



## WOMEN'S COMFORT CORNER FOUNDATION REPORT

### WATER AND PADS - EMPOWERMENT FOR LIFE!

#### A PROJECT OF INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE OF WOMEN IAW/AIF

**ACTIVITIES: 2024** at schools in Bulawayo and Harare as well as at the KidsRkids JUNIOR SCHOOL in Harare, Zimbabwe

#### 1. Introduction:

The WATER and PADS Project was designed to tackle the difficulties encountered by girls from primary to secondary school in understanding the various physical and hormonal changes that occur during early puberty. This initiative was implemented across schools in Bulawayo and Harare, Zimbabwe, and spanned from January to November 2024. On this particular occasion we interacted with primary school girls from KidsRkids Junior School. In a society where early puberty is often shrouded in myths, stigma, and discrimination, the ongoing project seeks to dispel the fears, confusion, shame, and cultural misconceptions associated with this stage of development.





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### 2. Interaction with the girls

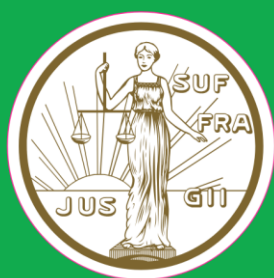
The initial phase focused on young students who are directly affected by the visible physical changes and menstruation. Natasha\* an 11-year-old girl highlighted her confusion and embarrassment upon noticing hair growth in her armpits and intimate area, and her subsequent horror upon discovering blood on her pants. She stated as follows:

**I would like to thank you for taking your time to cascade the pads project and addressing physical changes material to the girl child which can be frightening as one would not be aware of what would be happening”**

These experiences underscored the necessity of the project, which provided comprehensive education within the hour allocated to Women's Comfort Corner Foundation. The sessions began with an explanation of the biological structure of females to foster appreciation and understanding of their bodies.

Key topics included breast development, pubic hair growth, menstruation, menstrual hygiene, personal hygiene, and the proper use of sanitary wear. The booklets provided by IAW were instrumental in imparting knowledge in an easy manner. These booklets were distributed to both girls and boys for interactive sessions.

A significant finding was that 42% of the girls reported a loss of confidence in class during their periods, with the most traumatic experience being the staining of uniforms which at times was attributed to irregular menstruation.



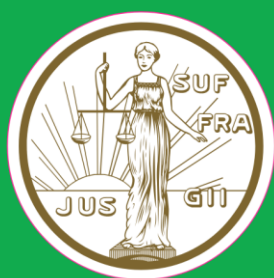
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### 3. Education

Further the girls were educated about the health risks and dangers of using dirty rags during menstruation.



To counteract this, various activities debates on menstruation were organized to boost their confidence. The project consistently emphasized that puberty is a natural transition from girlhood to womanhood and worked to debunk myths like using cooking sticks to flatten the breasts and delay breast growth. This was allegedly done ostensibly to prevent the girl child from being sexually abused. In some instances raw eggs are used in a bid to prevent pubic hair growth. The latter occurrence demonstrates the need to continue engaging schools and the community for the benefit and well-being of the girl child.



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### 4. Production of pads

The girls expressed concerns about the lack of sanitary wear, highlighting the need for programs to donate t, cotton wool pads to improve sanitary hygiene. In order to alleviate the problem IAW donated a sewing machine to WCCF. A project to sew pads for the girl child has been initiated, and efforts are underway to expand this program nationally by engaging stakeholders such as parents, teachers, clinics, churches, and the community. Educating girls alone will not lead to a comprehensive attitude change regarding early puberty and menstruation; the inclusion of boys in workshops is crucial to reducing shaming and bullying in schools during menstruation days. Theoretical presentations were complemented by practical demonstrations to enhance the project's effectiveness. Tools for use during presentations will significantly improve the delivery of information.

Alarmingly, in our interaction with primary school children 7 in 10 girls indicated they could not use sanitary wear properly, with 42% unaware of when to change the pads.







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### 5. Establishing Information Clubs

Advocating for the formation of clubs in schools and communities where girls can discuss their experiences and challenges is vital.

These clubs will provide a safe space for pupils to interact and express themselves without shame, thereby boosting self-esteem and confidence. Training adult females in communities to lead these efforts will ensure that girls receive support and guidance through the menstruation process. There is a need to explore alternative methods of educating girls, particularly those who are illiterate. Translators are essential in ensuring that all girls have access to knowledge and can benefit from the educational resources provided.



FROM: WOMEN'S COMFORT CORNER FOUNDATION WCCF  
Glen Middlemost, January 2025