

## ABSTRACT

**Background Statement:** According to the 2009 Uganda Education Management Information System report, the average primary school completion rate was 52%; retention rate for boys and girls was 53% and 42%, respectively. A study by the Netherlands Development Organization, reported that up to 40% of female teachers in primary schools missed school and 11% of the time girls missed learning due to challenges of coping with menstruation. Women and girls in rural settings in particular suffer from the stigma and lack of services and facilities to cope with the physical and psychological pains associated with menstruation. Sanitary pads sold locally are extremely expensive. HERS-EA is centred on women in higher education institutions (HEIs); however, it is critical to ensure that barriers to girls' education are addressed at grass root level; to reduce school drop-out rates for girls.

**Women Empowering Women Through Re-usable Sanitary Pads project:** HERS-EA partnered with African Village Support ([www.africanvillagesupport.org](http://www.africanvillagesupport.org)) an NGO that has developed an affordable reusable sanitary pads prototype with rural women in Bulambuli District, Eastern Uganda.

### Objectives of Study:

1. To provide the much needed affordable sanitary pads to school girls by supporting local women in Bulambuli district, Uganda who had started a project making re-usable sanitary pads.
2. To equip the women of Bulambuli district with basic business skills so that they could earn an income from making pads and also become trainers of other women in Butaleja district, Uganda.

**Approach:** With support from Mississippi State University, HERS-EA conducted a study in Bulambuli and Butaleja districts, trained women in Bulambuli to (i) better manage the pads project and (ii) train other women in making the pads.

**Results:** A Needs Assessment to establish ways in which menstruation affects girls and women was conducted in Bulambuli and Butaleja districts, Uganda and challenges identified; basic business skills were offered to women in Bulambuli district who in turn trained the women in Butaleja district; potential research areas were identified. Consequently the women in Butaleja have now made and sold reusable sanitary pads and are ready to grow their business, if they could access more capital.

**Potential Future Collaborations.** Opportunities exist for collaborative research, training and outreach between HEIs in East Africa, US and elsewhere, and other stakeholders on menstruation and; i) education of the girl child, ii) policy development for inclusion of resources in the national budget by African governments, iii) professional women; Science and Technology – developing an appropriate product that is environmentally friendly with regards to inputs and disposal, and iv) business-entrepreneurship development.

## APPROACH: HERS-EA executives offered Training



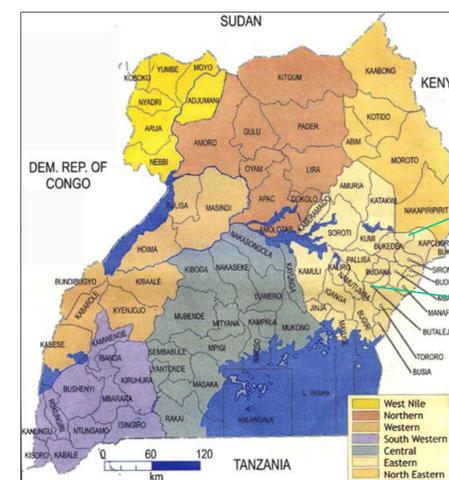
Ms Loyce Hamba (HERS-EA) addressing participants at Butaleja; looking on, Irene Naigaga, Naomi Lumutenga & Ruth Muwazi.

**Conclusion:** This project was implemented successfully. Also, the challenges women face regarding management of menstruation were highlighted and potential areas of research identified.

## Women Empowering Women Through Re-usable Sanitary pads in Eastern Uganda



Study Area: Uganda in East Africa



Study Area: Bulambuli and Butaleja districts, Eastern Uganda.



One of the Butaleja women demonstrates her newly acquired skills in making sanitary pads to Dr Ruth Muwazi, HERS-EA Chair.



Two of the trained trainers in Bulambuli who went to train others in Butaleja

## A summary of Ways in which lack of menstruation facilities affects different categories of women

Group	School girls	Married rural housewives	Professional/working (mainly teachers)
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Premenstrual pain that is not attended to; not seen as a 'sickness'</li> <li>• Tension/stress as periods approach and begin, due to lack of facilities</li> <li>• Missing school; up to 7 days a month.</li> <li>• Discomfort and irritation from items such as leaves, rags, cotton (in raw form)</li> <li>• Humiliation from peers (especially boys) and some teachers and members of the community when clothes are stained.</li> <li>• Girls feel inferior</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sit up all night to avoid soiling the bed.</li> <li>• Sexual aggression from husbands when bleeding</li> <li>• Humiliation by husbands when women ask for money to buy sanitary pads.</li> <li>• Lack of facilities can lead to unpleasant smells.</li> <li>• Abandonment by husbands who lack understanding of menstruation issues.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of female toilets in the work environment.</li> <li>• Sexist comments by male colleagues about hormonal stress.</li> <li>• Some cannot afford sanitary pads at market price.</li> </ul>

### Brief discussion and conclusion

The project of using sanitary pads as a means of addressing menstruation needs faced by girls and women who cannot afford branded pads was implemented successfully. The women received support from prominent male allies, one of whom volunteered to market the pads to all Head Teachers (HT) at the HT forum in March, 2016. However, a few unexpected **challenges** were encountered including; 1) Balancing the fear of losing husbands due to lack of understanding of menstruation issues, to seeking help regarding buying pads 2) Some women could not afford knickers; yet the pads needed to be fitted in a knicker 3) Many of the women were illiterate which made teaching of record-keeping skills difficult; 4) More sewing machines were needed; 5) Product distribution – there is a lack of packaging materials and the target schools are within 10-mile radius, without reliable public transport; 6) Funding for an office and capacity building at HERS-EA.



One of the participants packing finished sanitary pads for sale to local schools.

### Collaborative Research Areas:

1. **Education:** More focused research on the impact of menstruation on education of the girl child and therefore policy development including provisions in the national budget line.
2. **Sociology:** Impact of menstruation management on professional women; inclusiveness and full participation of women in economic and other activities
3. **Science and Technology:** Develop an appropriate product that is environmentally sensitive with regards to inputs and disposal.
4. **Business:** Sanitary products have guaranteed and growing demand; how can women benefit from a trade they *should* understand better than men?

### References:

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT