

Keeping girls in school with re-usable pads

The high cost of sanitary pads, coupled with limited access to clean water as well as proper sanitation facilities, especially in schools, is making it difficult for girls to manage their menstruation.

During menstruation, many school girls in poor communities use old clothes that leak and are uncomfortable as well as unhealthy. As a result, these girls face considerable physical and social challenges during menstruation, resulting in missing school and other important economic activities. Some end up dropping out of school all together.

According to Unicef, a girl will miss up to eight days in a term during menstruation, which translates to 11% of total learning days in a year.

A recent study by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) revealed that Uganda has the highest dropout rate in East Africa with up to 75% of the pupils dropping out, most of whom are

After his sister dropped out of school due to lack of sanitary pads, Sadat Nduhira, realised there was need to provide re-usable pads for girls who cannot afford disposable ones, writes **Geoffrey Mutegeki**

girls. While there are multiple factors responsible for this, one key reason is the poor management of the monthly menstruation cycle.

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

Research shows that many girls in Karamoja region miss four to five days of their school time every month

during their monthly periods and this due to lack of sanitary pads.

In a 2005 report on hygiene and sanitation in schools, the World Bank conducted findings on the impact of poor menstrual management on girls. The Bank report noted that: "If a girl misses four days of school every four weeks due to menstrual periods, she will miss 10% to 20% of her school days." The report also highlighted that sanitary pads are the only saviour in such situations. However, the pads

Solution

cost over sh3,000 a packet despite the waiver of value added tax on imported ones. However, a 26-year-old man in Kipamba zone, Makindye division, in Kampala, has joined the effort of several others countrywide to turn the course of events. He is helping young girls to produce reusable sanitary pads.

Sadat Nduhira, an artist is

collaborating with Parent's Care Primary School in Makindye, Kampala produce pads. The pupils produce reusable sanitary pads for their own use and distribute others in the slums in Makindye.

"I was inspired by my sister who dropped out of school because she could not afford sanitary pads. She would always miss going to school almost every month and gradually gave up on education. She lost interest in studies and got married," Nduhira recalls.

With such an experience, Nduhira decided to help several other girls in his community to get re-usable sanitary pads. He says this has helped keep many girls in school.

So far, 400 girls have benefited from this project by getting reusable sanitary pads. But the target is for 1,000 girls to benefit from the project by the close of this year.

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Nduhira SAVES city girls from

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"Sanitary pads are expensive and many girls cannot afford them. The challenge is that many people do not see it," Nduhira says.

The Poverty Status Report (PSR) 2014 indicates that 19.7% of Ugandans live below the poverty line meaning you can hardly spend a dollar a day. The fact that they cannot afford sh3,600, which is equivalent to a dollar, explains why most girls cannot spend on sanitary pads every month.

"In some homes, it is hard to get sh1,000 on any given day. How then do you expect us to afford pads?" laments Anita Asimwe, who lives in Makindye, a city suburb.

Way out

Nduhira says he is training girls how to make reusable sanitary pads for the sustainability of the project.

"Distributing these sanitary pads would have not been sustainable but if these girls know how to make them, it will have a greater impact," he says. Twaha Mubiri, the director of Parent's Care Primary School, says the project is also aimed at helping young girls acquire skills in making the pads, which can be an income-generating activity.

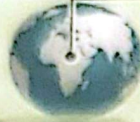
So far, the pupils have produced over 500 pads, which have been distributed to pupils of Parent's Care Primary School. They also distribute the pads to girls and families in the slums of Kapamba, and Kasato zones in Makindye.

According Sarah Nakabira, the school's headteacher, the project has given an opportunity to girls who cannot afford disposable pads to have an alternative. "They now have the reusable pads, which they can wash and use when the periods come. It is just a matter of keeping them clean," she says.

Nakabira says many young girls, whether in school or not, can hardly afford sanitary pads.

To ensure success of the project, Nduhira bought sewing machines and materials which he gave to the school to make the pads.

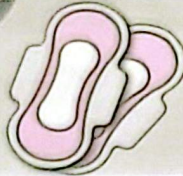
How menstruation affects girls' education



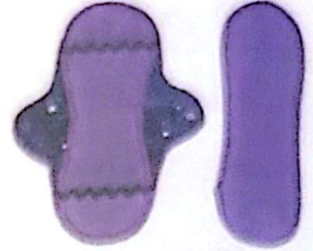
One in 10 African adolescent girls in rural areas misses school during menstruation and later drops out

Uganda has the highest rate of dropouts in East Africa at 75%, most of whom are girls. Study by UNESCO

A girl will miss up to 8 days a term during menstruation, which translates to 11% of total learning days in a year. UNICEF



Disposable pads cost more than sh3,000 for a pack of eight for a month



MAINTENANCE

Hygiene is key

Diana Byarugaba, a midwife at Jinja Hospital, says hygiene is vital for one to use washable sanitary pads.

She notes that pads should be washed with clean water and soap, and sun-dried to kill all the bacteria that might cause infections. Byarugaba says where possible, the re-usable sanitary pads can be ironed.

"If you are using re-usable pads, it is important that you regularly wash them with soap and water. Moist pads carry germs that lead to infections," she says.

Byarugaba says pads should be kept in a cool dry.

Unhygienic menstrual practices can cause reproductive tract infections, which can cause infertility in the long-term.

The pads are made using cotton wool and cotton fabrics, pressers or buttons.

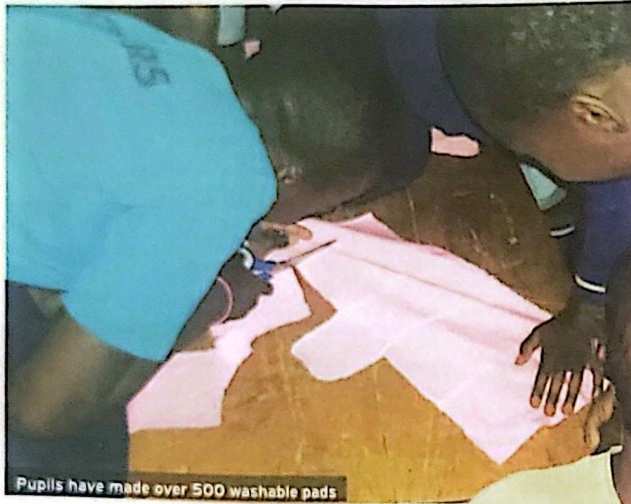
"Every Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings, the pupils learn how to make these pads. We trained them for one month. Now they are set to go," Nduhira says.

Although the pupils at Parent's Care Primary School are receiving the pads for free, on the open market a packet of three pieces of reusable pads costs between sh4,000 and sh6,000. The beauty with it is that you only need to buy three pieces which can serve a period of up to two years if they are well-maintained.

Intervention

The Government has a deliberate strategy to keep girls in school by providing free sanitary pads to pupils. This promise was made by President Yoweri Museveni during campaigns early last year, but it is yet to be fulfilled.

However, some people



Pupils have made over 500 washable pads

believe that the Government is not doing enough to help girls in schools access sanitary pads. There is need to scale up production of reusable pads, or at least make them free.

Betty Nabalimi, a parent in Makindye, says girlchild education can be transformed through the promotion of reusable sanitary pads.



Nduhira says 400 girls have benefitted from this project



2017 INTAKE

Little Muheji Kindergarten & Primary School

Interviews for Baby class to Primary six on Saturday 14th January, 2017 at School main campus, No vacancy for P.7. Time: 8:30am to 12:00PM. Come with a copy of immunisation card, a birth certificate.

Other Services: Transport, Restricted Boarding facilities, Day Care services.

Email: Info@littlemuhejishool.org, Tel: 0414-660-396

sanitary PADS woes



Pupils learning how to make reusable pads. Photos by Geoffrey Mutegeki and Andrew Masinde

WHAT THEY SAY ABOUT WASHABLE PADS



Bridget Karungi, St. Mary's Primary School, Kaihura
I have three pieces, which help me go through all my three days of my menstrual cycle. I use one per day. However, having one piece makes it uncomfortable, especially during the rainy season when the pads do not dry well.



Joan Adlkini, St. Mary's Primary School, Kaihura
I started using reusable pads when I was in Primary Six. You need a lot of water and at the same time, there is that attention you get from people every time you are drying them in the sun. If the re-usable pads are well-made, they never leak and serve the purpose.



Janat Nakakawa, parent
Re-usable pads are cheaper than disposable ones. They are always at hand even when you do not have money. Once you keep them clean and safe, you are sure your child will go to school.



Hasfa Nakimuli, parent
The project is helping girls keep in school and enabling them get cheap sanitary pads while at the same time giving them life skills. In our zone, many girls have been struggling to get the pads.



Fortunate Komugisha, student
We distributed some reusable pads to our friends. I am already using them and I will not ask my aunt to buy me sanitary pads. She can use the money to buy other basics.

400

The number of pads that girls have got from the project

500

The number of washable pads that pupils have, which have been distributed to pupils of Parent's Care Primary School.

sh3,000

The price of disposable sanitary pads, which girls, especially in rural areas, cannot afford