

'Pad Man': A movie driven by menstrual stigma

By Samuel Sanya
and Steven Odeke

It is not often that an Indian Bollywood movie tackles a Ugandan story, but *Pad Man*, the most recent blockbuster which premiered in Uganda on Saturday at the Hub, Oasis Mall, Kampala, manages just that.

Pad Man is based on the real life character Arunachalam Muruganantham who is obsessed with ensuring that all women in India have access to inexpensive, but world class sanitary towels. The movie features Bollywood heavy weights Akshay Kumar as the *Pad Man*, Radhika Apte, and Sonam Kapoor, who present Muruganantham's journey from a school drop-out to a social entrepreneur.

Pad Man is the first feature film that addresses the challenges of menstruation. The movie's plot, which is based on the life in Madhya Pradesh, a large state in central India, captures Muruganantham's struggles with social norms that make it taboo for a man to discuss a female issue.

Despite the risk of alienation from his family and friends and banishment from his village, the *Pad Man* persists on his quest to replace the dirty sanitary cloth. Driven by the need to protect his wife from infection, he presses on, overcoming challenges as they come along.

As a result his wife is taken from

Kenya Airways has enjoyed massive profits on that route, as the old Uganda Airlines fooled around until it died. Kenya Airways has had its

help the Uganda Airlines dream with KQ already established on the New York route. *Kweggamba!* Whoever is pushing for the late re-establishment of Uganda Airlines is doing what they call remembering

government will not force its departments to buy expensive QJ tickets to support a loss maker. Let us hope Uganda Airlines is only re-established by risk-taking investors and not the Government.

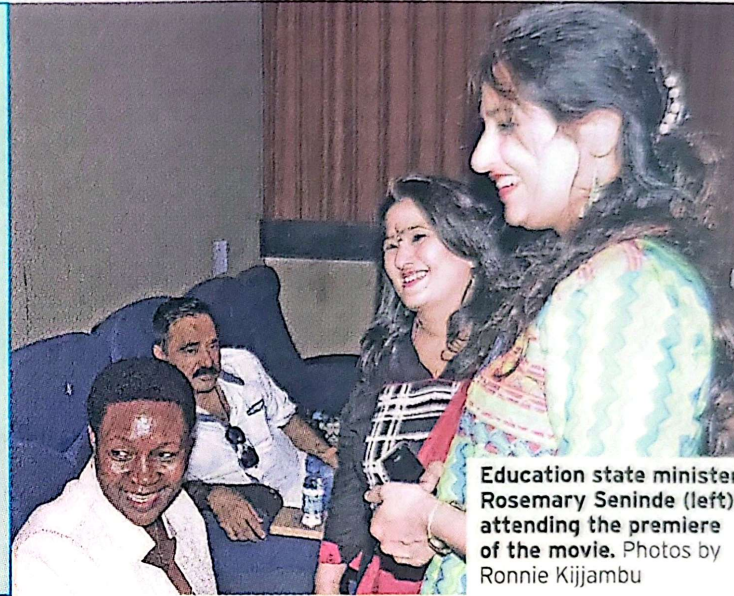
What others say

Ravi Shanker, Indian High Commissioner to Uganda

This is a movie that is as relevant to India as it is to Uganda. India and Uganda are similar in many ways; we can adapt an Indian solution to Uganda.

Gertrude Emojong, communications officer, So Sure Reusable pads

I liked the movie so much. It is moving to see a man who is very concerned with helping poor women access sanitary napkins.



Education state minister Rosemary Seninde (left) attending the premiere of the movie. Photos by Ronnie Kijjambu

seeking knowledge on how to make pads.

As a result, he befriends and winds up as a housekeeper for a university professor in a bid to learn the tricks of making pads.

As fate would have it, a big name musical act stumbles into his path and offers him the opportunity to show case his invention. He finally makes the big time when, in 2006, his innovation wins an award from the then President Pratibha Patil. His life changes forever.

As opposed to selling his secret to a big name company and making top dollar, the *Pad Man* chooses to trek village by village, selling



Students who attended the premiere receiving sanitary towels from the distributors of So Sure pads

inexpensive sanitary napkins for their livelihood.

Today, the machines run in 4,800

around the world. The *Pad Man* story has also appeared in several foreign language publications – Hebrew being one of them.