transmen." This inclusivity has been consistently reflected in the network's activities and leadership.

Participants described DMC-Nepal as a catalyst for grassroots change, with members actively engaging in local and international education, advocacy, and capacity-building campaigns. RPF team members frequently referred to DMC Nepal's affiliates as "real change makers," highlighting their pivotal role in expanding the movement at the community level.

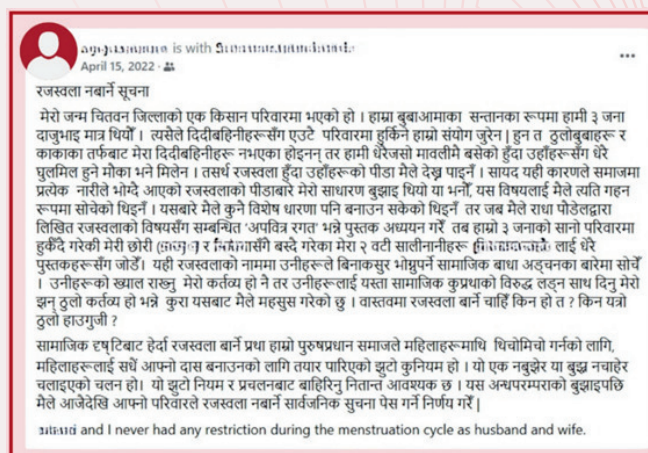
By May 2025, DMC-Nepal had grown to include 55 CSO members nationwide. National campaigns—spanning media engagement, collaboration with NGOs, and policy advocacy—are coordinated through this network, which convenes monthly virtual meetings and annual review workshops, both online and in person. Participants consistently reported that these networking efforts have fostered a sense of ownership and shared purpose. As one member reflected, "The workshops, regular meetings and online coaching sessions, have given us the confidence and tools to advocate for DM in our own communities, and to influence policy at higher levels."

They are responsible for lobbying and advocacy to make their communities dignified for all menstruators. DMC-Nepal has been hosting trainings for building new leaders around DM and trainings for media, too. The national level campaign such as engagement with media, NGOs, policy makers, etc. are operating under this network. The executive committee developed an annual action plan and amplified the movement around DM. It has impacts from individual level to national policy levels as discussed below.

Impacts of DM Movement at Individual and Family Level

Empirical findings demonstrate that the DM movement in Nepal has had a transformative impact at the individual and family level. Many participants described how increased awareness—often sparked by books, media, and direct engagement with DM campaigns—helped them challenge menstrual discrimination, foster self-confidence and agency. For example, a head teacher in Kathmandu shared, *"After reading Apabitra Ragat [Unholy Blood], I shared on Facebook declaring that there would be no more menstrual discrimination at my home, where I live with three menstruators."*

Similarly, a child club graduate posted a video about visiting Pashupatinath temple during menstruation, inspired by Radha through watching her video of visiting the Gadhimai temple. Radha shared that she received so many calls and messages from various means for years during the festival times specially Teej, Dashain, and Tihar where they shared the messages and photos of continuing their religious activities during menstruation.



(Source: Screenshot from a non-menstruator's Facebook)

These stories (participants create mother's video – sharing mother's stories of first menstruation, and share those on Facebook on Mothers' Day; some write 'Menstrual talk, dignity first / dignified menstruation, etc. on hand with mehendi, best wishes of Eid to all, let no one left behind due to menstruation, etc.) illustrate how exposure to DM concepts has led to real behavioral change.

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Participants sharing DM messages in the month of Shrawan

Participants cited diverse sources of information, including DM Day events, trainings, social media, and family discussions. One male participant noted, "I heard the term from my wife and now participate in DM activities."

Key informant interviews highlight personal transformation. A child protection coordinator from Lalbandi reflected, "I knew menstruation as a biological process, but only understood dignity after an RPF orientation." A journalist described a shift from shame to celebration, stating, "Now, after training, I realized menstruation is not a sin but an occasion to celebrate." Others, like a government officer, recognized and changed discriminatory behaviors at home after learning about DM.

These reflections show that learning about DM often prompts critical self-examination and unlearning of undignified practices. As one official from Rainas Municipality put it, *“While I still struggle with my learned beliefs, I have given my daughters the freedom to live without such limitations.”* Her experience underscores the internal conflict between traditional values and the desire to provide a more equitable future for the next generation. Similarly, a national news agency journalist described overcoming guilt and participating fully in religious rituals after engaging with DM education.

Structured programs and campaigns, such as those led by RPF and DMC-Nepal, have deepened understanding beyond hygiene, fostering open dialogue and adopting human rights perspective. As a senior nurse from Sunwal shared, *“After joining a program on DM, I learned more about DM, not just the biological process.”* Overall, participant experiences confirm that the DM movement is closing knowledge gaps, promoting self-reflection, and sparking lasting change in attitudes and practices at the individual and family level.

Impacts of DM Movement at School and Communities

The research team also learned of a few schools that are working to make their school DM-friendly. For instance, some schools have displayed DM messages and songs on walls (Bhandari, 2025), introduced biodegradable pad distribution (Shree Secondary School, Chitwan), and trained students to make reusable cloth pads (Tatopani Municipality, Jumla).

Extracurricular activities centered on DM are organized at schools like Diwakar Memorial Secondary School (Chitwan), while others have integrated DM into complementary curricula (Lalbandi, Chitwan, Jumla). Waste management of menstrual products and budget allocation for DM Day celebrations have also been reported in municipalities such as Madi and Lalbandi.

According to the DMC-Nepal team, most schools learned about DM through DM champions or via peer learning among teachers during meetings (Khairani MaVi, Chitwan).



Quiz Contest on DM organized by School, supported by Madi Municipality, Chitwan

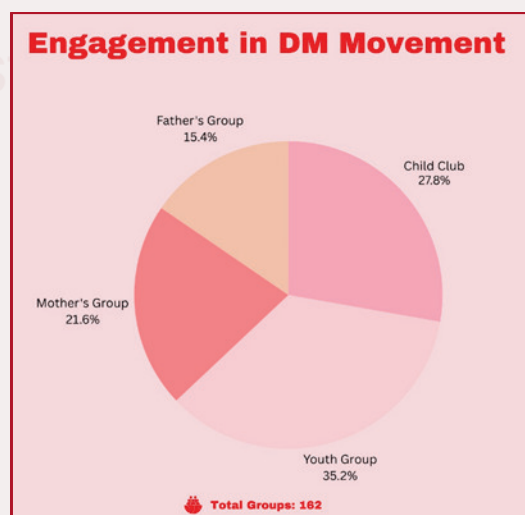
These efforts have also initiated community dialogues around DM. Moreover, the desk review of DMC-Nepal documents revealed that child clubs, mandated by government policy, have become active DM advocates in schools across Tatopani (Jumla), Sunwal (Nawalparasi), Madi (Chitwan), Sashi Nagar (Chitwan), Lalbandi (Sarlahi), and Kathmandu Metropolitan Ward 5. According to participant (school nurse) who was trained by DMC-Nepal, *“Among schools with School Health Nurse Programs, 44 schools across all seven provinces have incorporated DM education and are celebrating DM Day.”*

At the community level, diverse groups—including mothers’ groups, Female Community Health Volunteers, youth groups, fathers’ groups, and child clubs—actively promote DM values. Community events such as street dramas, folk songs, puppet shows, flash mobs, rallies, trainings, and workshops are common, often supported by NGOs, DMC Nepal, schools, and local governments. Youths leverage social media, songs, videos, poems, and art competitions to spread DM awareness.

Participants highlighted notable shifts in traditional roles. For example, a staff from DMC-Nepal member NGO shared that after DM training, a faith healer in western Nepal began advising girls and women to consume milk products during menstruation for dignified life – cascading the values of DM. Radha Paudel’s long-term engagement with faith and religious leaders, including facilitating conferences in Dhangadi (2022), Pokhara (2023), and Bajhang (2023), has helped transform these leaders into advocates for menstrual dignity. As Radha observed, *“Once they understand menstrual blood’s nature and DM as a human rights framework, they emancipate themselves and become leaders of societal transformation.”*

Personal testimonies underscore the movement’s profound impact. A 76-year-old participant from Achham expressed guilt and transformation after realizing his role in perpetuating menstrual discrimination: “I am a man, but also a victim of menstrual discrimination—I burned my hands cooking during my mother’s menstruation days.” Similarly, a male youth politician from Far East Nepal, reflecting on his political journey, authored an article titled “DM is a constitutional and political right” (Basnet, 2025), signaling growing political engagement with DM.

Overall, participant experiences confirm a gradual but meaningful shift from discriminatory menstrual norms toward dignity at both school and community levels, reflecting the DM movement’s expanding influence across Nepal.



Impacts of DM Movement on and through Media

Media plays a critical role in shaping public understanding of social issues, including menstruation. However, for many years, DM campaigners faced significant challenges in gaining media attention and sensitivity toward DM. Journalists from mainstream outlets reflected that media coverage often focused superficially on menstrual-related incidents—such as the death of a girl in a menstrual hut due to a snake bite—without investigating the underlying causes or broader social context. Moreover, some media outlets prioritized donor interests over the needs of beneficiaries, as shared by a journalist who participated in the DM Fellowship program.

Over time, sustained formal and informal dialogues between DM advocates and media professionals have led to increased media engagement with DM issues. Leading national media outlets—including Kantipur, Kathmandu Post, Nagarik News, Himal Khabar, Rising Nepal, Nepal FM, Radio Kantipur, and Radio Sagarmatha—have begun incorporating DM into their coverage. Notably, as shared by a journalist, “Nepal FM has been a pioneer since 2021, broadcasting DM jingles more than ten times daily, hosting weekly Facebook Live sessions, and airing dedicated radio programs and songs on DM.”

The RPF team noted a marked shift in journalist participation: five years ago, media professionals were hesitant to join DM fellowship programs, but by 2025, competition for these opportunities was intense.

This change reflects growing recognition of DM's importance—not only to dismantle menstrual discrimination but also to address domestic violence, sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR), climate justice, and constitutional rights. In 2023, a DM media handbook—an output of the fellowship—was published and disseminated widely. A DMC Nepal member observed, “In earlier days, editors often sent only female journalists to DM events, but now we receive equal numbers of male participants.”



This shift indicates increasing incorporation of DM values in media. Consistent national media coverage has normalized menstruation as a regular topic of public discourse. One journalist from AV News TV shared, *“I broadcast DM issues on TV where no other channel has done so. I strive to connect the issue with the community”* (Interview, 2025). This highlights the importance of diverse media platforms in reaching broad audiences and reshaping cultural narratives around menstruation.

An executive director of a radio station reflected on the collaborative DM radio program with RPF: *“Our mission was to reach people from east to west, mountain to Terai, ensuring no one suffers menstrual discrimination. What happened in the past is past; no one should suffer now”* (Interview, 2025). He noted a slow but steady societal shift toward viewing menstruation as natural rather than shameful. The program “DM is Everyone’s Business” not only raised awareness but also served as an advocacy tool, engaging communities and challenging entrenched norms. By broadcasting nationwide, it helped frame menstrual discrimination as a national issue rather than a localized problem.

A journalist from Biratnagar shared how RPF training boosted her confidence and self-awareness, enabling her to advocate for DM within her family and community, illustrating the personal empowerment fostered through media engagement.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the DM campaign’s presence on social media platforms. As reported by the DMC-Nepal team, DM messages reached even the most remote villages through Facebook, Instagram, X (Twitter), LinkedIn, and other channels. Likes, comments, shares, live webinars, songs, and statements related to DM surged, making online platforms a vital tool for mobilization. Participants from DMC-Nepal, RPF, and partner organizations emphasized that social media has strengthened solidarity among DM campaigners and expanded the movement’s reach.

Non-Menstruators as Allies for DM Movement

Non-menstruators—especially graduates of child clubs, youth clubs, and DM fellowship programs—are increasingly active advocates for DM at local and national levels. For example, the Coordinator of DMC-Nepal, a recognized member of the National MenEngage Alliance under the MoWCSC, received the National Youth Talent Award in 2024 for his DM advocacy.

Many non-menstruators become motivated after witnessing menstrual discrimination firsthand. One participant recalled, *“For the first time, I saw the scariest part of menstruation, when a grieving woman was barred from seeing her deceased mother-in-law due to her menstrual cycle.”* This injustice deeply upset him, leading him to question and challenge the practice. Similar experiences were shared by teachers, journalists, and religious leaders who began speaking out in their families and communities.

Change often starts at home. A teacher noted, *“First, I should change my family’s misconceptions before expecting society to change.”* By relating menstruation to birth *“With the same blood I was born, and she had the fortune to be called a mother”*—non-menstruators build empathy and awareness. These individuals have become role models, driving shifts in menstrual narratives within families, schools, and communities.

Increased Donors’ Commitment on DM

The research team observed that donor commitment to DM programs was initially minimal, with most support focused primarily on menstrual hygiene or WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) initiatives. However, over time, several key donors have expanded their engagement to include DM principles and advocacy. Organizations such as Amplify Change and SETI Foundation have collaborated with the RPF to advance DM work. Moreover, some organizations have maintained event-based collaboration, including AHF Nepal, GIZ (through Green Tara Nepal), UNDP Nepal, and WWF Nepal.

More recently, without collaborating with RPF/GSCDM, VSO (Voluntary Service Overseas) and ADARA Group have incorporated DM values into their programming, reflecting a growing recognition and commitment within the donor community toward holistic DM approach.

Menstrual Health and Hygiene Management Partners’ Alliance

As per Radha, she herself conceptualized and co-founded the Menstrual Health and Hygiene Management Partners’ Alliance (MHMPA) following the Dang Conference in 2017, shortly after Nepal finalized its national policy on DM. She advocated for transforming the alliance into a DM Partners Alliance to better reflect a rights-based approach, but *“the network remained focused on menstrual hygiene due to the influence of hygiene-centered I/NGOs, including GIZ”*, Radha bitterly expressed. Today, MHMPA includes over 100 institutional members, including RPF. Despite early resistance, MHMPA’s growing engagement with DM reflects a broader shift in Nepal’s menstrual movement toward inclusivity, rights, and systemic change.

DM Friendly Menstrual Pad Production

The RPF and Miteri Jaibik Pad Udhyog [Miteri Biodegradable Pad Factory] have pioneered Nepal's first biodegradable menstrual pad production within the NGO sector. Since its establishment in 2017, the Pad factory in Chitwan has manufactured eco-friendly disposable pads using pinewood pulp, cotton, and bioplastic packaging, ensuring full biodegradability and also reusable cloth pads (Bhandari, 2025).



*Miteri Bio-degradable Pad Factory,
Chitwan*

As per a member of DMC-Nepal, this factory also serves as a training hub, providing technical knowledge and evidence to government officials, media, and NGOs.

Many social enterprises, including Xpose Nepal, NIDISHI, and Samabikash Nepal, received training or visited the factory before launching their own menstrual pad initiatives. The factory's products have been procured by organizations such as Green Tara Nepal, UNDP Nepal, Tashi Orphanage School, AHF Nepal, and ADARA Group. Ministers and parliamentarians have also visited the facility to understand sustainable menstrual pad production in Nepal.

Recently, as shared by Radha, their biodegradable pad initiative was nominated for the Shark Tank Nepal idea pitch competition in April 2025, highlighting growing innovation and recognition in biodegradable menstrual products.

Dignified Menstruation

Impact at the Institutional/System Level

The DM movement in Nepal has achieved significant milestones across various institutional and systemic levels, including parliament, government ministries and commissions, municipalities, I/NGOs, the United Nations, and the private sector. These advances reflect a growing recognition of menstrual dignity as a critical social, political and human rights issue.

Parliamentarian Level

As reflected by Radha, a series of meetings of DM campaigners with parliamentarians resulted in the Resolution Motion on Dignified Menstruation.

The research team learned through social media post of RPF that the National Assembly unanimously endorsed the Resolution Motion on Dignified Menstruation on 21 March, 2025. It was a historical milestone in a discourse of DM in Nepal. For it, as participants from RPF and DMC-Nepal reflected, RPF team mobilized the formal and informal networks, hosted series of dialogues with parliamentarian and media.

Government Level

At the government level, DM has increasingly been integrated into policies and programs that address menstrual discrimination's complex social, cultural, political and human rights dimensions. The data and discussion have focused on ministries, commissions, and municipalities.



Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizen

The MoWCSC officially endorsed DM Day on December 8, 2019, with the minister publicly announcing the proposal and forwarding it to the cabinet via the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The ministry also co-hosted a series of intra-ministerial interaction programs on DM in Kathmandu during 2019 and 2020, including a significant three-day workshop (2020) that brought together stakeholders to strategize on advancing menstrual dignity.

Between 2020 and 2021, the ministry spearheaded menstrual hut dismantling programs in Karnali and Sudurpaschim provinces, implementing laws aimed at eradicating undignified practices. This initiative, framed as “hut dismantling for DM,” marked a critical step toward eliminating physical and social barriers that perpetuate menstrual stigma.

In 2020, the MoWCSC drafted the DM Guideline to replace the outdated Chhaupadi Guideline of 2008, forwarding it to parliament for legislative consideration. Furthermore, the ministry successfully incorporated DM principles into the Gender Equality Act of 2021, embedding menstrual dignity within Nepal's broader legal framework for gender justice.

Ministry of Education, Science and Technology

Through decades of activism by Radha Paudel and her team, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST) has undertaken initiatives aligned with DM.

Since 2019, the government has implemented a 'Free Pad-Distribution Program' in public schools, with Minister Giri Raj Mani Pokhrel initially distributing RPF's biodegradable menstrual pads. The MoEST has also endorsed the 'Sanitary Pad Distribution and Management Procedure 2019'. This pad distribution program, which continues through municipalities, is yet to fully align with the indicators of DM-friendly menstrual products, as noted by the RPF team, who continue to advocate for its improvement.



DM in School Curriculum, Yugbodh Dang, 2017

Additionally, MoEST included menstruation-related chapters in the school curriculum, following suggestions from RPF in 2017 during a consultation workshop in Dang with the Curriculum Development Center. Topics now covered include introductions to menstruation, menstrual huts, menstrual hygiene, and visible form of menstrual discrimination, reusable pad making, menstrual discrimination, and SRHR at various grade levels. However, the current content focuses more on WASH and product-related issues, overlooking the menstrual discrimination practiced in many families across Nepal.

Ministry of Water Supply

The desk review revealed that the Ministry of Water Supply initiated governmental action on DM in 2017 by hosting a national conference in Dang that convened menstrual activists, NGOs, donors, and government representatives. In the same year, the ministry organized an international training on menstrual management in Nagarkot. Taking a lead role, it coordinated with other ministries, including MoWCSC, Ministry of Health and Population, and MoEST, to draft a national policy on DM, with Radha serving as a core member of the policy drafting committee. In 2018, MoWCSC invited Radha and her team to lead a five-day training in Nagarkot. Furthermore, DM values were promoted through partnerships with RPF and Miteri Biodegradable Pad Factory, via biodegradable and reusable pad-making training for Water User's Groups in Chitwan during 2018/2019.

Ministry of Health and Population

The Ministry of Health and Population served as a coordinating body during the drafting of the National Policy on Dignified Menstruation in 2017 and has contributed to DM Day celebrations since its inception. Radha also remembers the ministry inviting her to deliver guest speech on adolescence health programs. Radha's involvement in drafting the curriculum for school health nurses and their training underscores the Ministry's commitment to integrating DM values and principles into its operations.

Ministry of Forest and Environment

The Ministry of Forest and Environment acknowledged the values of DM while deciding on guidelines for the free distribution of menstrual pads in 2019 at the Prime Minister's Office, according to Radha. Every ministry agreed to prioritize biodegradable pads in the 'Free Pad Distribution Program'. Additionally, Radha recalls that she was invited as a guest lecturer at a conference of foresters in Kathmandu in 2020, highlighting the ministry's recognition of the environmental aspects of DM.

Commissions

The National Women Commission has actively acknowledged the urgency of addressing menstrual discrimination. It co-hosted a one-day conference titled *“Dignified Menopause – A Human Right, Not A Privilege”* during the 3rd International DM Day in 2021. A commission member shared insights from field visits to districts like Doti and regions in eastern Nepal, noting that menstrual discrimination persists nationwide, though practices vary in extent. She emphasized the critical role of local governments in conducting awareness programs to tackle menstrual discrimination at the grassroots level.

In contrast, the National Human Rights Commission's (NHRC) engagement with DM has been mixed. While NHRC co-hosted the second International DM Day in 2020 and the country's first three-day international DM workshop, *“its focus largely remained on visible forms of menstrual discrimination, rather than addressing the broader human rights violations linked to menstrual discrimination nationwide”* critiques a member of DMC-Nepal.

Rural/Municipalities

Municipalities have emerged as key implementers of DM initiatives, particularly through the 'Free Pad-Distribution Program' launched in 2019. Local officials and RPF participants reported that some municipalities have gone beyond distribution by organizing reusable pad-making trainings (e.g., Tatopani Rural Municipality in Jumla) and orientation programs for political representatives and Female Community Health Volunteers (e.g., Ghodaghodi Municipality in Kailali). Several municipalities, including Mellekh and Chauarpati Rural Municipalities in Achham, Kanakasundari Rural Municipality in Jumla, Sunwal Municipality in Nawalparasi, and Madi Municipality in Chitwan, have developed educational materials such as hoarding boards to raise awareness about menstrual laws and DM principles. Some of these municipalities have integrated DM into school programming, allocated small budgets to promote DM-friendly environments, and even developed municipal-level DM policies. These localized efforts demonstrate growing institutional commitment to addressing menstrual discrimination and promoting DM at the grassroots level.

Integration of DM Into I/NGO Policies and Programs

The desk review shows that over 50 NGOs across all seven provinces of Nepal are actively engaged in DM advocacy, often marking International DM Day and other significant events like March 8. Many NGOs, including AHF Nepal, Akasha Academy, AWFS, CPO, CWIN-Nepal, Eco-Himal, Entrepreneurship and skill development organization disabled Association, FAYA Nepal, Green Tara Nepal, Hope Foundation Nepal, HDCN, Kopila Nepal, Medicos Society Nepal, SDC Bara, SOSEC and SHAKHI, are members of DMC-Nepal. Some, like PACE Nepal (Jumla), have incorporated DM into their safeguarding, GESI, and HR policies.

A child protection coordinator from Sarlahi shared, "Since we started working with RPF, we have made several changes in our office and community. We now have posters like 'Welcome to the Dignified Menstruation Friendly Office' and 'Dignified Menstruation is Our Responsibility.'" Likewise, a social mobilizer from SOSEC (Dailekh), highlighted the importance of respecting menstruation by saying, "To make the menstruation dignified, the management done respectfully is understood by DM." For her "dignified menstruation is about creating systems and practices to eliminate all forms of menstrual discrimination including menstrual management, signaling that dignity comes from individual's attitudes and broader structural and societal changes." Similarly, a project coordinator from Dailekh observed a shift from ridicule to tolerance around menstruation, signaling growing societal acceptance. This narrative is indicative of how personal beliefs can influence broader social interactions and, in turn, create a more open environment for discussion. Other NGOs outside DMC-Nepal, such as Sustainable WASH for All, REED Nepal, Namsaling Community Development Centre (NCDC), project HER, Her Turn, and Global Action Nepal, also contribute to DM efforts.

While donor-driven mindsets initially limited focus on DM, several INGOs have begun integrating DM principles. As per a DMC-Nepal team member, *"Organizations like AHF Nepal, WWF Nepal, VSO, and ADARA Group actively supported the DM activities."* A social safeguard officer from an INGO described how RPF's Training of Trainers program expanded her understanding from menstrual hygiene management to DM, illustrating the impact of capacity-building on shifting organizational approaches. She shared, *"Initially, we worked for menstrual hygiene management but not specifically saying dignified as such. But when we had a 5-day TOT with Radha, I came to know that we could not only talk about menstrual hygiene management but also realized to talk about DM as well."* Her experience shows how professional training programs help broaden the scope of understanding and approach, shifting the focus from just hygiene to the broader and more critical aspect of dignity in menstruation.

DM in United Nations in Nepal

UN agencies such as UNICEF, UNDP, UN Women, and UNFPA were also found to engage with menstruation issues, but as per DMC-Nepal members' experience, UNDP Nepal stands out for its direct work on DM. They remembered that UNDP's Parliament Support Program helped mark the 5th and 6th International DM Days in 2023 and 2024 and facilitated dialogues with parliamentarians in Karnali, Madhesh, and Kathmandu. UNDP also supported the Miteri Biodegradable Pad Factory's upgrade and involved Radha Paudel as a resource person in discussions on women in peace, politics, and gender equality. A UNDP GESI official also noted that Radha's sensitization sessions led to an "eye-opening experience" for staff, especially men, resulting in DM integration into projects and workplaces.

DM Among Rotarians

Participants from Rotary Club Bhaktapur shared that since 2022, the Rotary Club has made DM a core focus. Between 2021 and 2024, three Rotarians completed RPF's ToT on DM and subsequently organized multiple trainings and awareness activities. The club also marked DM Day annually and published two articles by RPF staff in their souvenir each year. They distribute menstrual pads produced by Miteri Biodegradable Pad Factory to schools and postpartum women. Recognizing Radha Paudel's contributions to social change through DM, Rotary awarded her a cash prize of NPR 100,000.

DM Among Universities

RPF and Kathmandu University have partnered to provide research grants to 4 master's level students on DM. Moreover, Kathmandu University also benefits from RPF's expertise through supervision and external review of menstruation-related research and public talks on DM. Additionally, colleges affiliated with Tribhuvan University and Pokhara University have invited Radha to speak on DM, further integrating the topic into academic discourse.

DM among Private Organizations

DM has started gaining attention within Nepal's private sector. Social media posts by GSCDM and RPF reports highlight several businesses actively supporting DM initiatives. For example, Fire and Ice Restaurant in Kathmandu organized two three-day DM training events and hosted the first International DM Day in 2019. The Vegan House Café and Restaurant in Lalitpur displays DM messages in restrooms and provides biodegradable pads and educational materials. Similarly, Ama Garden Hotel in Sauraha, Chitwan, has promoted DM since 2022, featuring a coffee house library stocked with DM books and reference materials. Kathmandu Guest House collaborated in marking DM Day 2023 and distributed DM kits to schools.



Financial institutions have also begun engaging with DM indicators. In 2022, Himalayan Bank's Head Office organized a Kathmandu-wide interaction program on DM for around 100 women branch managers. Similarly, Jyoti Bikas Bank collaborated on a year-long program mobilizing child clubs in Sunwal, Nawalparasi. Additionally, as per a RPF team member, social media posts from Nabil Bank and Chaudhary Group Foundation have shared DM-related messages, indicating spillover awareness within the corporate sector.

These examples reflect growing private sector involvement in promoting menstrual dignity through training, awareness, and resource provision.

DM in Sports

Recognizing that menstruators are everywhere, and therefore DM is universally important, the RPF has actively collaborated with sports organizations and clubs to create DM-friendly environments. Karnali Sports Club, organizer of the International Jumla-Rara Ultra Marathon, has partnered with RPF to promote DM during the event. RPF provided initial support to the marathon and trained 15 youths from the club on DM principles. The organizers asserted that their sports event was DM friendly.



Additionally, as per a DMC-Nepal team member, the Lord Buddha Youth Club in Lumbini actively promotes and disseminates information about biodegradable menstrual pads, further extending DM awareness within community sports.

DM among Disability Organizations and Queer Communities

RPF began working with menstruators with disabilities in 2019-2020 in Dailekh, with stories documented in *Stories of Menstrual Discrimination among Women with Disability in Nepal*. Since 2020, RPF's workshops have included sign language interpretation, continuing in all editions. In 2021, RPF published a pictorial book on DM for Girls with Neurodevelopmental Disorder and released a sign language version of the mini-handbook *DM is Everyone's Business* and its video on YouTube. Programs for deaf communities were held in Kathmandu and Pokhara during 2021-2022.

Disability organization, namely, Udhyamsil Tatha Sip Bikas Apanga Sangh [Disability Association for Entrepreneurship and Skills Development] (Nuwakot) has partnered with RPF since 2022. Two DM Fellows were found to actively advocate for DM through literature, local programs, and political activism. Another DM fellow was a prominent advocate nationally and internationally, who noted, “Wherever I go, I incorporate DM.”

Federation of Women with Disability Nepal (FWDN) and Prayatna Nepal (Visually-Impaired Women) have also engaged in RPF’s trainings and advocacy. “RPF’s training opened doors for us to talk openly about menstruation and disability,” shared a member of FWDN. The National Indigenous Disabled Women Association Nepal (NIDWAN) organizes DM programs and participates actively. Spillover effects include Nepal Blind Association’s dissemination of DM messages.

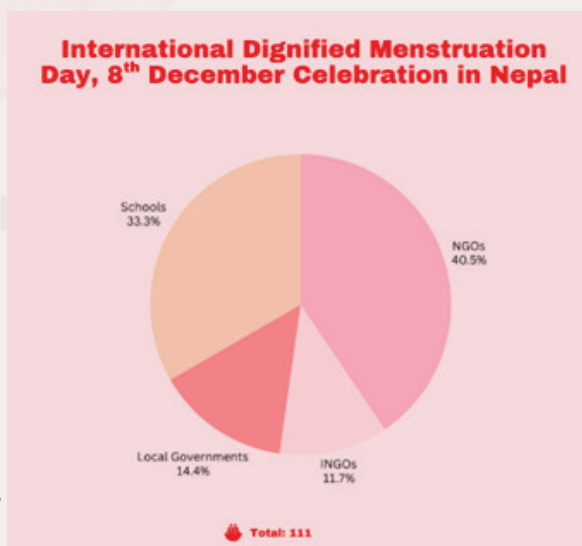
Mitini Nepal and Unity for Change, both members of DMC-Nepal and partners with RPF, actively engage in DM advocacy. Unity for Change collaborates with RPF on research about trans-menstruation and educates youth on DM. A Unity for Change staff member noted, “*Our partnership with RPF has been vital in raising awareness about DM among transgender and queer youth.*” Blue Diamond Society, Queer Youth Group, and Drishti Nepal were also found promoting DM through social media.

International DM Day Endorsed

The International DM Day, observed annually on December 8th, has gained widespread endorsement across Nepal. Through desk reviews, interviews, it was revealed that as of December 2024, around 11 organizations including PACE Nepal, UNDP Nepal, local governments, schools have incorporated this day into their official calendars and programming.

Furthermore, the National Youth Council of Nepal co-hosted the 7th International DM Day, as highlighted on their social media.

Furthermore, Hamro Patro, the first-ever Nepali and English digital calendar of Nepal has officially included December 8th as International DM Day since 2023. Additionally, many schools across the country, as discussed above, have begun spontaneously marking the day, reflecting growing grassroots recognition and celebration of menstrual dignity.



Chapter Summary

The DM Movement in Nepal has emerged as a powerful catalyst for social change, deepening national understanding and commitment to DM. Its multifaceted impact—from individual awareness to institutional policy integration—demonstrates the movement’s effectiveness in challenging menstrual discrimination, and fostering inclusive dialogue. The growing recognition and endorsement at various levels underscore its vital role in advancing DM as a human rights concern in Nepal.

Dignified Menstruation

GLOBAL IMPACT OF DIGNIFIED MENSTRUATION MOVEMENT

The chapter on the "Global Impact of the DM Movement" provides an overview of the engagement and impact of DM at the global level. It basically captures and assesses the work of GSCDM through its chapters and members.

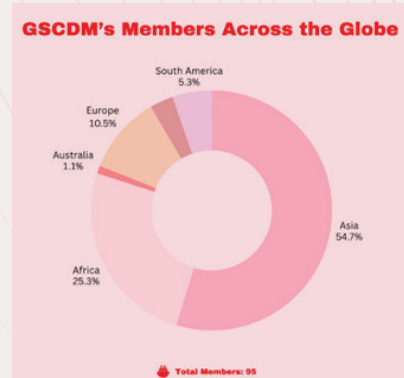
The movement highlights how menstrual discrimination manifests globally in diverse cultural and political contexts—from social exclusion and restrictions in Asia and Africa to workplace and educational challenges in North America and Europe—perpetuating patriarchal power structures and gender stereotypes. It emphasizes that menstruation affects everyone and that discrimination linked to it undermines fundamental human rights, health, education, and economic participation. The discussion underscores that achieving DM globally requires dismantling deep-rooted discriminatory practices and integrating menstrual dignity into human rights frameworks to ensure no one is left behind.

Brief Overview of GSCDM

The GSCDM stands apart from many networks traditionally led or supported by international NGOs, UN agencies, or donor communities. GSCDM's origin is deeply personal, rooted in the lived experience of its founder, Radha Paudel, who faced menstrual discrimination firsthand. Since 2008, Radha engaged in international forums on community psychology, women's rights, human rights defenders, and peacebuilding, often highlighting menstrual discrimination as a fundamental but overlooked issue underlying gender inequality. Despite initial resistance from organizers and donors who preferred to avoid the topic, her persistence incidentally brought her into contact with key global networks such as the Reproductive Health Supplies Coalition (RHSC) in 2015, which subsequently invited her to participate in their events. Specifically, Radha remembered that RHSC invited her to their events in 2016 (Seattle) and 2018 (Brussels). Later in 2019, she was invited to the Women Deliver Conference in Canada. In RHSC and Women Deliver, there was a talk about menstruation but as Radha remembered, they were totally focused on menstrual products or hygiene. She kept trying to build the critical mass at the global level by talking around DM in order to include it as an urgent theme for equity, and human rights.

Radha's efforts to build a global movement around DM culminated in the official founding of GSCDM in 2019. The coalition's mission is to dismantle institutional, structural, interpersonal, and social oppressive systems that affect menstruation and menstruators' access to basic human rights, critical resources, and dignity (GSCDM, 2025). GSCDM's approach *"redefines menstruation beyond hygiene to a life-cycle, dignity-centered framework, emphasizing menstrual discrimination as a form of gender-based violence and a human rights violation, and advocating for policy change and global solidarity"* shared a GSCDM team member.

GSCDM operates with a secretariat based at the RPF in Kathmandu, Nepal, with Radha serving as founder and CEO. As of May 2025, the website of GSCDM showed that a total over 95 NGO members are associated with commitment of working around DM. Out of them, 52 members are from Asia, 24 from Africa, 10 from Europe, 5 from South America, 3 from North America and 3 from the Pacific region.



Often, “NGOs and individuals when they know about DM through social media and word of mouth, they apply for membership,” a GSCDM Secretariat member shared. As of May 2025, its third steering committee includes members from the USA, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines. GSCDM has organically expanded to include eight chapters across Germany, Nigeria, North America, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Uganda, and the UK.

Key Concepts Around DM Movement Endorsed

The DM movement has influenced the language and framing used by international and local NGOs, activists, academics, and media worldwide. Terms that align with the movement’s values—such as menstruation, menstrual discrimination (encompassing all forms of menstrual-related bias globally), DM or menstrual dignity, menstruators and non-menstruators, and menstrual products instead of “sanitary” products—have become widely adopted. The phrase “menstrual talk, dignity first” has emerged as a mantra, especially emphasized during global awareness campaigns.

A project manager from Equipop (France) highlights this paradigm shift, noting that the focus has moved beyond just infrastructural solutions to embrace menstruation as a fundamental human rights issue. She explains,

“Changing the narrative is crucial, which is why we chose DM. By applying human rights approaches, we can challenge entrenched norms and reshape the broader conversation around menstruation. This shift highlights not only access to hygiene products but also the dignity, respect, and equality that menstruators deserve.”



(A local newspaper cut-out shared by Emily Friedman)

This reframing has resonated beyond GSCDM's direct network. A desk review revealed that numerous non-member organizations—including Action Aid India, the American Bar Association (USA), Conscious Connection Foundation (USA), Georgetown University (USA), Hochschule Fulda (Germany), and Liverpool John Moores University (UK)—have incorporated DM terminology and principles into their communications and programming. A notable milestone was the partnership with Harvard University to host the 6th International DM Day conference, underscoring the global recognition of the movement's importance.

As discussed in earlier chapter, DM indicators such as the three 'P's approach for menstrual products, the four 'S's for WASH, the four 'D's for menstrual leave, and indicators for DM-friendly schools have increasingly been referenced as practical tools to embed DM values and principles into policies and programs. For example, Project Baala in India invited Radha Paudel to discuss creating DM-friendly workplaces and actively promoted this concept through social media campaigns.

Since GSCDM's inception, the slogan “menstrual talk, dignity first” has served as a global call to action, especially during May's awareness activities. The coalition has also advocated for a shift from the term “menstrual hygiene” to “menstrual health.” In June 2022, alongside The Sikh Human Rights Group (UK), GSCDM appealed at the UN Human Rights Council to officially replace Menstrual Hygiene Day with Menstrual Health Day, emphasizing a more holistic and rights-based approach. As of May 2025, the term “menstrual health” has become widely accepted internationally, although some German government-funded organizations continue to use the older terminology.

Symbol of Dignified Menstruation

The symbol of DM, developed by the GSCDM and designed by artist Suman Maharjan with concept development by Radha Paudel has gained wide international recognition as a powerful representation of menstrual dignity. The symbol—a drop of blood transforming into a globe with latitude and longitude lines—visually signifies that more than half of the world's population are menstruators, highlighting menstruation as a fundamental aspect of humanity and the universe itself (GSCDM, 2024).

Participants from diverse global contexts have expressed deep emotional and reflective responses upon encountering this symbol. For example, an participant from India shared that despite years of work in schools, universities, and NGOs, they had never connected with the concept of DM until seeing the symbol, which moved them emotionally and inspired a sense of responsibility to speak up. Similarly, the GSCDM member from Sri Lanka reported that menstruators often feel pride when engaging with the symbol, while non-menstruators experience accountability and regret for past silence during their mothers' or sisters' menstruation.

GSCDM members have also reported that they embraced the symbol enthusiastically, were using stickers of the emblem on their workstations and personal devices, reflecting its resonance and role in normalizing menstruation in professional and public spaces. This symbol functions not only as a visual identity but also as a catalyst for initiating a dialogue on DM, fostering pride among both menstruators and non-menstruators, encouraging solidarity and accountability among non-menstruators.

Movement Building around DM

International DM Day for 8th December

The GSCDM has pioneered the establishment of International DM Day, observed annually on December 8th. Discussions with the GSCDM team, including its steering committee, revealed a shared and clear understanding of the rationale behind this initiative: i) Menstrual discrimination is a violation of human rights; ii) Menstrual discrimination constitutes a form of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and acts as a causal factor for SGBV; iii) Existing international observances do not adequately address the complex, pervasive nature of menstrual discrimination experienced globally.

Despite operating with minimal funding, GSCDM has successfully mobilized over 2,500 participants and engaged 400 speakers worldwide by the 6th International DM Day. This impressive grassroots momentum underscores the resonance and urgency of the cause.

International Dignified Menstruation (IDM) Day, 8th December					
IDM Day	Slogan	Total Participants	Total Speakers	Solidarity Partner	Countries Celebrated
1st IDM Day 2019	"Dignified Menstruation is for Preventing Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Promoting Human Rights"	2100	30	20	14
2nd IDM Day 2020	"Menstrual Talk, Dignity First": International Workshop on Dignified Menstruation	3300	39	71	30
3rd IDM Day 2021	"Dignified menopause - a human right, not a privilege"	3100	30	76	35
4th IDM Day 2022	"Dignified Menstruation For Ending Child Marriage"	3800	34	78	35
5th IDM Day 2023	"Dignified Menstruation is Integral for Ending Sexual Violence and Child Marriage"	4500	36	91	39
6th IDM Day 2024	"Upholding Dignified Menstruation: Fundamental to Sexual and Reproductive Health"	8400	52	98	41
7th IDM Day 2025	Dignified Menstruation: Reclaim inherent Dignity, Equality and Inalienable Rights	Learning Conference December 8-10 Kathmandu, Nepal			

(Prepared in consultation with GSCDM, April 2025)

As revealed through desk review, individuals and organizations which are not members of GSCDM, for example, Harvard University (USA), Hochschule Fulda (Germany), People in Need (Czech Republic), Share-Net International (Netherlands), Sustainable Sanitation Alliance (Germany), Water for Women Fund (Australia), World Vision International (USA), The Gurkha Welfare Trust (UK) etc. have begun marking this day, demonstrating its expanding global reach and impact.

Since its inception, the MenEngage Alliance Global has been a steadfast partner of GSCDM, actively advocating for DM. Their collaboration includes organizing events, inviting speakers to conferences, promoting DM messages, and facilitating panel discussions. A MenEngage representative noted, "We have direct collaboration with GSCDM, and our member organizations also observe International DM Day." Together, these efforts are elevating menstrual dignity as a critical human rights issue on the global stage, fostering solidarity, awareness, and action across diverse sectors and regions.

Petition and Appeals Submitted to Ensure DM

We found that GSCDM has actively sought to raise global awareness and secure policy recognition for DM through multiple petitions and appeals, despite operating with very limited resources. Key petitions submitted by GSCDM include:

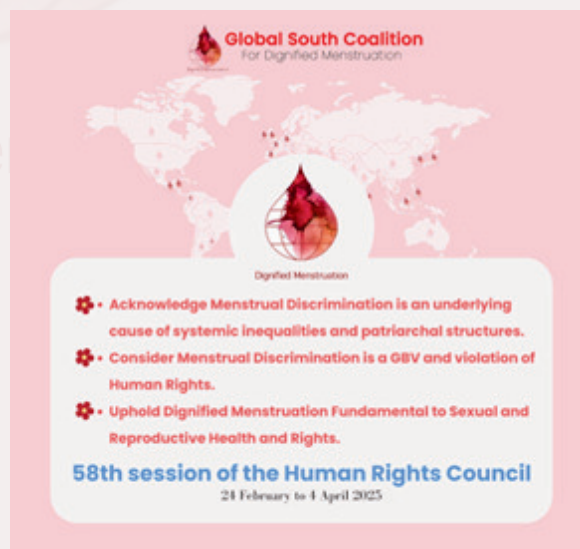
1. May 30, 2018: Petition against categorizing menstrual restrictions under traditional harmful practices in CEDAW, gathering 2,745 signatures.
2. August 16, 2019: Call to include DM in the Nairobi Summit on ICPD25, with 510 signatures.
3. November 12, 2019: Appeal to mark December 8 as International DM Day to end gender-based violence, supported by 32 signatures.
4. June 29, 2020: Urging UN Secretary-General António Guterres to endorse DM Day, with 846 signatures.
5. October 19, 2023: Formal appeal submitted to the UN Secretary-General to officially recognize December 8 as DM Day, led by Radha Paudel and handed over by Nepal's then Foreign Minister.

In addition, GSCDM contributed to the CEDAW General Recommendation 41 by emphasizing menstrual discrimination as a root cause of gender stereotypes, systemic inequalities, and patriarchal power structures. The coalition has also leveraged social media campaigns, including hashtags, to appeal to key international bodies such as the WHO, the Human Rights Council, and COP 2025 to integrate DM as a fundamental issue underlying gender inequality. These strategic advocacy efforts reflect GSCDM's commitment to dismantling menstrual discrimination as a human rights violation and a form of gender-based violence, embedding DM firmly within global policy discourse and human rights frameworks.

Menstrual Discrimination is an Underlying Cause of Gender Stereotypes, Systemic Inequalities, and Patriarchal Power Structures



CEDAW Committee's General Recommendation 41



Live Webinars

We could trace that since 2019, the GSCDM has hosted over 50 live webinars streamed via its Facebook page, reaching a wide and diverse global audience (estimated to be around 30000 reached out). The shift to virtual platforms was widely embraced by the international community, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, enabling continued dialogue and learning despite physical distancing constraints.

Participants across continents have shared their experiences and insights in these webinars, which cover a broad spectrum of topics related to DM. Themes have included menstrual discrimination, menstrual leave policies, menopause and its impact on education, the intersection of menstruation with mental health and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), climate crisis, menstrual products, HIV/AIDS, comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), the role of non-menstruators in advocacy, movement building, menstruators with disabilities, ending child marriage, and efforts to decolonize the menstrual movement.

The webinars also featured book talks on influential works such as *Menstrual Myth Busting*, *Reorganizing the Menstruation*, and *Unholy Blood*, enriching participants' understanding of menstrual dignity from multiple perspectives.

Speakers and participants hailed from a wide range of countries, including Australia, Canada, Cameroon, Cambodia, Chile, Colombia, Kenya, Philippines, Myanmar, Vanuatu, Malawi, Mexico, Niger, Nigeria, Sudan, Uganda, Peru, USA, UK, and more. This geographic diversity has fostered a rich exchange of cultural experiences and strategies, highlighting both shared challenges and unique local contexts.

Many participants have expressed that the webinars provided a rare and valuable platform to openly discuss menstruation-related issues, breaking taboos and fostering solidarity. For instance, some menstruators reflected on gaining pride and empowerment, while non-menstruators reported increased awareness and a sense of responsibility to support menstrual equity.

Engagement in NGO CSW

Archival evidence and participants' narratives revealed that since 2021, the GSCDM has actively engaged in the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) through virtual panel discussions, leveraging the shift to online formats prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic. GSCDM and its member organizations from around the world have consistently presented at successive CSW sessions, highlighting DM as a critical issue linked to sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender-based violence, technology, child marriage, and the urgency of dialogue on DM.

The themes of their presentations reflect a comprehensive approach: CSW65 in 2021 emphasized the urgent need for dialogue on DM; CSW66 in 2022 connected menstrual discrimination to child marriage; CSW67 in 2023 focused on the role of technology; CSW68 in 2024 underscored DM as integral to eliminating sexual and gender-based violence; and CSW69 in 2025 centered on upholding DM as fundamental to sexual and reproductive health and rights. Through this sustained participation, GSCDM has elevated menstrual dignity within global gender equality discourse, fostering international collaboration and policy advocacy that recognizes menstrual discrimination as a systemic human rights issue that constructs patriarchal structures.

Internships and Fellowship

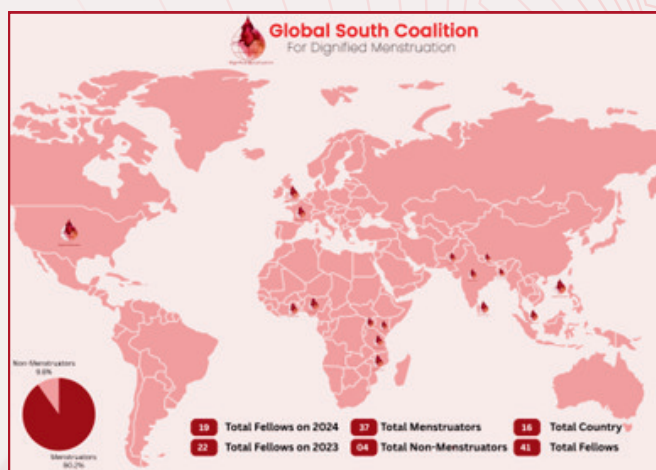
During the research, it was revealed that the GSCDM has strategically leveraged internships and fellowship programs to expand the global discourse on DM and build a committed network of advocates. Empirical data revealed that GSCDM has hosted a total of 12 menstruators as interns, with durations ranging from three to 24 weeks. While two interns worked remotely, the majority were based at the GSCDM secretariat office in Kathmandu. These interns represented a diverse set of countries and institutions, including Brazil (University of Boston), Germany (University of Hamburg, ASTA, Osnabruck University, Columbia University), Sweden (Mahindra United World College), Switzerland (University of Lausanne), USA (University of California Berkeley), and the UK (University of East London). Their roles encompassed research, social media campaigns, community engagement, and program implementation within their home institutions. Notably, the founder and director of GSCDM's North America Chapter began their journey as an intern, illustrating the program's potential to nurture future leadership.

A representative of GSCDM Philippines chapter highlighted the critical role of sustaining motivation within the movement, stating, *"I started with just an interest in this movement when I met Radha in 2016. Later, I started working with GSCDM more actively – including writing a chapter in the DM handbook."* Her testimony underscores how initial personal engagement can evolve into long-term commitment, emphasizing the importance of organizational structure and momentum to maintain active participation and ensure the movement's values endure over time.

In parallel, GSCDM's six-month fellowship program has engaged 41 youth fellows virtually from countries including Bangladesh, India, Ghana, France, Malawi, Malaysia, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Tanzania, USA, UK, and Uganda. The fellowship aims to amplify the DM movement globally by equipping young leaders with practical skills and advocacy platforms. For example, a Malawian alumnus reported significant community impact through hands-on training: *"I have reached out to almost 300 school-going girls, providing training to make menstrual pads and teaching them how to use and manage them."*

His work also involved mobilizing male champions, a critical step toward dismantling gender-based barriers in menstruation discourse.

Additionally, GSCDM launched the International Media Fellowship, engaging 14 journalists who have contributed to raising awareness on DM topics such as green menstruation, exemplified by coverage in outlets like the South China Morning Post (Bhandari, 2025).



Mapping of GSCDM's Fellows

During their fellowship, participants initiated DM-related projects in their homes, offices, and communities and served as resource persons and speakers. The program has produced tangible leadership outcomes; for instance, Nigeria's current GSCDM steering committee member was a fellowship alumnus. Many fellows have established their own NGOs and successfully mobilized community funding, reflecting growing trust and influence. The founder and director of North America Chapter of GSCDM was one of the interns who has also established a charity organization called DM INC USA in 2024. A significant intellectual contribution from the fellowship is the publication of *Stories from Global South*, a menstrual anthology that captures diverse narratives and perspectives from the movement.

Collectively, these empirical findings demonstrate that GSCDM's internships and fellowships are effective mechanisms for capacity building, leadership development, community impact, and the global amplification of DM advocacy.

Training of Trainers on DM

GSCDM has demonstrated a strong commitment to building the capacity of like-minded individuals and organizations globally. GSCDM members indicated that the organization successfully conducted three in-person international training sessions on DM in July and October 2023, and July 2024. These sessions collectively trained 75 participants representing a diverse range of countries, including India, France, Nepal, the Philippines, Rwanda, Togo, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, South Korea, Sudan, the USA, and the UK.

In addition to these international training programs, GSCDM responded to a request from the Asia office of AIDS HealthCare Foundation (AHF) by organizing a specialized DM training for 22 young women leaders participating in the Girls Act Program. This training, held in 2023, included representatives from nine Asian countries. Notably, three of these participants also contributed to the anthology, i.e. "stories of menstruation from the Global South" and have since become active speakers at various international forums.

Engagement of GSCDM Team in the International Platforms

GSCDM has actively participated in a wide range of prestigious global forums, significantly advancing the discourse on menstrual dignity, DM, gender equality, and social justice. Some of the key international engagements include:

- The Red Thread, 2025: Weaving Rights and Resistance for Menstrual Justice; organized by DASTAK foundation; keynote speech
- Women Waging Peace Conference (Feb 26-28, 2025): Presented on DM as a tool for peacebuilding
- 5th Latina America Conference, 2024: Keynote speech
- IRISE Institute, 2024: Menstrual Awareness and Advocacy Round Table Discussion.
- Italian Foundation, 2024: 20 years of Anniversary; Keynote speech
- Climate Conversation, 2024: Dignified Menstruation; Ethical and social implication of climate change and environmental justice for Africa and the diaspora.
- World Social Forum (2024): GSCDM had its specific panel “Dignified Menstruation: Decolonizing the Menstrual Movement and Reimagining Feminism” and also participated in a general panel
- Women Deliver- 2023: Menstruation Dignity and CSE for Gender Equality; hosted in collaboration with AHF (HCDA = human capability development approach – Sen
- Nov 17, 2022, Igniting Global Action for Menstrual Health conference organized by Period Pandemics – UK – Keynote “Activism at the intersection of Menstrual Health and GBV.”
- Society of Gender Professionals, 2023: Exploring Interlinkages Between Climate Justice and SRHR;
- Reframe Pan-Asian Summit, 2022: The Significance of GSCDM; hosted by Breakthrough; parallel discussion
- Somos Menstruantes, 2022: Dialogue on the importance of menstrual dignity in Peru and Colombia
- MenEngage Alliance, 2022: CSE: A Global learning and sharing symposium on health wellbeing values and equity
- MenEngage Alliance, 2021: Role of Men/Boys: Reconstruction of Power for DM.

By delivering keynote speeches and facilitating critical dialogues, GSCDM has positioned itself as a key advocate for DM and intersectional approaches to social equity. The organization’s engagements span multiple regions and thematic intersections—from peacebuilding and climate justice to comprehensive sexuality education and gender-based violence—demonstrating its holistic and inclusive strategy. This broad spectrum of participation not only amplifies GSCDM’s mission but also fosters cross-cultural learning, collaboration, and policy influence on pressing global issues. More importantly, these engagements have helped GSCDM to establish DM as a crosscutting issue.

Publications

GSCDM/RPF have collectively produced 22 books focused on DM, as detailed in the previous chapter. Radha and other GSCDM/RPF team members have contributed chapters to several prominent international publications, including *Making Menopause Matter*, *Period Matters: Menstruation in South Asia*, *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Menstruation Studies*, and *Gendered Agency in Transcultural Hinduism and Buddhism*.

GSCDM has developed a diverse range of educational materials to promote DM in multiple languages, such as *Mini Handbook on Dignified Menstruation is Everyone's Business*—available in Nepali, English, Spanish, and Sign Language, *Apabitra Ragat* (in Nepali and English), *DM for Girls with Neurodevelopmental Disorders* (in Nepali and English).

According to the GSCDM members' experiences, the English versions of these books have been instrumental in amplifying the DM movement worldwide. Most titles are available online, including on Amazon, in both print-on-demand and e-book formats. The encouraging sell-out of these books on Thuprai, an online bookstore, demonstrates the growing global demand for DM resources and underscores the expanding momentum of the movement internationally.

Furthermore, DM has been featured as a dedicated chapter in over nine international books, serving as an additional platform to raise awareness and promote the cause globally.

During the research team's data collection, GSCDM announced that DM had been included as an encyclopedia entry on menstruation and society, published by SAGE Publications, UK—marking a significant milestone in academic recognition and dissemination of knowledge on the subject.

DM Integrated in Other International Days

GSCDM and its members actively organize and participate in various activities aligned with other relevant international observances, such as International Women's Day on March 8. In 2024 and 2025, both member and non-member organizations—including Days for Girls-USA (2024), Health Watch Hammersmith and Fulham-UK (2024), Afro-Asiatisches Institut Salzburg-Austria (2025), Menopause Friendly-UK (2025), and the NSW Government-Australia (2025)—focused their efforts on menstrual rights and justice while commemorating March 8.

Similarly, many member organizations leverage other international observances such as International Girls' Day, World Environment Day, and World Health Day to advocate for DM. These strategic engagements help integrate menstrual rights and justice into broader social, environmental, and health-related conversations, thereby expanding the reach and impact of the DM movement as a crosscutting agenda.

Universities Creating Discourse on DM

Since 2012, Radha Paudel has actively engaged with over 50 universities worldwide, reaching approximately 2,500 students through both in-person and virtual guest lectures. These engagements have taken place across diverse countries including Austria, Canada, Germany, Malaysia, Norway, the Philippines, Portugal, the USA, and the UK, consistently placing DM at the core of the discussions.

In the United States, DM advocacy has been steadily growing since 2013. During an in-depth interview, Radha shared that as of May 2025, she has delivered 24 dedicated sessions to more than 650 undergraduate students at various universities across the country. These sessions were facilitated through Passage International's consultancy office in Nepal, further strengthening the academic discourse on DM.

This sustained academic outreach has played a critical role in planting the seeds of DM within higher education, fostering awareness, challenging menstrual stigma, and inspiring future leaders to advocate for menstrual rights and justice globally.

Organizations and Networks Working Around Menstruation

The research team identified that GSCDM collaborates with approximately 95 organizations and networks worldwide. These partners vary in focus: some work directly on DM, others address menstruation more broadly, and some operate in related sectors.

Key Global Networks Focused on Menstruation include the following:

- Inter-agency Working Group on Reproductive Health in Crisis (IAWG)
- Menstrual Health Hub
- Reproductive Health Supplies Coalition (RHSC)
- Global CSOs Network
- SRHR and Climate Justice Coalition
- Women Peace-Maker Program
- Gender and Climate Justice Circle
- African Coalition Menstrual Health Management

Regional Organizations Actively Working on Menstruation and supporting the cause of DM:

Region	Notable Organizations
Asia	Purple Feminist Group (Myanmar), The Awakening (Pakistan), Viluthu & Shanthimargham (Sri Lanka), Girls UP Emirates, Swastava Cancer Care Society, Orikalankini (India), Sierra Madre Sanctuary (Philippines)
Africa	Africa Foundation for Community Development, Growing Up (Uganda), Association for Reproductive and Family Health (Burundi), Aniedi Etim Foundation (Nigeria), ANPPCAN, CORPSAFRICA (Malawi)
Latin America	Princesas Menstruantes (Colombia), Menstrual Emancipadas, Medicina de Mujer, Menstruación Digna México, Lahaie Luna Lezama NGO (Venezuela), Carpa Roja México
Europe	Afro-Asiatisches Institut Salzburg (Austria), Menopause Café (Scotland), Monon.e.u. (Austria), Bloody Maries (Germany)
North America	The Oda Foundation, Monthly Dignity (Canada)
Australia	CHALICE Foundation

The founder of Australia's CHALICE Foundation emphasized the importance of building a network of menstrual educators aligned with GSCDM's mission to train individuals and sustain widespread awareness. She states, "We have been helping people to become menstrual educators, and thus, we align with GSCDM," highlighting the focus on knowledge transfer and capacity building.

Likewise, a GSCDM steering committee member from Pakistan shared how involving Radha in local trainings helped introduce DM sensitively in contexts where the concept was unfamiliar. This collaboration underscores the value of expertise and culturally relevant educational resources in fostering sustainable community empowerment.

As reflected by Radha, the Reproductive Health Supplies Coalition (RHSC) did not focus on menstruation until 2015. After 2018, it started working on DM independently. As reflected by other GSCDM secretariat members, other networks not yet connected to GSCDM, such as the ERA Coalition in the USA, have also begun working on menstrual dignity. Likewise, the Women Waging Peace program has appreciated and supported Radha's work, recognizing DM as a tool for peacebuilding by addressing the invisible conflicts caused by menstrual discrimination.

DM Friendly Menstrual Products

The desk review and interview data confirmed that Viluthu, Sri Lanka, has been actively addressing menstrual product needs by promoting reusable menstrual pads. A steering committee member from Sri Lanka visited Nepal's Miteri Biodegradable Pad Factory to explore replicating this model nationwide. In July 2023, the GSCDM team trained over 30 participants in Puttalam, Sri Lanka, to support this initiative. Additionally, the Sri Lankan government has committed to scaling up the program across the country.

GSCDM member organizations in Nigeria and Malawi are also working to align their menstrual pad projects with the "Three P" approach — focusing on the Person, Planet, and Pocket — ensuring that menstrual products are aligned with DM values.



Training participants Viluthu

Increased Donors Interest around DM

Despite initial resistance from donors towards supporting DM, GSCDM has gradually gained some financial backing from various organizations. In 2022, the charity Light My Fire contributed \$5,000 to support the DM campaign. That same year, the AIDS HealthCare Foundation (AHF) partnered with GSCDM to amplify the DM campaign through its HIV/AIDS program, particularly around DM Day celebrations. AHF has continued to support the expansion of the DM movement beyond Nepal.

Other donors such as PROSA, Americares, and UNDP/N-Peace Network (Thailand) have provided crucial support for DM initiatives during pandemics and earthquake relief efforts. Radha Paudel highlights Amplify Change as a key donor that champions the Global South and survivors by supporting DM campaigns, particularly small-scale projects that position menstrual dignity as an entry point to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR).

The Colombo Plan has also contributed event-based support for DM activities. Meanwhile, the Agence Française de Développement (AFD) has been a significant learning partner for GSCDM through its Sang Pour Sang (SpS) project, which promotes DM across nine countries. A consultant from PSI Europe (France) emphasized the importance of large-scale collaboration, noting that in 2023, the French Development Aid Agency issued a proposal to form a consortium aimed at addressing the structural drivers of menstrual discrimination in multiple global regions. Her involvement underscores how strategic partnerships between organizations and donors are vital to tackling systemic menstrual discrimination and advancing the DM movement worldwide.

This evolving donor landscape reflects GSCDM's persistent efforts and growing recognition of DM as a critical human rights issue.

Parliamentarians Interested on DM

Globally, parliamentarians, ministers, and even prime ministers have increasingly spoken about menstruation, often focusing on menstrual products and addressing menstrual poverty. However, a growing number of political leaders have begun advocating specifically for DM as a political and human rights issue.

Notable voices include, Helen Connolly, Commissioner for Children and Young People, Australia (2020); ii) Gangan Thapa, Former Health Minister, Nepal; iii) Dr. Bimala Rai Paudyal, Member of Nepal's National Planning Commission. These leaders have called for prioritizing DM as a fundamental political right.

During the 3rd International DM Day and Conference, co-hosted by GSCDM, Bhawani Prasad Khapung, State Minister for Health and Population, Nepal, and Maree Todd, Minister for Women's Health, Scotland, emphasized the urgent need to address dignified menopause as part of the broader DM agenda.

These political endorsements mark important milestones in elevating DM within national and international policy discussions, signaling increased governmental commitment to menstrual justice.

Historically, media coverage of menstruation focused mainly on taxation, accessibility, and hygiene issues, often framing it as a matter of period poverty. Recently, however, several international media outlets have begun incorporating DM into their narratives, frequently featuring statements from Radha, a leading DM advocate.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, outlets like the South China Morning Post exposed entrenched menstrual discrimination, particularly among female health workers.

Organizational newsletters such as those from the Sanitation and Hygiene Fund, Sanitation Learning Hub, Global Gedacht, Spotlight Nepal, and the Reproductive Health Supplies Coalition have also amplified the urgency of DM as a crosscutting theme.



Several film and documentary projects have further elevated DM globally. International productions from Austria, the Netherlands, the Philippines (e.g., *Women in Nepal: Fight for Dignified Menstruation* by Forum Asia), South Korea, and the USA have documented Radha Paudel's activism, broadening awareness across multiple languages and regions. Likewise, an artist affiliated with the Council of the Arts, Canada, shared how her documentary, developed under Radha Paudel's guidance and screened at the Kathmandu International Film Festival, successfully brought DM back onto lawmakers' agendas. The success of the documentary in influencing lawmakers to discuss the issue demonstrates how media and art can serve as powerful tools in advancing social change, leading to increased political awareness and action. All of these media and documentary features have also created avenues for global discourse on DM.

DM in Literary Work

Desk reviews and social media analysis revealed that DM has increasingly become a theme in international literary and artistic expressions, promoted by both GSCDM member and non-member organizations. Various creative forms—including songs, poetry, drama, fashion shows, paintings, and stories—have been showcased in diverse programs to challenge menstrual stigma and advocate for menstrual dignity.

Poetry, in particular, has proven effective in confronting discrimination and reclaiming bodily autonomy by highlighting the lack of dignity and safe spaces for menstruators. Songs in languages such as English and German use emotionally powerful and

advocacy-driven lyrics to engage wider audiences, shift narratives, and normalize conversations around menstruation and dignity. These artistic interventions reflect a measurable shift in public awareness and attitudes toward menstruation.

Theatre performances, street shows, and documentaries have created inclusive platforms for menstrual dignity and social change, dismantling myths and confronting discrimination through compelling storytelling. Visual arts—including paintings made with menstrual blood, illustrations, installations, and comics—challenge discriminatory menstrual practices and celebrate menstruation as a symbol of dignity. These creative efforts have not only disrupted entrenched taboos but also inspired grassroots movements and influenced policy discussions globally.

The GSCDM also organized a global art competition in 2023, where Afghan artist Nadira Ganji won recognition for her work.



Social Media

Participants' experiences and social media analysis revealed that the GSCDM has effectively leveraged social media platforms to amplify the message of DM at the international level. Through widespread sharing of posts, use of targeted hashtags such as #DignifiedMenstruation, and engagement in campaigns like the International DM Day, GSCDM has created a vibrant online community advocating for menstrual equity and human rights.

President of Rotari Club Bhaktapur handing over the 'Unholy Blood' to the Global President Jennifer E. Jones

Social media has enabled diverse stakeholders—including activists, journalists, policymakers, and youth—to participate in dialogues that challenge menstrual discrimination, highlighting DM as a critical intersectional issue. This digital activism has fostered measurable shifts in public discourse, policy engagement, and grassroots mobilization, demonstrating social media's powerful role in advancing DM as a universal human rights priority.

DM among International Rotary

The desk review and interview revealed that GSCDM has also been working with Rotary International. In 2022, Jennifer E. Jones made history as the first woman to serve as Rotary International's president and has since been a vocal advocate for DM. Following a petition by GSCDM urging Rotary to endorse International DM Day, Rotary's commitment became evident. That year, the Rotary Club of Silicon Valley hosted a webinar titled *"The Urgency of Dignified Menstruation,"* highlighting menstrual discrimination as a fundamental driver of gender inequality.

Further solidifying this support, Rotary International featured a dedicated DM event at its 2023 Convention in Melbourne, Australia, demonstrating growing solidarity for the global DM campaign and emphasizing its importance in international dialogues.



President of Rotari Club Bhaktapur handing over the 'Unholy Blood' to the Global President Jennifer E. Jones

Goodwill Ambassadors

The website of GSCDM mentioned that the DM has goodwill ambassador for amplifying the campaigns. Ms. Shrinkhala Khatiwada, Miss Nepal World 2018, an architect and social activist, served as a Goodwill Ambassador from 2021 to 2023.



Sangita on Manaslu

She was succeeded by Sangita Rokaya, a celebrated mountaineer known for her successful ascent of Mt. Everest, who has held the role since 2024. These ambassadors play a vital role in raising awareness, mobilizing public support, and advancing the movement for menstrual dignity across diverse communities.

Chapter Summary

The global impact of the DM Movement, led by the GSCDM and its chapters, has significantly advanced DM discourse worldwide. Through strategic advocacy and capacity-building, GSCDM has strengthened political commitment in countries such as Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Scotland, fostering policy recognition and action on dignified menstruation. The widespread endorsement of International Dignified Menstruation Day on December 8 further highlights the movement's growing influence in uniting diverse stakeholders around a shared human rights agenda. However, these are just the initial endeavors, which need to go a long way for sustained impact. Collectively, these developments underscore the movement's critical role in transforming menstrual discrimination issue into a global priority.

CHALLENGES WHILE INITIATING THE DIGNIFIED MENSTRUATION MOVEMENT

Since the DM movement has evolved as a new, global-south and survivor-led voluntary movement has faced multitude of challenges at multi-stages and levels. Therefore, covering all of those challenges in a single report of this kind would not be possible. However, some of the key challenges in advancing this movement has been framed under a few key analytical categories, including conceptual challenges, individual challenges and institutional challenges. Moreover, both national and global challenges have been merged under those analytical categories. Hence, this chapter explores the multifaceted challenges encountered during the DM movement, drawing on insights from team members of RPF, GSCDM, non-RPF individuals and organizations, as well as national and global perspectives.

Conceptual Challenges

Despite the increasing discourse around DM, many government officials, political leaders, media activists, and development stakeholders continue to use the term 'chhaupadi'— Nepali Achhami local dialect for menstruation.

The word chhaupadi has been misinterpreted and misused both nationally and globally to mislead the campaign. Despite having the national policy on DM 2017, in a recent CEDAW shadow report discussion on February 5, 2025 in Geneva, both the event rapporteur as well as Nepali government representatives used the term chhaupadi. Similarly, key national bodies such as the Human Rights Commission and National Women Commission continue to reference chhaupadi in their policies and programs. National mainstream media, including the Kantipur National Daily, still use the term 'chhaupadi', rather than menstrual discrimination (Dhungana, 2025). This seems perpetuated even to youths who have been fed with idea of menstrual blood as impure. The National Coordinator of DMC highlights the challenge: "Youth have been taught that menstrual blood is impure, so they follow restrictive practices during schooling." This social conditioning perpetuates stigma across generations.

More commonly, people tend to frame menstruation in terms of hygiene or health management, avoiding the term DM or addressing the complex nature of menstrual discrimination. This reluctance suggests an underlying resistance to fully acknowledging DM as a rights-based, socio-cultural, political issue. Some blame the DM movement as donor-driven or influenced by Global North agenda, reflecting a lingering colonial mindset that complicates acceptance.

Moreover, menstrual discrimination is often narrowly understood as menstrual stigma, which fails to capture its complexity across the menstrual lifecycle and its broader social, economic, and political implications.

A journalist with over three years of experience covering DM noted that politicians, parliamentarians, and activists frequently downplay the seriousness of menstrual discrimination, comparing it unfavorably to more visible and immediate issues such as physical violence or death. This lack of urgency contributes to menstrual discrimination receiving low priority despite its pervasive impact.

Such evidence indicates that the primary reason for resistance toward DM is the low prioritization by key stakeholders, even though menstrual discrimination affects all in varying degrees and forms.

Some global scholars use *chhaupadi* and sometimes blame the menstrual discrimination as Nepal's unique issue – despite the fact that menstrual discrimination is a global issue. UN and others put '*chhaupadi*' under the title of traditional harmful practice (GSCDM, 2025) such as dowry and witchcraft, not as an independent issue. This undermines the complexity and gravity of menstrual discrimination. Moreover, menstrual hygiene, menstrual health and period poverty have further undermined the complexity of menstrual discrimination in all diversity. All of these above examples and experiences highlight the challenges in realizing the gravity of the concept of DM.

Missing in Key Discourses

In both national and global discourse, DM remains largely absent despite significant progress in feminist, women's rights, human rights, and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) discourses. Since the emergence of feminist movements, the advancement of women's rights, and the establishment of international human rights frameworks (beginning with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948), menstrual discrimination has been notably overlooked. "This silence has perpetuated stigma and exclusion, making it challenging for advocates to advance the organically evolved DM movement," reflects a GSCDM team member. Although Nepal has actively participated in these global discourses and implemented reproductive health policies—such as the Safer Motherhood and Reproductive Health Act 2018—menstrual discrimination remains absent from these frameworks.

Radha reflects on this marginalization, stating, "If I had been born in the West, and this idea emerged there, the discourse and movement would have had greater scale and gravity." This highlights how global political dynamics have sidelined menstrual issues, particularly those originating from the Global South.

The DM Practical Handbook emphasize that menstrual discrimination directly impacts at least nine of the SDGs, underscoring its broad relevance. Yet, there remains a pressing need to incorporate Global South epistemologies and lived realities into mainstream feminist and human rights frameworks.

Almost all participants with experience working in feminist, women's rights, and human rights organizations reported that menstrual practices are rarely examined through the lenses of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), human rights, or feminism—even within their own homes and communities. Many stakeholders perceive menstruation as a less critical issue compared to other priorities such as women's political participation, peacebuilding, SGBV, citizenship rights, rights against caste discrimination or gender equality and social inclusion (GESI).

Desk reviews and participant testimonies consistently show that menstruation is not prioritized. Despite Radha's efforts to link DM with peacebuilding, SDGs, and other global agendas through international forums and petitions, she has experienced that resistance persists at all levels.

Moreover, a GSCDM member reflects that key international human rights instruments such as the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo and the 1995 Beijing Conference, which identified 12 critical areas of concern, have not explicitly addressed menstrual discrimination.

GSCDM members during the interview frequently iterated that discussions focusing solely on the anatomy and physiology of male and female reproductive systems, including menstruation, fail to address the deeper social and systemic dimensions of menstrual discrimination. Despite numerous programs and initiatives, DM has yet to receive the comprehensive attention it requires.

Missing DM in Education from School to University

Dignified menstruation remains a largely neglected issue within educational systems from primary schools to universities despite longstanding commitments to quality education, social justice, equality, child rights, and girls' education in Nepal and beyond. The First National Educational Planning Commission in 1954 marked early efforts toward universal literacy. Movements such as Education for All (EFA) and the Girls' Education Challenge (GEC) since 2012 have improved access for marginalized girls. However, these progressive agendas have not translated into prioritizing DM within education.

Government efforts have begun to address menstrual health education: the Ministry of Education revised curricula from Grades 4 to 12 to include menstruation-related content, and policies such as the Sanitary Pad Distribution and Management Procedure (2019) support menstrual hygiene. However, these initiatives often emphasize hygiene and product distribution, with limited focus on dismantling menstrual stigma or promoting dignity. Similarly, a Nepali university faculty member noted that DM is absent even in health-related courses such as nursing, medicine, and public health.

Children typically begin to learn informally about menstruation between ages 6 and 9, yet no school curriculum or education policy explicitly addresses DM. Schools are rarely designed to be DM-friendly, lacking adequate infrastructure and supportive environments. This gap extends into higher education institutions (HEIs) nationally and globally, where DM remains absent from curricula and institutional discourse. Consequently, DM emerges as a relatively new and under-recognized theoretical framework within education.

Research and desk reviews reveal that while menstrual hygiene management (MHM) programs exist—such as UNICEF, UNESCO, World Education—these primarily focus on hygiene facilities and basic awareness rather than embedding DM as a rights-based, comprehensive educational theme. GSCDM members report that organizations working in education and universities often avoid discussing DM. An academician from Bangladesh observed, “Till now, there is no specific section or space for DM in the universities where I teach.” Participants from the USA, Africa and Asia thought in retrospect that they have not found discrimination related to menstruation and menopause in their higher education curriculum.

This persistent neglect in education systems reflects broader menstrual discrimination and institutional resistance, hindering the normalization of menstruation and the advancement of menstrual dignity. Addressing this gap is critical for empowering menstruators, reducing absenteeism, and fostering gender equality through informed, rights-based education.

Missing DM in Child Rights

Child rights have been a focus of international and national frameworks for decades, beginning with the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which Nepal ratified to reinforce its commitment to protecting children's welfare. Desk review of the GSCDM publications indicated that children get to know about menstruation around 6 to 9 years. The CRC comprises four main pillars, i.e., survival, protection, development and participation; however, child rights. However, none of these pillars address menstrual discrimination directly or indirectly. As expressed by a participant from Australia, “Despite numerous programs on child rights, there is paucity of information and interventions on menstrual discrimination.”

Globally, UN, networks, I/NGOs have been working around ending child marriage. Historically, Sharda Act of 1929 (India) was found to be among the earliest legal efforts addressing child marriage. Over the past 60 years, the UN and Nepal have developed numerous policies and programs aimed at ending child marriage, a practice that remains pervasive despite legal prohibitions. However, none of these acknowledge menstrual discrimination as a driving force for child marriage or DM as a strategy to end child marriage.

Nepali experts who have been talking about child marriage, emphasize that menstrual stigma and discrimination compel many families to marry off girls early, often to avoid the social and cultural challenges associated with menstruation. Likewise, GSCDM members highlight that while child marriage programs focus on legal frameworks, awareness, and enforcement, they often neglect DM as a core issue. This omission limits the effectiveness of interventions, as menstrual discrimination remains deeply embedded in cultural norms and social expectations that pressure girls into early marriage.

Missing DM in Menstrual Movement

The menstrual movement has evolved over several decades, marked by key milestones such as the 1974 Society of Menstrual Cycle Research (SMCR), the 2012 global focus (WHO and UNICEF) on menstrual health, UNESCO's 2014 emphasis on menstrual hygiene, and the 2015 spotlight on period poverty. However, these important frameworks have largely overlooked the critical aspects of menstrual discrimination. The dominant discourse has remained narrowly focused on the biological five-day menstrual cycle and menstrual management, often neglecting the broader life-cycle approach and the complex, multilayered social, cultural, political and human rights issues. This limited focus has constrained the movement's ability to address the deep-rooted stigma, exclusion, and discrimination that menstruators face throughout the lifecycle.

Missing DM in Sectoral/GESI Policies and Programs

While Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) policies have increasingly been integrated across sectors nationally and globally, DM remains notably absent from these frameworks. The ILO document highlights that workplace dignity discussions often emphasize equal pay and general gender equity but do not address menstrual dignity or the unique challenges menstruators face (ILO C190), such as stigma, inadequate facilities, and discrimination throughout the menstrual lifecycle—including menopause and beyond. A GSCDM member shared that sectoral policies in agriculture, sports, technology, and climate change similarly overlook menstruation's impact on participation and inclusion. As per a Steering Committee Member of GSCDM, "Although most GESI policies aim to foster inclusivity, they tend to miss the complex, multilayered nature of menstrual discrimination that affects health, education, employment, social engagement, etc." This gap perpetuates exclusion and limits the effectiveness of gender-responsive policies.

Individual, As a Radha, Pioneer for DM

Radha Paudel's journey as a pioneer of the DM movement has been marked by significant challenges at both national and international levels, reflecting the deeply entrenched stigma and resistance around menstruation.

At the grassroots level, Radha faced intense opposition and personal threats, especially during the early days of her activism nearly three decades ago. In rural areas, communities often rejected her efforts outright—blaming her, refusing to participate in her training workshops, and even attempting physical assault, she remembers. She was accused of being anti-Hindu and labeled as a woman of bad character, with threats to her life coming from local leaders and activists alike. For instance, a local leader in Jumla threatened to kill her, and she received threatening calls from a Hindu Federation warning her not to speak about menstruation. Religious leaders publicly condemned her work, with one commenting disparagingly in 2021 that her activism was socially disruptive, Radha recalls.

Despite these hostile beginnings, Radha recalls that once she explained the scientific, constitutional, and human rights basis of menstrual discrimination and DM, many opponents softened their stance. Interestingly, she shares that “I find working with uneducated rural populations and even religious leaders easier today than engaging with urban, educated elites.”

In Kathmandu, Radha encountered a different kind of resistance—subtle yet pervasive. Within ministries, among lawyers, journalists, politicians, and activists, she often faced public criticism cloaked in cultural and religious arguments, accusations of radicalism, and deliberate exclusion from key platforms. For example, as reflected by a university faculty who also participated the program with Radha, “During a documentary screening and panel discussion on DM on 30 January 2025, a donor representative from GIZ publicly opposed her participation when the moderator announced her name, despite prior confirmation.” Radha also reflects that she has also been labeled as “insane,” and “anti-monarchy” on social media and in public discourse. Some activists have openly called for legal action against her, while others have undermined her credibility to donors by falsely claiming she was unavailable for coordination.

Media outlets often avoided publishing her work or delayed responses, and some questioned the very need to address menstruation when “more serious” issues exist. She remembers one highly acclaimed litterateur in Nepal saying: “Do we really need to write on menstruation? Don't we have any other serious issues?” Such systemic exclusion and backlash represent only the visible tip of the iceberg in the challenges Radha has faced.

Radha's struggles extended beyond Nepal's borders. At international workshops and seminars in countries such as Indonesia (2008), Thailand (2011, 2014, 2016), the Philippines (2014), Turkey (2014), and the USA (2012, 2014, 2016, 2018), she encountered dismissive attitudes and skepticism.

Many international peers perceived menstrual discrimination as a uniquely Nepali problem, rooted in poverty and “uncivilized” cultural practices, rather than a global human rights issue. This perception was reinforced by media portrayals that exoticized Nepal’s challenges.

Radha recalls that she was often criticized by colleagues who were working around menstruation together earlier through emails, social media, and WhatsApp messages, accusing her of being a troublemaker within the menstrual movement and calling for the closure of the GSCDM and threatened not to observe December 8 as International DM Day. Requests for collaboration from sectors such as Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), climate justice, family planning, safe abortion campaign, etc. were frequently ignored, further isolating her advocacy.

Despite these formidable barriers, Radha’s persistence led to significant milestones, including the establishment of International DM Day and growing recognition of menstrual dignity as a human rights issue in Nepal and beyond. Her activism embodies a courageous challenge to existing notions of power relations, patriarchy, peace, human rights, etc. and institutional inertia, inspiring a global movement that seeks to dismantle menstrual discrimination.

As a Team Member of RPF or DMC Nepal

As a team member of RPF or DMC Nepal, one of the persistent challenges has been the “lack of meaningful space to participate and contribute in key forums” – shared an RPF staff. Invitations are often sent with uncertainty—“Did you receive it?”—only to find that when the time comes, RPF representatives are excluded from panels or denied opportunities to speak. For example, *“During the Menstrual Health and Hygiene Management Partner Alliance (MHMPA) celebration on May 28, 2025, discussions focused on menopause, but when I raised my hand three times to emphasize that DM encompasses menopause, I was repeatedly ignored”* shared another RPF staff. This was not a single incident; similar silencing had occurred at CEDAW shadow report preparatory meeting, where RPF’s inputs were met with dismissive attitudes despite RPF being a member of these organizations.

This marginalization extends to national institutions as well. *“When RPF initially sought to participate in panels organized by ministries and the Human Rights Commission, we were included in initial communications but later replaced without explanation”* an RPF staff remembers. At the global level, responses to emails are often delayed or ignored, deadlines are overlooked, and program schedules are compressed—pressuring RPF to shorten presentations as if menstrual dignity is a less important topic. These experiences highlight the ongoing struggle to have DM recognized and prioritized within mainstream policy and advocacy spaces.

As a Team Member of GSCDM

As a team member of the GSCDM, the challenges at the national level in respective countries are significant. Although DM is publicly acknowledged as an important topic, it often receives little to no dedicated funding—both nationally and globally. Many stakeholders perceive DM as primarily a Nepali issue, given its origins, and thus do not see it as relevant to their own contexts. Furthermore, there is a tendency to focus only on visible forms of menstrual discrimination, while the more subtle, invisible forms remain neglected. When GSCDM members seek to participate in global forums, they frequently face exclusion: abstracts are rejected, and discussions are often redirected to issues like sexual violence or climate change, which are seen as more urgent or tangible. Compounding these challenges, some activists within the broader menstrual health movement act competitively, dismissing DM as vague or unachievable, arguing that only hygiene-related issues are measurable and worthy of attention. These dynamics create significant barriers to advancing DM as a recognized and prioritized global human rights issue.

Non-RPF/GSCDM

Many individuals and organizations who have embraced DM after exposure to RPF or GSCDM trainings face significant challenges in their advocacy efforts, both nationally and globally.

At the national level, a former Child Club graduate turned DM campaigner, shared his frustration: *“While I was working as a Child Club graduate, I was often invited to speak. But now, as a DM campaigner, I am frequently rejected.”* This reflects a broader pattern where new advocates struggle to gain recognition and support outside established networks.

One participant noted, *“AIN itself resists; we have invited them through various channels, but they do not celebrate DM—except for AIDS HealthCare Foundation Nepal, SETI Foundation, and UNDP Nepal.”*

Similarly, as per a member of DMC-Nepal, *“Plan International Nepal reportedly ceased using DM frameworks after 2023 despite previously duplicating RPF publications”*, highlighting challenges in sustaining commitment. She further expressed in retrospection that *“Plan International Nepal used RPF materials without permission and then there was some negotiations, but they did not follow the commitment as per the negotiation”* (See the adjacent photo which shows public apology by Plan International Nepal [top] and negotiation agreement [bottom]).



RPF team reflected that apart from Amplify Change and AHF, global support for DM remains limited, constraining the movement's growth and impact. Globally, the donor community presents additional hurdles. As per a DMC Nepal team member, *"Despite efforts to engage them, many donors and networks remain resistant to fully embracing DM."* These experiences underscore the ongoing barriers faced by DM advocates to get solidarity to the issue.

Resistance from Culture and Religions

Menstrual discrimination at the community level is deeply intertwined with cultural and religious beliefs, creating significant barriers to advancing DM. Across Nepal and many other countries, silence and ignorance about menstruation are often justified by invoking tradition and religion. A DMC-Nepal member stated that "stakeholders—including media personnel and institutions like the National Women's Commission—sometimes engage in 'othering,' suggesting menstrual discrimination is a problem confined to rural or western regions, not urban centers." Globally, similar patterns emerged. As shared by a GSCDM member, in countries like Nigeria, Sri Lanka, Austria, and Canada, menstrual discrimination is rarely discussed within human rights dialogues, often dismissing as a cultural issue, too sensitive to address openly.

A DMC-Nepal member recalls, *"In Nepal, Hindu and Muslim communities frequently uphold religious doctrines that portray menstruation as a state of impurity or divine will, discouraging open discussion or challenge."* Many believe menstruation is a god's ordinance that necessitates exclusion from religious and social activities. While Buddhist and Christian communities may not exhibit the same level of visible restrictions, certain rituals still marginalize menstruators by defining menstrual blood as dirty or impure, reinforcing notions of weakness and exclusion. For example, women are often barred from temples, kitchens, or social gatherings during menstruation, and must perform purification rituals afterward. However, even in urban areas, many women continue to observe restrictions such as avoiding religious worship or social events, driven by internalized stigma and fear of divine retribution. These cultural and religious frameworks not only perpetuate menstrual discrimination but also hinder efforts to promote menstrual dignity, as questioning these norms is often seen as disrespectful.

Institutional Level Challenges

A tragic example illustrating systemic void is the deaths of two girls aged 14 and 19 in Dailekh back in 2017, who died in menstrual huts due to visible menstruation discrimination. Radha and colleagues filed a legal case, but it was dismissed citing lack of relevant laws, highlighting systemic legal inadequacies.

As shared by a DMC-Nepal member, *"Despite some gradual development of policies on DM, institutional support remains weak due to the absence of concrete action plans, dedicated budgets, and focal units within government bodies."*

Moreover, participants reflected that political commitment is notably low, and the system has yet to fully own or prioritize DM as a critical human rights issue. One participant reflected, “Policies exist on paper, but without budgets, focal persons, or clear action plans, menstrual dignity remains sidelined. Political will is missing, and institutions hesitate to take ownership.” Another noted, *“Even when tragedies like the Dailekh deaths occur, the legal and institutional response is weak, showing how menstrual discrimination is not yet seen as a priority.”*

As per a GSCDM member, “Key national and global policies on child marriage, women’s rights, and GESI—including the Paris Declaration and climate justice frameworks—fail to explicitly address menstrual discrimination.” Another GSCDM member remarked, *“Major international forums such as the Commission for Population and Development (CPD) and the Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI) similarly omit menstrual discrimination from their agendas, focusing instead on issues like sexual harassment and exploitation.”*

Most of the participants reflected that media houses and universities, even those with GESI policies, rarely incorporate menstrual discrimination into their frameworks, perpetuating invisibility. Donor agencies and UN bodies often limit their engagement to menstrual hygiene, neglecting the broader menstrual dignity dimensions. For instance, a participant reflected that *“despite personal commitments, UNICEF’s regional office failed to send a promised delegation to a DM event, and the EU’s Nepal office does not prioritize DM integration into ongoing programs.”*

It appears that both national and global funding partners find it convenient to work on the overarching menstrual agenda, but they shy away from working specifically on DM. This indicates a greater systemic barrier to the advocates of DM.

Funding Constraints

Advocating for DM faces significant funding constraints that limit research, program development, and policy implementation. Despite the recognized importance of menstrual issues, there is a lack of baseline data, pilot studies, and comprehensive research on DM due to insufficient financial support and limited donor interest. This funding gap restricts the ability to plan and execute extensive studies that could provide evidence to inform effective interventions and scale up advocacy efforts.

Participants and existing literature highlight that while numerous initiatives focus on menstrual management, the broader issues of menstrual discrimination remain under-researched. For example, many government policies and programs incorporate menstrual management as a minor component within water, sanitation, and health sectors but lack dedicated budgets or strategic plans addressing DM comprehensively.

The scarcity of funds also affects community engagement and awareness campaigns, which are crucial for challenging deep-rooted menstrual discrimination at all levels.

Moreover, menstruators from LGBTQIA+, menstruators with disability, climate disasters, humanitarian settings and pandemics are facing multiple-layers of discrimination due to systemic and symptomatic impact of menstrual discrimination constrained by lack of funding.

Colonized Mindset

A pervasive colonized mindset continues to undermine efforts to advance DM in Nepal, manifesting in subtle yet systemic ways across funding, research, and representation. Nepali experts working within the country often face significant disparities in recognition and remuneration. For instance, a Nepali professional involved in menstrual issue related projects, observed that despite their expertise, local Nepali experts are paid less than even junior foreign project support staff on the same projects. This wage gap reflects a broader undervaluing of local knowledge and capacity.

Moreover, another participant shared that, *“non-resident Nepalis frequently receive funding and opportunities that bypass Nepali experts based in Nepal.”* This dynamic not only marginalizes true local voices but also perpetuates a cycle where decision-making and resources are controlled by those outside the immediate context, often disconnected from on-the-ground realities.


Publishers and international stakeholders similarly demonstrate a lack of trust in Nepali-led initiatives. They often dismiss local narratives, misinterpret cultural contexts, and hesitate to invest without extensive evidence. This demand for proof before funding creates a paradox: How can Nepali organizations generate the necessary data and evidence without initial investment? a GSCDM member questions. Such skepticism and control over knowledge production are hallmarks of a colonized mindset that prioritizes donor-driven agendas over indigenous leadership.

Despite having similar kind of understanding and practices of menstrual discrimination as in Nepal, many menstrual activists and NGOs from Global South (African, Asian, Latin America) tend to work in silos, e.g., free distribution of menstrual pad, menstrual management. As reflected by a participant from Nigeria, *“Since no donors have prioritized DM, we are also not comfortable working on DM.”* However, of late, a few menstrual organizations have started using the word of dignity, which still does not carry the value of DM.

It means the colonized mindset remains a significant barrier to DM advocacy in Nepal and beyond. Addressing it demands systemic change that challenges entrenched power imbalances and promotes genuine local ownership and leadership.

Chapter Summary

Initiating the Dignified Menstruation Movement has faced significant challenges, including conceptual ambiguities and its absence from key public and policy discourses. Members of the RPF and GSCDM have encountered resistance rooted in cultural and religious norms, as well as institutional barriers marked by lack of ownership and the perception that menstruation is "not our issue." Funding constraints and a deeply ingrained colonized mindset further complicate efforts to advance the movement. Despite these obstacles, the initiative continues to progress, driven by persistent advocacy and a growing recognition of the urgent need to address menstrual discrimination and promote dignity.



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DM MOVEMENT ASSESSMENT BASED ON DAC FRAMEWORK

Since the DM movement is not a one-off, time-bound, dedicated funded project, evaluating its impact from an existing project evaluation framework may not do justice. However, due to lack of a valid existing evaluation framework for examining the impact of such a movement, the research team agreed to adapt the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) framework.

The OECD's DAC framework, established in 1960, is a widely used tool for evaluating development projects. It focuses on six key criteria: Relevance, Coherence, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Impact, and Sustainability. Applying this framework to the DM movement provides a comprehensive way to assess how well the movement meets stakeholder needs, aligns with policies, uses resources, and creates lasting social change. Given the complex and rights-based nature of DM advocacy, the DAC framework offers a robust approach to evaluate its progress and guide future improvements.

Relevance

Menstrual discrimination exists globally in diverse forms, yet it remains largely unrecognized as a fundamental driver of power imbalances and patriarchal oppression. As one participant noted, *"Menstrual discrimination is a hidden violence—an underlying cause of gender-based violence (GBV) and a violation of human rights."* Indeed, the United Nations' 1993 definition of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) has four categories: physical, sexual, emotional and denial from resources and services (United Nations General Assembly, 1993). *"Various types of menstrual discrimination fall under more than two categories; however, SGBV does not talk about menstrual discrimination"* a GSCDM member expressed. In this context, discussion of menstrual discrimination becomes highly relevant since SGBV misses this but it is a global pervasive issue.

Globally, WASH initiatives, menstrual management, period poverty, menstrual health, etc. have often focused narrowly on menstrual products and work in silos, which do not address the complex menstrual discrimination that hinders freedom, equality, dignity and non-discrimination (Human Rights Declaration, 1948). To address these along with the basic human rights principles requires DM framework.

Since menstrual discrimination is missing in the feminist movement (Owen, 2024), DM movement becomes relevant to address this gap. The DM movement addresses this gap by framing menstruation as a holistic human rights issue.

The GSCDM envisions *"menstruators within all identities living with dignity throughout their life cycle."* A participant emphasized, "DM is everyone's business," highlighting that non-menstruators are also affected by menstrual discrimination and play a vital role in dismantling it. Similarly, there is no international day to mark menstrual discrimination as a violation of human rights and gender-based violence.

Thus, DM Day is relevant to address this gap. Moreover, DM publications and indicators are relevant to address the void of this sector.

Research shows meaningful changes at individual and institutional levels, reflecting a shift in discourse that challenges entrenched patriarchal hierarchies. As one participant shared, *“This movement fills a critical gap, urging society to confront and dismantle the power relations that sustain menstrual discrimination.”* Through its inclusive and transformative approach, the DM movement remains highly relevant, resonating across cultures and communities worldwide.

Coherence

The DM movement demonstrates strong coherence with local, national, and international policies and commitments. It aligns closely with international human rights frameworks, including the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), particularly Article 5 addressing gender stereotypes. It also aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – 9 goals out of 17 are directly related (DM Practical Handbook, 2020). The movement also intersects with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006), the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) on sexual and reproductive health rights.

At the national level, DM aligns with Nepal’s Constitution (article 14, fundamental rights), and is reflected in key policies such as Nepal’s Domestic Violence Act (2009), Child Marriage Strategy (2014), Safe Motherhood and Reproductive Health Act (2018), and inclusive education (School Sector Reform Plan 2009). The recent unanimous parliamentary resolution motion on DM (March 2025) marks a historic step, formally recognizing menstrual discrimination as a violation of constitutional and human rights. This resolution strengthens the movement’s policy foundation and signals growing political commitment.

As per an intern at RPF, *“The movement’s principles—holistic, inclusive, decolonized, and life-cycle oriented—are integrated across sectors including health, education, agriculture, climate, child rights, disability, LGBTQIA+ etc. advocacy.”* It actively engages diverse stakeholders at all levels: community groups, policymakers, media, religious leaders, and private sectors. Trainings, webinars, school curricula, social media campaigns, and learning materials further reinforce coherence by promoting consistent messaging and capacity building.

The RPF and the GSCDM have been instrumental in highlighting gaps in existing policies and advocating for menstrual dignity as a cross-cutting social justice issue. As one participant noted, *“The movement bridges local realities with global commitments, ensuring that menstrual discrimination is addressed not just as a hygiene issue but as a fundamental human rights concern.”*

The collaborative efforts of GSCDM's network across Nepal and beyond have fostered policy changes, increased awareness, and empowered communities, demonstrating the movement's coherence and growing impact at multiple levels.

Effectiveness

The DM movement has made significant strides in increasing the visibility, acceptance, and institutionalization of menstrual discrimination issues and DM values. Radha's personal journey—highlighted by her influential book *Khalangama Hamala* (a war memoir), her work on gender-responsive constitutional reforms, and her peace and political advocacy—has lent authenticity and public credibility to the movement. As one participant noted, “Radha's story and writings gave voice and validity to menstrual dignity, inspiring many to join the cause.”

The movement's ideas have been disseminated through diverse channels, including pictorial books, songs, non-academic handbooks, and social media, reaching broad audiences beyond traditional academic spaces. Radha also shared that she ran the organization and also supported the movement through the royalty and selling of her DM related books. Despite limited funding, DM advocacy has thrived by applying flexible, community-centered approach, namely the Miteri model, which emphasizes collaboration, inclusivity, and shared responsibility. This flat organizational structure encourages collective action, with participants often volunteering to advance the cause. A GSCDM member from Sri Lanka shared, *“Radha was here in Viluthu, she trained and helped us to write a proposal, which was awarded and we could conduct national-wide research – a first of its kind in Sri Lanka; which was possible due to Radha's voluntary support.”*

The GSCDM and RPF employ the “3E”—Educate, Empower, Emancipate—a praxis-driven multifaceted innovative model, to drive change. Likewise, the ecological model engaging all stakeholders from local to global and vice-versa (buzz effect) has helped minimize the loopholes/backlashes, mitigate risks and to advance the DM movement. Through training, workshops, webinars, conferences, public talks, and community engagement, individuals and institutions learn to identify and challenge patriarchal power dynamics and systemic inequalities. This approach has empowered survivors of menstrual discrimination to speak out and it has also influenced individuals and institutions to revise policies and practices. A participant reflected, “After learning about DM, I realized how deeply discrimination is embedded and felt motivated to create change.”

Moreover, social media, blogs, increased online visibility due to COVID-19 pandemics, are also the effective tools to foster the DM movement.

RPF's strategies also challenge patriarchal norms by building networks, enhancing education, and mobilizing communities. Campaigns like the International DM Day (December 8) have helped normalize menstruation and reduce menstrual discrimination through public dialogues and media engagement.

School-based initiatives, including curriculum development and reference guides, have contributed to dignified, more inclusive learning environments. As a young participant shared, *“Since these programs started, I feel more confident and less ashamed during my menstruation at school.”*

DM Champions who belonged to Child Club graduates, interns, fellows, faith-healers, media fellows, activists, etc., have been mobilized at all levels. Likewise, the GSCDM members have also actively integrated DM in their ongoing activities and also promoted DM across individuals and institutions despite their funding constraints. With all above-mentioned challenges, DM movement has created a momentum and space in the global human rights discourse.

Efficiency

As per the research team’s observation and discussion with RPF/GSCDM members, the DM movement operates with remarkable efficiency despite being severely under-resourced. The core work is managed within a single flat – which serves as personal space for Radha and interns, and also houses offices of the RPF, and the GSCDM.

Regarding program efficiency, we found that continuous monitoring and evaluation—both formal and informal—ensure programmatic effectiveness through regular reflection and adaptation.

A key strength of the movement lies in the voluntary engagement of staff, interns, and activists who often work beyond regular hours driven by deep commitment rather than financial incentives. However, this overwork raises concerns about staff wellbeing and sustainability. As one participant noted, *“The passion is immense, but we must also care for those who carry the movement forward.”*

Radha’s journey exemplifies this dedication. As a survivor of war and menstrual discrimination, she has overcome personal and institutional challenges to build a movement grounded in human rights, health, empowerment, child rights, and gender equality. Starting with grassroots activism and formal and informal engagement with I/NGOs, she founded DMC Nepal informally, RPF in 2017, and GSCDM in 2019 to institutionalize the DM movement in Nepal and beyond.

The study findings reveal that while socio-cultural and political barriers remain the primary challenges to practicing DM, financial constraints also limit the movement’s expansion. Yet, participants emphasize that the movement’s survival and growth rely more on passion and commitment than on large funding. One interviewee shared, *“Even with limited funds, our dedication keeps the movement alive and growing.”*

Despite limited human and financial resources, GSCDM and RPF have maintained relentless, efficient advocacy through a small but highly motivated core team. This efficiency, driven by shared vision, underscores the movement’s resilience and potential for sustained impact.

Impact

The DM movement, led by Radha and organizations like RPF and GSCDM, has achieved significant national and global impact by reframing menstruation as a universal human rights issue. The movement's holistic approach—grounded in universalism and intersectionality—has united diverse groups and challenged entrenched patriarchal norms across Nepal and beyond.

Personal and societal transformation is a hallmark of the movement. Many participants described how training and engagement with DM shifted their perspectives: “After learning about DM, I started questioning the taboos at home and school. Now, I feel empowered to speak up.” Youth-led initiatives, such as creative campaigns and child clubs, have mobilized communities and sparked dialogue, while media engagement has normalized menstruation in public discourse.

The movement's influence is visible in policy and practice at the national level. The unopposed passage of the National Assembly's resolution motion on DM in March 2025 marked a historic shift, mandating the integration of menstrual dignity into government policies, education, and workplace culture. As one participant shared, “Seeing DM recognized in parliament was a moment of pride and hope for lasting change.” Moreover, key policy provisions like DM policy 2017, menstrual law 2017, Free Distribution of Biodegradable Menstrual Pad 2019, integrating DM into Gender Equality Act 2021, integration of DM into sixteenth five-year periodic plan and a few municipalities have DM policies including allocated budgets. Likewise, DM indicators are now used in schools and offices, and the movement's educational materials, songs, and training manuals have reached both urban and remote communities.

Globally, the DM movement has inspired solidarity and action, with the International DM Day (December 8) now celebrated worldwide. Donors like Amplify Change, AHF, SETI Foundation, etc., networks like MenEngaged Alliance, have already endorsed the DM into their policies and programming.

Likewise, the movement's inclusion as a flagship program of the Colombo Plan in 2024, involving 28 countries, and the launch of global anthologies and training manuals, demonstrate its expanding reach. International partnerships and fellowships have empowered youth, men, trans men, and non-menstruators to become advocates, breaking silence and stigma in their own contexts.

Participants from Sri Lanka and Latin America shared how the DM movement challenged long-held perceptions and age-old practices rooted in silence and stigma. As per a GSCDM member, *“For centuries, menstrual discrimination—manifested as exclusion, restrictions, and anxiety—was normalized, affecting half the world's population. The movement sparked personal, societal, institutional, national, and global shifts by breaking this silence and confronting myths, unconscious biases, and cultural taboos.”*

It means the movement has fostered profound cultural change in families, communities, workplaces and parliaments.

The DM movement challenges mainstream feminism and intersectionality frameworks and discourses for often overlooking menstrual discrimination. While feminism broadly advocates for gender equality, it has historically neglected the specific and pervasive issues surrounding menstruation. Similarly, intersectionality—designed to address overlapping identities and systemic inequalities—frequently fails to explicitly incorporate menstrual discrimination into its analyses. A GSCDM member highlighted this gap, stating, “The intersectionality approach often overlooks menstruation, which is why DM must be explicitly integrated.”

This critique pushes for a more inclusive feminism and intersectionality that fully recognizes menstrual discrimination as a fundamental human rights issue. Moreover, the DM movement exemplifies decolonial praxis by directly confronting colonial legacies embedded in menstrual health discourse, policy, and cultural norms. As a GSCDM member put it, “It challenges the colonial narrative of menstruation, instead framing it as dignified, natural, and sacred.” It challenges the dominance of Global North perspectives in menstrual management and health by centering Global South epistemologies—foregrounding the lived realities, cultural contexts, and knowledge systems of menstruators in the Global South. In this regard, a DM fellow reflected, “Instead of focusing narrowly on technical solutions like hygiene products, the movement exposes menstrual discrimination as a pervasive, global issue rooted in stigma and structural oppression, not just a rural or isolated problem.”

Explicitly decolonial, DM dismantles colonial and patriarchal narratives by rejecting reductionist, product-centered approaches. “It prioritizes survivor-led, context-specific knowledge and adopts a holistic, life-cycle perspective that includes all menstruators, regardless of identity or background,” reflects a CSO representative from Nepal. By reframing menstrual discrimination as a global agenda and launching Global South-led initiatives, the DM movement reimagines menstrual justice through dignity and systemic change.

Sustainability

The DM movement has already taken meaningful shape, created a strong knowledge base and developed the capacity of personnel—especially experts from the Global South—who can lead and expand advocacy efforts. The desk review showed that there are adequate knowledge products on DM which have set a foundation for knowledge sharing and utilization. Likewise, a good cadres of DM champions have already been produced (include interns, fellows, staff and advocates) – “who have the capacity to forward the DM movement” reflects a GSCDM member.

Moreover, though small in scale, endorsement of DM indicators by the government, I/NGOs, networks, etc. is an indication of its sustainability and ownership. These foundations allow others to replicate and scale up the movement in diverse contexts.

However, sustained progress depends on greater attention and commitment from the global audience, including donors, academia and development partners. A key challenge remains in translating governments and donors' verbal commitments into concrete actions and resource allocation. It appears that financial sustainability is hardly hit due to non-commitment of the funding agencies at local and global level.

Overall, programmatic sustainability, ownership and commitments are increasing; however, financial sustainability is still a challenge.

Chapter Summary

The assessment of the DM movement using the DAC framework reveals overwhelmingly positive outcomes across most evaluation criteria, reflecting its relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability in various dimensions. However, financial sustainability remains a critical challenge that needs strategic attention to ensure the movement's long-term viability and continued growth. Addressing this gap will be essential to maintaining momentum and deepening the movement's transformative impact.

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CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the evidence and findings presented above, this chapter draws some conclusions and also presents actionable recommendations to strengthen policy implementation, expand education and advocacy, and foster inclusive, sustainable growth of the DM movement at national and global levels.

Conclusion

The DM movement in Nepal has evolved from a taboo topic to a recognized, inclusive socio-political movement with growing national and global influence. The movement has successfully shifted language, attitudes, and practices around menstruation, promoting the use of “mahinawaari” and the terms “menstruators” and “non-menstruators” to foster inclusivity. DM is now acknowledged as both a human right, with increasing integration into government policies, educational materials, and community programs.

Institutional impacts of DM are evident at individual level to global policy frameworks. Likewise, publications, creative arts, and advocacy networks have further mainstreamed DM values. The movement’s momentum demonstrates that DM is not just a Nepali issue but a universal human rights concern, with Nepal setting an example for the global south and beyond.

Evolved from an individual’s effort, DM movement has gradually taken a space in global policy discourse. Despite these achievements, challenges remain, including persistent resistance from individuals and institutions as well as limited funding, and lack of trust in the movement by international partners.

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Recommendations

<p>For RPF, GSCDM Secretariat, and Steering Committee</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strengthen collaborations with both funding and non-funding partners to broaden the movement's reach and resources. 2. Develop sustainable funding models, including budget sharing with local governments and communities, to support ongoing and future initiatives. 3. Target cultural, religious, and institutional resistance through tailored interventions. The intervention projects could be stand-alone or integrated. 4. Gradually build a multi-country, diverse team to enhance regional and global coordination. 5. Building on South-South collaboration, conduct (multi-year/cross-continental) participatory action research and applied projects to generate evidence and inform policy and practice in partnership with academia and I/NGOs. 6. Advocate for increased donor support and international collaboration to sustain and scale the movement in Nepal and beyond. 7. Capitalize DM champions to amplify DM movement at local and global levels. 8. Build capacity of emerging DM champions, both local and global, through short-term to long-term research, training and academic fellowships, including regular, exchange and task-based. 9. Disseminate DM knowledge products with diverse audience, including menstruators with disability, LGBTQIA+.
<p>For Development Community and Funding Agencies</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Integrate DM values and principles in their policies and programs. 2. Hear stories, accept leadership and support campaigns of the survivor-led national and global network originating from the Global South. 3. Shift resources for South-South research and collaboration; multi-continental DM projects; and Global South-led DM initiatives. 4. Fund and empower DM focused grassroots and global networks of menstruators with disability, LGBTQIA+, and those working on pandemic and climate disaster issues. 5. Take immediate actions to inculcate DM framework in sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), child rights, human rights, women's rights, politics and feminist agenda.

	<p>6. Incorporate DM as a crosscutting theme across sectors, including sports, agriculture, climate, employment, media, etc.</p> <p>7. Enhance meaningful engagement and mobilization of non-menstruators including faith-healers in dismantling the menstrual discrimination at all levels and sectors.</p>
For Governments at All Levels	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Formulate independent policy on DM and develop strategic costed programs for its implementation. In case of Nepal, translate policy gains, such as Resolution Motion on DM 2025, into actionable programs with dedicated budgets and measurable outcomes. 2. Recognize DM as a critical and missing agenda and take steps towards reforming policies related to SRHR, child rights, human rights, women's rights, politics and feminist agenda. 3. Integrate DM into all relevant sectors—including sports, agriculture, climate, employment, and media—by embedding DM considerations into national and sectoral policies, planning processes, and program guidelines. 4. Actively involve non-menstruators including faith-healers in efforts to dismantle menstrual discrimination, recognizing their influential roles in shaping menstrual norms and practices. 5. Collaborate closely with local NGOs, community-based organizations, activists, and DM coalitions to leverage their expertise, grassroots reach, and indigenous knowledge for effective DM programming.
For Academia	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mobilize resources for promoting DM scholarship and discourse. 2. Collaborate with advocacy groups and academic community for evidence-based interventions, including (co-)leading DM projects, collaborative applied research and knowledge uptake. 3. Make effective use of DM research findings to influence policy reforms in all sectors, including disability, LGBTQIA+. 4. Expand DM-friendly curricula, training manuals, and creative outreach to make menstruation dignified and foster inclusive dialogue across schools, workplaces, and communities. 5. Develop and implement DM-friendly policies within academic and institutional workplaces.

For Media

1. Build capacity among media workers to accurately report on DM.
2. Invest in operational research on media engagement on DM and influence of DM on media.
3. Actively promote DM narratives and serve as watchdogs against misinformation on menstrual discrimination.
4. Develop and implement DM-friendly policies within media houses.

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