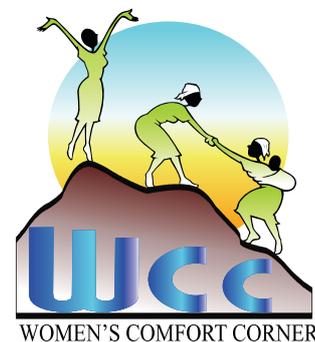


NATIONAL CONFERENCE: TRANSFORMING MENSTRUAL HEALTH MANAGEMENT IN SCHOOLS

A project of international Alliance of Women



GIRLS' VOICES



Entering Womanhood A project of international Alliance of Women IAW/AIF

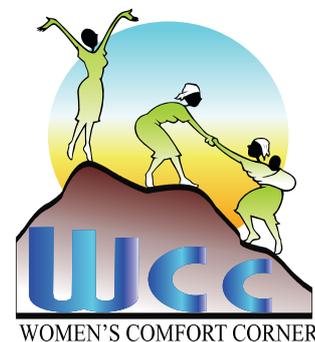
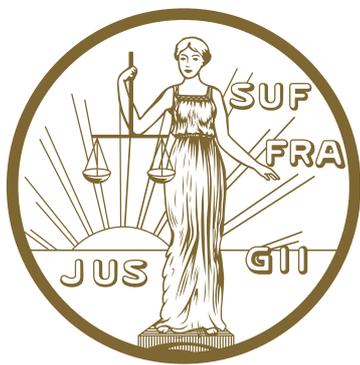
On the 16th of August, 2023 Women's Comfort Corner Foundation hosted a National Conference on the Transforming Menstrual Health Management in Primary and Secondary Schools. Amongst two hundred and three (203) invited guests there were discussions with high level leaders, communities, women and girls to advocate and create awareness among public on improving Menstrual Hygiene Management. This was a unique gathering where the disabled girls were also represented. Stakeholders' involvement in Menstrual Health Management Conference will be assessed be collected from the stakeholders who have expressed interest in working with Women's Comfort Corner Foundation.

The conference was prompted by the extensive research wherein the outcome indicated that girls resort to using unhygienic, unsafe materials during their menstruation due to a plethora of reasons including inability to purchase pads.

WHY WAS THE CONFERENCE HOSTED

The Conference was hosted to: raise awareness about the stigma and confronting the taboos head on; focusing on period-friendly sanitation facilities; raise awareness about the challenges faced in particular by rural girls and young women regarding access to menstrual products.



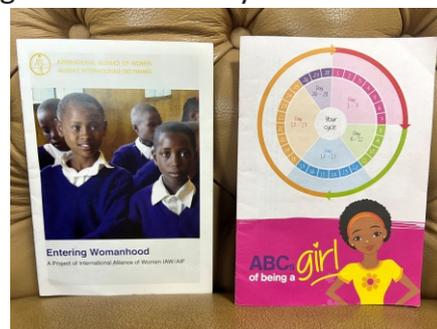


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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS)

Improved and sustainable Menstrual Health Management has great impact on several of the Sustainable Development Goals. The International Alliance of Women's focus is on the education sector and developing WASH in school policies. The discussants concurred that health and water, sanitation and hygiene are interlinked. The deprivation associated with period poverty recognize the centrality of:

- Sustainable Development 1 [No poverty]
- Sustainable Development 3 [Good health and Well Being]
- Sustainable Development 4 [Quality Education]
- Sustainable Development 5 [Gender Equality]
- Sustainable Development 6 [Clean water and sanitation]

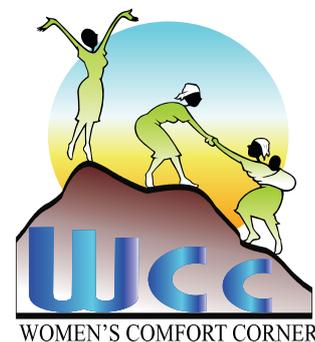


INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE OF WOMEN BOOKLETS

The booklets from the International Alliance of Women reprinted by Women's Comfort Corner Foundation made it explicit that Menstrual Health Management goes beyond water, sanitation and disposal. The Booklet entitled **Entering Womanhood - (A Project of International Alliance of Women IAW/AIF)** provides information on puberty, menstruation, menstrual cycle, violence and harassment. The booklets also made it easier for teachers and the community to cascade information and gender sensitive education to the girls and the boys. **Twenty booklets of Entering Womenhood were given to each of the 203 conference participants.**

For the children in primary schools the most relevant booklets are the **ABCs of being a girl**. The booklet written in simple language helps teachers to impart information to the girls. **It describes the onset of menstruation, what happens during the cycle, body changes** and importantly how often the pads should be changed. **Twenty booklets of ABCs of being a girl were given to each of the 203 conference participants.** Female-friendly water and sanitation facilities in schools, and trained teachers supporting students are two examples of gender-responsive measures that could be implemented within the education sector.

As Women's Comfort Corner Foundation we believe engaging the teachers, community, policy makers to better address the Menstrual Health Management needs of girls. The booklets also delves into the issues of rape and HIV.



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INFORMATION AND EDUCATION – [BOOKLETS]
TRANSLATING ENGLISH INTO VERNACULAR LANGUAGE

Some of the children in the rural areas are not able to read and understand English. Considering the unfortunate scenario, representatives from WCCF proposed that able volunteers, the community and teachers translate the contents of the booklets into vernacular. The factual information contained in the booklets is invaluable in helping the primary school children to understand biology.

The translation is also helpful in that in some home settings some guardians are hesitant or unwilling to discuss MHM due to the taboo or to being uninformed themselves. Capacity building to the community, teachers and health workers is of great importance. We have noted a very positive outcome by including men and boys in training and education to increase their understanding and foster their support, particularly by not imposing discriminatory practices.

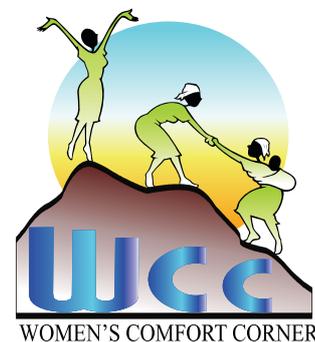
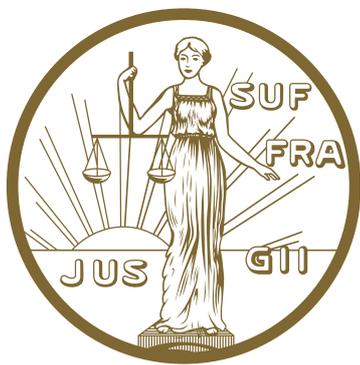
DOES THE EDUCATION SECTOR RECOGNIZE THE MENSTRUAL NEEDS OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN SCHOOLS?

Through PADS Project and assistance from International Alliance of Women. The pads project managed by Women's Comfort Corner Foundation in Zimbabwe is beginning to bear fruit. There is still inadequate sanitation and water facilities but a dramatic difference is visible in several schools for example the number of people who attended the conference and the booklets which were distributed it's bound to reach thousands of people country wide and in the process pushing back stigma and societal taboos. The partners who attended the conference will help accelerate progress on menstrual health and hygiene for the girl child, both a prerequisite and an outcome of sustainable development. Existing socio-cultural taboos and discriminatory practices around menstruation need to be challenged.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) is an essential human right and part of the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Most girls lack information on sexual health and information. Menstrual hygiene management (MHM) is part of the overall efforts within SRHR. In the rural areas some girls are struggling with misinformation. The conclusion reached at the conference is to escalate education and training in the affected areas and it is expected that a positive outcome will result from the conference.

The teams from the rural areas were unanimous in their submissions that most girls do not attend school for the duration of their periods. The cause of this injustice emanates from inadequate water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities because most families in the rural areas do not have access to pads.



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EFFECT OF PADS ON THE ENVIRONMENT:

In some parts of the city and in the rural areas inadequate unsafe disposal for soiled materials. More research and information is needed for appropriate disposal solutions that are safe, effective, and affordable. A suggestion was made for the use reusable pads for the sake of the environment. It is also essential for the girls to have access to water and soap for daily hygiene as well as for the increased needs during menstruation.

LACK OF EDUCATION BARRIER TO EMPOWERMENT

The key development sectors where MHM could be included are health, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), incorporating MHM as one of the subjects in the school curriculum. The booklets from International Alliance of Women bolsters empowerment to the girl child by providing education around puberty and menstruation which helps overcome the barrier to girls' empowerment. Although lots of progress has been made Menstrual Health Management is often not properly addressed, thus many women and girls lack or have

difficulty in accessing adequate hygienic, absorbent menstrual materials and WASH facilities.

GIRLS WITH DISABILITY

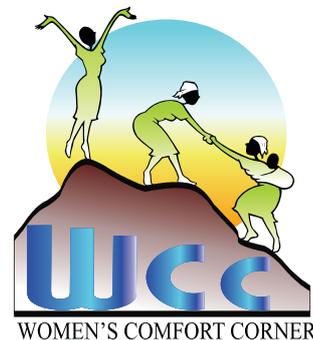
Women's Comfort Corner's initial focus is on the disabled girls from 10 – 18 years. The attitude against people living with disability has unfortunately always negative. Most of the parents go to the extreme and hide the disabled children at home out of shame. Most programs rolled out in the country hardly include people living with disability which prompts the parents of the children hide their children in their homes as a protective measure. In general, people living with disability are seen as incapable, unproductive and need to be taken care of all the time. The marginalisation results in the disabled people having very low esteem and feel like they are burdens even in the school premises.

One of the attendants a 15 year old made jarring submissions stating that the discrimination against children in schools was debilitating which discourages them from attending school.

It was distressing to hear how the social and cultural forces that undermine children's ability as a solid barrier because of inadequate school infrastructure. Most facilities are not accessible to school children with disabilities. For wheel chairs there are no ramps. For the girl child the major barrier to school retention is inaccessible water and sanitation a real tragedy and a violation of rights.

ADVOCACY DIRECTED TO GIRLS WITH DISABILITY

The plan is to direct advocacy to educational officials and the community to help advocate for the improvement of facilities to include accessible bathroom facilities for disabled students. Include the disabled student in menstruation awareness clubs and avail disposal bins.



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HOW THE DISABLED GIRL CHILD LIVES WILL IMPROVE

The girl child will understand the importance of Menstrual Health Management and by being part of the Menstruation Clubs. The clubs decide how to navigate positive health management which in turn helps to prevent or contract diseases. The booklets from the International Alliance of Women have been shared to help the girl child appreciate changes in their body. Instead of getting requisite information from mainly the community and teachers the adolescents will rely on peer to peer information sharing.

PROPOSED SUPPORT FROM INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE OF WOMEN AND WOMEN'S COMFORT CORNER FOUNDATION

International Alliance of Women will provide educational information in the form of booklets

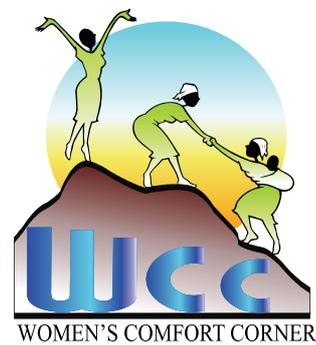
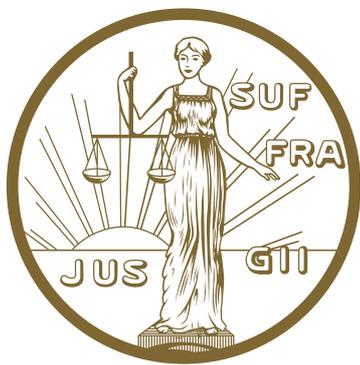
Women's Comfort Corner Foundation will disseminate information in relation to Menstrual Health Management including capacity building on all levels. Support programmes that provide education to girls, boys, and teachers in schools.

Support multi-sectorial collaboration among stakeholders on all levels to develop strategies, policies, and/ or programmes that include MHM.

ECOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS

Support the development and provision of sustainable and ecological solutions and innovations related to MHM.

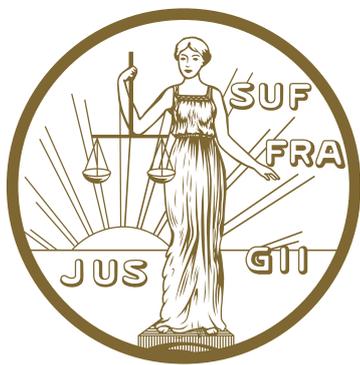




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THE CONFERENCE IN PICTURES

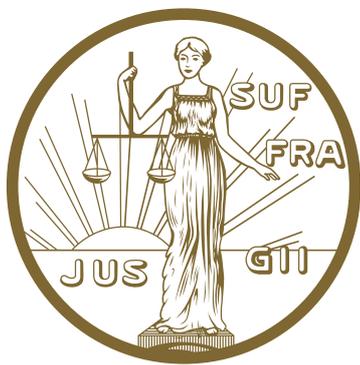




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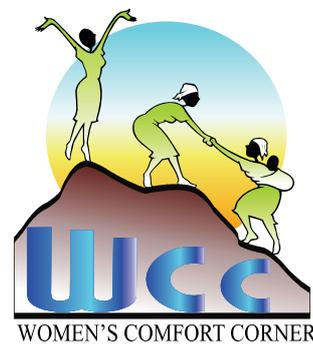




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