



In Uganda, adolescent girls and young women in inadequately served and rural communities miss up to eight days of study each school term because they are on their periods. This is due to lack of washrooms, lack of sanitary pads and bullying by peers with in and out of school settings, research conducted by various civil society organizations show that on average girls miss up 11% of the total learning days in a school calendar year. It's the school absence rate that is hard for the adolescent girls and young women to make up for and partly accounts for many adolescent girls and young women dropping out of high school in rural and inadequately served communities.

Most of the adolescent girls and young girls reached during some of our school out reaches say they use pieces of cloth called a [kitenge](#) which they get from their mothers or their own old pieces of cloth, while others improvise with the cloth nappies used by their younger siblings. Some girls even use dry leaves to try to soak up the blood in emergency situations. Not only are these adolescent girls dealing with a lack of materials, they are also stigmatized by cultural attitudes that regard menstruating women and girls as being un clean or dirty. Many girls grow up dreading their periods because of the social stigma associated with menstruation, as well as the lack of services and facilities to help them.

*“I used to use cloths that I would cut from my old T-shirts to keep the blood from staining my dresses, but they were not enough and blood would still stain my clothes,” said Joan, a 14-year-old student at St. Noa Kiyinda Primary School in Mityana. “Boys used to laugh at me and I eventually simply stayed home whenever my periods started.”*

After a visit by [Peer To Peer Uganda \(PEERU\)](#) with a sensitization and awareness campaign of **Know your Body** to our school;

*“Now I don’t get ashamed or embarrassed when I get my periods,” she says. “I even attend classes during my periods and nobody notices. Even boys at school no longer laugh at me like they used to do”*

Milly from Nakasongola district had to repeat a class for another year at Zengebe Primary School after she missed her final exams because of her period.

*“When I started menstruating, I went through many difficult days,” she says. “I could not get myself any materials to use to stop myself from soiling my clothes. It was better for me to stay at home rather than go through that shame at school.”*

There are many private companies that sell disposable sanitary pads in Uganda, but they are only sold in su supermarkets in towns and don’t reach rural areas. A number of social enterprises have emerged to address the issue, like Afripads, making re-useable menstrual kits, Makapads that make disposal pads out of paper waste. The cost of their products is generally lower than the imported disposable pads, but they are still relatively expensive and their outreach to rural areas is very limited yet still such local manufacturers lack financial support to increase production to satisfy the demand.

To fill the gap, [Peer To Peer Uganda \(PEERU\)](#) with support from [Community Health Alliance Uganda](#) and the [International HIV/AIDS Alliance](#) is implementing the **Know Your Body Campaign** under the **READY Teens Program**, to teach adolescent girls, young girls and their parents on menstrual hygiene and management and Body change. We also involve the wider community to address cultural taboos around and myths that hinder discussing menstruation. Now, schools in Mityana, Luwero and Nakasongola including secondary schools and primary schools are being engaged through the campaign which is to run till 2019 as we further engage adolescent peers through their school health clubs, focused group discussions and puppetry activation’s.

There is still need to address the issues adolescent girls and young women face holistically by advocating for the provision of affordable solutions for every girl in every school as a basic right.

Ugandan female parliamentarians under the leadership of the speaker of parliament Rebecca Kadaga are leading a campaign asking the government to provide adequate washrooms and to drop taxes on sanitary pads. The Ugandan constitution includes a pledge to “provide the facilities and opportunities necessary to enhance the welfare of women to enable them realise their full potential and advancement”. Sanitary towels and bathrooms seem a small price to pay for helping adolescent girls and young women to access a complete education.

*By: Bwire Moses  
Founder/Team Leader  
Peer To Peer Uganda (PEERU)*