



# **MEN**struation

A manual introducing boys  
and girls to the period.

**T4U**

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real people making  
a real difference

## **Acknowledgements**

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Charlotte is a multi-talented award-winning poet and writer with a bachelor's degree in Biomedical Sciences. She is passionate about community health. She volunteers with Nyalojje Integrated Foundation (NIF) as a project lead in community health education programs. She is a final year medical student at Makerere University in Uganda.

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## **HOW TO USE THE MANUAL**

This manual has been developed with the aim of increasing awareness on menstruation. It mainly focuses on highlighting how to, and the need to involve boys and men in the efforts of achieving menstrual hygiene management for girls and women in the community.

The contents of this manual can be used to introduce or train young people from the age of 9 years about menstruation. It is applicable in various situations such as;

- Settings with only boys/men e.g.: boys' only schools, and male community groups like boys' football teams.
- Settings with both boys and girls such as mixed schools that are very common in Uganda.
- Settings with only girls e.g.: girls' only schools and women/girls only groups in the community.
- To freely and openly talk about menstruation.
- Training of trainers in workshops or advocacy trainings.
- It can also be used by organizations to introduce the subject to their workers as well as improve understanding, dignity and dispel myths around menstruation.

This manual is designed to be participant friendly and to get participants talking about and involved in Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) advocacy. The facilitator should try to involve as many of the participants as possible and desist from actively engaging the same volunteer for all the sessions.

Being the first of its kind, the manual has been developed in such a way that it can be used in different settings and cultures. In any MHM training program, one of the key areas that require particular attention is culture and its associated myths in the community. The section on Facts and Myths in this manual was designed with a view that the trainers would study the local context and incorporate the commonly observed myths and/or facts within the community into the manual/training. This way, the subject is better appreciated and embraced by the community.

Also, this manual has carefully chosen true stories from young people across Uganda. Whereas they can be read, the video is preferred since it is richer in content due to the audio/visual explanations that would improve on learning of the subject.

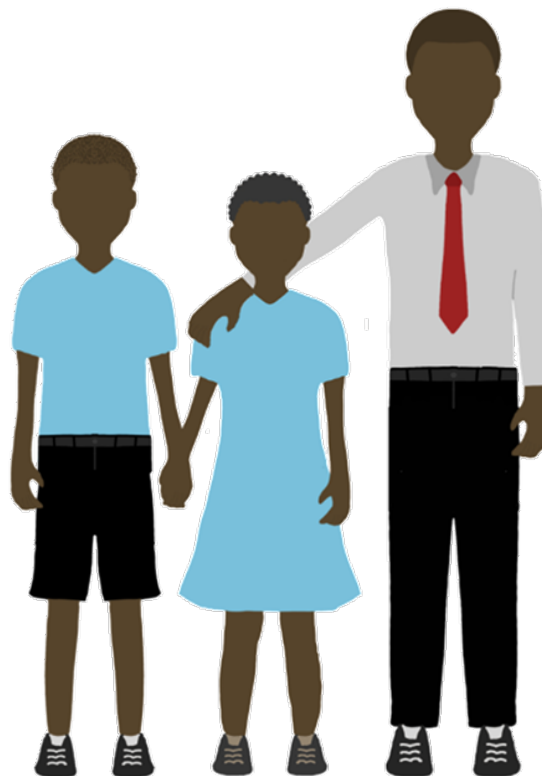
## INTRODUCTION

Promoting menstrual hygiene management for girls requires the full support of the boys who are without a doubt an essential part of the community. The boys and men are brothers, cousins, boyfriends, friends to the girls and have the potential of becoming fathers, managers, husbands, teachers, supervisors and opinion leaders. People in these positions hold the power to influence decisions, many of which will have an effect on the girl's menstrual experience and the overall community perception of menstruation.

The audio-visual clip (Appendix 1) is an example of some of the unexpected situations many boys and men find themselves in. In many of such cases, the girls will fail to get the necessary support to hygienically manage their menstruation **with dignity** because the boys did not have any idea about menstruation or how they could have been of help. [Read/Watch/listen to the story at this point]

This material will introduce boys to the basic concepts of menstruation so that they can be:

- Supportive of the females, especially during menstruation.
  - More accepting of the girls, and freer with them during menstruation.
  - More knowledgeable about the concept of menstruation.
- Able to openly talk about menstruation/normalise menstruation.



## THE JOHARI WINDOW

The Johari window is a technique that was used by Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham to help people understand themselves and their relationships with one another. It has been adapted to get people's views and perceptions about menstruation.

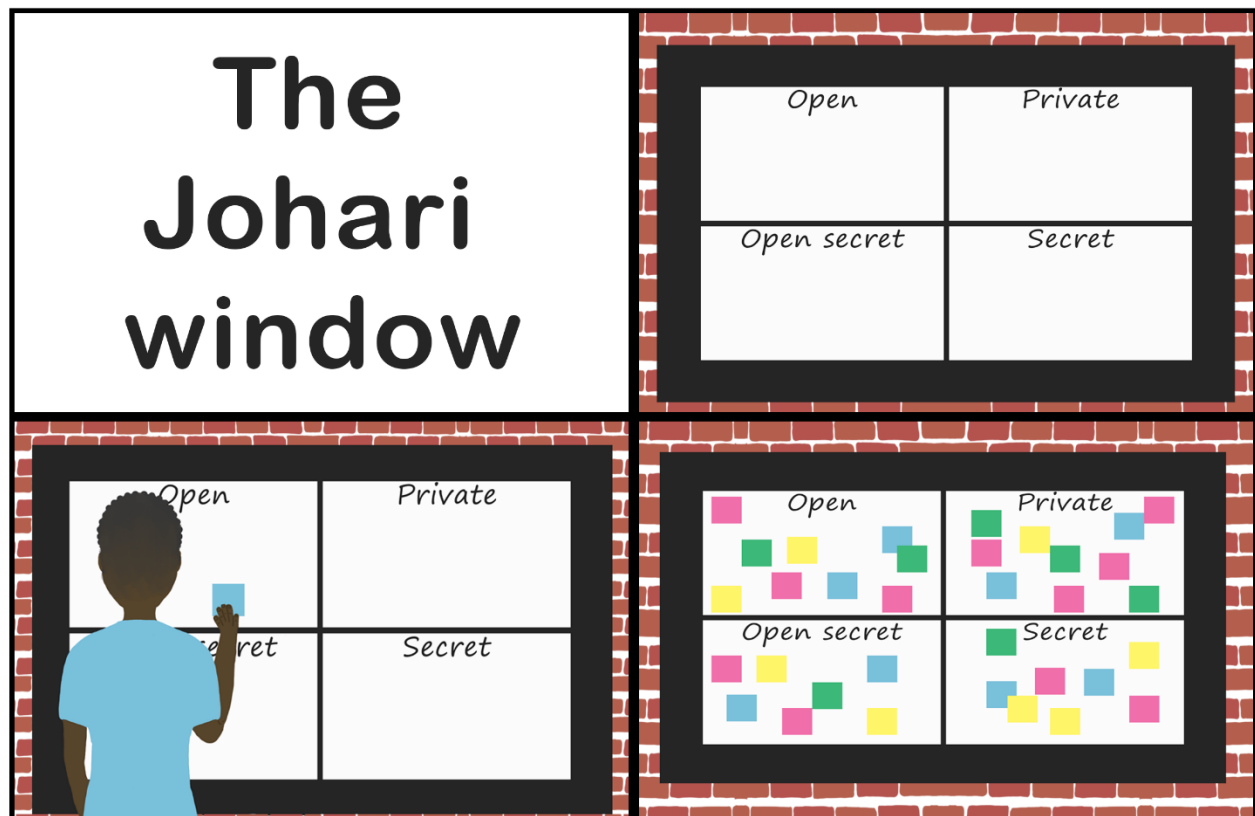
This will be used at the beginning of the session to achieve many purposes which include;

- Opening up about the topic of menstruation.
- Talking about something one rarely talks about or has never talked about.
- To gauge the willingness of the participants to discuss menstruation.
- Acting as an icebreaker to start talking about menstruation.
- To get an idea of the perceptions of the participants and the community about menstruation.

### **Materials needed:**

- 2-4 flip chart papers (depending on the number of participants)
- Pens
- Sticky notes in four different colours
- Marker

Before the session begins, stick the flip chart papers on to a wall or blackboard and make sure they are firmly in place. Label the papers with a marker as shown below;



## **Activity (20minutes)**

Make sure the participants understand what the different terms mean and give examples of situations that may fall in the different boxes. *Repeat the explanation if you should*

**Open** – something that is known by everyone and easily talked about even in public and with anyone, for example music.

**Open secret** – something that people are aware of but do not talk about, for example corruption.

**Secret** – something one would talk about with only a few close people, for example where one keeps their money.

**Private** – something one does not share or talk about with anyone, for example one's HIV status.

Give each participant four sticky notes of the same color (**Blue**) and tell them to write an example [apart from those given above] of what they believe would be in each of the boxes box [open, open secret, secret, private] and then let them put the sticky notes in the various respective boxes.

Get a volunteer to read the various examples in the different boxes to help get a clear picture.

Now give each participant a **Green** sticky note.

**Ask them;** “*How does the community you live in view talking about menstruation?*”

Ask them to place the sticky note where they think best suits this question.

Give the participants some time to stick the sticky notes in the various boxes.

Give them **Yellow** sticky notes. Ensure that everyone has only one sticky note.

**Ask them;** “*How do girls view talking about menstruation?*”

Ask them to place the sticky note where they think best suits this question.

Give the participants some time to stick the sticky notes in the various boxes.

Lastly, give each one a **Pink** sticky note for this fourth round of similar activity.

**Ask them;** “*How do you view talking about menstruation?*”

Ask them to place the sticky note where they think best suits this question.

Give the participants some time to stick the sticky notes in the various boxes.

Note: The colours (blue, green, yellow & pink) of the sticky notes above are for illustration purposes. Trainers are free to choose any other 4 colours depending on the availability and choice.

## **Discussion**

Ask the participants to look at the charts and voice their observations. (Involve about 4-5 participants)

You can drive the conversation further by asking the following questions;

- What could be the reasons for placing menstruation in one box and not another?
- What are the effects of being in one box as compared to being in another?
- Do we need to move people from one box to another?
- How do we move people from one box to another?

## **Ending the Session**

You might have realized that various factors affect the box where people placed the sticky notes. One of the major determinants is culture. Some cultures treat menstruation as a 'hushed' subject.

There are also myths about menstruation which may affect how people view menstruation. With time, you will have to handle how to overcome the myths using factually proven knowledge.

Conclude this session with reading/watching the Poem “***Broken Dreams***” (Appendix 2)  
The poem describes the typical life of a girl who fails to become the person she wanted to be because of the challenges associated with menstruation.



### **Broken Dreams**

*As a young girl  
My dream is to study hard  
Get a bright future  
Grow into a responsible lady.  
....*

Until one day,  
Seated in class  
I find blood on my skirt,  
Trembling in fear,  
And confusion,  
I rush to the toilet.  
No water to clean myself.

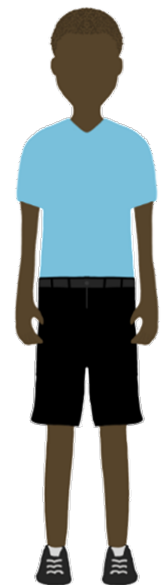
## **MALE INVOLVEMENT**

### **WHY BOYS SHOULD BE INVOLVED IN MENSTRUAL HYGIENE MANAGEMENT**

Normally, boys and men are kept away from issues of menstruation. Girls from a young age are taught to keep 'their issues' away from their fathers, uncles, brothers, teachers and other males. Teachers in schools send boys out of class and make sure no male teacher is around before talking to the girls about menstruation. This has not only led to shame (in case a girl stains her clothing in the presence of a male), but also a tendency of girls to keep away from school when they start having their period due to fear of being bullied by boys.

So why should boys be involved in menstrual hygiene management?

- Boys are ignorant about menstruation because it is considered a 'girls' issue' and they are silenced when they express curiosity on the topic.
- Boys/men have women in their lives who may need help during this time.
- We live in a society where most decisions (especially financial ones) are made by men. If money is not put aside for sanitary towels, girls are most likely to stain their clothes or resort to using unsanitary material like rugs and paper which may lead to infections.
- If we are to overcome bullying and stigma associated with menstruation, boys should get involved.
- Boys/men are future fathers/ father figures. They need to understand their daughters' needs during menstruation and provide them with the necessary physical and psychological support.
- In a society where most of the leaders and stakeholders/bosses are often men, it is essential to include boys and men in menstrual hygiene management for better understanding of the challenges women go through and for advocacy of better hygienic sanitary facilities in schools and at workplaces.
- Improvement in menstrual hygiene management can also help to build the economy as girls and women will not have to forfeit school or work respectively, while they are on their period. This is a win for both sexes.
- A combined effort is always better.



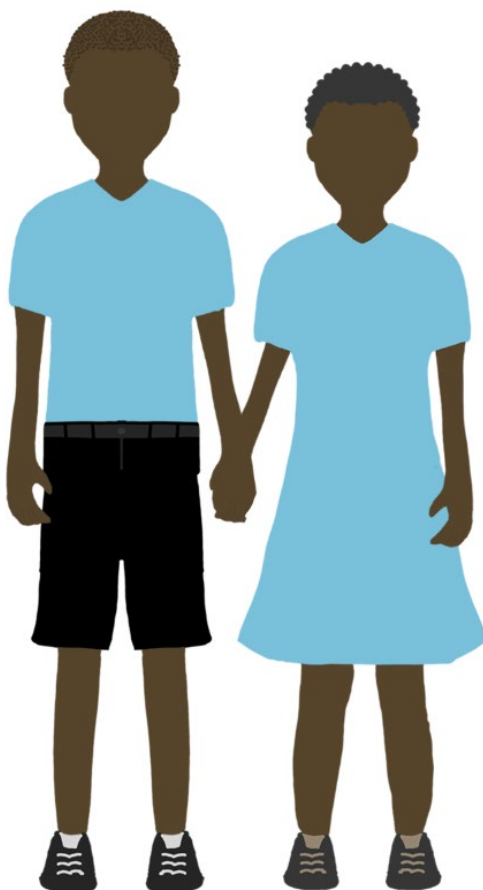




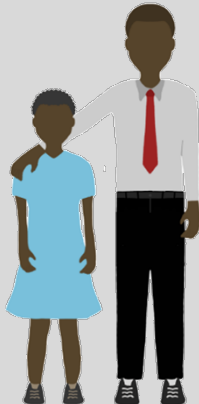
## **OPPORTUNITIES FOR BOYS/MEN IN MENSTRUAL HEALTH/HYGIENE MANAGEMENT.**

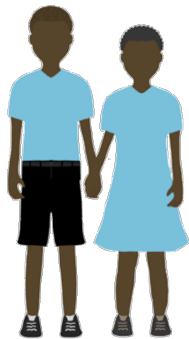

In this manual, we use these words to describe moments/opportunities where boys and men would play a pivotal role in ensuring that girls and women achieve proper menstrual hygiene management. It is important to understand that girls and women need clean, safe and private changing rooms, appropriate materials (such as sanitary towels, clean water), adequate information on menstruation, and a supportive environment (such as supportive friends and colleagues).



Evidence shows that most men have inaccurate or inadequate information on menstruation. This affects their attitude towards girls and women who are in their menses as they may either react with extreme negativity or lack of interest on the subject. For this reason, girls may be bullied, lack self-esteem and fear to share their challenges or seek the help that they need.

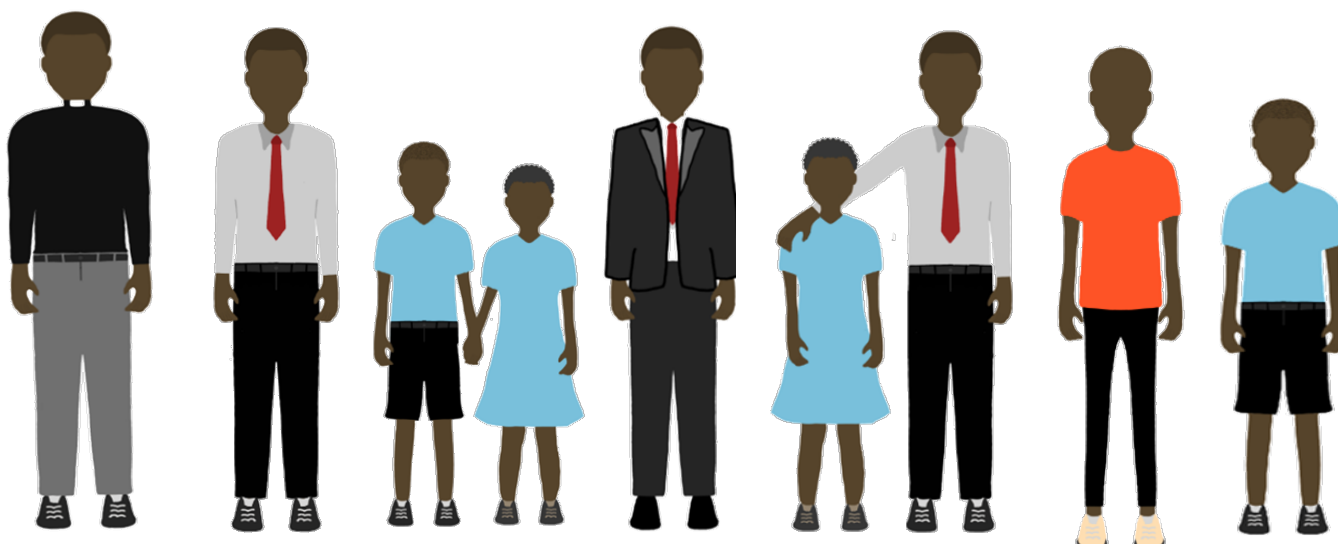
We will use this section to explore the different aspects and key moments when the boys and men would play a key role in ensuring achievement of proper menstrual hygiene management



Place		Menstrual specific roles/moments	Notes
School	Male Teachers	<div>  </div> <p>Give girls permission to go to the toilet.</p> <p>Create a less stigmatizing school/class environment for the girls.</p> <p>Teach about menstruation in class.</p> <p>Use positive words to describe menstruation.</p>	There are generally more male teachers than female teachers in schools in low income countries.
	Male pupils/students	<div>  </div> <p>Create a less stigmatizing environment for the girls.</p> <p>Avoid teasing and bullying girls.</p> <p>Acquire skills and participate in menstrual products discussions and presentations.</p> <p>Understand that menstruation is normal.</p> <p>Challenge myths and taboos with facts.</p>	
Home	Fathers/male guardians	<div>  </div> <p>Provide money to buy household items e.g. menstrual hygiene necessities.</p> <p>Responsible for latrine design and construction. These should be safe, private, with proper lighting etc.</p> <p>Be role models &amp; thus help in dispelling myths and challenging taboos etc.</p> <p>Ensure the girls have clean water and they</p>	Generally, males in most homes hold greater decision-making powers than women.

		are not barred from accessing it.	
	<p>Brothers /siblings /cousins</p> 	<p>Acquire skills and participate in menstrual products discussions and presentations.</p> <p>Share information on proper menstrual hygiene.</p> <p>Provide emotional support</p> <p>Create a supportive environment for the girls.</p>	<p>Brothers are usually the first male friends of their sisters and also form the immediate and most common environment in which girls live.</p>
<b>Community</b>	<p>Church leaders, Village leaders,</p> 	<p>They are opinion leaders who can challenge taboos, dispel myths and change cultural norms.</p> <p>Advocate for policies that address menstrual needs.</p> <p>Involve women in water and sanitation program decision making.</p> <p>Ensure and advocate for availability and access to gender-sensitive community water and sanitation facilities.</p> <p>Advocate for accessibility and affordability of sanitary towels.</p> <p>Dispel myths and taboos associated with menstruation especially religious ones. For instance, religious leaders can clarify what their holy books say about menstruation.</p>	<p>Community leaders hold key positions in the society which places them at a favorable position to influence better menstrual hygiene management policies.</p>

<b>Workplace</b>	<b>Bosses/Proprietor</b> 	Formulate workplace policies. Design and construct a workplace with adequate private toilets and water sources. Responsible for allocating leave from work if and when necessary.	Bosses design the workplace and their policies.
	<b>Male colleagues</b> 	Provide support to female counterparts, for example to stand in for them and do the heavy work when necessary. Make the work environment less stigmatizing. Advocate for better workplace policies. Openly talk about menstruation with the aim of normalizing it. Be empathetic	



## **LESSON ON MENSTRUATION – BASICS**

### **Background**

Menstruation is a broad subject and proper management of a girl's menstruation requires more than just sanitary pads to absorb blood. Menstrual hygiene management is achieved when girls/women live in a supportive and safe environment where they have access to:

- Appropriate materials (like sanitary pads and cloth) which they can change as frequently as possible.
- Supportive facilities (such as toilets, changing rooms and disposal facilities) with access to clean running water which they can access as frequently as required.
- Appropriate menstrual education.

Whereas girls are pivotal in MHM, the boys can be supportive. They may be helpful in pad production, changing room construction and creating a supportive environment.

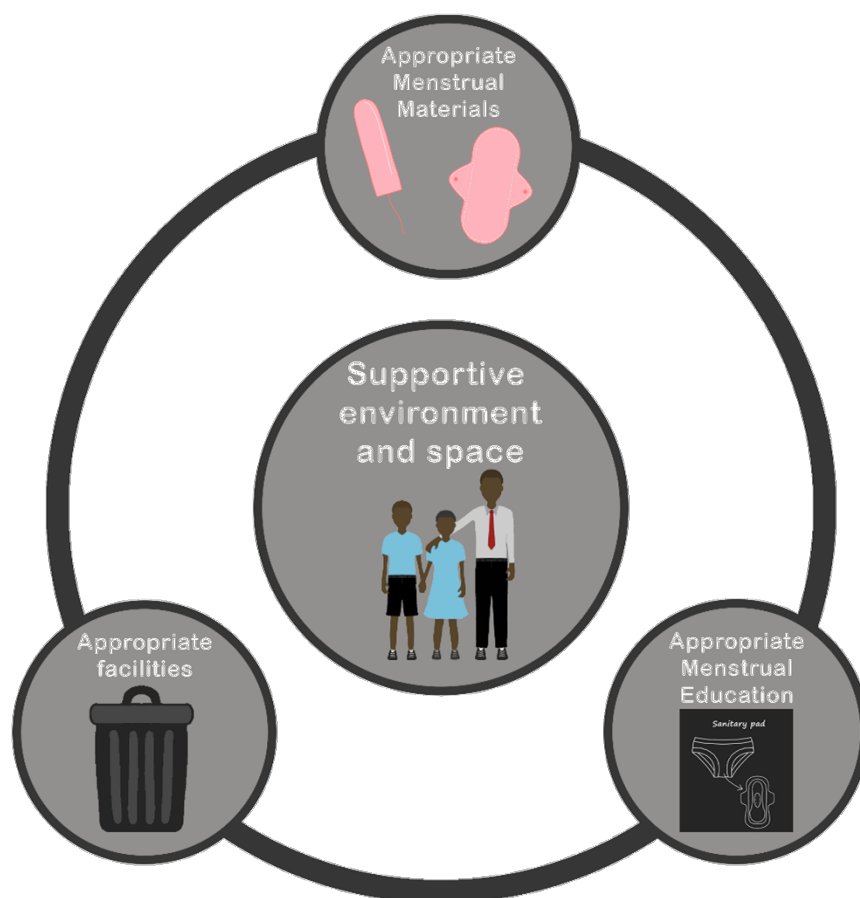


Figure 1: Components of MHM. Modified from *Sommer, Schmitt, & Clatworthy, (2017)*

## **Activity:**

### **Materials needed:**

- Flip chart
- Markers

Make sure the flip chart is placed at a point where everyone can see clearly. The flip chart contents should be prepared in advance to save time.

At the beginning of the sessions, ask a few volunteers (about 4 or 5) to tell the class what they have heard or know about menstruation. The answers may range from myths to facts to taboos but this will set the pace for the session. Make sure you take note of the answers as they will be helpful during your lesson.

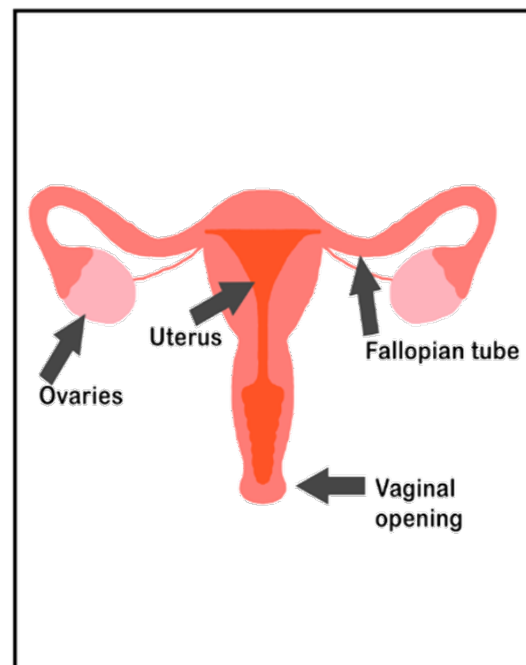
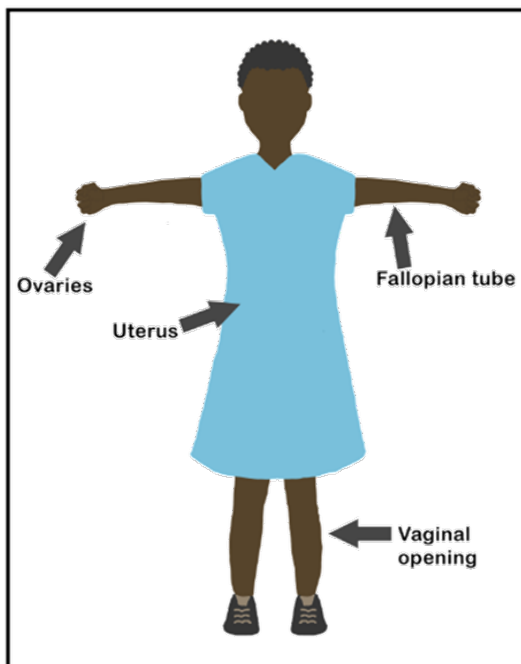
To start the session, give an overview of the female reproductive system. Get a volunteer to face the class. Make them stand with arms spread apart and fists tightly clenched.

The fists represent the ovaries

The arms represent the fallopian tubes

The chest and abdomen represent the uterus

The legs represent the vaginal opening.



## **Explanation/Summary**

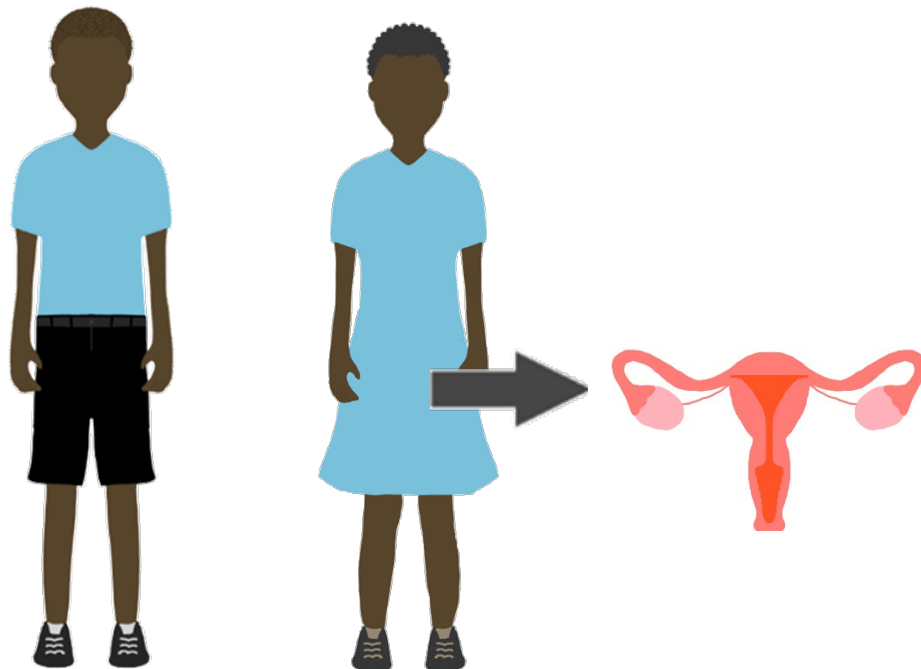
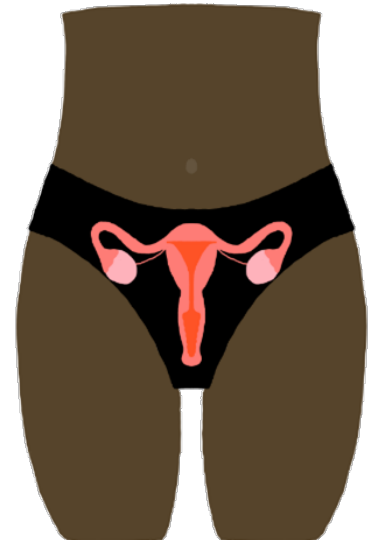
When the egg is released from one of the ovaries, it flows through the fallopian tube. When it reaches the fallopian tube and there is no sperm to fertilize it, it goes into the uterus (which was ready for implantation of an embryo) and then the uterus lining together with the egg are shed as menstrual blood.

*Read this out loud after explaining the above*

## **So why not boys? Why only girls?**

Boys and girls are made differently. While girls have a uterus, boys do not. This means that girls can get pregnant and give birth to children but boys cannot.

Boys and girls are both special in the way they are created.



*When using the flip chart, make sure you keep it short and direct.*

*At the beginning of the session, introduce the participants to general body changes, in both boys and girls before delving into menstruation.*

## Contents of the flip chart.

### Page 1

#### Puberty

Puberty is a period when boys and girls undergo sexual maturity. This happens between the ages of 9 to 16 years for girls and 12 to 16 years for boys.

**Girls:**

**9-16**

**Boys:**

**12-16**

*[Side note: it can occur earlier or later as everyone is different.]*

### Page 2

#### Examples of changes boys and girls undergo during puberty.

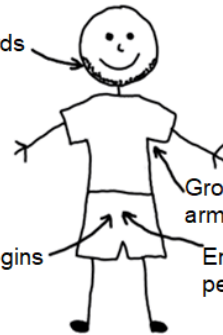
Growth of beards

**Boys:**

Ejaculation begins  
(wet dreams)

Growth of hair in the  
armpits and pubic area

Enlargement of  
penis

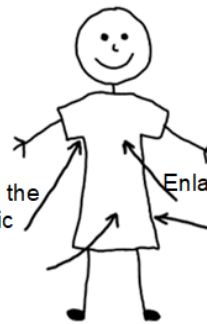


**Girls:**

Growth of hair in the  
armpits and pubic  
area.

Enlargement of breasts

Growth of hips



### Page 3

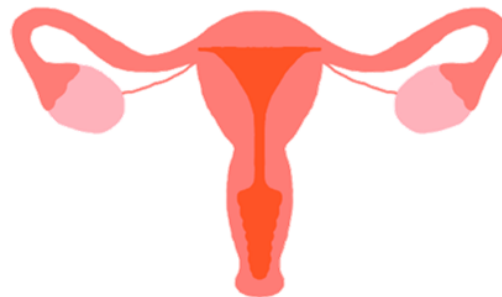
#### Menstruation

This is one of the changes girls go through during puberty. It is usually called period or menses

### Page 4

#### What is menstruation?

Menstruation is the regular discharge of blood and tissue from the uterus through the vagina. It usually takes about 2 to 7 days.



*Menstruation is normal and not a curse from God. Putting sticks under the armpit doesn't reduce the number of days of menstruation*



## Page 5

### Menopause and Menarche

#### Menarche:

This is the first menstruation and it happens between 9-16 years of age.

**9-16 years**

#### Menopause:

The cessation/end of menstruation. It occurs between 45-55 years of age. The average age is 48 years.

**45-55 years**

*[Side note: It can start earlier or later.]*

## Page 6

### The menstrual cycle

This is the process the body goes through to prepare for the possibility of a pregnancy. If a pregnancy does not occur, the lining of the uterus and the egg are shed through the vagina (menstruation).

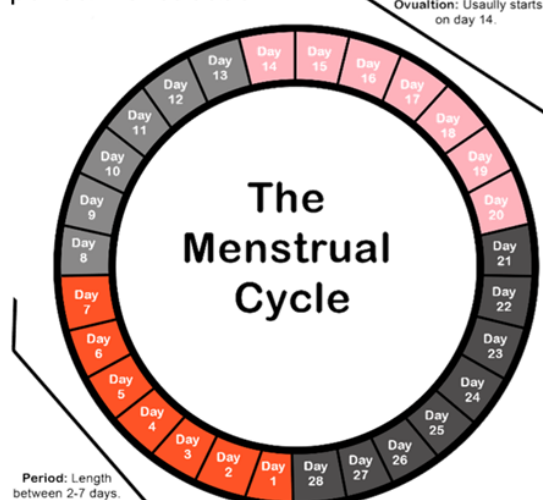
*[Side note: It can start earlier or later.]*

*Menstruation doesn't mean that the girls are ready to get married. The body is still developing and it is recommended that girls are not married before the age of 18 years.*

## Page 7

### The menstrual cycle... continued

This takes between 21 days to 35 days. That means it takes about 21 days to 35 days before a girl sees her next period/menstruation.



## Page 8

### How much blood is lost during menstruation?



During each period;  
About 2-3 tablespoons (between 10-80mls) of blood is lost.

*Eating certain foods like sugarcane doesn't increase the blood flow.*

*[Side note: It is important to understand that there are a few people who may bleed a little more or less than the stated volume. It is also normal for some girls to have clots in the menstrual blood. A girl should seek medical attention whenever she feels the periods affect her ability to perform her usual day-to-day activities. This may happen when they become dizzy, pale and or the bleeding is much more than the usual amount. Many girls may not be in position to measure the amount of blood lost, but they can always understand whenever a change has occurred by comparing the number of pads used or how soaked the pads are during the current menstrual period, with the previous periods.]*

## Hygiene



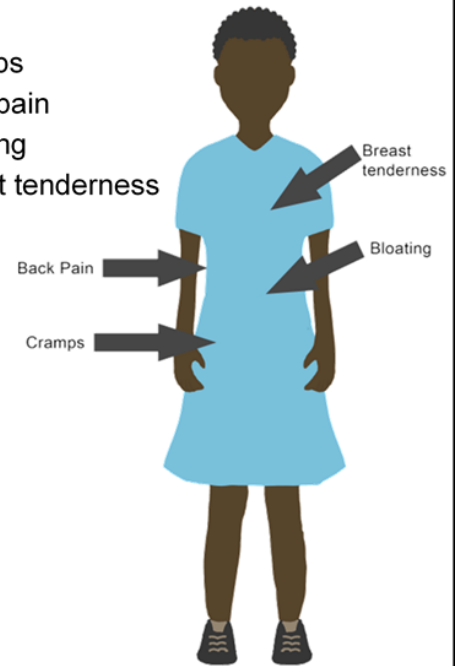
Girls need to bathe regularly (at least twice a day) when menstruating i.e. in the morning before school and in the evening after school.

It is NOT bad/wrong for a girl/woman to maintain the normal bathing frequency during menstruation. However, some girls/women find it more comfortable to bathe more times during menstruation than when they are not in their periods.

*Menstruating girls are not dirty and don't need to be isolated. They won't contaminate water when they touch it.*

## Discomfort during menstruation can be due to:

- Cramps
- Back pain
- Bloating
- Breast tenderness



## How to overcome the discomfort (cramps)

- Exercise
- Painkillers
- Hot water bottle

If the pain persists, you are advised to see a doctor.

*Having sex doesn't relieve cramps*



## Challenges faced by girls during menstruation

- Lack of sanitary facilities.
- Lack of pads/sanitary materials to collect or absorb the blood.
- Shame, especially when laughed at.
- Myths and taboos making the entire process unbearable.
- Lack of information about menstruation.



At the end of the presentation, allow time for questions and any additions. Make sure you clarify on any issues which were not understood.

This session is to familiarize the participants with the various menstrual products that are on the market. Despite the fact that some of the materials may not be readily available on the local market, the participants need to know that they can be used in other settings.

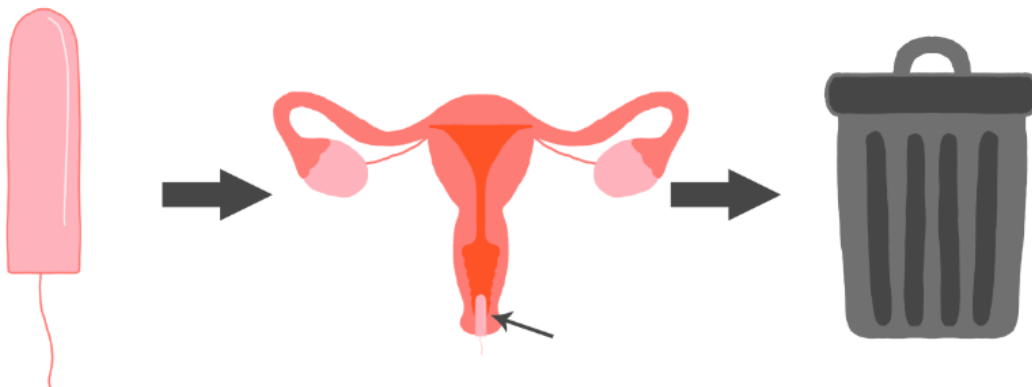
**Materials needed:**

- Pads (reusable and disposable)
- Menstrual cup
- Tampons
- Pieces of cloth
- Cotton
- A panty
- Flip charts
- Markers

(If some of the materials are not available, give the participants other options and inform them that there are other alternatives)

Familiarize them with the different products before the activity.

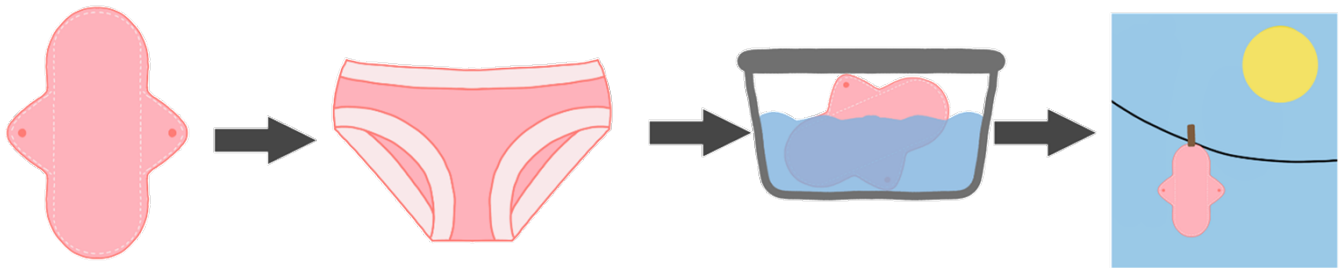
**Tampon:** A tampon is inserted in the vagina then removed and disposed of after single use.



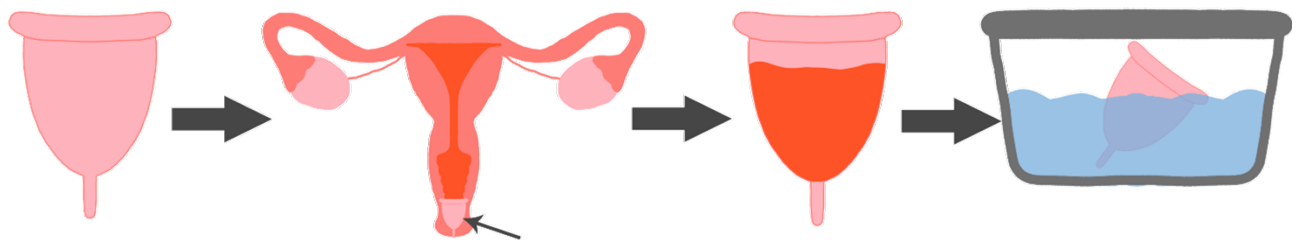
**Sanitary pad:** A sanitary pad is used and then disposed of after a single use.



**Reusable sanitary pad:** Reusable pads are used and then washed and dried in the sun for the next use.



**Menstrual cup:** A menstrual cup is inserted into the vagina to collect the blood and then removed, washed and reinserted.



### **Activity (10minutes)**

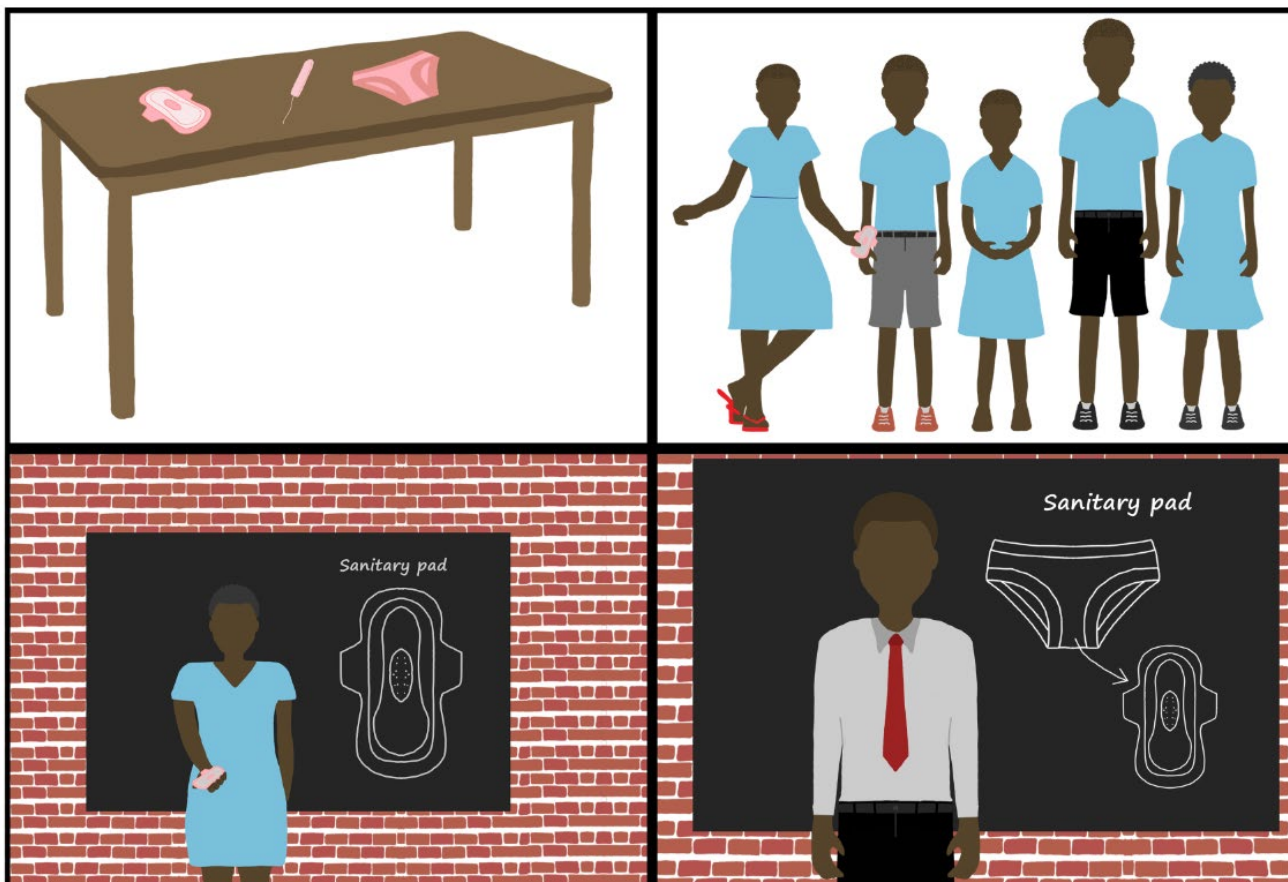
Lay all the available sanitary materials on a table. It is advisable to have a variety of the same kind of sanitary materials like disposable sanitary towels. If possible, pass the packaging around so that the audience can appreciate how they look on the outside [as they might have seen it before in shops but were not aware]

Form groups of 5 (or more depending on the number of participants) and let each group leader pick a reusable sanitary pad, a disposable sanitary pad, a tampon and a menstrual cup (or any other sanitary material available, like pieces of cloth)



In groups of 5 (or more), the participants should list the advantages or disadvantages of the various menstrual products (using their prior knowledge and the highlights above). You will realize that they can derive some advantages and disadvantages that may already be listed below. You can add the answers below as you discuss the answers after the activity.

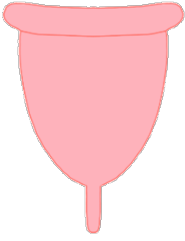
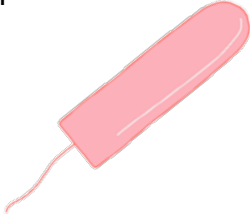
You can tell the groups to use a table to list the answers.

After the activity, one of the group members is nominated to present the answers in front of the class. Evaluate the different answers and discuss them with the participants. Make sure you don't repeat the answers which have been discussed already.



Answers may include:

Sanitary material	Advantages	Disadvantages
Sanitary pad(disposable) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Easy to use (sticks on the panty)</li> <li>- Comes in ranges of sizes and types</li> <li>- Can be found in most local stores</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pollutes environment</li> <li>- Is expensive since it has to be bought every month</li> </ul>
Sanitary pad(reusable) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Is cheap in the long run</li> <li>- Comfortable (made of cotton)</li> <li>- Can be made locally</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Difficult to maintain (needs washing and drying in the sun, users need privacy)</li> <li>- Can lead to infections if not properly washed</li> </ul>

Menstrual cup 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Cheap in the long run</li> <li>- Easy to wash as it is medical grade silicone</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Expensive at initial purchase</li> <li>- May not be culturally appropriate in some communities as it's inserted in the vagina</li> <li>- It is not easily accessible</li> <li>- May be uncomfortable</li> </ul>
Tampon 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Easy to carry around</li> <li>- Allows a wide range of sports including swimming</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- May be uncomfortable</li> <li>- May not be acceptable in some communities as it is inserted in the vagina</li> <li>- It is expensive</li> <li>- It is not available in local stores</li> </ul>

At the end of the session, compare the answers and allow some participants to explain or prove their answers.

It is worth noting that there are a variety of other materials girls use to soak the blood, these range from toilet paper, pieces of cloth, cotton, rags, cow dung, leaves. These may not only increase the risk of infections but also be uncomfortable to the girl as she will have to worry about it falling out.

In some cultures, a menstruating girl is made to sit in sand the whole day throughout the days of her menstruation.

At the end of the session, explain how each material is used and how to put a pad on a panty. Illustrate using both a reusable pad and disposable pad.

## ADDITIONAL NOTES ON MENSTRUATION

### Sex During Menstruation.

It is up to the lady and her spouse/partner to decide for themselves if they would want to have sexual intercourse during menstruation. They however need to understand that unprotected sex even during menstruation exposes individuals to sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) including HIV/AIDS. Under such circumstances (unprotected sex), the risk of acquiring STDs is higher during menstruation than out of menstruation. This is due to reduced protective barriers (like reduced cervical mucus), high (alkalinic) pH and presence of iron in the menstrual blood during periods. An individual's psychological and physical state (such as stress, anxiety, cramps and headache etc) can also influence the decision concerning sex during periods.

## **MYTHS AND FACTS**

A myth is a traditional story mainly told to explain a particular practice, belief or natural event. Many times, the myths are false despite being widely known and upheld by the members of the community. Some of the myths are restrictive making the girls and women miss out on important life opportunities and events such as physical activity, praying, cooking, and going to school. Understanding the facts (correct information) about menstruation is one of the ways of reducing myths on the subject in the society. Dispelling the myths and knowing facts helps reduce stigma around menstruation and improves mental health and school education.

### **Activity:**

For this lesson on understanding myths and facts around menstruation, the session should be conducted in an open area or large classroom where movement from one area to the other would be easy for all the participants.

**Requirements:** Open space/area, Ability to move (or raise hands for those unable to move)

**Duration:** 30 to 45 minutes.

### **Instructions:**

While seated, show the participants the different areas/marked areas for the lesson (see figure below).

Each of the 3 areas would represent something different, i.e.

Moving to the right hand side (or place marked letter A) would mean that the read statement is a fact,

Left hand side (or B) represents a statement which is a myth (incorrect), and

Staying in the middle would represent “I do not know.”

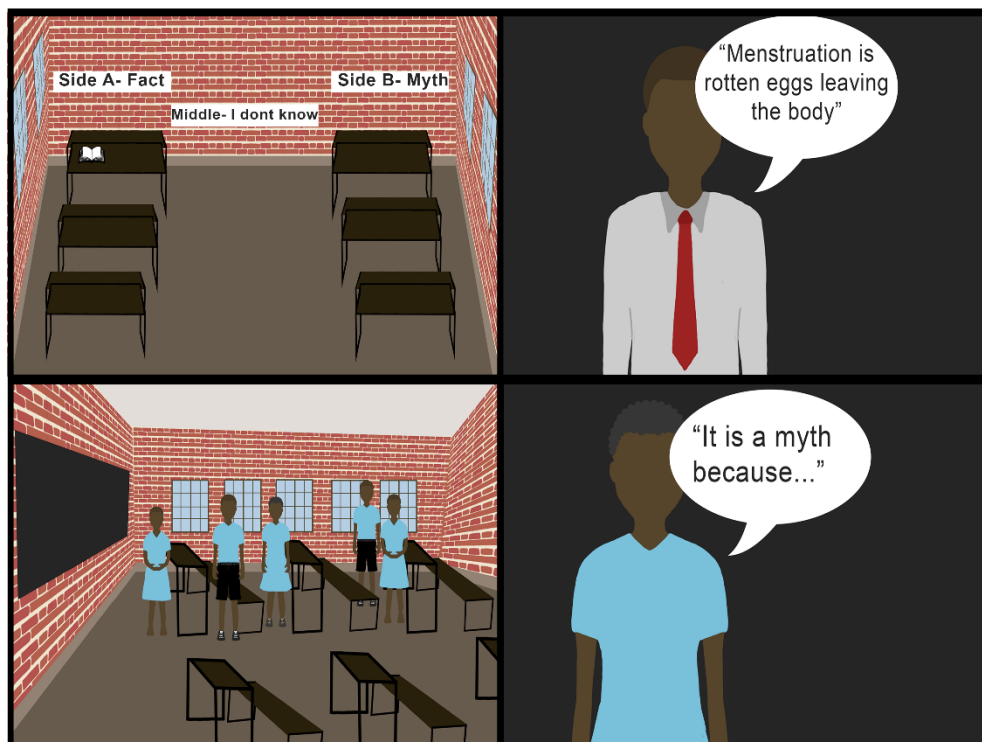
The instructor should then clearly readout only 1 (one) fact or myth at a time to the participants.



The participants are then given time to move to any area depending on what they perceive the statement to be, whether it is a myth (move to A), fact (move to B) or do not know (middle).

One participant (Maximum 2) from each group is given an opportunity to say why he/she thinks it is a myth or fact.

The process is repeated, but this time by the instructor reading other facts or myth.



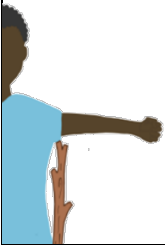



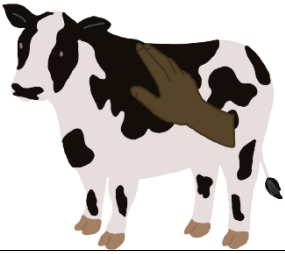


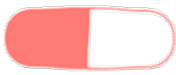
NB:




1. For those with who are unable to move easily, raising hands to represent a fact may be used.
2. The facilitator may include other myths/facts commonly heard in the area.
3. The facilitator should only select a couple of myths/facts for a session and not all of them as it may become monotonous and unreasonably long.

Myth	Facts
Menstruation is dirty and impure.	Menstruation is a normal process.
Menstruation is a sickness.	Menstruation is a normal biological process that occurs every month.

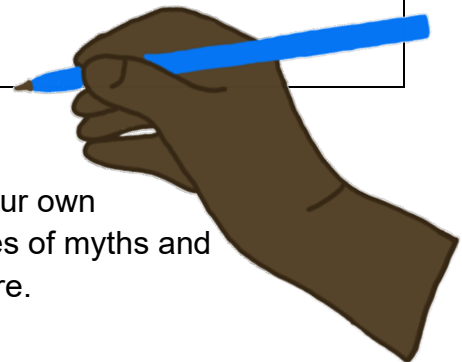
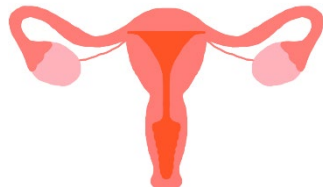


	Normal menstruation is not an illness even though some of the feelings (symptoms) that occur before or during menstruation may make a person feel sickly.
Menstruation is rotten eggs leaving the body.	Menstruation is the body's way of removing an unfertilized egg. The egg and uterine lining are not rotten or unclean.
A girl becomes an adult with her first period.	A girl who starts menstruating and is at risk of many complications if she gets pregnant on her first period.
<p>If you step on menstrual blood, you get cracks in your feet.</p> 	<p>Stepping in menstrual blood doesn't cause feet to crack. However, one should keep good hygiene during menstruation so that blood is not all over the place.</p> 
 <p>You can reduce the length of periods with sticks under the armpit.</p>	The length of periods vary from person to person and putting sticks under the armpits doesn't reduce the length.
Certain types of food interrupt menstruation blood flow.	Girls are encouraged to eat foods rich in iron during menstruation. Foods eaten don't affect menstruation.
<p>Menstruating girls or women should not participate in exercises.</p> 	Exercises may sometimes help relieve the discomfort that comes along with menstruation.

<p>A cow will become infertile when a menstruating girl touches it.</p> 	<p>The touch of a menstruating girl has no effect on the fertility of a cow.</p>
<p>A plant will dry when a menstruating girl touches it.</p> 	<p>The touch of a menstruating girl has no effect on plants.</p> 
<p>Improper disposal of used menstrual materials like pads can make a girl menstruate for the rest of her life.</p>	<p>It's advisable to dispose of sanitary materials properly like in the pit latrine because of hygiene purposes. The method of disposal will not affect menstruation.</p>
<p>Burning or burying used sanitary material can lead to infertility.</p>	<p>Burning or burying sanitary material is safe and hygienic and has no link to infertility.</p>
<p>The use of painkillers to relieve menstrual cramps can lead to infertility.</p>	<p>Painkillers can be used to relieve cramps and body ache during menstruation and therefore it has no effect on menstruation.</p> 
<p>Starting menstruation means a girl is ready to marry.</p>	<p>A girl's body is still developing after she has started menstruation. It is not advisable for a girl to marry/get married off before she reaches the age of 18years.</p>

Menstruating women and girls should not eat certain foods like yoghurt, vegetables, cold water.	<p>A menstruating girl should eat foods rich in iron to replace iron losses during the bleeding. Foods rich in iron are beans liver, dark green vegetables etc. The girls should also drink plenty of water to stay hydrated as usual.</p> 
A girl or woman should not cook during menstruation.	A woman can continue to cook during her menstruation.
<p>A girl or woman should not attend religious functions or church while menstruating.</p> 	<p>Some religions restrict women from worshipping during menstruation with the excuse that they are dirty or impure. A menstruating woman is not impure or dirty.</p>
A woman should sleep separately during menstruation.	There is no reason a woman or girl who is menstruating should sleep separately.
Drinking sugary drinks and eating sugar canes during menstruation can make the blood flow heavier.	Sugary drinks and sugarcane do not increase the flow during menstruation.
Women and girls should not cut their hair and nails during menstruation.	A woman or girl can cut her hair at any time even during menstruation as usual.
A touch from a menstruating girl will cause milk to curdle, rashes on a newborn.	<p>Menstruation has no effect on milk or the skin of a newborn baby.</p> 
Eating cold food during your period can result into cramps.	Eating cold food will not give a menstruating woman cramps.

Women and girls should not have sex during menstruation.	It is up to women and their partners to decide if they want to have sex during menstruation or not.
Some women menstruate from their hands or face.	Menstruation is from the uterus and only comes out through the vagina.
Menstruation is a curse from God.	It is not written anywhere in the Bible that menstruation is a curse to women from God (Genesis 3:16 onwards)
Sex can reduce period pain(cramps)	Sex doesn't reduce or relieve period pain.



Write your own examples of myths and facts here.

## **ADVOCACY**

Advocacy refers to the activities done by an individual or group(s) of people with the aim of causing a change in the way things are done in an institution. The desired changes in the institution may include adjusting the policies, changing the mindset, improving working/living conditions and re-organizing the programs. A key aspect of advocacy includes involving and/or influencing others to take collective action.

It is important to note that there is not a single way most effective way for advocacy. The direction of activities and methods employed will always depend on the nature and structure of community, extent and uniqueness of the challenge and the available opportunities. Each community is unique.

For advocacy to be effective in achieving the intended goals, the participants (especially the leaders) must be;

- Passionate about the subject (in this case menstruation) [Most important]
- Have adequate knowledge on the subject.
- Be considerate, empathetic and have a thorough understanding of the environment.
- Well prepared (adequate prior planning) to avoid communication fatigue and being misunderstood.

Advocacy is an important tool for demystifying myths and taboos, creating a proper menstrual hygiene management environment and,

Whereas advocacy has mainly been driven by organizations, it can be initiated and be driven by the local/ most affected communities.

There are two important aspects of advocacy:

- Identifying and utilizing the moments/opportunities at your disposal
- Using the resources (including human resources) at your disposal

### **Identifying and utilizing the key moments/opportunities**

These opportunities include important days. Communities can always customize the themes, programs of international days to suit the local need(s). Depending on the community need and priorities, advocacy around menstruation can easily be integrated into the following internationally recognized days:

- World Menstrual Hygiene Day (28th May)
- The Day of the African Child (16th June)
- International Women's Day (8th March)

The communities should also make use of days (of 'locality' relevance). These include;

- Music competition
- Sports activities (e.g. football, athletics).
- Community gathering

#### **Activities that can be done include:**

- Reading poems and singing
- Skits and plays
- Games
- Matching
- Debates and writing competitions

#### **Making use of available resources**

For sustainability, it is important to always invest time and other resources in the locally available resources. These include;

- Key people in the community (opinion leaders, religious leaders, teachers, local leaders etc.)
- The talent and skill of the members of the local community. These include sewing skills (to train people to make pads using locally available materials), public speaking skills (to give speeches related to the subject), and artistic skills (to compose appropriate and relevant messages, songs, and stories).

It is important that a clear message about menstruation is given before and/or after the events.

Advertise or pass the message using posters, flyers, cardboards, teardrops, T-shirts etc.

Write a report at the end of every event/activity which should be shared by as many stakeholders as possible (including media -newspapers and radios), local authorities and community members.



## **Appendix 1**

### **STORY 1**

#### **Experience with menstruation**

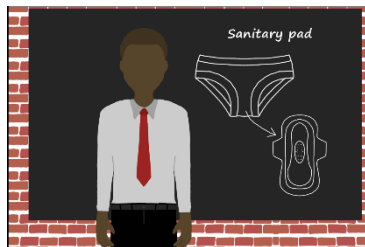


My name is GD. I am the first-born child in a family of five (four boys and one girl). I was 15 years of age when my dad was transferred to work in Kumi from Mbale district. As society expected, our dad left me with the responsibility of taking care of the family. This was a very challenging task since I had to plan for what we were to eat, yet I was only in senior 3.

I was rather disturbed when my sister came to ask me for money to buy her pads. I asked myself what my sister was thinking about to ask me for money when we had just a little money to meet the family needs in the absence of our parents. She repeatedly 'begged' for just a little money. I initially declined to give her the money because she feared to disclose why she needed the money. In fact, she later said, "just give me, I'll tell you later." Even when she finally explained that she needed the money to



buy the sanitary pads, I remained hesitant since I could not fully understand what it all meant.

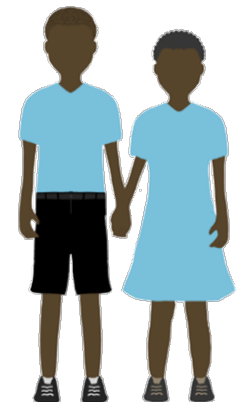


Being in secondary school, we had been taught about menstruation. The knowledge I had acquired was not enough to fully understand different aspects of the subject including whether one needed materials (like sanitary pads) to hold the blood, the shame and fear as well as discomfort that come with the periods. I, therefore, ignorantly neglected her needs and initially concentrated on looking for food and making sure

the house is clean. However, her persistence on the subject and narration of the stories of the challenges she faced during periods made me develop a desire to be supportive to her since she was my sister whom I had protect.

I'm happy that she was frank about menstruation and her experience as it taught me more than what I had learnt in school. Today, she does not have to regularly remind me to give her the money as I budget (or even borrow) for it in advance and ensure that she has the money early enough. As a family, we now try to ensure that the home is conducive and comfortable enough for her to change pads whenever she needs to with privacy. We also takeover her usual roles at home such as preparing food and fetching water from the well when she is experiencing discomfort during menstruation. Six years down the road,

I am happy to continue supporting my sister and this taught me to even be supportive to other females at school and in the workplace to have their periods with dignity. I believe menstruation is a normal and girls in the age of puberty experience it monthly.



## **Appendix 2 (Poem)**

### **Broken Dreams**

As a young girl  
My dream is to study hard  
Get a bright future  
Grow into a responsible lady.

I worked hard in school  
Nothing seemed to deter me  
The future seemed so bright.

Great job  
Great house  
Posh car  
Wonderful husband  
And of course, children.

Each day that goes by  
'Am full of happiness  
And focused

Until one day,  
Seated in class  
I find blood on my skirt,  
Trembling in fear,  
And confusion,  
I rush to the toilet.  
No water to clean myself.

With no options,  
I use papers to try to stop the blood  
I can't go back to class  
The blood is so scary...  
The flow seems to increase.

Am I sick?  
Is it a bad omen?  
Or a disease?  
'Am caught up in a dilemma.

No one cares  
Everyone runs away from me  
Laughing at me...  
No one to hold my hand.  
I feel life is very different.

I rush home  
Too confused  
and embarrassed  
to tell anyone  
Mother suggests I stay home  
It seems the best to do

So I use old rags  
The pain is much  
The bleeding is heavier  
I stay in bed  
I suffer in silence  
Am I cursed?

I miss school  
Tests  
Explanations  
And my promotional exams.

So I am to repeat the class  
Holding me down  
Too many giggles and mockery from students  
I miss more classes each month  
More tests  
And a chance to a bright future.

My love for school diminishes  
My dreams are shattered  
With each class I miss  
With each lesson I miss



The future seems amiss.

I leave school  
I can't stand it anymore  
It's hard to catch up each time  
Always hard to sit again in class.

My future is broken  
My dreams vanish overnight  
I wish for an option  
I wish for a helping hand.

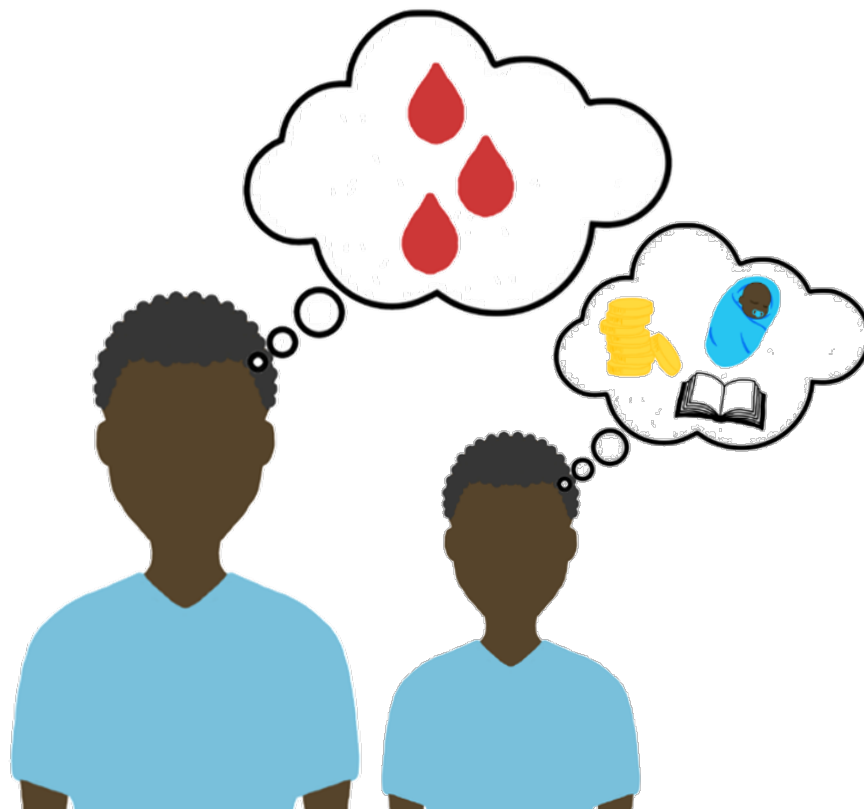
I am not the first  
Or the last  
Many girls saw and still see this as a nightmare  
Because they lack the knowledge about this  
experience

Many futures are buried  
Each coming day  
Many girls are suffering  
No one seems to care.

They have no option  
But to quit school  
Just to avoid shame  
Mockery  
And embarrassment.

We need education on this,  
To both girls and boys  
For a lasting solution  
You never know  
Who will be available to help?  
Our dreams cannot just go down the drain.

***By Akello Charlotte***



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The background features a light gray grid with a repeating pattern of white icons. The icons include a graduation cap, a person silhouette, a lightbulb, a butterfly, and a leaf. The text 'T4U' is centered in a large, bold, orange font.

# T4U

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**real people making  
a real difference**