



## **#EndPeriodPoverty for 250 Girls in Rural Zimbabwe**



**May 2020**

## **Background to Talia Women's Network**

Talia Women's Network believes in the empowerment of young women, girls and communities in situations of poverty, illiteracy, disease and social injustice bringing economic and social opportunities for young women, girls and youth and exists to facilitate the development of large-scale, positive change through economic and social programs that enable them to realize their potential. Talia is building resilient young women, girls and youth who actively participate in creating peaceful, inclusive and sustainable communities.

We envision **communities where young women, girls and youth lead confident, morally astute, healthy and economically empowered lives**. Our mission is **to equip young women, girls and youth with life skills to harness economic and social opportunities, inspiring change and bringing transformation to their lives and their communities**.

Talia is a Christian-based, apolitical organisation which upholds **Compassion, Dignity, Effectiveness, Innovation and Integrity** as core values governing the Trust and all its activities.

Talia Women's Network achieves its mission through the implementation of economic empowerment initiatives for women, girls and youth under the following key pillars:

1. Education and Leadership Development
2. Economic Empowerment and Livelihoods
3. Reproductive Health and Rights

## **What is the Problem?**

According to the 2017 Inter-Censal Demographic Survey 2017 (ZimStats 2017), 52% of the population of Zimbabwe is women. Despite efforts to advance women's rights, women and girls still face extraordinary barriers because of something as natural as menstruation. The lack of proper sanitation facilities and affordable hygiene products for use by adolescent girls and women at home, school or work, affects their health; their potential to access education, employment; overall safety, productivity and quality of life. According to UNICEF, one in every ten school girls in Africa miss class or drop out of school completely because of sanitary towels.

There is a low educational attainment among women in communities. Lack of menstrual hygiene products is one major reason why girls drop out. There are several taboos and cultural factors that perpetuate a silence on menstrual issues and this inflicts indignity to the girls as they are forced to cope with period stigma in silence. As the girls drop out of school, they are more prone to be victims of sexual abuse, early marriages and unwanted pregnancies. According to UNICEF, 15 million girls worldwide are married before 18 years every year. World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that 1 million girls, less than 15 years give birth every year.

In addition, there is stigmatization of women who seek help on sexual health issues from community health facilities such as treatment of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) and HIV/AIDS testing. There are unreported sexual abuse cases, unwanted pregnancies and STI infections, which could be avoided. There is high activity of illegal gold miners in rural Bindura (known locally as makorokoza) and many girls fall victim to their sexual advances. There is lack of access to sexual reproductive health and rights information and a very low uptake of contraceptives – particularly from sexually active adolescents.

### **How will the Project Solve the Problem?**

Talia Women's Network provides a multi-sectoral approach to menstrual health management and promotes positive attitudes that are critical for transformative change to be realised. There are negative effects of poor menstrual experiences on physical health, wellbeing, education and their participation in daily life. Provision of menstrual products alone cannot be the solution to menstrual difficulties – there is need to embrace complexity in understanding menstrual experiences. There is a broad range of factors that influence girls' experiences – these include comfort, availability of menstrual products, knowledge of menstruation, access to social support structures and cultural taboos placed on the girls.

The project seeks to allow girls to 'bleed without fear' through increased access to menstrual hygiene products. Talia Women's Network will host workshops on Menstrual Health and Hygiene and distribute dignity packs for the girls to use. The dignity packs contain reusable sanitary pads, underwear and basic hygiene products such as soap, bath towel, toothbrush, toothpaste and Vaseline. Talia seeks to build on the sustainability of the component as well as turn it into an income-generating venture. Talia will set up a group of willing women to receive training on producing reusable sanitary pads. These will be sold to the local community and beyond as well as supplied for free to the girls at the local schools to keep them in school. Talia will acquire, through this project, the sewing machines and materials required to teach the women on production of reusable sanitary pads. This model has already been implemented in other districts through funding from other partners and has already been proved a success.

The project will also facilitate community dialogue and conversations with community stakeholders to create a platform for discussion on issues affecting women's health and wellness. As there is increased dialogue on issues such as access to menstrual health products, importance of water and sanitation for menstruating girls, early childhood marriages, gender based violence – in the communities, the girls will be encouraged to adopt a health seeking culture. This will be achieved through establishment of a women-friendly health centre to encourage health-seeking behaviours for HIV testing, STI treatment and access to contraceptives without fear of stigmatisation. There are a lot of unmarried young people engaging in sex but are ashamed to seek for contraceptives and condoms in their communities. Training and capacity building will be given to the health caregivers for them to maintain health information confidential; to encourage them not to be judgemental even if they know the patients; and to be able to offer counselling to victims of sexual abuse.

## **Potential Long-Term Impact**

Talia Women's Network intends to see substantial changes in the lives of the girls participating in the project, which will cascade to their families and the community. The long-term impact of the project is increased quality and enjoyment of life among the participants. The World Bank states that by increasing the share of girls and women with secondary education by 1% per capita, income growth is boosted by 0.3%. Increasing the access to menstrual health services and sexual reproductive rights and health – this improves the chances of getting more girls to acquire an education. According to UNICEF, educating girls yields spectacular social benefits for the current generation and those to come. An educated girl tends to marry later and have healthier children. The children she does have will be more likely to survive; they will be better nourished and better educated. She will be more productive at home and better paid in the workplace. She will be better able to protect herself against HIV/AIDS and to assume a more active role in social, economic and political decision-making throughout her life.

The project will create community safety nets that protect vulnerable girls from abuse, gender based violence, early childhood marriages, unwanted pregnancies and teen pregnancies. There will be improved access to healthcare and services such as information on sexual reproductive health and rights and access to contraceptives.

In addition, Talia Women's Network intends for the project to stimulate national dialogue and influence government policies to include menstrual health management. The culture that makes it safe to talk openly about reproductive health management will be cultivated. Taboos surrounding menstruation will be eradicated.