

AFRIpads: a simple product that's changing lives across Uganda

Growing up comes with challenges for all girls, though particularly for those growing up in poverty in the developing world. Without sufficient information and resources, natural bodily processes like menstruation can be a frightening experience for girls and can even pose a threat to their [education](#) and well-being.

"I started my period when I was 15," 16-year-old Maureen, of [Uganda](#), confided. "My mother never talked to me about it, and when I first saw it, I was scared. Every month I would miss 3 or 4 days of school. I was fearful of going when I had it."

Unfortunately, like Maureen, many girls in developing countries have little information on [sexual health](#), and don't understand that menstruation is normal. They are unsure of how to hygienically address this monthly matter, and have few options for sanitary materials – often using cotton wool, newspaper, or even leaves.

Concerned, embarrassed, uncomfortable and without the proper tools and resources, girls often opt to stay home during menstruation -- missing several days of class every month. Lower attendance can mean less likelihood to pass, to stay in school and to secure a job -- limiting their chance of learning, building confidence and life skills, and attaining economic independence.

And that's where [AFRIpads](#) comes in. The Plan-partnered company, founded in 2009 by Canadians Sophia Klumpp and Paul Grinvalds, produces washable cloth pads. Simple to use, AFRIpads products are also sanitary, eco-friendly, cost-effective and, ultimately, life-changing. From the workers who create them, to the girls who use them, meet some of the men and women across Africa, of all ages, whose lives have improved thanks to this one product.

The many people of AFRipads

THE CREATORS



Plan has offered training in business and financial skills, which has enabled Irene to earn a degree. She now works as a production manager at the factory.



The AFRipads factory employs over 100 people in Uganda, and produces approximately 700 sanitary kits every week. Each kit contains a holder, pads, and a storage bag to store pads that cannot be immediately washed.



Rose works in the quality control room ensuring that every product is stenciled, cut, lined, sewn, and packaged to standard. "My life is improving and I'm able to educate my children, in order to get a better future," she said.



Josephine was unemployed before she got a job at the factory. "My job allows me to look after myself and my family," she said. "I pay school fees for 2 relatives and I am also able to buy supplies for the hairdressing salon I operate on the side."

THE DISTRIBUTORS



Lovisa is a radio personality who informs women about the products and proper usage. She is one of the many women that have become an official AFRipads dealer and opened her own small business.



It isn't just women who are involved: Joseph drives a vehicle to transport the pads to sellers. Recently, he and his wife Irene – who works at the factory – were able to afford to buy land and build their own home!



Sarah sells the reusable pads – which are significantly cheaper than disposable products – to William, a supportive father of 5 daughters. Plan also enables distributors, like Sarah, to purchase the products at a subsidized rate so that they too can benefit financially.

THE EDUCATORS



Plan implemented Menstrual Health Management programs across 53 villages in Uganda. Many teachers, health workers and volunteers educate girls and boys on menstrual hygiene and related topics. Awareness sessions and dramatic plays help inform while also destigmatizing gender-specific, taboo subjects.



Peninah, 15, became a health prefect because she wanted to share the information she had learned. "I teach my friends about cleaning their latrines at home, keeping their compounds clean, and washing their clothes. I tell them to bathe daily and to wash and dry their AFRipads very well."

THE CONSUMERS



"Now I can just sit and be comfortable," said Mamay. "Even if I play or I jump, nothing happens."



Thanks to AFRipads, Maureen, 16, and her friends, now have access to effective sanitary products. "All the girls are coming to school every day and our grades are better," she said. "No one is upset about getting their period anymore."



Best of all, this simple solution gets girls back in classrooms, where they belong.

THE IMPACT

The AFRipads initiative reveals how investing in girls can effect change at many levels.

"It helps promote gender equality more broadly as girls stay in school longer. They can earn a livelihood and have accurate information on how to manage their health effectively," said Plan Uganda's Mary Namwebe.

With Plan's [Gifts of Hope](#), you too can break down barriers that prevent girls from reaching their full potential, helping them look forward to brighter futures. When you purchase a Gift of Hope online, a complimentary Ecard or PDF card can be sent to your recipient – recognizing the incredible impact they've inspired.

Taken from Plan Canada

<http://plancanada.ca/afripads-uganda-how-a-simple-product-is-changing-lives#panel4-3>

