

Building Equitable North–South Partnerships For Menstrual Justice

A joint strategy from Irise Institute East Africa (Uganda) and Irise International (UK)



Our Shared Vision

A world where people are not limited by menstruation- able to learn, work, and thrive with dignity, confidence, and equal opportunity- upheld by resilient grassroots movements, just and equitable partnerships, and systems that redistribute power and resources fairly across the globe.

Our Mission

We work together to ensure no person who menstruates is held back. Rooted in a decolonial approach, we strengthen local movements and grassroots leadership, generate evidence to influence systems and policies, and build a just ecosystem where resources flow equitably to grassroots organisations and communities.





Our Roles In The Partnership

- **Irise Institute East Africa:** Leads the strategy and implementation of menstrual justice work in the region. It designs and delivers context-specific programmes, strengthens adolescent-responsive systems, amplifies grassroots leadership, and shapes national and regional policy through evidence. As the regional lead, IIEA ensures that programmes are grounded in local realities while driving forward a broader vision for systemic change across East Africa.
- **Irise International:** Serves as a backbone organisation resourcing grassroots movements, strengthening youth leadership, influencing systems and funders. In doing so, it is mindful of its positionality: mobilising resources responsibly, while also platforming and amplifying the impact of grassroots leadership within global policy agendas, ensuring that menstrual justice work is rooted in equity and intersectionality.

Our Partnership Journey

This is not a story about glorifying a perfect partnership.

It is about the messy, necessary work of building something real between the Global South and North, where power is named, trust is earned daily, and hard, uncomfortable conversations matter more than polished reports. We have lived every inch of ground in this collaboration: through funding crises, cultural misunderstandings and differences, and the quiet violence of unequal systems.

Over the past 10 years, we have built a collaboration grounded in trust, mutual respect, and a series of thoughtful choices. Our organisations are independently governed yet bound in a “sisterhood” committed to menstrual justice. This independence gives us the freedom to prioritise what is truly best for our teams and communities, and we actively choose to collaborate and continually redefine what this partnership means to us. Our collaboration is rooted in shared conviction, allowing us to be honest, make difficult decisions when needed, as we continue to place people who menstruate at the centre of our journey together.



From lived experience, we know partnerships thrive when they are rooted in equity, trust, and courage. This means the Global South co-leads on setting agendas, designing projects, and driving implementation, while resources are shared transparently and co-created. Power dynamics are named and navigated, with strategic alignment extending beyond individual leaders to board-to-board engagement. It means prioritising time together, even with limited resources, because relationships deepen through shared spaces where we can celebrate wins, unpack challenges, and learn collectively.

Practising decoloniality for us is not about grand gestures, it's about consistent, courageous micro-acts of activism. This partnership is different because we are not just talking about the legacy of colonialism; we are living it. We are working together to redistribute power, centre local knowledge, and hold space for honest conversations even when they are uncomfortable. This means:

- Embracing and approaching our work commitments with feminist leadership principles to be intentional and aware of the different dynamics around us. In practice, this means ensuring inclusive decision-making spaces where both organisations shape joint priorities together, equitable resource allocation, and power-sharing practices that centre grassroots leadership in programme design and advocacy.
- Challenging funders to spend time and work directly with East African partners.
- Creating space for visits that allow donors to truly listen and learn from communities.
- Insisting that reporting does not need to conform to rigid or colonial standards of “perfect English” or Western structuring.
- Pushing for fundraising to shift into East Africa as part of a wider effort to disrupt centuries of wealth concentration in the Global North.
- Working more with like-minded donors and organisations to push for the status quo to change.

Achievements and Milestones

The Period Equality Network (TPEN)

The first grassroots-led menstrual justice network in East Africa, uniting over 270 members and delivering a groundbreaking small-grants programme to ensure local voices influence regional and global policy agendas. TPEN has helped position menstrual justice as a united, growing movement in the region, sparking new policy framework discussions and sustained engagement with policy-makers, government departments, civil society, and grassroots organisations. Personal experience narratives have been amplified, reinforcing menstrual health as a critical issue affecting millions.

Scarlet Murmurations: Advancing Global Menstrual Justice

Scarlet Murmurations is a pioneering framework and toolkit co-produced by grassroots actors worldwide, positioning menstrual justice as a determinant of opportunity and equality. It demonstrates the deeply **intersectional nature of menstrual justice**, showing how it is inseparable from climate, disability, racial, gender, and economic justice, and emphasises alignment with wider movements to drive meaningful change. The framework issues clear recommendations: for grassroots and movement actors to embed a justice lens in their work; and for funders, academics, and INGOs to redistribute power and resources, amplify lived experience, and dismantle systemic barriers such as post-colonial funding dynamics and fragmented action. By centring collective action and evidence, Scarlet Murmurations builds a shared case for lasting, inclusive, and locally-led systems of change.

Period Positive Schools

The Period Positive Schools programme is a flagship, evidence-based initiative that goes beyond product provision and WASH in girls' education to adopt a holistic, whole-community approach that challenges harmful social norms and supports sustainable change. It has brought menstrual health issues to the forefront of public discourse in East Africa, while also working with governments to embed menstrual health within local, national and regional agendas, ensuring long-term impact and systemic change.

Our Shared Commitments for the Next 5 Years

- Uphold feminist praxis and decolonial values in all work.
- Ensure resources flow equitably to grassroots partners.
- Build a global menstrual justice movement grounded in lived realities.
- Remain transparent, adaptable, and committed to collective learning.

Joint Strategic Priorities (2025–2030)

1. Operationalise Menstrual Justice Globally

- Define and adopt core principles: intersectionality, feminist leadership, systemic change.
- Develop practical tools and resources with and for grassroots partners worldwide, adapted from local contexts
- Commission research to strengthen evidence-based work and demonstrate need
- Embed justice principles into programmes and advocacy platforms.

Expected Outcome/Impact: Menstrual justice becomes a recognised global framework, with shared language, tools, and evidence that grassroots actors and policy-makers alike can adopt to drive systemic change.

2. Strengthen TPEN's East Africa Work

- Showcase impact through data and storytelling that centres grassroots voices.
- Strengthen structure and participatory ownership by deepening collective leadership and accountability.
- Increase grants and resource distribution aligned with policy gaps, especially at key intersections of gender, physical health, mental health, climate change, and education.
- Influence policy and convene biennial conferences to amplify grassroots priorities and shape regional agendas.

Expected Outcome/Impact: TPEN is established as a trusted regional leader in menstrual justice, with stronger community ownership, increased policy influence, and measurable improvements in menstrual health equity and its intersections across East Africa.

3. Catalyse Global Uptake of Grassroots Funding

- Refine TPEN's small-grants model for replication in other regions across the world.
- Create governance and fundraising toolkits.
- Address donor barriers to directly fund grassroots actors.

Expected Outcome/Impact: Grassroots organisations worldwide have greater direct access to sustainable funding, enabling them to lead change in their own contexts and strengthen movements from the ground up.

Call To Action

We invite:

- **Communities & Grassroots Partners** – to actively co-create solutions, shape local priorities, and lead transformative change in their own contexts, ensuring programmes reflect lived realities and local expertise.
- **Partners & Collaborators** – to integrate and champion our menstrual justice framework, embedding equity, intersectionality, and sustainability across all initiatives and partnerships.
- **Funders & Donors** – to provide long-term, flexible support that nurtures grassroots intersectional leadership, strengthens local capacity, and sustains meaningful impact over time.
- **Government Actors** – to make menstrual justice a visible priority by integrating it into budgets, policies, and public services, ensuring that systemic change reaches all communities equitably.



