Sanitary pads

The main problems faced by school girls is sanitary pads, girls stay at home rather than attending school when menstruating, unhygienic ways to dry menstrual materials, inadequate waste disposal facilities, lack of privacy for changing menstrual materials, limited education on facts of menstruation, limited counselling and guidance, low self-esteem and un supportive attitudes of some men.

About 90% of women and girls in rural areas cannot afford sanitary pads. Evidence suggests that the period around puberty is one in which many girls drop out of school or are absent from school for significant periods of time. This means that over 1000 girls miss 6 weeks of school every year and women miss valuable work hours in our community.

Limited access to safe, affordable, convenient and culturally appropriate methods for dealing with menstruation has far reaching implications for rights and physical, social and mental wellbeing of many adolescent girls, it has been shown to restrict access to education. Faced with complete lack of sanitary pads, this can only mean that the girls miss school for considerable period of time and this has negative impact on the quality of learning they receive, their overall academic performance, and their retention and transition through the education system. Meanwhile UNESCO estimates that one in 10 African adolescent girls miss school during menses and eventually drop out because of menstruation related issues.

Menstruation is treated with silence and as a taboo topic with menstrual blood viewed as unclean and harmful, which limits women’s and adolescent girls’ access to relevant and important information about their bodies.

In schools there is usually a lack of physiological education, this is often attributed to predominantly male science teachers feeling uncomfortable about teaching such a subject, especially if they have not received formal training in how to do so. At home, advice given by traditional aunts and grandmothers is often insufficient, older women considered as wise are also often illiterate or un educated and may reinforce myths that are biologically incorrect.

The inaccessibility of menstrual products results in embarrassment, anxiety and shame when girls and women stain their clothes which is stigmatizing. When girls start missing school they are far more likely to be exposed to other risks such as early pregnancy and marriage, HIV/AIDS. Increasing girls completion of education cycle is a critical component of efforts to build their wider empowerment and in particular for ensuring that they are more able to be involved in decision making over all aspects of their lives including over their reproductive and sexual health rights. Inaccessibility of menstrual products compromises the effective uptake of family planning services, this is occasioned by the fact that girls who cannot afford the disposable sanitary towels more often are more at risk of manipulation by men who promise to provide them with the money to buy the pads.

Description of the solution

Making reusable pads has radically proved to create a world where women and girls can step boldly into the promise of their future.

Goal: to empower the vulnerable girls and women through provision of reusable pads and capacity building on menstrual hygiene management and reproductive health for improved performance and self-esteem.

This will be done through distribution of reusable sanitary pads as well as ensuring provision of menstrual hygiene management education and facilities to girls in primary schools.