



MENSTRUAL HYGIENE MANAGEMENT FOR SCHOOLGIRLS IN SOUTH SUDAN

South Sudan Red Cross

Photo description: Two schoolgirls participating in South Sudan Red Cross project
Photo credit: South Sudan Red Cross

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CASE STUDY

Background

Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) remains a critical barrier to educational access for girls in South Sudan. Schoolgirls face multiple challenges, including access to reliable information, products and services, compounded by stigma from their male and female peers. The SSRC identified the challenges of procuring and distributing reusable sanitary pads, necessitating significant financial, technical and management resources. Therefore, the SSRC's innovative approach to engage with girls and women, and mobilizing, training and supporting them to produce reusable sanitary pads from locally available materials in Kuajok aimed to combat menstrual stigma as well as access issues and recognize this group as agents of their own change.

The project was in partnership with the Canadian Red Cross (CRC). In particular, the CRC's Localized Innovation Fund (LIF) that was executed over 18 months from April 2022 to September 2023 with 3 National Societies: South Sudan, Philippines, and Nepal. The LIF forms part of CRC's commitment to localization to support locally led humanitarian response and resilience interventions. LIF aims to advance opportunities for innovation through a flexible and evidence-based process led by NSs, that is informed by local contexts and priorities.

Who was Supported and How

The South Sudan Red Cross (SSRC) designed and implemented an innovation in Kuajok, Gogrial West County, Warrap State, to break the prevailing barriers on Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) by conducting community engagement and engaging schoolgirls in the production and distribution of reusable pads, contributing to changes in knowledge, attitude and interest within the community.

The project relied on strong community engagement, including holding initial meetings with key stakeholders such as the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, community representatives (10 male and 5 female), school management committees and Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) to plan the activities. The SSRC, in collaboration with these stakeholders, identified five appropriate schools for the intervention and developed selection criteria to prioritize girls in need, including those who excelled academically but dropped out of school due to financial issues, or those who struggled to remain amid financial difficulties and their parents' inability to fund their education, young mothers neglected by their families and facing discrimination in the community, as well as girls with disabilities. In addition, the project utilized a local radio station to disseminate this information, reduce stigma and encourage uptake and usage of the reusable sanitary pads.

Personal Experience

At the age of 17, Bakhita Akoul left school due to an unintended pregnancy, struggling to support herself and feed her child with low paying jobs. In 2022, she heard about the project facilitated by the SSRC on the local Kuajok radio station (99.0 FM) that addressed the challenge of early pregnancy and encouraged school re-enrollment. With encouragement of her father, she decided to enroll again in a local school, one of the five schools where the SSRC supported the sanitary pad project.

“With the skills I have gained from this training, I aspire to train and empower more girls and women in my community who are willing to make their own reusable pads through locally available materials. The pads we made through the support of SSRC are distributed to schoolgirls at no cost. However, with additional support, we will be able to make more which we can sell at a reduced price to allow access for everyone as well as make it an income-generating opportunity for us.”

- Bakhita Akoul, 17 year-old participant in SSRC’s Sanitary Pad Pilot Project

Successes

The project equipped girls with valuable tailoring skills through dedicated volunteers. These volunteers trained the girls to create reusable sanitary pads, enabling them to work in the centers and gain financial independence at no cost.

Other key successes include:

- 20 female students (including one girl with disabilities) from 5 different schools trained.
- 2,500 pieces of sanitary towels produced locally and distributed during face-to-face MHM awareness sessions in schools.
- Awareness on MHM was raised through Kuajok’s 99.0 FM. The radio station reached approximately 90,000 people with MHM messages.

Lessons Learned

- 1- Pro Improvement in the livelihoods of participating girls by providing them with new skills and increasing their school attendance. Participants received a small income from the sale of locally produced pads, which were offered at subsidized prices in the local market.
- 2- Introduction of the local production model of Gogrial West County helps to reduce dependency on importing reusable pads from Uganda.
- 3- Inclusion of parents, teachers, and boys was critical for the project's effectiveness and sustainability, as well as the confidence and empowerment of schoolgirls and women. Training boys on menstrual hygiene and the use of local materials for effective management proved to be highly beneficial.
- 4- Leveraging SSRC's capacity acquired from other projects, especially from the school-based "Healthy Bodies Healthy Minds in South Sudan" project, enabled access to gender-based analysis, stakeholder engagement, staff and technical support and behaviour change programming.
- 5- SSRC is exploring opportunities to expand the initiative to additional schools with support from the Ministry of Education. This includes developing production centers by supplying equipment and materials to the initial five pilot schools and make reusable pads more accessible and affordable for students and the local community.