

RAVENS FOUNDATION (RAF)

EMPOWER 650 UGANDAN GIRLS TO CREATE REUSABLE MENSTRUAL PADS

REUSABLE SANITARY NAPKIN

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QUARTER TWO REPORT(APRIL-JUNE 2021

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The average adolescent girl will menstruate for about 3,000 days in her lifetime. Unfortunately majority of these girls and women have limited options for affordable menstrual materials. And yet poor menstrual hygiene can pose physical health risks such as reproductive and urinary tract infections. Providing access to safer low-cost menstrual materials could reduce urogenital diseases. Periods don't stop for pandemics! The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has exacerbated persisting challenges related to menstruation. Financial stress from the pandemic's economic impact causes families to prioritize other basic needs, except menstrual materials. Therefore, it is more necessary now than ever before that women and girls especially those living in extreme poverty, should be equipped with skills in making reusable menstrual pads.

INTRODUCTION

RAVENS FOUNDATION (RAF), is an indigenous non-government organization founded in 2018, with the aim of contributing to the process of transformational development in the lives of adolescent girls, teenage mothers, other vulnerable women and entire communities.

VISION: Fanning the Wisdom of Motherhood and Nobility of Womanhood.

MISSION: RAVENS FOUNDATION (RAF) exists to develop and impact women especially young mothers with the love of Christ through sharing the word of God, counseling, life skills training and social services provision, hence enabling them to become women of noble character who continually build their homes.

OBJECTIVES:

- a) To Increase opportunities for women and girls to access education and acquire skills for self-sustainability and economic growth.
- b) To provide an avenue where vulnerable women and girls can be equipped with life skills that will boost their self-esteem and self-worth as well as enabling them to make better life choices.
- c) To empower women with positive parenting skills that enables them to provide a loving and supportive home environment for their children.
- d) To improve Health through promotion of proper sanitation and hygiene practices, sexual and reproductive health education.

BACKGROUND

Every day more than **800 million people** between ages 15 and 49 are menstruating. And yet, in some cultures, monthly menstruation is a stigmatized issue shrouded in silence, secrecy and shame. It's a topic that can be embarrassing to talk about, and some communities around the globe have developed harmful myths and beliefs regarding it. A lack of information about menstruation leads to damaging misconceptions and discrimination, and can cause girls to miss out on normal childhood experiences and activities. Stigma, taboos and myths prevent adolescent girls from the opportunity to learn about menstruation and develop healthy habits.

The average adolescent girl will menstruate for about **3,000 days in her lifetime**. Unfortunately majority of these girls, especially those living in extreme poverty lack access to a restroom, people to talk to who understand, and clean materials to use in managing their periods; a phenomenon often called period poverty. Many girls and women have limited options for affordable menstrual materials. Poor menstrual hygiene can pose physical health risks and has been linked to reproductive and urinary tract infections. Providing access to safer low-cost menstrual materials could reduce urogenital diseases.

Periods don't stop for pandemics! The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic highlights, or even exacerbates, persisting challenges related to menstruation. Financial stress from the pandemic's economic impact causes families to prioritize other basic needs. And disrupted supply chains increase prices of commercial products, making them unaffordable for too many women and girls; hence the solution lies in homemade reusable menstrual pads.

Schools, community centers, churches and other touch points where girls and women can typically access critical information about menstruation as a natural process that is neither shameful nor polluting are closed due to the pandemic. For those without computers or internet access, other sources of information are nonexistent. Consequently, period stigma and taboos persist, and can undermine adolescent girls' confidence at a key stage of development. There is also limited availability of routine health services amid the COVID-19 response. Menstrual health and hygiene (MHH) needs to be included in COVID-19 emergency response interventions.

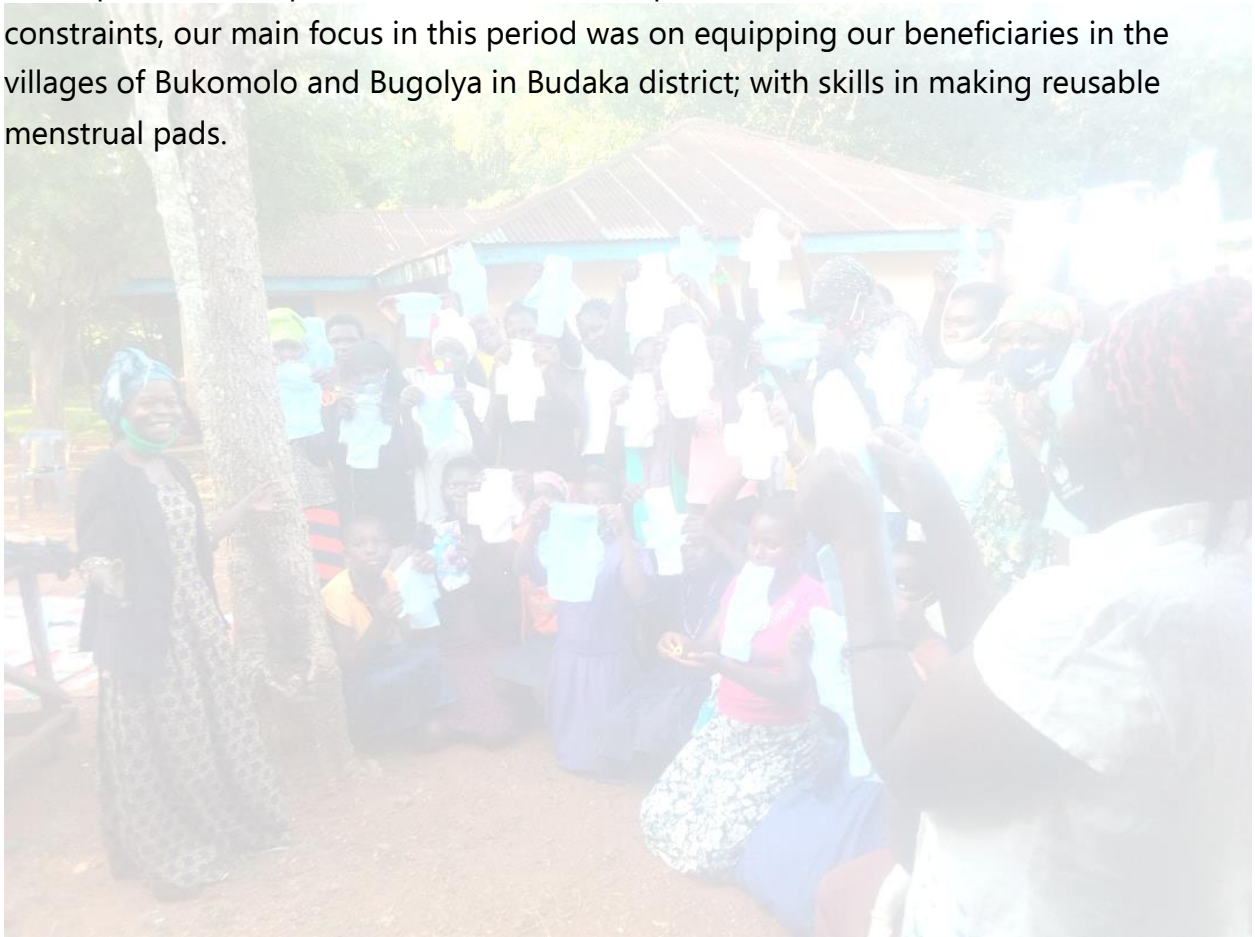
Ravens Foundation premised its interventions on the above , hence embarking on efforts to engage the adolescent girls and young women on issues of reproductive health, our objectives for the project being;

1. To equip 650 girls with skills in making re-usable menstrual pads.
2. To offer psychological support to girls in dealing with emotional challenges that come with menstruation.
3. To boost the self-esteem of girls by equipping them with the necessary life skills in assertiveness and decision making.

In order to fulfill our objectives we planned to carry out the following activities;

- Life skills training to equip the girls with the necessary skills in assertiveness and decision making, hence enabling them to cope with life's challenges and overcome stigmatizing labels against girls.
- Providing information and skills in Menstrual Health and making of re-usable pads.

This report covers a period of three months, April to June 2021. Due to resource constraints, our main focus in this period was on equipping our beneficiaries in the villages of Bukomolo and Bugolya in Budaka district; with skills in making reusable menstrual pads.



ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT DURING THE REPORTING PERIOD

The major activity during the reporting period was training of women and girls in making reusable menstrual pads.



Inception Meeting: this took place on May 26, 2021. During our mobilization work in the first quarter, January to March 2021, we registered 20 women and girls, but on the first day during our inception meeting a total of 41 women and girls turned up.



Training: Given the limited resources, we could not afford to carry on the training for a long period of time but the four days we conducted the training were a great success. A total of 60 women and girls were trained, plus a few boys from within the neighborhood.



ACHIEVEMENTS REGISTERED

By the end of day four of the training we had registered the following achievements;

- Six adolescent girls had learnt to operate the manual sewing machine and were able to do the threading and actual sewing.
- Four adult women were equally able to operate the sewing machine. They were able to join their own pieces and produce reusable

pads and also to help their colleagues who had not yet mastered how to use the sewing machine.

- 60 pieces of reusable sanitary pads were produced and these were shared out among the participants as a way of motivating them to continue making the products.

CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED

- One sewing machine is not enough compared to the number of women and girls who need to learn.
- The cost of materials especially the bed wetter and buttons is a lot more expensive than what majority of our beneficiaries can afford.

SUGGESTIONS OF HOW TO SOLVE THE CHALLENGES

- We need to acquire more sewing machines, chairs and possibly a tent to accommodate the growing number of trainees.
- We can consider renovating the existing old structure at the training centre.

Note: All these call for more resources and so we call upon any willing individuals who can give to this cause. We also welcome any ideas towards handling these challenges.

LESSONS LEARNT

- It is the first time that such training is being conducted in the area. This can be evidenced from the expression made by one of the opinion leaders who came around, as quoted below;

“This is the first time such training is being done in this community-actually in the entire sub-county.” (Opinion leader)

- There is need for the training sessions to be done on a regular and continuing basis, so that many more girls and women are equipped with the skill. This was expressed by a one Alamanzani (not real names) husband to one of the trainees who came on the last day to express his gratitude to Ravens Foundation this opportunity.
- Five boys expressed their desire and interest to also learn this skill and many other skills that can help them improve their lives.

CONCLUSION

The challenge menstruating girls and women face is often less tangible than simply the availability of infrastructure, and is rooted in social norms and beliefs. In many cultures, menstruating women are considered impure/unclean and are systematically excluded from participating in every-day activities, such as education, employment, and cultural and religious practices. Moreover, the taboos and stigmas attached to menstruation lead to an overall culture of silence around the topic, resulting in limited information on menstruation and menstrual hygiene. Such misinformation can have ramifications on the health and dignity of girls and women.

Given the multiple challenges women and adolescent girls face, it is evident that promoting menstrual hygiene management (MHM) is not only a sanitation matter; it is also an important step towards safeguarding the dignity, bodily integrity and overall life opportunities of women and girls. Therefore, equipping rural girls and women with skills in making safe low cost reusable pads is not only solving the issues of menstrual hygiene but can have the ripple effect of uplifting the economic status of the target beneficiaries and their households.

APPENDICES (PHOTOGRAPHS)

A: INCEPTION MEETING





B: TRAINING SESSIONS





C: GROUP ACTIVITIES





