

# UGANDA TRANSFORMING NORMS ABOUT MENSTRUATION



*"Thanks to the GUSO programme and Restless Development, I feel more like a man because I am able to contribute to improving the living standards of our family. Ever since I learnt how to make reusable sanitary pads in class, I make them for my sister and even my mother. At first I used to sneak into her room and put them on her bed, because I thought she would be embarrassed if she found out that I was the one making them but once she found out, she was actually surprised and it brought us closer. After school, I also make extra pads for selling and this has reduced the financial burden on my father because I can now afford to buy an exercise book."*

- Karim Kamuboona from Namatooke primary school – Mayuge District.

**During menstruation days, the overall school absence in Uganda is 28%, compared to 7% during regular days. This illustrates how menstrual care is a major health and educational issue affecting girls across Uganda.**

## **Barriers girl face**

School-aged girls in marginalised communities face the greatest barriers to accessing menstrual care. In Uganda, many schools do not have the necessary facilities, supplies, knowledge or understanding to support girls during menstruation. On top of this, some schools do not have enough water and sanitation available, which makes menstrual care almost impossible to maintain. All of these factors cause stress and embarrassment for female students, which negatively impacts their education and ability to stay in school. However, solutions are not easy, where challenges centred around menstruation are dominated by social and cultural norms, including secrecy, shame and approaches that do not involve the wider community and in particular, men and boys.

## **Involving boys**

To overcome this, Restless Development, part of the Uganda SRHR Alliance and the GUSO programme, partnered with key influencers to address the myths and misconceptions surrounding menstrual care. Communities were sensitised on the social, economic and health benefits of menstrual care and how this plays a key role in girls' empowerment. Restless Development started to offer peer educator-led sessions on Menstruation and Menstrual Care to both boys and girls, in and out of school.

Through the peer to peer approach, boys were asked to each train at least three other groups of boys in making reusable sanitary pads, which also positively impacts their financial independence. Additionally, Restless Development conduct education sessions on menstrual care management to address recurring myths and misconceptions surrounding menstruation and male involvement in menstrual care.

### **Fighting stigma**

Partnering with key stakeholders, such as cultural and religious leaders, changed communities' mind-sets on male engagement in menstrual care. The engagement of young boys helped to imprint them with menstrual care skills for sharing and emulation, but has also been a key factor in fighting male-instigated stigma and discrimination of girls during period days.

### **Empowering girls**

Menstrual care plays a fundamental role in empowering young girls to reach their full potential. The transition during reproductive age for some girls is often met with fear and anxiety due to a lack of knowledge and resources about menstruation and the changes occurring in their bodies. Menstruation is not only a reproductive health issue, it is also an all-round public health concern with vast impact on a society's social, education and economic outcomes.