



Concept Proposal on a Public Health and Environment Protection Concern in Urban Areas in Uganda



Author: Ms. Norah Owaraga (MScDevMgmt(Open)), the Managing Director, authored this concept proposal, which was reviewed and approved by Professor Dr. Christopher Garimoi Orach, the Board Chair.



Proposed Intervention: A two-year menstrual hygiene campaign targeted towards duty bearers – technocrats and politicians of urban areas in Uganda; as well as rights holders, with particular focus on women. The campaign shall consist of three major components:



- 1) **Empirical research and publications** on best practice for management of used menstrual hygiene products for good public health and environmental protection. The resultant research findings and publications are instrumental in the achievement of the other two components of this intervention.
- 2) **Policy advocacy** for enactment of relevant bylaws for management of menstrual waste – used pads, cotton, clothes, and other products in urban areas. Including lobbying for strategies and budgets for menstrual hygiene management to be developed, approved, funded and implemented by urban authorities.
- 3) **Causing positive attitude and behavioural change** towards menstrual hygiene management practices among the wider population. Mentoring young women in use of theatre for development, in order to ignite conversations in their respective communities on issues related to menstrual hygiene management. And 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.

Contact Us

Email: info@cparuganda.com
website: www.cparuganda.com
Twitter: [@CPARUGANDA](https://twitter.com/CPARUGANDA).

Intervention Planned Results

With the achievement of the following planned results, ultimately, in the longer-term, this intervention will contribute to the reduction of menstrual waste disposed into garbage skips and onward into landfills:

- 1) Research reports on menstrual hygiene authored by CPAR Uganda are adopted and in use by authorities of participating urban areas, as well as other stakeholders.
 - a) One focussed on intersectionality of gender issues, menstrual waste management and public health.
 - b) Another on intersectionality of gender issues, menstrual waste management and the environment.
- 2) Policy briefs written by CPAR Uganda adopted and in use by authorities of participating urban areas in developing bylaws, policies, strategies and budgets for menstrual waste management.
 - a) One policy brief focussed on menstrual waste management and public health.
 - b) Another on menstrual waste management and environmental protection.
- 3) Trained Menstrual Hygiene Change Agents - For each participating urban unit, 25 young women selected from different divisions will have been trained in theatre for development and participatory action research. The trained change agents will be able to develop community theatre productions from start to finish, perform them, ignite and document conversations in their respective communities, and to use the findings to innovate solutions. The trained change agents will be a valuable resource in their communities, because the skills they will acquire from this intervention are transferable to addressing other issues as well.

Intervention Justification – Using the Case of Entebbe Municipality

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 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 whom 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 be concerned as well 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 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 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 insufficient appropriate management of used menstrual products 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 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 a 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 Lake Victoria is not polluted with medical waste in the form of menstrual blood.

Furthermore, 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 millions of such non-biodegradable menstrual products are not dumped into landfills in Entebbe.

About CPAR Uganda and the Author

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 and Ex-Officio Secretary of the Board, is Ms. Norah Owaraga, a Cultural Anthropologist.

Ms. Owaraga is the daughter of the late Engineer George William Owaraga, who rested on 1st November 2020. Eng. Owaraga 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 and in partnership with Rotary and urban authorities, CPAR Uganda, proposes this intervention to ensure public health and environment protection in urban areas through the appropriate management of Used Menstrual Products.

While CPAR Uganda possesses the requisite technical expertise to execute this project, it lacks the funds to do so. Any help given to CPAR Uganda to raise the required funding, through grant funding, corporate social responsibility and other sources, to implement this project will be much appreciated.