

# Reproductive Health



## Building Healthy Communities



# Menstrual Hygiene

Ensuring Public Health and Environment Protection in Entebbe Municipality through Incineration of Used Menstrual Products

## Introduction

CPAR Uganda Ltd is a non-profit company limited by guarantee and not having share capital. It was incorporated on 8th October 2008 by the Uganda Registration Services Bureau, under The Companies Act (Cap. 110 of the laws of Uganda), registration number 102332. It came into being through the indigenisation of the Uganda country programme of the international charity, the [Canadian Physicians for Aid and Relief \(CPAR\)](#); hence the use of the acronym CPAR as its name.

CPAR Uganda is owned by Ugandans of distinguished standing who volunteer their time, financial resources and expertise in service of others less advantaged. Its current Board Chair is [Prof. Dr. Christopher Garimoi Orach](#), a professor of community health at the School of Public Health, College of Health Sciences, Makerere University Kampala and he is a Rotarian. Its current Managing Director is [Ms. Norah Owaraga](#), a Cultural Anthropologist and a resident of Entebbe Municipality.

Ms. Owaraga is the daughter of the late Engineer George William Owaraga, who was a long-term resident of Entebbe Municipality, for over fifty years until he rested on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2020; and was a long serving civil servant. At the time that he retired, in 1986, he was the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Works. Eng. Owaraga was an active Rotarian, in fact, a Past President of the Entebbe Rotary Club. In his lifetime, he contributed to the greater good of various communities in Entebbe and in Uganda as a whole. He embodied the aspirations of Rotarians and was renowned for his service above self and in taking action on important persistent issues afflicting and affecting communities in Entebbe and beyond.

In honour of late Eng. Owaraga, CPAR Uganda, for the first time, would like to intervene in Entebbe Municipality and to include Entebbe Municipality among its geographic areas of coverage. Beginning with piloting in Entebbe Municipality its project, ***“Ensuring Public Health and Environment Protection through Incineration of Used Menstrual Products,”*** under its Menstrual Hygiene Campaign, under its Reproductive Health Programme. A pilot project that CPAR Uganda intends to implement in close collaboration and partnership with the Rotary Club of Entebbe and Entebbe Municipal Council.

## Background

The population of Entebbe Municipality is estimated to be about 70,000 people. Assuming Uganda’s national population demographics apply, 51 percent of Entebbe’s population is female. That is to say, the population of Entebbe is made up of about 35,000 women and girls. Globally, it is estimated (SNV and IRC, 2012) that 52 percent of the female population is of reproductive age. It is likely, therefore, that about 18,000 women and girls who are resident in Entebbe are menstruating.

Factor in the fact that Entebbe is the gateway to Uganda, hosting Uganda’s only international airport, through which, on average, about 5,000 passengers travel daily. Many of those passengers are likely menstruating women. Furthermore, Entebbe is a popular destination for tourism and for holding events, such as state meetings at State House Entebbe and big conferences with hundreds of participants. It is valid to assume many tourists and event participants are menstruating women.

Normally, on average, a woman or girl of reproductive age menstruates once a month and for a duration of four days. During her menstruation period, on average, it is expected she will need to change and refresh whatever menstruation product she is using at least four times a day. It is the ideal minimum frequency for hygiene purposes. And so, in a month, a menstruating woman or girl may use at least 16 pieces of a menstruation product.

The majority, 52 percent, of menstruating women and girls in Uganda use disposable pads (Kalembe & Emojong, 2020); meaning that about 9,000 menstruating women and girls in Entebbe use single use disposal pads. Thus, the volume of disposable used pads generated by menstruating women and girls in Entebbe could be about 144,000 pieces a month; which is about 1.7 million pieces a year.

From a public health perspective, menstrual blood is medical waste. There is need, therefore, to as well be concerned about disposal of other single use padding that women and girls use. Such as used by 10 percent of Uganda women and girls (Kalembe & Emojong, 2020), who use cotton wool, toilet paper and other material. For Entebbe Municipality, there is thus need to be concerned about disposal of other single use padding of about 1,800 women; which could be about 29,000 pieces a month; about 345,000 pieces a year. The volume could be much higher, assuming the 32 percent of women and girls who use clothes for padding (Kalembe & Emojong, 2020) do not reuse them. It is feasible they may use pieces of cloth once and dispose of them.

Deducing from the existential experiences of women associated with CPAR Uganda and from conversations with other women, there is every indication that Entebbe Municipality does not have in place the requisite policies and systems for effective and safe disposal of pads, cotton, clothes, and other material containing menstrual blood. It is apparently the norm that women in Entebbe are disposing off their menstrual blood (in used disposal pads, cotton, clothes) together with other waste into garbage skips; from whence it is collected and it ends up in landfills.

Menstruating women are forced to dispose their menstrual blood together with other waste, because of insufficient provision of period friendly toilets in public spaces; and of incinerators in Entebbe municipality, it would appear. Period friendly toilets can be either flash toilets or pit latrines which are clean; have clean water for washing up; a wash room area; and a special bin for disposal of used menstrual products.

It is also likely that women and girls are unaware that by disposing their menstrual blood in garbage skips and landfills they contribute to the spread of diseases, such as, for example, Hepatitis B. Medical personnel confirm that if a menstruating woman has Hepatitis B, it will be in her menstrual blood and anyone one who touches her used pad, for example, may be infected with the disease. This puts the health of hundreds of garbage collectors, sorters and scavengers at risk; and other people as well.

Other public health concerns include the fact that some landfills in Entebbe are located upstream on raised grounds near Lake Victoria. It makes sense that when it rains, run off water into the lake will have come into contact with menstrual blood contained in used menstrual products in the landfill. Lake Victoria is a source of drinking water for humans and animals. It is a source of food – fish for human consumption. And it is used for leisure – people swim in it. It is prudent, therefore, that it is not polluted with medical waste in the form of menstrual blood.

A major environmental concern is the composition of disposable menstrual products – tampons and pads – which is mostly plastic (Harrison & Tyson, 2023) – ***“pads can contain up to 90 percent plastic ... While in a landfill, disposable pads are estimated to take 500 to 800 years to break down, and materials such as plastic never truly biodegrade.”*** It is prudent that used disposable menstrual products are not dumped into landfills and that they should be incinerated.

## **Proposed Intervention**

A two-year menstrual hygiene campaign targeted towards duty bearers – both technocrats and politicians of Entebbe Municipality; and as well as to the rights holders with particular focus on women and girls. The campaign shall consist of three major components:

- Empirical research and publication on best practice for management of menstrual hygiene products for good public health and environmental protection. The resultant research findings and publications are instrumental in the achievement of the second component.

- Policy advocacy for enactment of the relevant Entebbe Municipality bylaws for management of menstrual waste – incineration of used pads, cotton, clothes, and other products. This will include lobbying for implementation strategies and budgets for menstrual hygiene management to be developed, approved and implemented by the Entebbe Municipal Council.
- Causing positive attitude and behavioural change towards menstrual hygiene management practices among the wider population. This will be achieved through mentoring young women in the use of theatre for development to ignite conversations in their respective communities in Entebbe Municipality on issues related to menstrual hygiene management. The young women will be mentored to become innovators who take leadership to encourage their respective communities to adopt best practices for menstrual hygiene management – safe disposal of used menstrual products.

## **Results**

- ✓ At least two research reports on menstrual hygiene authored by CPAR Uganda are approved and in use by Entebbe Municipal Council and other stakeholders. One report will focus on the intersectionality of gender issues, menstrual waste management and public health; and the other on the intersectionality of gender issues, menstrual waste management and environmental protection.
- ✓ At least two policy briefs written by CPAR Uganda and used by Entebbe Municipal Council in developing bylaws, policies, strategies and budgets for menstrual waste management. One policy brief will focus on menstrual waste management and public health; and another on menstrual waste management and environmental protection.
- ✓ Twenty-five young women selected from all divisions of Entebbe municipality and trained in theatre for development and participatory action research. They will be able to develop a community theatre production from start to finish, perform it, ignite conversations, document them and use them to innovate solutions. These young women will be a valuable resource in their communities, because the skills they will acquire from this intervention are transferable to other issues and settings as well.
- ✓ Ultimately, in the longer-term, this intervention will contribute to the reduction of menstrual waste – used pads and other menstrual products disposed in landfills, due to there being sufficient provision of period friendly toilets and incinerators in Entebbe Municipality.
- ✓ If successful, this intervention will be transferrable to other cities and municipality in the country.

## **Budget Overview**

This intervention requires at least Ug. Shs. 50,000,000 (fifty million shillings) to cover the direct costs of its implementation. A detailed budget breakdown will be done after further consultations are carried out with relevant technocrats of Entebbe Municipality and other potential partners, including but not limited to Entebbe Rotary Club.

## **Author**

Ms. Norah Owaraga, in her capacity of Managing Director, authored this concept proposal on behalf of CPAR Uganda. It was reviewed and approved by Prof. Christopher Garimoi Orach, in his capacity of Board Chair. For more information, contact us, at CPAR Uganda, via telephone +256 770 562 443; email: [info@cparuganda.com](mailto:info@cparuganda.com); website: [www.cparuganda.com](http://www.cparuganda.com); and Twitter: @CPARUGANDA.