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Global Bridge Network

## Improvement of school environment to combat Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) challenges to Stop Adolescent Girls' School Dropouts in Uganda



Baseline line Report on Menstrual Hygiene Management among primary school girls  
in Kibalinga and Nabingoola sub-counties-

Mubende District

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## 1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

This report presents the findings of the baseline survey exercise on Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) among girls from three (3) primary school in Kibalinga and Nabingoola Sub counties in Mubende District.

The baseline survey exercise was conducted by Emilly. P. K. Katamujuna, Elizabeth Nakinobe, Analogy Milly and Wilber Ssembajwe on behalf of SORAK Development Agency during the month of April 2017. It was specifically carried out in 3 primary schools in Kibalinga and Nabingoola sub-counties, Mubende district. This study set out to enlist the situation of Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) both at school and at home. The selected adolescent girls answered questionnaires prepared by the team.

This survey aimed at establishing the knowledge attitudes towards menstruation, practices of Menstrual Hygiene Management among rural 'in school' adolescent girls so as to benchmark the existing situation for future informed interventions. The survey also employed comprehensive interactions with senior women and male teachers on MHM issues on a basis of getting benchmark information for addressing menstrual challenges that adolescent girls face both at school and at home.

### 1.1 The Project

SORAK is implementing the **Menstrual Hygiene Management and reusable sanitary pad making in Kibalinga and Nabingoola Sub-counties in Mubende district**. The project is guided by the goal to; to equip pupils, parents and teachers with knowledge and skills on Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) and making of reusable pads.

The project is to be piloted in 3 primary schools in Kibalinga and Nabingoola Sub counties Mubende District. The study targeted Precious Child Learning Centre- an NGO operated for

Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC), St. Josephs Kibalinga- government aided and catholic founded and Lwawuna Primary School – a government aided and Muslim founded.

## **1.2 Survey and Goal**

The goal of the baseline survey was to investigate the challenges and opportunities of Menstruation Hygiene Management, and its' influence on school absenteeism among Primary school female students in Uganda and how adoptive reusable pads can be among school girls.

The findings here in provide valuable information necessary for planning and designing better and effective girl child friendly intervention projects. These findings will be a yardstick for measuring the impact created by the pilot project towards Menstrual Hygiene Management: it is also necessary for following up and monitoring vulnerable girls' completion of basic education as well as enhancement of women empowerment.

## **1.3 Criteria for selecting the 3 schools**

There are several contributing factors to girl child drop out of schools. Currently in Uganda, Menstruation has become a key driver to drop out of school. Yet the Constitution of Uganda advocates for equal rights regardless of sex, religion, tribe, race, family background; and each individual is born free and is supposed to enjoy equal rights. However, the existing social-cultural belief creates gaps between male and female. Most of the traditional and religious beliefs have played a great role in exposing boy children to opportunities and holding back the girl children in the domestic arena. Preparing them as home makers and mothers; thereby promoting gender imbalances between males and females. It was upon this back ground that the three schools were selected. It was aimed to

establish the magnitude of Menstrual Hygiene Management problem on the Orphaned and Vulnerable Children (OVC), and children from different religious backgrounds both in the Catholic and Muslim founded. This enabled the survey to bring out pertinent issues as presented in the findings section.

## **Gender and Age of the respondents**

Menstruation and managing it related challenges is a gender issue. It is an issue that affects specific gender and it is influenced by age. Participants in the baseline survey were females drawn from primary four (p.4) to primary seven (p.6). If focused on young adolescent girls between 10-17 years of age.

## **2 The Baseline Survey Exercise**

The MHM survey exercise aimed at determining the MHM situation with specific interest to identify issues that affect performance among adolescent girls with emphasis on making the re-usable sanitary pad for improved MHM in 3 schools of Kibalinga and Nabingoola Sub counties Mubende District. The baseline survey also came up with recommendation that would help in improving performance among adolescent girls.

The specific objectives of baseline survey were;

1. To establish MHM practices at schools.
2. To assess the possibility of improving MHM through re-usable sanitary pad making and utilization.
3. To explore how to design suitable Menstrual Hygiene Management interventions among school going adolescent girls.

### **2.1 Respondents for the Study**

The total number of respondents for the study was 80 girls. The study population was sampled from three Primary schools; among female students of P4 and P6 between the ages of 10-17 years who participated in a cross-sectional survey.

Table 1: three (3) above shows the number of adolescent girls participated in the survey.

**Table 1**

School	Number (%)
St Joseph Kibalinga Primary School	44(55)
Lwawuna Primary School	32(40)
Precious Child Centre Primary School	04(5)
<b>Total no. of girls</b>	<b>80 (100)</b>

## 2.2 THE MHM BASELINE EXERCISE METHODOLOGY

The methodology to this MHM baseline survey exercise was characterised by the following;

- The survey had an orientation session for the respondents of the questionnaires which involved a 30-minute briefing and targeted girls who had started on their menstrual cycle at the time of the survey. The study targeted only girls and was conducted by only women. The session was aimed at arresting the fears, expectations and reactions of the targeted girls. After the session, a one on one interaction commenced to fill the questionnaire with the guidance of SORAK representatives.
- Administering questionnaires to eighty (80) adolescent school girls that had already started their menstrual periods for not more than three (3) times from all the three selected schools (Kibalinga P/S, Lwawuna P/S and Precious Child Learning Centre) from the two sub counties of Kibalinga and Nabingoola in Mubende district.
- Document review was also used; the team studied the school's documents including but not limited to school finance committee minutes, income and expenditures to verify and analyse the percentage of funds allocated for the promotion of the Menstrual

Hygiene Management

- Conducting Key Informant Interviews (KIIs); KIIs were conducted with senior male and female teachers on Menstrual Hygiene Management. These were aimed to supplement data collected through questionnaires.



The photos above Assessment ongoing at St. Josephs' Kibalinga Primary school





Girls of Lwawuna primary school listening attentively during assessment

### 2.3 Data Analysis

Quantitative data was double-entered, uploaded, and cleaned using MS Access, before being exported to STATA for analysis. Some of the data cleaning and checks (consistency and range; missing data) would be performed in STATA.

## 3 THE STUDY FINDINGS /RESULTS

### 3.1 Overview

The presentation of the baseline survey findings exercise is largely descriptive to give a general picture on the nature of MHM situation and the gaps that exist in the study area.

These findings are combined and they cover all the three selected schools of the study area.

A total of 80 girls participated in the survey. According to the analysis most girls who had started their periods their mean age was 14 years.

Mean age of started periods of participants	14 (+/- 1.05)
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### 3.2 Main reasons for missing school in the past 30 days

25% of the interviewed girls acknowledged missing school because of lack on menstrual

materials to use while at school, where as 32.5% stayed home because of menstruation related illness as a. Table 2 below:

**Table 2**

Reason	Frequency (%)
Sick at home while menstruating	13(32.5)
Menstruating and having no pads to use	10(25)

**Source: Field Data 2017**

The survey revealed that a girl will stay away from school for at least 4 days each month. This translates into losing 12 days per term and 36 days per year, hence affecting adolescent girl's academic performance compared to their male counterparts who do not miss even a day during the same period. It should however be noted that an adolescent girl who experiences good menstrual hygiene management will not face the above-mentioned challenges and will ably compete with boys in the academic arena; this is associated to higher chances of staying in school and excelling.

The MHM baseline survey team got a chance and interacted with the senior women teacher Lwawuna Primary school. She noted that,

*"If you want a girl to stay at school, address the challenge of menstrual hygiene... 'Every month, a girl stays away from school for 4 days and above, multiply this for a term and year, and analyze the impact on the girl's performance" .*

She further observed that school attendance by

girls was being hindered by challenges of poor Menstrual Hygiene Management; and also expressed an urgent need for schools to have a washroom for girls and increase budget allocation for the hygiene and sanitary department.

Some of the other reasons associated with menstruation and school attendance as identified by the survey are: - lack of materials to use during their menstrual periods and other related factors that come along with menstruation such as stomach pain, back ache and staining of their clothes. It was noted that majority of the girls are never prepared, there by staining their clothes.

### 3.3 Used materials of sanitary pad

Table 3. below shows materials that the girls usually use interchangeably during their menstruation periods according to affordability.

**Table 3**

Materials used during the last period	Frequency (%)
Newspapers	3 (3.80)
Leaves	2 (2.60)
Old clothes	30 (38.96)
Toilet paper	3 (3.80)
Cotton wool	8 (10.13)
Knickers only	11 (13.92)
Locally made disposable pads made of local materials e.g. banana fibers	5 (6.33)
Locally made re-usable pads	18 (23.38)
Disposable manufactured pads	31 (39.24)
Manufactured tampons	4 (5.06)
New clothes	32 (40.51)
Other	2 (4.88)

**Source: Field Data 2017**

89.13% of those that have used disposable manufactured pads would be interested in trying out sanitary pads made locally in Uganda. This was raised, because the girls feel that it is expensive to procure manufactured pads on a monthly basis for just use and disposal and yet they come from poor households. Most girls preferred re-usable pads compared to the other types as showed in the table 3 above because they are cheaper and cost effective, many families in rural areas cannot even afford to get 2 USD a day; and as such cannot afford disposable sanitary pads. They preferred reusable sanitary pads that are less costly, reusable and sustainable. It was noted that it is the best choice for such poor populations since one can use it wash it and use it the next day as long as proper cleaning and Menstrual Hygiene Management is practiced.

### 3.4 Main problems faced in the last menstruation period

Table 4. Below highlights the challenges that the respondents faced during their last menstrual periods.

**Table 4**

Problems faced in the last menstruation period	Percentage (%)
Girls stained their knickers with blood in the last menstruation period	87%
Stained their outer garments	51.9%
Experienced menstrual cramps during their last periods	82%

**Source: Field Data 2017**

The respondents noted that during their last period they faced a number of challenges which included; - 87% of the girls interviewed had their knickers stained with blood in the last menstruation period, more than half (51.9%) had stained their outer garments and 82% had experienced menstrual cramps during their last periods. They explained that after facing the

three major problems, they found it hard to be comfortable in class and opted to stay away from school until the periods had ended. This ideally means losing more time, that cannot be compensated as they (girls) are expected to do household chores at home when they should be reading and catching up with the lost time.

### 3.5 Information about periods

Getting accurate and reliable information about menstruation periods is important and according to the findings in Table 5. below highlights the sources and types of information that girls access.

**Table 5**

Type of Information	Source of Information	Number (%)
Main person from whom girls learnt menstruation periods from	Mother	58(73.42%)
	Senga (paternal aunt)	9(11.39%)
When did you learn about menstruation periods	Before 1st period	63 (79.75%)
	When 1st period started	14 (17.72%)
	After 1st period ended	2(2.53%)
Source of most useful information about periods	My mother	30(37.97)
	Senga	11(16.46)
	Sister	9(11.39)
Who do you talk about menstruation periods with?	Do not talk about menstruation with their fathers	51.3%

**Source: Field Data 2017**

It was noted from the survey that mothers have played a great in sharing with the girls information about menstruation periods and this accounted for 58 girls at 73.42%; whereas, 11.39% of the girls noted that they got

information from their senga (paternal aunt). 79.75% of the girls acknowledged that they got timely information about menstruation periods (Before 1st period), 17.72% said they got information when their 1st period started; and 2.53% of the interviewed girls said that they got information after their 1st period had ended.

The survey revealed that mothers have been a key source of the most useful information about periods and 37.97% of the girls were proud of it, followed by Senga accounting for 16.46% and 11.39% of the girls getting useful information from their respective sisters.

### 3.6 Information about those that have used washable materials

The survey investigated on the Information about those girls that had used washable materials table 6. Below

**Table 6**

Information about those that have used washable materials	Opinion	Number (%)
Do you use re-usable/washable menstrual absorbents?	Yes	63(79.75)
	No	16(20.25)
How do you wash your reusable menstrual absorbents when you are at home?	Water alone	5(7.35)
	Water and soap	61(89.71)
	I don't wash it	2(2.94)
How do you wash your reusable menstrual absorbents when you are at School?	Water alone	4(5.97)
	Water and soap	39(58.21)
	I don't wash it	24(35.82)

**Source: Field Data 2017**

Findings from the survey revealed that 79.75% of the girls reached by the survey used re-

usable/washable materials and only 20.25% had not used re-usable pads. While at home 89.71% had practiced recommended Menstrual Hygiene Management, by using water and soap in washing the reusable materials. However, there was a 7.35% that only used water in washing and 2.94% did not wash pads; making the girls prone to infections due to poor Menstrual Hygiene Management. It was quite different in the school setting, where by 58.21% had practiced recommended Menstrual Hygiene Management, by using water and soap in washing the reusable materials at school and there was a 5.97% that only used water in washing and 35.82% did not wash pads; making more girls exposed to infections and reinfection due to poor Menstrual Hygiene Management.

This information was vital to inform that pilot project to ensure that it expounds more on the needs for proper menstrual hygiene management as well as for making a basis for making reusable pads and how to maintain them clean, before, during and after the menstruation periods.

### 3.7 Perceptions about menstrual Periods

The survey explored more to find out about the different perceptions on menstruation as shown in Table 7. below.

**Table 7**

Perception		Frequency (%)
Period days are like any other day	Strongly disagree	40 (50.63)
	Somewhat disagree	26 (32.91)
	Neither agree nor disagree	4 (5.06)
	Somewhat agree	7 (8.86)
	Strongly agree	2 (2.53)
I prefer staying at home during my period rather than going to school	Strongly disagree	27 (34.18)
	Somewhat disagree	21 (26.58)

	Neither agree nor disagree	10 (12.66)
	Somewhat agree	9 (11.39)
	Strongly agree	12 (15.19)
During my period, I avoid physical activity	Strongly disagree	24 (30.38)
	Somewhat disagree	28 (35.44)
	Neither agree nor disagree	6 (7.59)
	Somewhat agree	10 (12.66)
	Strongly agree	11 (13.92)
I feel anxious about having my next period	Strongly disagree	17 (21.52)
	Somewhat disagree	7 (8.86)
	Neither agree nor disagree	23 (29.11)
	Somewhat agree	10 (12.66)
	Strongly agree	22 (27.85)
I wish I would know more information about my menstrual period	Strongly disagree	4(5.13)
	Somewhat disagree	0
	Neither agree nor disagree	1(1.28)
	Somewhat agree	15(19.23)
	Strongly agree	58(74.36)
Boys tease me about my menstrual period	Strongly disagree	20 (25.97)
	Somewhat disagree	16 (20.78)
	Neither agree nor disagree	7 (9.09)
	Somewhat agree	14 (18.18)
	Strongly agree	20 (25.97)

**Source: Field Data 2017**

The aspect of menstrual periods and the related hygiene management is a contentious issue that community and every member of the population has different perceptions about. For instance, 50.63% of the respondents and victims of the situation strongly disagreed and 32.91% somewhat disagree that menstrual period



days are like any other day. They noted that it is part of nature and they have nothing more to add to it, than seeing it as any other usual day.

34.18% of the respondents strongly disagree while 26.58% somewhat disagree with staying at home during my period rather than going to school. They noted that though they may not be feeling well, they would not love to stay at home and miss school.

Much as 30.38% of the girls interviewed strongly disagreed, 35.44% somewhat disagreed with avoiding any physical activity during periods; whereas 13.92% strongly agreed with the idea. They noted that their mothers and aunts encouraged them not to avoid physical activities because there are activities that help them to avoid cramps. Girls however noted that they feel anxious about having my next period and 74.36% strongly agreed that they would love to get more information about menstrual periods. On the other hand, it was noted that boys still tease girls during their menstrual periods, especially when their dresses have been stained. This informed the implementers that there was need to prioritise sensitization of boys during pilot project implementation.

#### 4 SOME OF THE MOST MEMORABLE COMMENTS

- ✦ Thank you so much for teaching us about health*
- ✦ More knowledge how to handle periods*
- ✦ Thank you for the support and advice*
- ✦ Want sensitization about menstruation*
- ✦ Will we be given pads?*
- ✦ More knowledge how to handle periods*
- ✦ Will we be trained to use reusable pads?*
- ✦ Thank you for the time and opportunities offered to teach us about our health*
- ✦ Thank you for the counseling sessions*
- ✦ Thank you for the time and advice*
- ✦ I have been happy and ask you to come back for my advice*

## 5 CONCLUSION

This MHM baseline survey exercise has revealed that there is persistent poor MHM amongst the adolescent girls in all the schools where the survey was conducted especially for Kibalinga and Lwawuna P/S which are Government aided. The MHM baseline survey team has learnt that out of the three (3) schools visited 2 (Kibalinga and Lwawuna P/S) still lack infrastructure and other materials including but not limited to; - Toilets, wash rooms, incinerator, water, soap, among others; that must be used to promote MHM at school.

Menstrual Hygiene Management remains a feminine activity and as result, male senior teachers still refer to it as a senior women's responsibility. MHM commodities are in short supply in all the schools visited despite being a government policy for schools to provide sanitary pads to school going adolescent girls. School administrators, teachers and senior women teachers and school children agree that there is an urgent need to supply MHM commodities. It was also stated that these MHM commodities should come along with training, washroom infrastructure supply and involving female parents in the making of reusable sanitary pads in order to make the activity acceptable and sustainable. It was noted, that if girls are able to manage proper hygiene during their period, enrolment in their classes would increase, thus improving the overall education system and ultimately the development of the Nation.

### 5.1 Recommendations

These recommendations were made bearing in mind the mandate and the means that are potentially available for SORAK in collaboration with her development partners to intervene and struggle to tackle the baseline survey findings and MHM challenges. The key recommendations include the following;

- a) SORAK must build capacity for community and girls, so as to advocate for increased and sustained supply of MHM commodities in schools.
- b) Train girls, boys, male and female parents and teachers in reusable sanitary pad making and ensure a stable supply chain of the materials required to make these pads.
- c) Schools should be supported and encouraged to provide washrooms for girls.
- d) Encourage adolescent peer-peer engagement of girls which is in line with the anticipated training outcomes of school based trainings planned in this project.
- e) Schools should increase budget allocation to sanitation department; this will address the issue of inadequate MHM materials.
- f) Schools should organise Parents' meetings to sensitize parents on their roles and responsibilities in the promotion of MHM both at school and at home.
- g) There is need for sexual reproductive health and sex education in schools. Both girls and boys should be made to understand what menstruation is, its importance and how it can be handled.
- h) Senior women teachers should be equipped with knowledge of supporting girls in their menstruation periods and even be equipped with some first aid/ pain killer drugs that they can give to the girls while at school when they get the pains and also some spare pads to give to the girls when they get their menstruations.

**END**