

Friday, 11 November 2011 22:32

Enabling girls to stay in school Featured

Written by [Administrator](#)

font size | [Print](#) | [Be the first to comment!](#)

Rate this item

(1 Vote)



Education Equity: Creating a level playing field for girls in Africa

In struggling and disadvantaged communities across the globe, youth face a number of significant challenges. Simply being able to find gainful employment is but one of those as they struggle to differentiate themselves to find and land jobs. The young girls and women in these communities face a number of additional challenges that put them at an even greater disadvantage.



Jobs are extremely scarce and staying in school is an important part of gaining the basic qualifications to be able to apply for the few jobs that there are. There are numerous challenges to overcome to just be able to be at school. Once these youth get to school, doing well at school is an additional challenge to being able to go further. Yet, a large number of girls on the African continent miss the opportunity to be able to take these steps simply because their bodies are developing and as menstruation becomes a part of their lives, they face additional challenges.



The first, in a number of cases, is ridicule and bullying as a result of having their period start at an inopportune moment while at school and they are unprepared. This can and has resulted in girls not returning to school after the experience, an experience that should be about celebrating the fact that they are becoming young women, not feeling embarrassed and having their self-esteem severely damaged. They are not just caught off guard; their circumstance is such that they just cannot afford basic menstrual products to support themselves. In a significant number of cases their families can't even afford to provide more than one meal a day and for some a meal only every two days. The result of this is that these young girls and women then end up staying home for the duration of their period, missing a significant amount of school. They underachieve and cannot perform to the real level of their abilities because they just can't be in school for a week each month.

During my meetings and presentations I was intrigued and surprised that when I asked the groups, which include boys and girls, why they thought girls were absent from school on a regular basis. The boys answered that girls like to 'bunk' (skip) school. The girls responded with jeers and shouts at the boys. This lack of awareness creates added pressure on girls' self-esteem. The boys believe they are just 'bunking' (skipping) school because they are lazy and this results in a further level of bullying for the girls. Ultimately, the girls become more disillusioned and drop out of school at an early age.



After listening to the group banter back and forth, I explained that the girls are missing school because of their periods and the lack of menstrual products, and then introduced the Pads4Girls natural menstrual products program and Lunapads. The boys in a large number of cases are surprised and even shocked. A silence descends over the gathering and you can feel the energy shift among the group. The teachers and adults watched cautiously and as the dialogue and the presentation continued I saw the teachers move off the walls they had been standing against and their chairs to the side and into the group of students and start to assist in the presentation.

So what happened next? A positive outcome of this discussion is that in the case of Bergnek, was that it was the boys who took the initiative and went out into the community to talk to the girls who were not at school to ask them if they would come back to school if they had a program to support them. The boys reported back a few days later excited about the fact they could help and with a list of girls who wanted help. This first result underscores, once again, the fact that Education IS THE KEY to supporting communities to develop.

When I experience events like this in my travels and visits to our communities I often wonder, 'Who did we lose? What great mind and person did the community and the world not get to see do amazing things?' I say this because I have met these young girls and women and when I get the chance to engage and communicate with them, they are bright, resourceful and community minded women. This emphasizes for me the necessity and importance of what we do at My Arms Wide Open, and solidifies my resolve to NEVER give up on the women and children of Africa and our world. We cannot do this alone, it takes collaboration and partnership and we are just one of the many it will take to create the opportunities and awareness to give the disadvantaged the power to choose, to ultimately restore balance in our world.



At My Arms Wide Open, we work alongside community to identify and develop opportunities that give mothers, youth and children the power to choose how they can support and build communities. In the process we partner with organizations like Lunapads and their Pads4Girls program to improve the circumstance of young woman so that they have the opportunity to be all they can be and to thrive.

OUR GOAL: To support 1,500 girls and young women in the communities of Bergnek, Limpopo and Cradock, Eastern Cape in South Africa to stay in School.

Give Girls the POWER to Choose and help level the playing field. To support the Pads4Girls program in

Bergnek and Cradock in South Africa please [visit our site](#) or Lunapads.com to make a donation.

To see more about some of the work we do take a look at each of the following links:

[My Business My Community](#),

[My First Steps My Path](#), and

[My Mentor My Coach](#) programs.



Open YOUR Heart and support the communities in rural South Africa and make a one-time [donation](#) or set up a monthly donation today, by visiting My Arms Wide Open and completing the [donation form](#). Every dollar, referral and [donation in kind](#) helps!

[Lunapads International](#) is a women-owned and operated mission-based business based in Vancouver, Canada. Our mission is to help individuals have healthier and more positive experiences of their menstrual cycles, and by extension, their bodies overall. Our team is made up of a passionate group of women who believe that using natural menstrual products is a creative and empowering way to honor and care for ourselves and the planet.

The [My Arms Wide Open®](#) Charitable Foundation, was established to provide support and collaboration with mothers, children, and youth in South Africa, enabling them to build sustainable communities and responsible businesses. With stronger families, communities emerge as a solid foundation for society. In the process they re-engage fathers to repair the family unit. In our definition, mothers include women who are caring for children and include child-led households, working within the pre-teen and teen groups. Fathers include the fathers, young males and adult males within the community.

Last modified on Wednesday, 23 November 2011 15:43

Read **369** times

Published in [Current Projects](#)

Tagged under [My Arms Wide Open](#) [South Africa](#) [Sustainable Communities](#) [Foundation](#) [Sustainable Business](#) [African aid](#) [AIDS](#) [Charitable Giving](#) [Child Aid](#) [Charitable Aid](#) [Foreign Aid](#) [HIV](#) [Humanitarian Aid](#) [Sustainability](#) [Pads4Girls](#)

Social sharing

[Administrator](#)



Latest from Administrator

[Innovation from ASU EPICS Gold](#)

[Warren's Big Idea for Social Innovation](#)

[Music for My Arms Wide Open](#)

[A BIG Thank you!](#)

[Framed By A Fairy - Alexa's Story](#)

Related items (by tag)

[Innovation from ASU EPICS Gold](#)

[Warren's Big Idea for Social Innovation](#)

[Music for My Arms Wide Open](#)

[A BIG Thank you!](#)

[Framed By A Fairy - Alexa's Story](#)

[back to top](#)