



SOFEDC
WOMEN'S SOLIDARITY FOR ENVIRONMENTAL
DEVELOPMENT AND CHILDREN'S RIGHT IN DR CONGO
in collaboration with the International Alliance of Women
IAW / AIF

« Water and Pads for School-Girls - Empowerment for Life »

An awareness-raising activity on menstrual hygiene for girls

Introduction

Menstrual hygiene management is a topic related to more than one human rights. Almost every woman and girl (from puberty to menopause) will have her period on average every 28 days for about 5 days. It is a completely normal biological process, just as normal as the fact that many men will have facial hair. Yet menstruation is surrounded by silence, myths and taboos, and is even stigmatized. Women and girls around the world face many challenges to manage their menstrual periods. They may lack the means to do so, or they face discriminatory cultural norms or practices that make it difficult to maintain good hygiene. As a result of all these challenges, women and girls may be denied some basic human rights, thus turning a simple biological fact into an obstacle to gender equality. The biological fact of menstruation itself, the need to manage it well, and society's response to both aspects are linked to gender equality and the human rights of women and girls.

Objectives of the activity

General objective:

Breaking the taboo on menstruation, which is actually a weapon of discrimination and a violation of children's human rights

Specific objectives :

- reduce the dropout rate of schoolgirls due to monthly absences as a result of lacking information on menstrual hygiene
- eliminate all discriminatory taboos about menstruation
- avoid early and unwanted pregnancies
- provide information preparing the girls for their first period
- inform the girls on how to use the hygienic pads and how to deal with menstruation in general
- inform the girls about the proper menstrual management in their school educational environment, as well as about their personal hygiene
- inform the girls about pharmaceutical products to use in case of painful periods
- exchange of experiences among the girls on how to deal with a surprising start of the period at school.

Expected results

- the girls are informed about menstrual health and will spread their knowledge within their communities
- the girls speak openly about menstruation without any shame
- the girls talk freely with others about their experiences
- the booklets about menstrual health are distributed and will be useful guides.

Methodological approach

- spontaneous exchanges among the girl-students
- questions that elicit clear answers about what happens to girls during their menstruation in their school setting
- presentations of the topic by the girl-students

- decisions taken by groups on how to raise awareness
- setting up groups of 5 girl-students who can choose a school where they go for raising awareness within the next school year.

The participants

107 girls from the SOS Bukavu Children's Village School and the PRF, family strengthening program
<https://www.soschildrensvillages.ca/node/23958>

Teaching material

"Puberty and menstrual hygiene - a short guide for girls" - "La puberté et l'hygiène menstruelle" published in French by UNICEF Burkina Faso. The copies were printed and sent by the International Women's Alliance IAW/AIF to SOFEDEC and were then distributed.

Date and place :

July 09, 2019 from 8 to 12 am at the SOS school in Bukavu

Venue of the activity

Official opening: **The Prefect of the Bunyakiri Institute**

Facilitator: **Mrs. Anuarite Siirewabo Muyuwa**

Outline discussed to achieve the objectives

Ms. Anuarite Siirewabo, outlines puberty and menstruation by closely following the information given in the brochure:

- What is puberty?
- What are the possible changes in the girl?
- Tips for body hygiene
- Having your period - a natural step as you grow up
- When you see the blood every month you shouldn't be afraid!
- It's not a disease, it's a function of the body!
- What to do when the period arrives? Menstrual hygiene
- Tips for managing menstrual hygiene at school
- Health advice
- Menstrual calendar

Various hygienic pads

The facilitator gives very precise information about the management of the periods.

Reusable pads

A clean piece of cotton is used, folded several times and placed at the bottom of the panties or tied in a traditional way with a cord. Helpful are also reusable washable towels. These napkins are produced locally. To feel good and to stay clean and to avoid stains or infections, the pads should be changed at least every 3 to 4 hours. The reusable pad must be washed. For drying it should be exposed to the sun (well correctly hung up on a clothes line), and later on put back in a clean bag for the next use.

Single-use pads

These are sanitary towels made of synthetic fibre and cellulose, sometimes available in shops. After use they must be buried in a place where children or animals cannot find them, e. g. in a traditional toilet, but never in a river nor in the public garbage can, the schoolyard or in a flush toilet!
 "If you have any questions, you should talk to an elderly woman you trust. »

Discussion with the school-girls

During this event the girls bring up a lot of questions about menstruation. They start discussions that show the problems of girls:

- sleeping with a man can be followed by a stop of menstruation and therefore an unwanted pregnancy
- menstruation is not a disease
- many cultural practices violate the rights of children (girls)
- due to menstruation some schoolgirls miss classes and even drop out of school, which may result in alcoholism, in unwanted pregnancies and early marriages,
- lack of adequate sanitation facilities at school
- difficulty to know the cycle due to the lack of menstrual calendars
- lack of sanitary pads (locally produced reusable towels)
- lack of awareness in the communities

Recommendations of the girls at the end of the lecture:

- schools must have separate toilets for girls and boys
- organizations should distribute calendars to track the menstrual cycle
- organizations should provide pads of different types; this allows each girl to find the right ones according to her means
- awareness-raising campaigns in favour of girls should be intensified in both urban and rural areas.

THANK YOU!

Anuarite Siirewabo July 18 2019