

RUMPS FOR RURAL GIRLS

PLAY-BASED EDUCATIONAL MODEL



A photograph showing the hands and arms of several children, likely of African descent, working together on a project. They are gathered around a table, and one child is using a red marker to draw on a white sheet of paper. There are other papers and materials on the table, including a pink one with some text. The children are wearing casual clothing, such as a blue and white checkered shirt and a pink shirt.

PROGRAM SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Educating women and girls is vital for the world to achieve higher levels of economic growth and development. However, most girls and women are subjected to different forms of gender-based violence like; period stigma and poverty, sexual and physical abuse, early child marriages and pregnancies, denial to their educational right due to cultural practices, FGM, among others which affect their school enrolment, retention and completion, further widening the educational inequality gap between girls and boys.

Because, we believe that education provides an opportunity to amplify one's voice in society and fulfil one's potential, we sought to engage in impact programs that create safe environments for young girls to keep and complete school excellently starting with Re-Usable Menstrual Pads (RUMPs) for Rural girls' program.

With menstruation being one of the biggest factors that affects girls especially rural girls school attendance retention and completion rate, we started the RUMPs for Rural Girls program that aims to support rural girls and child mothers with menstrual materials and value-based children's books as well as proper menstruation hygiene information in an effort to keep them in school. In 2020, under My Voice Podcast, this program served over 100 rural girls in a school called Ongai Primary School in Alero sub-county, Nwoya district.



On the 26th and 27th of May 2022, a team of 6 volunteers delivered menstrual hygiene materials and value-based educational books, conducted play sessions and trainings on re-usable menstrual pad making, and menstrual hygiene management to the pupils, child-mothers and school drop-outs in four communities of Nwoya district at four host schools namely; Coorom P7 Primary School in Koch Goma Sub-county, Koch Iii Primary School in Koch Iii Sub-county, Nwoya P7 Primary School in Lungulu Sub-County and Purongo Hill P7 Primary School in Purongo Town Council.



BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Menstruation is a natural and biological process that occurs in every woman in their reproductive ages and about 1.8 billion people menstruate globally. However, due to period poverty and stigma especially in rural settings, many girls and women perceive it as a limitation and burden. Nwoya District is one of the many communities that is affected by period poverty and stigma.

Dwona Initiative mapped out the communities and schools which had a high school-girl class absenteeism rate because of menstruation. In this case, four communities and schools were selected namely; Coorom P7 Primary School in Koch Goma Sub-county, Koch Iii Primary School in Koch Iii Sub-county, Nwoya P7 Primary School in Lungulu Sub-County and Purongo Hill P7 Primary School in Purongo Town Council. We found that over 50% of rural girls in the four schools struggle to access period products because of the inability to afford them and the stigma around the topic.

This has caused majority of these young girls to miss school and even for some, to completely drop out. In addition for those that endeavour to come to school use old and unhygienic cloths during menstruation which not only has adverse effects on their health but also their class attendance as well as their performance.

ABOUT DWONA

Dwona is a nonprofit organisation that is dedicated to amplifying girls and women's voices through education, entrepreneurship and safe places with an effort to eradicate gender based violence, gender inequality and poverty.

We envision a world where girls and women's voices are amplified and heard in all spheres of socio-economic development and thrive through education, entrepreneurship and safe places.





CONTEXT

The RUMPs for Rural Girls Program seeks to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals 4; Quality Education, 5; Gender Equality, and 3; Good Health and wellbeing. This program focuses on rural school going girls and child-mothers with a secondary target group of school going boys and drop-outs from rural communities across Uganda with a high school drop out rate of the girl child.

OVERALL OBJECTIVE

The overall objective of this program is to amplify the voices of girls at risk of forms of violence and abuse and defend their rights to health, education and the opportunity to fulfil their potential.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- To contribute to government's efforts of improving girl child school enrolment and retention by championing Menstrual Hygiene Management awareness for rural girls in rural communities.
- To distribute menstrual materials to rural girls in four communities of Nwoya district at four host schools namely; Coorom P7 Primary School in Koch Goma Sub-county, Koch Iii Primary School in Koch Iii Sub-county, Nwoya P7 Primary School in Lungulu Sub-County and Purongo Hill P7 Primary School in Purongo Town Council.
- To conduct reusable sanitary pad making sessions and play sessions on menstrual hygiene and its importance.
- To highlight the importance of the culture of reading and education in their lives.



METHODOLOGY

Methodology entails the selection of the target schools and communities, key informative interviews, advocacy campaigns and fundraising as highlighted below;

Selection of the target schools and communities;

- Regional context – Northern Uganda, which is a war ravaged area having undergone and experienced a long period of insurgency.
- The education sector indicators for primary going children in Nwoya district which showed poor performance in the Primary Leaving Examinations for the past 5 years and a sky rocketing dropout rate of the girl child.
- High class absenteeism rates of the girl child in the four primary schools because of period poverty and stigma.
- High rates of child-mothers and school girl drop outs in the four communities.



Key Informative interviews;

Interviews were done by the senior women who are in-charge of the well-being of the girl children in the four schools namely; Coorom P7 Primary school in Koch Goma Sub-county, Koch Iii Primary School in Koch Iii Sub-county, Nwoya P7 Primary School in Lungulu Sub-County and Purongo Hill P7 Primary School in Purongo Town Council.

The senior women were able to ably share the details about the situation of the girls in the schools, the number of girls who miss school because of period poverty and stigma and number of child-mothers from the specific schools and communities.



Advocacy campaign;

Dwona Initiative began the RUMPs for rural girls advocacy campaign towards Menstrual Hygiene Management awareness for rural girls and child mothers in Northern Uganda specifically in four communities; Koch Goma Sub-county, Koch Ili Sub-county, Lungulu Sub-County and Purongo Town Council.

Through the organisation's social media pages, volunteers and friends were able to support young rural girls and child mothers through fundraising for menstrual materials.

The menstrual materials included; 335 bars of soap, 1,675 menstrual liners, 670 menstrual shields, 335 African bags, and 335 menstrual calendars for over 335 girls. A total of UGX 11,960,000 was raised both in-kind and in cash. Through a supportive collaboration, The Thinking Watermill Society and Agorà Pharma made a generous donation towards menstrual products for the rural girls and child-mothers. enjuba donated in-kind UGX 2,500,000 in form of value-based educational children's (Sharon's song and Armani the boda boda rider) books that teach that girls' dreams and choices are valid. Pheona Nakishero, an African children's author, donated in-kind UGX 2,400,000 in form of children's storybooks. Support was also received from Alpha Girl Care Uganda and My African Womanhood.



EVENTS OF THE DAY

Arrival and introductions;

On the 26th of May, 2022, at exactly 8am, a vibrant team of 6 was at their first school, Coorom P7 Primary School in the community of Koch Goma. We received a warm welcome to the school from the Head teacher, Ms. Jannie Grace Okulu, the deputy head teacher and the senior woman teacher. At that moment, we could see the curious little ones peeping through their classroom windows to see if their long awaited visitors had arrived yet. As soon as they confirmed it was us, their beautiful faces quickly lit up with huge smiles. They excitedly dashed out of their class, carrying desks and some seats under a big tree shed where we were to have the program from. All the pupils from Primary 4 to Primary 7 class converged together. With the help from *Save the Children's* program to engage child-mothers and school drop-out children, 20 child-mothers and 3 male school drop-out males joined us.

We kicked off the program with introductions from the school leadership team, school management committee and the Dwona team. We then asked the children to form small groups where they could work as a team during the play sessions.

Menstrual health play sessions;



In our first play session, visual aids, puzzles, manilla cards and a writing marker were given to each team. The first play session they were to engage in was about the terms around the menstruation and the cycle. One could easily see the children's excitement as they put together the puzzle pieces around the menstrual cycle and the female reproductive system.



In this session, the children wrote down each menstrual term in acholi. Writing these words in their native language was aimed at enabling an easy and more familiar understanding of the concept.



After the introductory play session, we took a deep dive into the menstrual cycle phases. We did this through a game called "Race, Period," where children construct a menstrual bracelet with coloured balloons in teams. All the pupils picked a team they supported and cheered on and you could hear some say; "I want to join" as the game went on.



After the game, we went into the last play session which consisted of a game called, "Bloody Bingo." The pupils could not believe learning about menstruation would be this fun because of the stigma around the topic of menstruation.

Reusable menstrual pads making session;

In this session, we taught all the pupils, school drops-outs and child-mothers how to make reusable sanitary pads and in each team, the boys took the lead. We emphasised this to ensure that boys become supporters and allies to their fellow girl pupils around issues of menstruation so that it is not an issue that causes them to miss school.

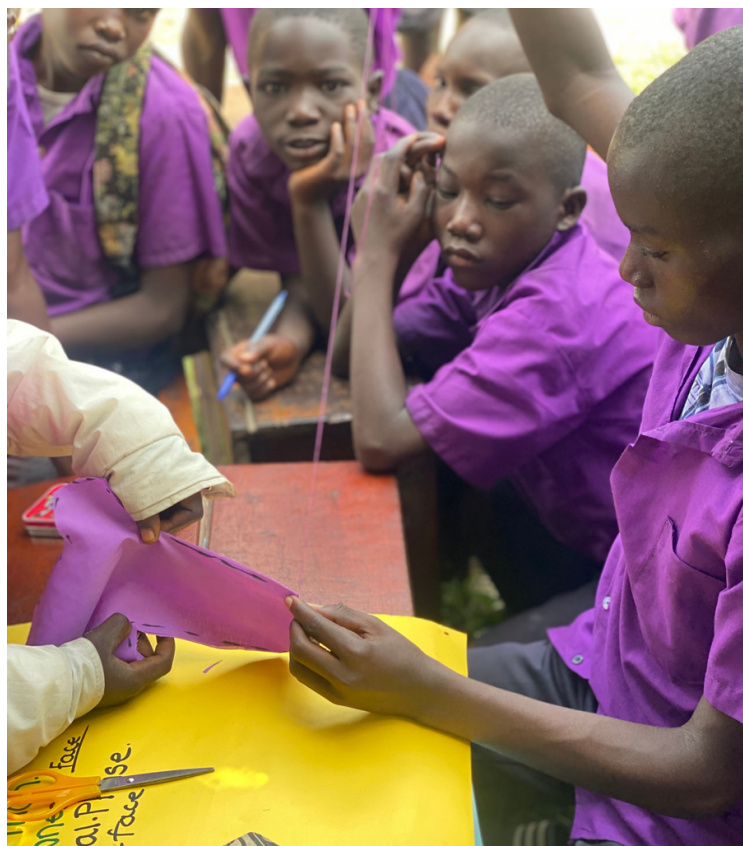
In Coorom P7 primary school, a total of 131 rural school girls from P4 - P7, 88 rural school boys, 19 child-mothers and 4 boy child school drop-outs were trained on how to make reusable sanitary pads.

In Koch Iii primary school, a total of 80 rural school girls from P4 - P7, 110 rural school boys were trained in the reusable menstrual pads session.

In Nwoya P7 primary school, a total of 42 rural school girls inclusive of 6 child mothers from P4-P7, 3 child-mothers from the community, 4 female parents and 27 school boys were trained.

In Purongo Hill P7 primary school, 225 rural school girls inclusive of from P4-P7 and 217 rural school boys were trained.

Our total reach was 965 rural girls, child-mothers, boys and parents. A total of 38 child-mothers was reached during the program.



Reading sessions;



We conducted a read aloud session with the pupils as we read the book titles of *Amani, the boda boda rider* and *Sharon's song* which teach young girls a “I can do spirit” and that their dreams are valid.



In this session, young girls shared their future hopes and dreams to the fellow peers. As the girls mentioned their desired career paths, the team noticed most of the girls want to take on STEM career paths like becoming a nurse, doctor, accountant, pilot among others. We then encouraged them that they are so many women waiting for them in those careers and they should not become discouraged along the way.



Interaction with the girls, dissemination of period materials and training on menstrual hygiene management session;

In this session, we distributed fempacks containing 2 menstrual shields, 5 menstrual liners, a bar of soap, a menstrual calendar, a ziplock bag and an african bag. This session was an interactive one as girls shared their first period experiences and what information they knew about reusable menstrual pads. We then trained the girls on how to use the reusable menstrual pads and the best hygienic practices during their period. All menstruating girls and the child-mothers present at the four schools received a fempack and a storybook to keep them in school for a period of 3 years without a worry of missing school because of the inability to afford period products.

In total, 335 rural girls and child-mothers received period products.



KEY FINDINGS

From events and interactions that transpired from the RUMPs for Rural Girls Program, the following are the key findings;

Positive response to the RUMPs for Rural Girls' Program by the four communities.

All four communities were receptive of the RUMPs for Rural Girls' program. In attendance were all the schools' leadership members, teachers, school management committee members and parents of the children.

Distribution of menstrual materials as an incentive for girl child education

All the senior women in the four schools noted an increase in class attendance of the girls after the program. In the month of June, the senior women reported that no girl missed class because of menstruation.

Boy child and the topic of menstruation

In a survey conducted with a random sampling of 20 boys, we found out that 100% of the boys had never had a discussion or engaged in the topic of menstruation.

Effects of period poverty and stigma in the four communities

In Purongo Hill P7 primary school, the senior woman; Ms. Grace Adong noted that over 100 girls from P.4 - P.7 miss school a term because of the inability to afford period products and has heavily contributed to their poor performance. The other factors include; living with care givers who don't provide for them, child-headed families and failure to pay school fees.

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In Nwoya P7 primary school, the senior woman; Ms. Linda Proscovia Amony noted that the girls' performance is not good with the best girl in primary seven having a third grade. She attributed the bad performance to the low class attendance which is majorly caused by menstruation and followed by children being family heads and hence, skip school to work so as to survive and pay their fees.

In Koch Lii Primary School, the senior woman; Judith Ageno noted that over 40 girls from P.4 - P.7 miss class a month because of the inability to afford period products.

In Coorom P7 Primary School, the senior woman noted that over 5 girls from P4 - P7 a week miss school because of the inability to afford period products.

In a baseline survey conducted in all the 4 schools by random sampling, we found a high prevalence of period stigma amongst the girls. 98% of the girls find the topic of menstruation very uncomfortable and do not like to talk about it.

Through a random sample of 20, we found that 100% of girls do not come to school when they do not have period products to hold their menstrual period.

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COVID19 effects on the girl -child

In the four communities, we were able to reach 38 child mothers.

Most of these child-mothers mentioned that majority of them struggle to attend school , look for work and also, look after their child. With that, buying sanitary pads can not be a priority for them. This has led to some of them getting infections from the unhygienic cloths used during their periods.



RECOMMENDATIONS

At school level;

- Boys should be involved during menstrual hygiene sessions so as to be supporters and allies to their fellow girl pupils.
- Information on menstrual hygiene management should be given out to school going girls as early as primary 3. Schools should create Menstrual hygiene Management Clubs with a focus on disseminating menstrual hygiene information to children in school and in the communities.
- A percentage of the school budget should be dedicated to providing emergency re-usable sanitary pads rather disposable sanitary sanitary pads.

At Community level;

- A collective centre at the community level for skilling child mothers and child-heads so that they can ably provide for their families and advance their education decently.

At national level;

- Favourable policies to support child-mothers' school retention and completion rates.
- Dissemination of free menstrual products to schools and proper menstrual hygiene information.

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