



72th World Health Assembly Agenda item 12.8

May 24th 2019

Speaker Ms. Seema Uplekar

International Alliance of Women, IAW, focusses on Women's rights, including their sexual and reproductive health rights.

Girls' chances to thrive and transform their lives are often reduced at an early age due to the lack of health education, particularly the menstrual health management. According to UNICEF¹, UNESCO² and WHO³ about one in 10 girls in Africa, Asia and South America skips school during menstruation and often finally drops out due to an unhealthy environment where no sanitary pads or proper toilets are available. Menstruation is often one of the strongest taboos.

Therefore IAW in 2017 launched the project **"Water and Pads for School-Girls – Empowerment for Life"**⁴. The project is carried out by seven IAW member-organizations in low-income countries. It addresses several goals of the UN Sustainable Development agenda 2030. Contacts with selected schools were established in poor rural areas in Cameroon, DR Congo, Pakistan, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The teachers most of all pleaded for age-adapted teaching-tools on sexual health. An IAW team then organized or edited booklets in English and French appropriate for primary and secondary schools. The pilot-project conducted at a rural school in Cameroon in February 2019 was very successful. It had a wide media coverage. Many parents of the school-girls were thankful for the breaking up of this taboo. The girls and boys got an increased awareness of mutual responsibilities when growing up.

IAW strongly supports all WHO efforts to disseminate educational tools about sexual and reproductive health, such as booklets written in regional languages.

We appeal to all governments to endorse efforts to provide a good menstrual health management for girls worldwide, thus enabling them to attend school without discrimination.

1 UNICEF http://www.unicef.org/wash/schools/files/MHM_vConf_2014.pdf

2 UNESCO <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002267/226792e.pdf>

3 WHO <https://reproductive-health-journal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12978-017-0293-6>

4 IAW Water and Pads Project: <https://iawwaterandpads.jimdofree.com/>

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