



# **CLAIMING DIGNIFIED MENSTRUATION: FARUG'S JOURNEY IN MENSTRUAL HEALTH AND QUEER LIBERATION**

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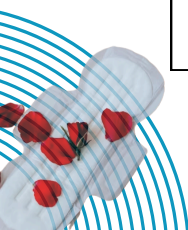
October 2025

# INTRODUCTION

When the story of FARUG's work on menstrual health is told years from now, it will not begin with policies, budgets, or statistics. It will begin with a very human moment, a stain on a trouser during the 2019 **Uganda Lesbian Forum (UGALEF)**. What might have been brushed off as a small embarrassment instead became a turning point. That moment revealed the silence, stigma, and invisibility that surrounded menstruation, even within activist spaces that had long fought for dignity and inclusion. From it grew a deliberate decision: FARUG would place menstrual health at the centre of its advocacy.

Founded in 2003 as Uganda's first membership-based organisation for Lesbian, Bisexual and Queer (LBQ) womxn, FARUG has always been driven by the belief that liberation means tackling every layer of oppression. Over the years, it has challenged patriarchy, homophobia, and systemic violence, while building spaces for resilience, healing, and solidarity. By turning its attention to menstrual health, FARUG widened the lens of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) to include one of the most basic yet neglected aspects of bodily autonomy.

This report tells the story of that journey, how an organisation, working in an often hostile environment, transformed menstruation from a private struggle into a collective site of empowerment, justice, and political organising. It draws on the voices of beneficiaries who lived the change, and on the reflections of leaders who steered the strategy. Together, these narratives show how menstrual health became not just a programme, but a vital part of FARUG's identity and legacy.



# VOICES FROM THE COMMUNITY

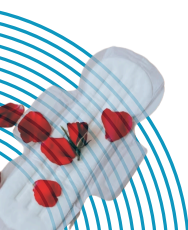
To understand the impact of FARUG's menstrual health work, we turned to the people at the heart of it: the community. A total of twelve beneficiaries and members of the LBQ community were interviewed, each sharing personal reflections on how the projects touched their lives. Their stories, layered with honesty and resilience, reveal how menstruation, once hidden in silence, became a pathway for dignity, empowerment, and collective learning.

## 1. First Encounters with FARUG's Menstrual Health Work

For many, their first experience with FARUG's menstrual health initiatives was transformative. Some remembered receiving pads at community events, a gesture that carried profound weight in spaces where menstruation was often stigmatised. Others spoke of trainings, podcasts, or the menstrual summit where, for the first time, they could discuss periods openly, free of judgment.

One beneficiary reflected, **"It gave me the language to talk about menstruation. At home, it was silence; in school, it was avoidance. FARUG gave me words and confidence."** Another recalled the relief of being in a space where menstruation was not taboo but a shared, valid experience.

From the organisational perspective, this focus was sparked by a moment during the 2019 Uganda Lesbian Forum when a visibly masculine lesbian woman stained herself. What might have been dismissed as embarrassment instead became a catalyst.



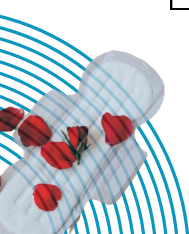
As one leader later explained, **“That incident forced us to confront what we weren’t talking about. It showed us that menstruation couldn’t stay in the background of our SRHR work; it had to be central.”**

## 2. Changing Understandings of Menstruation and the Body.

Before engaging with FARUG’s menstrual health work and outreaches, many participants carried with them myths and misconceptions. Some had grown up believing that menstruation was a curse, that blood made them unclean, or that periods were something to be endured in silence. For masculine-presenting LBQ individuals, the experience was often compounded by dysphoria and secrecy, making menstruation even harder to navigate.

Through FARUG’s menstrual camps, dialogues, podcasts and publications, these ideas began to shift. Participants spoke of finally understanding their cycles, learning practical ways to manage menstrual pain, and recognising that menstruation was not a punishment but part of their bodily autonomy. **“I used to hate my body during my period,” one beneficiary admitted. “Now I see it differently; I know how to care for myself, and I’m not ashamed.”**

The leadership echoed this shift, framing menstruation not as a hygiene issue but as a political and human rights issue. By centering it in their SRHR advocacy, FARUG sought to disrupt the silences that had long erased LBQ menstrual experiences from menstrual public discourse. This dual approach, personal empowerment alongside political framing, redefined how the community understood not only their bodies but also their place in broader struggles for menstrual justice.





### 3. Unforgettable Moments

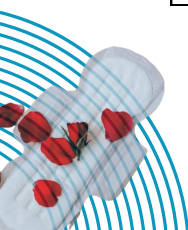
When asked about the moments that stayed with them, participants lit up with vivid memories. Menstrual Camps and workshops were recalled as spaces where myths were shattered and confidence bloomed. For most, it was the recently held inaugural LBQ Menstrual Health Summit 2025 that stood out; the first time they had ever seen menstruation discussed as a political issue, openly and proudly, in a queer-affirming space.

Others spoke of the Claiming Dignified menstruation Booklet- <https://faruganda.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/Dignified-menstruation-book.pdf>, FARUG's groundbreaking publication, as a milestone that gave them both language and validation. "I held it in my hands and thought, this is us," one beneficiary shared. The podcasts were also highlighted, especially by those who had never imagined themselves speaking publicly about menstruation. Recording an episode, or even just listening, became a source of courage and pride.

For FARUG's leadership, these moments were more than activities; they were turning points. The Menstrual Summit demonstrated that menstrual health could no longer be sidelined, while the Claiming Dignified menstruation Booklet positioned FARUG at the forefront of linking menstruation to queer feminist struggles in Uganda and beyond. Together, they marked the shift from quiet interventions to visible, history-making advocacy.

### 4. Using Knowledge to Support Others

For many beneficiaries, what they gained from FARUG's menstrual health work did not stop with them. They carried the knowledge into their homes, neighborhoods, and peer groups, becoming quiet educators and advocates in their own right.



One lesbian womxn described teaching her younger siblings how to track their cycles and manage menstruation with dignity. Another recalled helping a pregnant teenager in her community, using information she had learned in FARUG's safe spaces to offer guidance and comfort. Others said they had spoken to their partners about consent and respect during menstruation, conversations they had once been too shy to start.

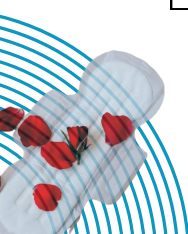
**"I never thought I could talk about periods in public," one beneficiary admitted. "Now I find myself correcting myths, even with neighbors. It feels powerful to say, 'That's not true, here's what I've learned.'"**

From the organizational perspective, this ripple effect was intentional. FARUG had always emphasized peer-to-peer learning, trusting that the most lasting change would come when knowledge moved organically through communities. The stories shared by participants proved that this model was working, each person leaving with tools not just for themselves, but for others around them.

## 5. Hopes for the Future

When asked what they wanted to see next, beneficiaries spoke with both gratitude and urgency. Many called for FARUG to expand its reach, especially into rural communities where menstruation remains shrouded in silence and pads are still a luxury. Others emphasized the need to include trans and non-binary voices more prominently, ensuring that all menstruators feel seen in future work.

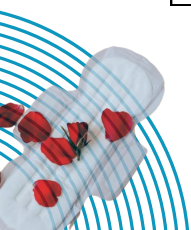
There were also calls for sustained advocacy in schools, where young LBQ persons struggling with identity and dysphoria could be reached early with accurate information.



Participants wanted cheaper, more accessible menstrual products, continued conversations about consent, and more spaces like the LBQ menstrual summit; safe, affirming gatherings where they could learn, heal, and celebrate together.

One beneficiary summed it up simply: **“FARUG has given us courage, but we need more. More spaces, more voices, more LBQ and gender diverse menstruators who know that menstruation is not shame, it is life.”**

The leadership shared a similar vision, but framed it strategically. Their hopes included building stronger research to back menstrual advocacy and equity, pushing for menstrual health to be recognized in national policy, and sustaining partnerships despite the difficult political climate. Together, the voices of the LBQ community and the vision of leadership pointed to the same truth: the journey was far from over, and the future demanded both persistence and creativity.



# LEADERSHIP AND STRATEGY

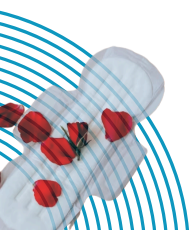
While the community shared stories of dignity reclaimed and myths dismantled, FARUG's leadership reflected on why menstrual health became so central to their work and how it shaped the organisation's identity.

## 1. Why Menstrual Health?

According to FARUG's leaders, the decision was rooted in lived reality. The 2019 incident at the Uganda Lesbian Forum, when a visibly masculine lesbian womxn stained themselves, revealed a silence even within activist spaces. **"We realised that if we could not talk openly about menstruation here, then who would talk about it for us?"** one leader explained. From that moment, menstrual health was no longer just a side issue but a core part of SRHR programming. It was about dignity, autonomy, and justice for LBQ womxn whose menstrual experiences were routinely erased from mainstream menstrual conversations.

## 2. Challenges Under Hostile Laws

Implementing menstrual health projects was never straightforward, particularly against the backdrop of Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Act. The law bred fear, caused some donors, partners and allies to withdraw, and placed LBQ organising under constant scrutiny. Funding was harder to secure, visibility carried risks, and stigma made participation unsafe for many. FARUG had to make careful choices, balancing security with the need to push boundaries.

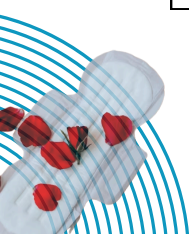


Despite these challenges, the work continued, often with reduced resources but renewed determination.

### 3. How Menstrual Health Shaped FARUG's Identity

Over time, menstrual health advocacy became woven into the very fabric of FARUG's identity. Leaders described it as a political lens through which to reimagine SRHR: not just hygiene or access to pads, but a broader fight for rights, dignity, and recognition. By producing resources like the *Claiming Dignified menstruation Booklet* and convening the first ever LBQ menstrual summit in Africa which framed menstruation as a feminist and queer issue, FARUG positioned itself as a pioneer in Uganda and Africa as a whole.

This advocacy also strengthened the organisation's long-term strategy. It deepened partnerships, informed research, and affirmed that intersectionality was not optional but necessary. Menstrual health became a platform through which FARUG could connect personal stories to political change, ensuring that LBQ womxn were no longer invisible in national or global SRHR debates.





# COLLECTIVE REFLECTIONS

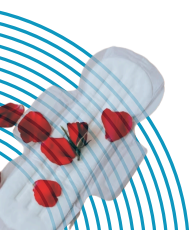
Listening to the community and leadership side by side reveals a powerful synergy. Though their perspectives were shaped by different roles, both spoke to the same truths: menstruation was not simply a matter of hygiene but of dignity, inclusion, and justice.

For beneficiaries, the impact was immediate and personal. They described moments of shame turned into learning, silence transformed into voice, and private struggles reframed as collective ones. The words “I’m not alone” came up more than once, signaling the relief of finding solidarity in experiences that had long been hidden.

For leadership, the focus was broader but no less personal. They framed menstrual health as political terrain, a site where LBQ womxn’s rights, bodies, and visibility intersected with systemic oppression. What began as a response to one lesbian’s stained trouser grew into a deliberate strategy to shift national conversations and carve out queer-affirming spaces in the face of hostility.

The reflections converged on several key themes:

- **Dignity:** The recognition that menstruation is not shameful but integral to bodily autonomy.
- **Inclusion:** A shared demand for spaces that acknowledge all menstruators (LBQ womxn, trans, and non-binary people alike.)
- **Resilience:** The ability to continue building and speaking even under laws designed to silence.



- **Collective Power:** Knowledge and tools passed from FARUG to individuals, and then outwards into families, schools, and communities.

Together, these reflections remind us that FARUG's menstrual health journey was never just about distributing pads or holding dialogues and summits. It was about rewriting narratives, one story at a time, and grounding menstrual health within the larger struggle for freedom and justice.



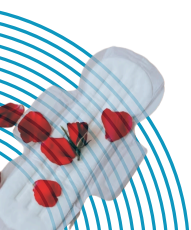
## OUTCOMES AND IMPACT



The story of FARUG's menstrual health work is not only about conversations held and spaces created; it is also about the tangible outcomes that have reshaped both individuals and the movement.

### Transformative Knowledge

Community members consistently spoke of how their understanding of menstruation changed. Myths about dirtiness, curses, or infertility gave way to clarity about cycles, consent, and bodily autonomy. For many, this knowledge was not just personal but something they carried back to siblings, partners, and peers, sparking wider conversations.



## Groundbreaking Resources

The publication of *Claiming Dignified Menstruation: An Essential Guide for Lesbian, Bisexual and Queer Womxn*, was a watershed moment. It was the first of its kind in the global south, documenting LBQ realities that had long been invisible. Beneficiaries described the pride of seeing themselves in print, while leaders recognized the book as a resource for future advocacy, research, and programming.

## Spaces of Belonging

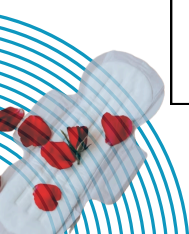
Events like the Menstrual Health Summit provided rare, safe and affirming environments where LBQ womxn could openly link periods to politics, stigma, and queerness. These gatherings not only deepened knowledge but also built solidarity networks, offering emotional relief and collective strength in a hostile context.

## Amplifying Voices

Podcasts, storytelling workshops, and dialogues gave beneficiaries platforms to speak and be heard. For some, recording an episode was their first time speaking publicly about menstruation; for others, it was a way to connect with wider audiences and challenge misinformation. FARUG's peer-to-peer approach ensured that these voices travelled far beyond the walls of workshops.

## Shaping Movement Identity

For FARUG, menstrual health became a defining strand of its work. By weaving it into SRHR advocacy, the organisation positioned itself as a trailblazer, not only in Uganda but also in Africa as a whole, linking menstruation to broader feminist and queer struggles. It demonstrated that menstrual dignity was inseparable from human rights, equality, and justice.



# CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

FARUG's journey in menstrual health was as much about navigating obstacles as it was about celebrating wins. The voices of both community members and leadership revealed recurring challenges, but also the lessons that shaped the path forward.

## Hostile Laws and Shrinking Space

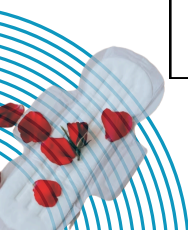
The Anti-Homosexuality Act cast a long shadow over the work. Its passage bred fear, deterred partners, and placed every activity under scrutiny. Some partners, allies and donors even withdrew, leaving gaps in funding and solidarity. Leadership described this as one of the toughest realities to manage, balancing visibility with security while refusing to abandon the agenda.

## Stigma and Exclusion

Community members highlighted the stigma they faced when accessing menstrual health services, particularly masc-presenting LBQ people and trans men. For them, menstruation often triggered dysphoria and increased exposure to discrimination. Others spoke of social myths that cast menstruation as dirty, shameful, or even a curse, fueling isolation.

## Period poverty

High costs of menstrual products were a recurring concern, especially for those in rural communities. Participants also noted the scarcity of inclusive resources and the difficulty of sustaining advocacy without consistent funding. Even when resources existed, they were often not tailored to queer realities.



# LESSONS ALONG THE WAY

Despite these challenges, important lessons emerged. Leadership stressed the power of peer-to-peer models, where knowledge moves from one person to another and ripples outward. Community voices emphasized the need for inclusivity, ensuring that all who menstruate, regardless of gender identity, feel seen. Both sides recognized the importance of research and documentation, not only to inform advocacy but to preserve stories for future generations.

Above all, the work showed that dignity could be claimed even in hostile environments. Each obstacle became an opportunity to adapt, rethink strategies, and push boundaries a little further.

## THE ROAD AHEAD

FARUG's menstrual health journey has shown that dignity can be reclaimed in the most difficult of environments. From a stained trouser at UGALEF in 2019 to the publication of the Claiming Dignified Menstruation booklet and the convening of the first ever LBQ Menstrual Health Summit in Africa, what began as a moment of discomfort has grown into a movement. Along the way, FARUG has changed how LBQ communities see themselves, how they care for each other, and how menstrual health is understood within feminist and queer struggles.



## Outcomes at a Glance

- Knowledge that shifted myths about identity and menstruation into confidence and clarity.
- Groundbreaking resources that documented LBQ menstrual realities for the first time.
- Safe, affirming spaces where menstruation was linked to dignity and politics.
- A stronger organizational identity, positioning FARUG as a trailblazer in menstrual health advocacy.

## Recommendations for the Future

From both community voices and leadership reflections, several priorities emerged:

- Expand reach into rural LBQ communities where stigma and lack of products remain acute.
- Strengthen inclusivity by centering the voices of trans and non-binary people in menstrual health advocacy.
- Invest in affordable and sustainable menstrual products to ease the financial burden on LBQ communities.
- Build more LBQ specific menstrual health and dignity research and documentation to inform policy and preserve stories for generations to come.
- Continue creating safe and affirming spaces for LBQ and gender diverse menstruators where menstrual conversations can flourish without fear.



# A Note of Gratitude

This work was made possible through the courage of the LBQ community, the dedication of FARUG staff and members, and the support of partners who believed in the vision. Special thanks go to Amplify Change and the Global South Coalition for Dignified Menstruation, whose solidarity made critical milestones like the Claiming Dignified Menstruation booklet a reality.

As FARUG looks ahead, the call is clear: to keep pushing for menstrual dignity as a human rights issue, to amplify the voices of those too often silenced, and to ensure that no one's body is shamed into silence. Menstruation is not a curse, nor a private burden; it is part of life, and part of the struggle for justice.

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