

Promise Tracker

New special report. The *Promise Tracker* is Daily Monitor's weekly special feature that will track the promises made by leaders of all categories as well as public agencies to the people. The aim is to cause accountability, show status and analyse whether it was a realistic, unrealistic or empty promise.

Girls wait on Museveni to deliver sanitary pads as promised

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THE PROMISE:

On the afternoon of November 12, 2015, President Museveni while campaigning in the Lango sub-region ahead of the 2016 General Election, announced that government was to provide girls with sanitary towels if at all he was re-elected.

"I want all our daughters to attend school and remain there until they complete their studies. One of the reasons that force our daughters out of school is that when their periods start, they do not have sanitary pads. When they are in class, they soil their dresses. So they run away from school" he said at a campaign rally at Alira Primary School in Akura Sub-county, Alebtong District.

During the same rally, Mr Museveni promised that government would also provide a whole new range of scholastic materials.

"In the schools, we are going to provide more scholastic materials such as textbooks and mathematical sets. We are also proposing to provide exercise books so that parents just buy school uniforms and packed lunch," he said.

According to the President, who was the candidate for the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) party, the distribution of the free pads to the girls was meant to take effect in the financial year 2017/2018.

Mr Museveni's promise came against a backdrop of several reports that painted a grim future for girl child education in Uganda, largely on account of issues evolving around the management of menstrual hygiene, especially among girls experiencing menstruation for their very first or first few times.

The Forum for African Women Educationists had in 1999 issued the findings of a study that revealed that one in every three girl children in Uganda misses entire school days on end, once their menstrual periods start.

The causes for this decision were always associated with failure by their respective families to provide them with sanitary towels. This would in turn mean no protection from possibly soiling themselves, leading to embarrassment and getting teased by their male counterparts whenever the men-

struation periods started.

A report issued by the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (Unesco) in the last half of 2011 had shown that Uganda has the highest drop-out rate for females in the East African region, with up to half the number of students never completing their primary school education.

Other reasons for this scenario were listed as, among others, pregnancies, early marriages, a fizzling out of interest on the part of the girls, hidden costs at school, and family responsibilities.

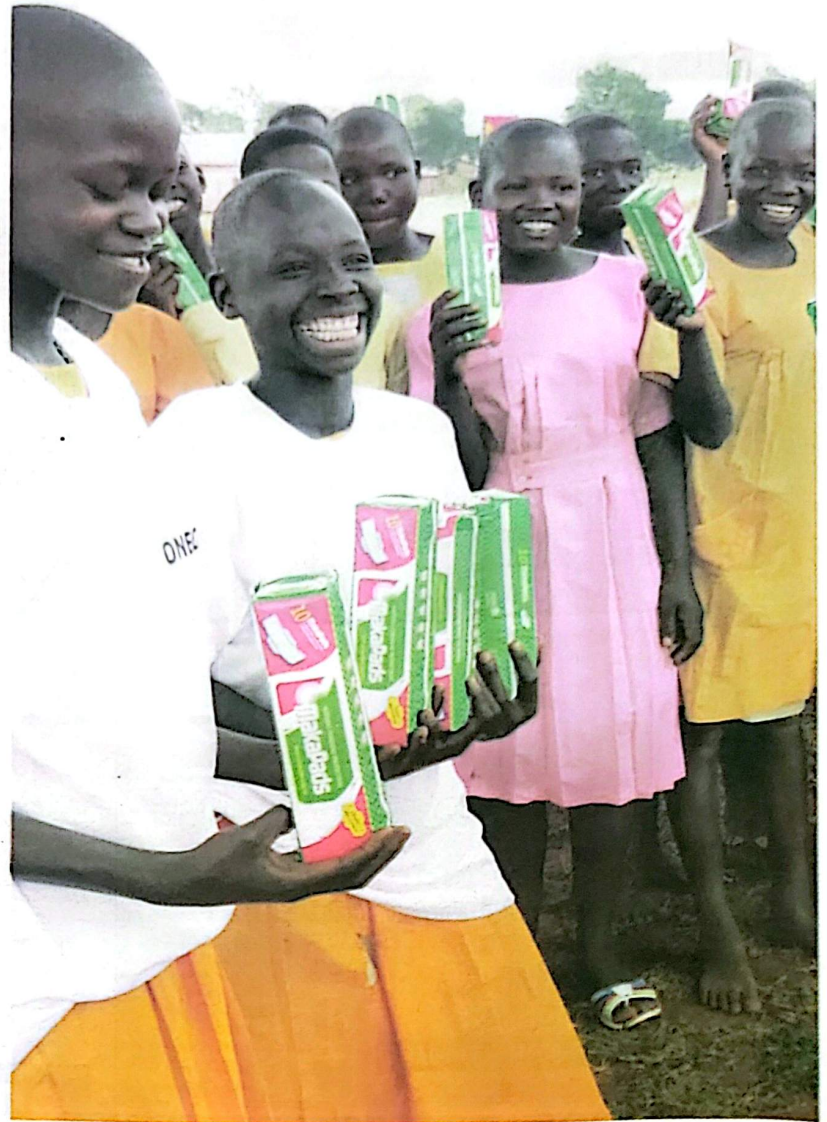
Another report, "Out of School Children Study in Uganda," authored by Ms Christine Mbabazi Mpyangu, Eric Awich Ochen, Eria Olowo Onyango and Yovani Moses Lubaale with funding from the government of Uganda, Stromme Foundation, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Eriks Development Partner and the UN agency for refugees (UNHCR) and published in March 2014, painted an even gloomier picture.

It notes that where as Uganda was one of the first African countries to have introduced universal education at primary level, and gone ahead to recruit many teachers and construct structures under programmes such as the School's Facilitation Grant (SFG), Uganda still has one of the highest percentages of primary school dropouts in the world.

According to their findings, the most prominent cause of dropouts were financial constraints, with 81 per cent of the respondents citing lack of money as the reason their children had dropped out of school.

Besides the reasons advanced by the earlier report issued by Unesco, the four scholars cited early marriages, failure by the families to provide girl children with sanitary pads, the children's involvement in domestic work, long distances between the children's homes and schools, obligations to family businesses and overcrowding, as some of the causes of the high rate of dropouts.

Besides, another pilot study, "Menstruation and the Cycle of Poverty: A Cluster Quasi-Randomised Control Trial of Sanitary Pad and Puberty Education Provision in Uganda", which was conducted by both the University of Oxford and Plan International in Kamuli District in the period between January



Relief. KYEEYA Girls excited by receipt of sanitary pads from One Girl NGO. PHOTOS BY SAM CALEB OPIO

2012 and December 2014, had indicated that addressing the issue of menstrual hygiene would influence attendance and retention of the girl child in school.

Researchers who were involved in the Kamuli study distributed reusable sanitary pads and provided puberty education classes to menstruating girls in eight schools.

A comparison that was carried out between girls from the eight schools that formed the study group and the rest who did not benefit from the study, revealed that many more of the girls who benefited from the pilot study had stayed on in school, while many more of those from

schools that had not participated had dropped out. The study, which involved 1,124 girls, revealed that where as there had been an across the board decline in school dropouts, given the findings from the Kamuli study, Mr Museveni's promise was deemed as a major step towards dealing away with one of the factors behind the high percentage of girls dropping out of school.

However, more than 23 months since the promise was made, and close to one-and-a-half financial years since it was meant to have started, the promised distribution of sanitary towels has not taken off.

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IMPACT

The announcement by Mrs Museveni that the government would after all not be providing the sanitary pads sparked off anger in sections of the populace. Makerere University research fellow, Dr Stella Nyanzi, took the matter more personal, taking to social media where she launched a virulent tirade against Mrs Museveni, her husband and the government.

"What sort of mother allows her daughters to keep away from school because they are too poor to afford padding materials that would adequately protect them from the shame and ridicule that comes by staining their uniforms with menstrual blood?" she wrote.

The researcher, who was to later do time in Police cells and Luzira Prison, soon launched a private initiative aimed at raising at least Shs35million to buy and distribute sanitary pads to girl children.

It was reported that the initiative dubbed the Sanitary Pads for Uganda campaign had on its first day raised at least Shs3.4million. The money is said to have been contributed by at least 27 people across the world.

Dr Nyanzi's initiative which had within one week raised Shs8.3million from slightly more than 60 people was soon joined by four producers of low cost sanitary pads, namely Eco-Pads, Sweet Day, AfriPads and Shuya Pads.

As the public sought to pressure Mr Museveni's government to come good on his promise, more crowd funding initiatives such as the one which was launched by the Democratic Party (DP) President, Mr Nibert Mao came up.

Though well intentioned, the initiatives have not been able to tackle the problem and the situation that pertained prior to November 2015 when Mr Museveni promised to make has continued to prevail, with affected girls losing up to 13 days per term as they are compelled to skip four to five days every month while undergoing menstruation.

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Time. The number of months since President Museveni promised to give sanitary pads to girls. This was in a bid to address the fact that some girls miss school or drop out altogether because of the discomfort that comes with going through menstruation without access to pads.

MONITOR'S POSITION

Public anger and frustration over Mr Museveni's government's failure to keep its promise to provide sanitary pads is understandable. The public has a right to demand that Mr Museveni makes good on his word and Mr Museveni, as the fountain of honour, should do all in his power to ensure that this promise is realised at the soonest. The ideal would be for it to be provided for in the financial year 2018/2019.



Give. Speaker Rebecca Kadaga launches sanitary pads giveaway at Namnaga Primary School.



Make them. EAGY Aids Education Group for Youth mentors senior women teachers and church leaders to train girls on home made sanitary pads at Kamull Youth Center.



Group donations. KYEEYA Pupils of Kyeeya primary School receive sanitary pads from One Girl Bulogo Women's Group.

VOICES



"The fact is that money is there, but the girl child is not politically important at this point in time. What seems to be important is the amendment of Article 102 (b) of the constitution. That is why Shs9 billion is being spent on MPs to consult the public on the constitution amendment bill. If this government had been interested in the future of the girl child that money would have gone to buying pads for the girls."

FORMER LCV CHAIRPERSON OF KAMULL, MS PROSCOVIA SALAAMU MUSUMBA



"I am not saying that Government should provide (the sanitary pads), but it has a role to play. Besides empowering the communities economically so that they are in a position to provide, government has a duty to educate parents on their roles. We should also have puberty and sex education in the schools. Government is currently reluctant to go that way, but it is unavoidable."

MR PATRICK EMUKULE, PROGRAMME UNIT MANAGER, PLAN KAMULI



"It had been budgeted for, but it turned out to be one of the unfunded priorities. We were not happy, but we were told that because of the drought, money was deducted from ministries across the board in order to fund the agriculture sector. We now hope that it will be included in the budget for the next financial year."

MS CONNIE GALIWANGO NAKAYENZE, CHAIRPERSON PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND SPORT



OFFICIAL EXPLANATION

On February 14, a few months to when the provision of the sanitary pads to the girls was meant to begin, the Minister for Education and Sports, Ms Janet Museveni, while appearing before the Parliamentary Committee on Education and Sports, announced that realisation of the said promise would not be happening as soon as had been expected.

"I want you all to understand that we have not got the funding for this in our budget yet," Mrs Museveni told members of the committee.

Her Ministry had been allocated Shs2.8trillion for the financial year 2017/2018, which would not allow for the provision of the pads.

Will the promise ever be fulfilled? If Mrs Museveni's word is anything to go by, chances are it will not be happening soon, as there is no certainty whether funds to oil the venture will be made available to her Ministry sooner than later.

"We [government] were hoping that if we can get the funds, we could do part of it," she said then.

However, it is important that one of or the entire legion of Mr Museveni's advisors and representatives in the districts rise to the occasion and advise the President to desist from taking populist positions, which have resulted into him making promises that he should not be making. Mr Museveni should be advised to focus on addressing issues like poverty alleviation and improvement of household incomes. Most families

are not able to provide their menstruating girls with appropriate sanitary ware because they have no incomes worth writing home about. Providing the girls with the pads is a great idea if it ever happens, but it would amount to providing a man with the fish. Addressing the issue of poverty in the communities would be arming it with the tools to do the fishing. That is the direction that the country needs to take.