

NGO teaches pupils how to make sanitary pads

NEBBI

By Benedict Okethwengu

In an effort to promote menstrual hygiene among girls from poor backgrounds and curb school absenteeism, Women in Action-Uganda (WAU), a non-governmental organisation, has partnered with schools in Nebbi district to teach girls how to make their own sanitary pads.

The girls are being trained in the making of cheap, re-usable pads using locally available materials.

The training started last Friday at Goli Mixed Primary School in Nebbi sub-county.

Statistics

The school is one of those battling high school dropout rates among girls in the district, according to headteacher Alfred Obomba.

The education ministry's statistical abstract report 2013, puts the school completion rate to 32% for female pupils and 61% for male ones.

Trailblazers Mentoring Foundation findings also revealed that out of 13,918 girls who enrolled under the Universal Primary Education (UPE) in Nebbi district in 2008, only 1,547 managed to complete Primary Seven.

The report further indicates that at least 1,512 girls below the age of 18 in the district have given birth during the period from January to October 2014.

Phiona Nyamutoro, the Nebbi district secretary for female youth affairs, said menstruation is one of the leading causes of girls' failure to complete primary school.

"When girls start experiencing their monthly cycles, they tend to keep away from school. Parental support during these trying times is also minimal, as most parents here find modern sanitary pads costly," she said.

In the open market, a packet



Nyamutoro showing pupils of Goli Mixed Primary School in Nebbi district how to make re-usable sanitary pads. Photo By Benedict okethwengu

Experts say menstruation is one of the leading causes of girls' failure to complete primary school

of modern sanitary pads costs between sh2,500 and sh3,000.

"The re-usable sanitary pads will help our girls stay in school," Nyamutoro said.

Joyce Ocida, who has been the senior woman teacher at Goli for the last 24 years, recalls how a girl dropped out of school after she discovered that her dress was stained.

"It was her first experience and her mother could not afford to buy for her pads. It was very embarrassing for her. She never returned to school," she said.

Eunice Atyeronimungu, the headprefect at the school, said: "I was lucky that my aunt bought for me pads, but many of my fellow girls are having it rough. Their parents cannot afford to buy the pads, so they stay out of school to avoid being teased by the boys."

Making of pads

Jane Bisando, a trainer with WAU, explained that the pads are made using cotton, polythene paper and cloth.

The pads also have wings, where the press buttons are fitted and used to hold them to the knickers.

"When full, the pad is removed, soaked and washed with clean water, then hung in the sun to dry.

Zahara Namanda, the executive director of WAU, said when the pad dries, it should be ironed to kill all bacteria.

She said four pieces of re-usable pads can be used for whole year if well handled.

She also said the pads will help break the silence among girls and cut dropout rates.

Emmanuel Orombo, the Nebbi district youth council chairperson, says the re-usable sanitary pads will greatly

improve school attendance among girls.

Globally, at least 500 million girls and women lack adequate facilities for managing their periods, according to a 2015 report by the United Nations Children Emergency Fund and the World Health Organisation.

The report estimated that there were four million girls in primary school today and that if one million of them have started their periods, yet 75% of the country's population lives in the rural areas, where menstruation is never freely talked about, then annually 750 girls might be contemplating dropping out of school.

The report revealed that of the 80 days allocated to a school term, 29.7% of the adolescent girls said they miss a minimum of four days per cycle. This also includes examination days, important class presentations and the introduction of new topics.

UNESCO estimates that one in 10 African adolescent girls in remote areas misses school during her periods and eventually drops out because of menstruation-related issues.