

# AFRIPAD PILOT PROJECT

On Saturday June 20<sup>th</sup> 2015, the Afripad Pilot Project was conducted at the Canan Nursery & Junior Academy school in Agule county (Pallisa district). This event, mainly targeting young girls from classes P4 to P7, was organized by members of Visionary Lady International in conjunction with the Global Bridge Network, an organization based in Japan.

A preliminary survey had previously been administered to determine the rate of female school dropouts and the circumstances leading to this. It was found that the girls' dropout rate was significantly higher than that of the boys. In addition, the lack of pads for girls to use during their monthly menstrual periods as well as a general lack of menstrual hygiene knowledge was identified as a major challenge faced by the schoolgirls. As such, a fundraising campaign was initiated among the Japanese community in order to address this issue by providing the girls with re-usable sanitary pads and a training session on menstrual hygiene management.

The activity opened on Saturday with registration, prayers and introductions from the school's administrative members and head teacher. The panel expressed gratitude and excitement towards the upcoming training session and the volunteers were thanked for their presence.

This was followed from a speech by the region's representant LC3, Otaget Robert, who had been designated as the guest of honor at this event. Mr. Otaget spoke at length about the importance of education and of female empowerment, emphasizing the fact that girls were often disadvantaged because of their families' lack of funds to provide them with sanitary pads and other necessary school materials. The LC also addressed the pupils, encouraging them to discipline themselves in school to obtain optimal results.

Questionnaires were then handed out to the target female population in order to assess the magnitude of the issue of menstruation with regards to the schooling process. This sample consisted of all girls aged 9 to 17 (classes P4 to P7) attending Canan Nursery & Junior Academy school, both in the boarding section and in the regular section. This age criteria was selected on the basis that it is generally within this age range that most girls begin to menstruate and therefore start to experience complications in managing their menstrual hygiene. The survey was composed of various parts, with questions ranging from basic facts



such as name, age, class and family size to questions inquiring as to the girls' personal experience in dealing with their periods, as well as their school performance. The respondents were grouped together in a classroom separate from the others and were led through each question in turn by the facilitators. They were asked to direct any questions regarding the questionnaire material toward the facilitators, so as to avoid speaking with their comrades and influencing one another's answers.

While filling in the questionnaires, the language barrier between the facilitators and the respondents proved to be more impactful than had been anticipated. Although most children had a basic grasp of the English language, many were unable to understand the questions that were asked of them or the explanations provided by the facilitators. Because of this, the interviewers spent a considerable amount of time on certain questions facing a particular lack of understanding. Several children were also taken to a separate room to be interviewed individually with the help of a translator, who spoke to them in their native language and translated their answers back to English. The process of filling out the questionnaires therefore greatly exceeded the allotted timeframe of one hour. Nonetheless, the team managed to collect 62 completed questionnaires: we believe that these responses will allow us to shed light onto the difference that this intervention has made in the lives of these schoolgirls. However, these turned out to be fewer than the 120 girls that the survey had been initially intended for: this can be attributed to a miscalculation on the school coordinator's end in regards to the number of girls falling within the target age range. We plan to select another school in the region in which to distribute the remaining knickers and reusable pads.

Following this, the students performed a traditional dance and recited a few poems they had written themselves. In particular, a strikingly beautiful poem recited by 4 upper-level girls referenced the core issue to be addressed: "Menstruation,



menstruation, you cannot be controlled. You exist in us by nature, taking our blood. Menstruation, menstruation; because of you, some of our girls have dropped out of school." This performance along with the others provided great entertainment and allowed for energy levels to be revived. The pupils continued to present a positive attitude toward the project at hand.

The highlight of the day's activities was the menstrual hygiene management training that was provided at this time. A nurse from the Agule Health Center 3 opened the session, touching on the subjects of general hygiene, puberty and the accompanying

developmental changes, pregnancy and methods of contraception, and menstrual hygiene. Members of VLI then proceeded to demonstrate the use of the pads that were to be given out at the end of the day, and to delve further into the risks of unsafe menstrual health practices and unprotected sexual intercourse. A continuous effort was made in helping both boys and girls to come to view menstruation as a natural occurrence rather than a “dirty” or “impure” event. The boys were also reprimanded for bullying girls and enlightened as to why this was not correct. Throughout the entire training session, the students were very attentive and were brimming with questions for the presenters as the training came to a close.



Next, the organizers proceeded to hand out the Afripads as well as a few pairs of knickers to every schoolgirl falling under the age range of the target population. These were mostly received with gratitude and enthusiasm, and many girls could be seen beaming with satisfaction.



As the day came to an end, Maiko briefly addressed the audience, making sure to give special recognition to the Japanese individuals who had donated money to fund this project. She highlighted the fact that the numerous Japanese donors were hoping to relieve the girls of the unfortunate circumstances caused by the onset of



their menstruation, before insisting that all girls should remain in school without absenting themselves to complete their educations and be granted better opportunities in the future. The head teacher then presented his closing remarks; the organizers were kindly requested to carry out this same project in other schools in the surrounding region, as the need for sanitary pads and trainings on reproductive health is very widespread. Members of VLI and Global Bridge Network were once again thanked profusely for their efforts and departed on a lovely note, with the entire school community warmly sending them on their way.



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On the Next day after the workshop in Caanan Juniour School, Sunday June 21th 2015, we distributed Afripads to the girls who have dropped out of schools. Those girls had cooperated with us during the interviews we had in the previous investigation/survey in May 2015, they had answered that they had dropped out of school due to lack of sanitary pads and that they could not afford buying them.



VLI and Global Bridge Network provided a menstrual hygiene management training and how to use Afripads to the girls before providing them with the pads. The girls smiled and were very happy to receive the reusable pads and promised to return to school when the next term starts since the current term had already started.



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On Wednesday, July 1<sup>st</sup> 2015, VLI proceeded to conduct a Menstrual Hygiene Management training workshop at the Opadoi primary school in the village of Opadoi (within Kameki County). Similarly to the previous activity staged by the organization, a survey had been carried out prior to this to identify the problems that affect school-going girls and among these, those causing them to drop out of school. In order to do so, VL1 representatives had visited the school on the previous Friday, the 26<sup>th</sup> of June, to select girls from classes P4 to P7 and take them through a session of questionnaire filling. This enabled them to assess the extent to which the lack of sanitary pads affects the attendance and performance of girls of school-going age. It was found that the lack of sanitary pads was a very prominent problem among the schoolgirls of the government-aided Opadoi primary school, what with the school's large number of female pupils and the high volume of complaints recorded. It was upon these findings that VL1 based their decision to carry out another Afripads activity at this school.



In attendance at the training was the LC1 of the area. Mr. Peter was extremely delighted by VLI's initiative to benefit schoolgirls; he expressed his heart-felt remarks and welcomed the guests to his area while demonstrating a great deal of appreciation for the efforts of the organization. The school's headmaster also contributed a speech emphasizing on the high rate of dropouts among the schoolgirls, stating that "In the lower classes, girls are big in number when joining school but as we go to the upper levels, they keep dropping out, especially when they start their periods. This issue has led girls into early marriages and teenage pregnancies." He later introduced his staff members and gave special recognition to the Senior Lady (school counselor) before beginning the training.

Unlike the girls at the Canan Nursery & Junior Academy School, the girls at this school appeared to be very timid with regards to issues concerning their health (and in particular, sexual reproductive health issues, menstruation and sex education). They were unable to answer questions when asked to work in groups; in addition, we noted that when receiving the pads and knickers, the presence of boys made the girls uncomfortable such that the unforeseen need to separate the two sexes for this part of the agenda arose. VLI managed this situation by taking the boys to a separate room while the activity



was carried on for the girls exclusively. This complication indicated to VLI that primary schools require better sex education to shed light onto these issues and create a safe space for children to express their questions and concerns.



The turn up for the event was great: 250 girls participated in the training itself. However, because we had a limited amount of materials to give away, priority was given to the girls who had filled out the questionnaires. The rest of the participants were sorted according to age, class and whether or not they had their reports with them as they had been instructed. We managed to gather 72 completed questionnaires and to give away a total of 160

Afripads. In all, this training was highly successful and allowed us to collect a sufficient number of responses to draw conclusions from and inform the organization's upcoming activities in the realm of menstrual health and girls' education.