

community

CAMPAIGNERS

Newsletter



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

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

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



”

Hello and welcome to ActionAid UK’s Community Campaigner Winter newsletter, our last newsletter of 2023. My name is Sienna, and I have been a Community Campaigner since the beginning of the year. Since then, I have never looked back. Over the last few years, I have started to dedicate my time to helping end injustice, whether that be through a mere donation or taking part in fundraisers; it’s become quite a big part of my life. After running 40km for ActionAid’s ‘Go the Distance’ challenge in 2022, I found that this charity aligned with the causes I wanted to fight for, and now here I am introducing this edition of our newsletter.

The recent Israel-Gaza crisis has been taking up most of ActionAid’s attention. We have been working endlessly to push for a ceasefire in Gaza to prevent further violence, forced displacement and to deliver life-saving humanitarian supplies. We send our love and solidarity to everyone caught up in the violence.

This newsletter has some incredible contributions from our Working Group:

Numra offers a critique on one of the year’s biggest and most successful films, Barbie. She poses the question as to whether the film was actually a feminist flick or just another example of consumerism.

Sarah speaks about the struggle many women have to face with reproductive health by opening up about her personal experiences and sharing her thoughts on this issue. (CW: miscarriage, descriptions of medical violence against black women.)

Mishita talks about her own response to anti-trans rhetoric in the UK and brings to light how the struggle for trans rights is directly linked to the struggles faced by all oppressed groups. (CW: mentions of transphobia and violence against trans people.)

Finally, I jump back in to conclude this newsletter by discussing the importance of solidarity and how you can get involved to create a better world for future generations to live in.

- Sienna

Changing the world

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



Beauty
Standards

Barbie critique - Numra

Barbie was one of the most anticipated movies of 2023, however after watching the movie, I discovered that it had several flaws, which resulted in an opposite message than it intended to portray. The movie's casting was definitely diverse, as women from multiple ethnicities, nationalities and sizes were represented in the movie. It becomes clear that even though there was a diverse cast, stereotypical Barbie, who was a white, slim and blond woman, was still upheld as the ultimate Barbie. This reinforces the notion of an objective beauty standard. Millions of girls, including myself, went to watch the movie, ready to celebrate their individuality, only to be suppressed by beauty standards once again.

One moment in the movie was particularly alarming, when Margot Robbie (Barbie) tells Gloria that she doesn't feel pretty anymore because she is not a stereotypical Barbie. The narrator then says, "Note to the filmmakers: Margot Robbie is the wrong person to cast if you want to make this point." How can this line be present in a movie about feminism? The narrator is ultimately saying that there are women, who are not pretty and who would have been a suitable choice if they wanted to show someone who is ugly. Does this mean that every woman who doesn't look like Margot Robbie is suddenly ugly? In a single sentence, the movie undermined the entire purpose of feminism, yet some believe that Barbie is a feminist movie.

The creators of Barbie had the unique chance to broadcast the power and strength of the matriarchy, but instead, they showed how a society run by women is so weak that it can be abolished within a day by patriarchy. President Barbie is undermined as she is portrayed as a weak woman who wasn't able to secure her position of power. The marketing of the movie was applauded worldwide, but in reality, the movie promoted excess consumerism, which is damaging to the planet. Many people, including nearly all of my friends, were influenced to wear pink and buy accessories in order to promote a movie. People then resulted to fast fashion, which is generated by child labour and unfair wages. The Barbie movie promoted selfish consumerism. Anything that claims to be feminist must include all women. Garment workers in low-income countries produced fast fashion items on an extremely poor wage because the movie created a demanding environment that enabled greed and unethical profit to be made. The Barbie movie paid no recognition to the girls who live in poverty and make their own dolls from whatever they have. The marginalisation of girls who live in poverty suggests that the notion of Barbie is only for those who can purchase the label of Barbie. This means that Barbie is a label of conformity and a symbol of consumerism only attainable to some, not all. I believe that the concept of Barbie portrayed in the movie does not uphold feminist values and the Barbie movie has once again resurfaced the damaging beauty

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



Trigger Warning

Reproductive health: An introduction - Sarah

Billions of women, trans and non-binary people across the world are affected by reproductive health.

According to the [Government 2021 Census](#), there are 30.4 million women and girls living in the UK (51% of the total population), and [World Bank data](#) puts the global number of women and girls at 3.92 billion (49.7%). With such a significant proportion of the world population affected by their reproductive health, you would think great strides would have been made that encompass everything from sexual health education and contraception to post-partum and menopausal hormone fluctuations.

But as I sit here writing this introduction, I can’t help but reflect on the miscarriage I had a few months ago. A missed miscarriage is supposedly rare, affecting only 3% of pregnancies. The risk of miscarriage, according to the NHS, is 1 in 8 pregnancies. One in 100 women [will experience three or more recurrently](#). And yet, when I spoke to friends and family about what had happened, I was shocked to find every single person I spoke to had either had a miscarriage or someone (sometimes even several people) close to them had.

It got me thinking about all the stages of reproductive health and how much it can affect our lives. It also got me thinking about what we know about reproductive health and what we assume. This is an enormous topic, one which could take up several dissertations, but over the next few Community Campaigners newsletter issues, I will endeavour to explore some key aspects of reproductive health for women, trans and non-binary people and will hopefully inspire others to think, read, reflect and, most importantly, talk about reproductive health.

To understand where we are, we must first understand where we have come from, with a short introduction on the history of modern-day gynaecology. Although texts referencing gynaecology exist from as far back as the 5th century BC, and midwifery [can be traced to the palaeolithic era \(40,000 B.C.\)](#), it is Marion Sims (1813 – 1883) from Alabama, USA, in the late 1800’s who is considered the father of modern surgical gynaecology. In the early 19th century, doctors did not study female reproductive anatomy as it was seen as repulsive. If a woman had to go to the doctor, she would lift her skirts to the knee whilst standing, and the doctor, without looking directly at her, would kneel and “root around”.

Sims, without any formal gynaecological training, developed the first surgical cure for vesicovaginal fistulas. He did so by performing experimental backyard surgeries on enslaved black women without any informed consent and without anaesthesia. Sims chose not to use anaesthesia or any other form of numbing as [he held the racist belief that black people didn’t feel pain, a belief that persists to this day](#). Surgeries could be over an hour long, with a dozen or so other doctors watching. The experiments continued over four years, with some women having up to 30 operations each and a recovery time of up to 3 months after every intervention. He was named president of the American Medical Association in 1876 and president of the American Gynaecological Society in 1880. His statue stood in New York City’s Central Park until 2018, when it was removed after sustained public protest.

The modern-day gynaecological knowledge we have was gained from the abject pain, horror and de-humanisation of enslaved black women. It has a medical basis created by privileged white men. As we explore the varied themes of reproductive health over the next several instalments, I urge you to consider the varying realities of women, trans and non-binary people all over the world. [This introduction is dedicated to the 50,000 pregnant women in Gaza, 5522 of whom are expected to give birth in the next month without any anaesthesia or pain relief*](#).

*Number correct at time of writing



Image by [LightFieldStudios](#)

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



Trigger Warning

Trans rights: Just an academic debate? - Mishita

The recent brutal murder of [Brianna Ghey, a 16-year-old trans girl](#), stands as an illustration of the [56% surge in crimes against trans people between 2020 and 2022](#), an alarming statistic only exacerbated by the unsettling reality that [88% of such cases remain unreported](#).

But while these unsettling statistics continue their ascent, people seem to be more inclined to engage in a ‘debate’ regarding the very existence of trans people, casting doubt upon the necessity of affording them simple rights. It is shocking that in 2023, a minority group constituting approximately 262,000 of the UK’s population have their very existence questioned.

The political sphere has not proven immune to this, as evidenced by the obstruction of Scotland’s Gender Recognition Reform (GRR) Bill by the UK government in Westminster. This obstruction, executed under the guise of safeguarding women’s interests, mirrors the cynical reasoning behind the prohibition of building gender-neutral bathrooms in public buildings in August 2023. The belief that trans-women are not ‘real-women’ but rather a threat to cis-women and their safety is a convenient guise, but where is this importance given to violence against women as rape cases (perpetuated by cis-men) continue to rise with [more than 90% of those reporting](#) denied justice?

The academic realm is not exempt from such controversy. The film ‘Adult Human Female’, deemed transphobic by many, has found an audience within universities across the nation. While gender-critical ‘feminists’ seek to unequivocally contest the categorisation of trans women as women and consider it within the realm of ‘civil debate’, there is nothing civil about debating whether people are allowed equal rights, all while hate crimes against them continue to increase in magnitude. In the field of sports, the exclusion of all transgender participants from women’s sports has been legalised by UK Athletics. This seems to be clearly done on the presumption (and under ignorance) that male physique must be inherently better in all sports and that trans people somehow do not go under hormonal or biological changes when transitioning.

Even sports such as chess are not barred from such ridiculous logic, alluding to men possessing intellectual superiority. The point of having categories based on weight and other biological characteristics is missed. At the same time, an archaic binary of ‘men and women’ is pushed forward, leaving little room for other gender identities.

Social discontent is palpable amid the backdrop of declining quality of life, soaring rents, inflation, interest rates and reduced social services. This discontent, however, has been strategically redirected by those in power towards trans individuals.

The solution to these monstrous conditions lies in an organised effort to counteract transphobic sentiments. In doing so, we must recognise that the struggle for trans rights is intrinsically linked to the broader fight for the rights of all oppressed groups. The call is clear: unity in purpose, strength in solidarity, and an unwavering commitment to a society where all individuals, irrespective of identity, are treated with dignity and whose rights exist not just on a piece of paper but as a material reality.



SOLIDARITY



community

Conclusion - Sienna

The extremely important discussions in this newsletter are just the tip of the iceberg. There are so many injustices women, girls, trans and non-binary people face all over the world. I hope that Numra, Sarah and Mishita's pieces have opened your eyes a little more and perhaps even taught you a thing or two.

As previously mentioned, ActionAid is tirelessly tackling the crisis taking place in Gaza by creating petitions, contacting Members of Parliament to call for a ceasefire and asking for contributions to our appeal. We have a duty to continue to raise awareness of ongoing inequality faced by so many so that we can keep challenging attitudes and support campaigns that demand justice. Whatever resources we have, from our time to our skills, our network aims to harness our collective power to shift unequal, unjust or oppressive systems.

If you would like to get involved, you can donate to the [Gaza Crisis Appeal](#) or sign the [#CeasefireNow petition](#). Furthermore, if you're interested in becoming a Community Campaigner, you can check out [this webpage](#) where you will find all the information you need to know.

I may be biased, but I think the work done by Community Campaigners is exceptional, and I feel so honoured to be a part of a network of like-minded people committed to sharing our power and privilege. So, please find out more about ActionAid and the work we do so we can hopefully all begin to witness a more harmonious world.

We are all connected, so we need to use our strengths to eliminate another's injustice. Your involvement, big or small, can build our solidarity with people not only in Israel and Gaza but other parts of the world! If you've not been involved in our network for a while, why not pick things up in the New Year? It wouldn't hurt to try and see the ways that you can get involved. It will make a world of difference.

"My humanity is bound up in yours, for we can only be human together." - Desmond Tutu

Thank you for reading!