



Girls first



A BLOODY SERIOUS MATTER

Menstrual Hygiene Management in Uganda

FINAL REPORT (1st of July 2014 - December 2020)

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1st of July 2014 - 31st of December 2020

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Why Plan International Works on Menstrual Hygiene Management

In many countries, menstruation is limiting the development of girls and women to reach their full potential. They don't receive proper information about their own body and sexual reproductive health system, what menstruation is and how to manage it hygienically. Often, they also don't have access to affordable and hygienic menstrual products and private, clean latrines where they can change their pads. Discriminating norms, taboos and myths surrounding menstruation are still very strong and continue to dictate what girls and women are not allowed to, or should do while menstruating.

As a result, many girls drop out of school or are taken out of school by their parents who believe they are ready to get married after getting their first periods. In Uganda, one in every four adolescent girls who miss school do so because of menstruation-related problems.¹

Recent studies indicate that menstruation is not only limiting girls and women in countries in Africa, Asia and the Middle East but also in countries in Europe. Also, in the Netherlands, Belgium and the United Kingdom quite some girls and women cannot afford the menstrual products that they need and they do not experience a safe environment to talk about their menstruation with their close relatives.

Plan International believes that all women and girls should be able to exercise their sexual rights and health and their wellbeing and development should not be limited by their menstruation. For this reason we have been working for many years now with girls and boys, women and men, local communities, schools, parents, teachers and health workers, religious and local leaders and local and national governments to break down the barriers that girls and women are facing to enable them to manage their menstruation in a healthy manner and with dignity.

¹ Adolescent Risk Behavior Study, 2017

CONTENTS

1. Overall impact of the programme	11
2. Achievements on the 3 objectives of the programme	12
Objective 1: Improving Knowledge, Attitudes and MHM Practices (KAP) among rural women, adolescent girls, boys, men and governments in Tororo, Lira and Kamuli Districts	12
Anticipated Result 1.1: At least 80% of all beneficiaries (150.000) that have received training on menstrual hygiene management have improved KAP on MHM.	12
Anticipated Result 1.2 At least 78% of targeted girls and women (85.568) using sanitary pads and exhibiting hygienic behaviours.	15
Anticipated Result 1.3 Increased visibility and awareness on MHM within the district and national level forums.	16
Objective 2 Increasing access to affordable and hygienic sanitary pads among rural women and girls in Tororo, Lira and Kamuli.	18
Anticipated results 2.1: Established distribution network of AFRIPads (So Sure Reusable Sanitary Pads) in Tororo, Lira and Kamuli.	18
Anticipated result 2.2: 180 AFRIPads dealers trained.	20
Anticipated result 2.3: 69.000 MHM kits sold.	20
Anticipated result 2.4: 255 local entrepreneurs (70 men and 185 women) trained how to make and sell local reusable pads.	20
Anticipated result 2.5: 6720 girls trained how to make reusable pads for themselves.	21
Anticipated Result 2.6: Increased volume of sales of local pads by the local entrepreneurs.	21
Objective 3 Increasing access to equitable gender friendly WASH facilities among girls and boys in Tororo Lira, and Kamuli.	22
Anticipated result 3.1: 54 girl friendly latrine blocks constructed & Anticipated result 3.2: 20 or more rehabilitated boreholes at schools.	
3. Sustainability of project activities	24
4. Lessons Learned & Recommendations	24
5. Multiplier effects & Next steps	25
6. Communication about the project in the Netherlands	25



Introduction

The Bloody Serious Matter project started as a small pilot on the 15th of July 2012. At that time the lack of good Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) was not a problem often acknowledged or tackled by development organisations and governments. During the first two years of the pilot project Plan International (Plan) developed its MHM approach and tested its cooperation with the social enterprise AFRIpads Uganda in the rural districts of Tororo and Lira.

Thanks to the support of the National Postcode Lottery in 2014, Plan was able to scale up its MHM activities in Tororo and Lira and also to expend its activities in to Kamuli. Thanks to the immense dedication of the Plan Uganda Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) team, the project was able to create a big and lasting impact on the communities and the lives of the girls Plan works with. The programme also contributed significantly to the changes in the national governments approach on MHM and the changing views on MHM in the wider WASH sector.

The project implementation was delayed substantially due to a variety of (good) reasons. While implementing the project Plan gained new insights and learned it needed to adjust its project implementation to gain a bigger impact. For example, during the COVID-19 crisis Plan learned that ensuring good access to menstrual hygiene products and information is especially important during a crisis. Therefore, Plan continued providing MHM information via radio campaigns and distributed dignity kits which include menstrual pads to those who did not have the means to acquire these themselves. Furthermore, during the project period, AFRIpads had to change its product and marketing strategy and project areas were also significantly affected by floods and eventually COVID-19 and the project needed to adapt to these changes. In this changing context, we really appreciate the flexibility of the National Postcode Lottery, who enabled us to adjust and improve our project approach and allowed us to take the time we needed to roll out this labour intensive project.

Moreover, the flexibility of the lottery significantly contributed to the impact we were able to achieve with this project and allowed us to develop a robust approach which we are already replicating in many other projects in many other countries as well. This clearly shows the sustainable and long term impact of the project also beyond the project period. We have witnessed the impact of our project on the position of women and girls and we are aware that there are many more women and girls that are in need of this support. Therefore, we will continue our work in this area. Currently we are already implementing MHM activities as part of our wider WASH projects in Ethiopia, Zambia, Uganda, Indonesia and Nepal. Plan International Netherlands has also decided to use part of the unearmarked funding we receive from NPL to scale up the Bloody Serious Matter project activities in Kamuli District in Uganda for the coming two years. During these two years we will intensify our search for new funding to implement even more MHM activities in other districts in Uganda and in other countries.

This final report presents an overview of the entire progress of the project while it was funded by the National Postcode Lottery (1st of July 2014 until the 31st of December 2020). This final report will describes the sustainability of the activities, the lessons learnt and how Plan International Netherlands communicated about the project to the wider Dutch public. Additionally, in June 2019 an external end evaluation was conducted to assess the impact of the programme. Within this final report we will distil the main outcomes of the end evaluation and supplement this with the final update on the project results by the end of December 2020.

**MENSTRUATION IS
NORMAL FOR GIRLS**



Programme Details

Title of the project	A bloody serious matter: Menstrual Hygiene Management in Uganda
Beneficiaries	150.000 rural women, men, boys and girls
Project goal	85.568 rural women and adolescent girls in Tororo, Kamuli and Lira have improved Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices about Menstrual Hygiene and have increased access to affordable and hygienic pads.
Project locations	The districts of Tororo, Kamuli and Lira in Uganda
Project term	6 years (FY 2014-FY 2020)
Project duration	1st of July 2014 until 31st of December 2020
Project budget	€ 2.001.197
Objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improved Knowledge, Attitudes and MHM Practices among rural women, ado-lescent girls, boys, men and government in Tororo, Lira and Kamuli Districts. 2. Increased access to affordable and hygienic sanitary pads among rural women and girls in Tororo, Lira and Kamuli. 3. Increasing access to equitable gender friendly WASH facilities among girls and boys in Tororo Lira, and Kamuli.
Anticipated results Objective 1	<p>At least 80% of all beneficiaries (150.000) that have received training on menstrual hygiene management have improved KAP on MHM.</p> <p>At least 78% of targeted girls and women (85.568) using sanitary pads and exhibiting hygienic behaviours.</p> <p>Increased visibility and awareness on MHM within the district and national level forums.</p>
Anticipated results Objective 2	<p>Established distribution network of AF-RIpads (So Sure Reusable Sanitary Pads) in Tororo, Lira and Kamuli.</p> <p>180 AFRIpads dealers trained.</p> <p>69.000 MHM kits sold.</p> <p>255 local entrepreneurs (70 men and 185 women) trained how to make and sell local reusable pads.</p> <p>6720 girls trained how to make reusable pads for themselves.</p> <p>Increased volume of sales of local pads by the local entrepreneurs.</p>
Anticipated results Objective 3	<p>54 girl friendly latrine blocks constructed.</p> <p>20 or more rehabilitated boreholes at schools.</p>

Activities result 1	<p>Awareness raising on MHM in 192 school Health clubs. Training of 896 teaches on MHM. Training of 368 (512) for Ph1 and Phase 2 Village Health Team (VHT) workers. Training of 50 Community based organizations 4 media campaigns/ radio spots and talk shows. 434 sessions for phase 1 &2 drama per-formance in 868 villages. Support Ministry of Health to develop and rollout MHM guidelines.</p>
Activities result 2	<p>Targeted marketing campaigns by AF-RIpads for So Sure product in Tororo, Lira and Kamuli. Establishment of distribution network for So Sure by AFRIpads in Tororo, Lira and Kamuli. Training of 252 local entrepreneurs (185 women and 67 men) and 6720 girls and how to make reusable pads from local materials. Training of 252 local entrepreneurs on marketing and business skills and how to share knowledge on good MHM practices.</p>
Activities result 3	<p>Construction of 54 girl friendly latrine blocks. Rehabilitation of 20 boreholes at the target schools.</p>



1. Overall impact of the programme

With the support of the National Postcode Lottery, Plan International Uganda was able to substantially scale up its Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) activities in Uganda in 2014. The project was very successful and through its many activities which include theatre (for development) about MHM, construction of girl friendly school latrines and waterpoints, training of school girls and boys in how to make re-usable menstrual pads, joint lobbying to encourage MHM to be integrated into policies, Plan International was able to reach more than **200,109 beneficiaries** (72,140 girls, 47,968 boys, 43,942 men & 36,059 women by December 2020).

“Before we got the training I did feel concerned about buying sanitary pads for my girls or my wife. However, now I feel it is my responsibility especially for my girl who is now in senior class. I feel ashamed because I did not help my older daughters at a time they needed this kind of support. Now I encourage my fellow men to take their responsibilities although there is still some resistance from some of them.”

(Male drama club member in Kamuli)

The main impact of this project has been:

- **Increased level of knowledge about MHM:** 95% of girls had correct knowledge about MHM in June 2019 compared to 68% in June 2012, and 95% of the boys had correct knowledge about MHM in June 2019 compared to 54% in June 2012.
- **Changing attitudes regarding MHM:** 90% of the girls no longer regarded menstruation as a secret issue compared to 65% at the start of the project and 88% of respondents reported knowledge that girls/women have liberty to go to worship places (church, mosque) during menstruation compared to 72% at baseline.
- **Improvement in MHM practices:** With the construction of 69 girl friendly, inclusive latrine blocks and 34 boreholes at schools, gender equitable WASH facilities in schools have increased substantially. Due to various activities access to affordable and appropriate sanitary materials has increased from 87% to 96%.

During the period 2014-2020, we have seen an increase in girls successfully attending and finishing school in the project areas from 56% to 95%, and girls are mentioning that menstruation is no longer limiting them to attend schools. The project also has contributed to a shift in gender relations and power dynamics. For example, girls are supported by boys and their fathers to stay in school after they started their period and mothers and fathers are more open to discuss MHM with their daughters. And both male and female teachers have become more confident to teach this subject.

2. Achievements on the 3 objectives of the programme

The 3 objectives of the programme are:

1. Improving Knowledge, Attitudes and MHM Practices (KAP) among rural women, adolescent girls, boys, men and governments in Tororo, Lira and Kamuli Districts.
2. Increasing access to affordable and hygienic sanitary pads among rural women and girls in Tororo, Lira and Kamuli.
3. Increasing access to equitable gender friendly WASH facilities among girls and boys in Tororo Lira, and Kamuli.

Achievements per objective:

Objective 1: Improving Knowledge, Attitudes and MHM Practices (KAP) among rural women, adolescent girls, boys, men and governments in Tororo, Lira and Kamuli Districts.

Planned activities to achieve objective 1	Conducted activities by the end of the project
Awareness raising on MHM in 192 school Health clubs.	197 school health clubs empowered on their roles in the promotion of MHM.
Training of 896 teaches on MHM.	855 teachers trained on MHM and local pads production to support the girls in school.
Training of 368 Village Health Team (VHT) workers.	461 community health workers capacitated as Trainers of Trainers on MHM.
Training of 50 community based organisations.	52 community based organisation orientated on MHM in partnership with Ministry of Educa-tion and Sports to scale up MHM activities.
4 media campaigns/ radio spots and talk shows.	113 radio talk shows conducted to increase awareness on MHM. Key speakers on radio shows included district staff, school health club members, cultural and religious leaders.
434 drama sessions on MHM in 868 villages.	963 drama sessions on MHM delivered through local community groups in form of skits, poems and songs.
Support Ministry of Health to develop and rollout MHM guidelines.	A national training manual for teachers and other stakeholders was developed in partner-ship with the Ministry of Education. 20,000 copies printed and distributed among stake-holders. 45 coordinating tutors drawn from National teachers colleges were trained to roll out the manual among teachers throughout the country.

Anticipated Result 1.1: At least 80% of all beneficiaries (150.000) that have received training on menstrual hygiene management have improved KAP on MHM.

The MHM project aimed at ensuring that beneficiaries had knowledge about; biological changes associated with menstruation, the menstruation cycle, understanding the signs associated with menstruation, health risks associated with poor menstrual hygiene, materials to use during menstruation and hygienic disposal of menstrual waste.

- By the end of the project 95% for the girls and 90% for boys had the right knowledge about what menstruation is compared to only 68% of the girls and 54% of the boys at the start of the project.
- By the end of the project 97% of girls and 96% of boys interviewed understood menstruation as a normal phenomenon compared to 85% for girls and 74% for boys half way the project.
- At the end of the project girls at all the project schools mentioned that girls are no longer being teased when they have their period and also that they received support from teachers, other girls and boys.

The table below presents a summary of a comparative analysis of attitudes on menstruation for boys and girls during mid-term and end of project evaluation for MHM project.

Attitudes	Girls		Boys	
	MTR (agree)	End line (agree)	MTR (agree)	End line (agree)
Menstruation is a normal process in females	85%	97%	74%	97%
Girls should be allowed to go to school during menstruation	82%	90%	72%	96%
Girls/women should not go to worship places (church, mosque) during menstruation	29%	12%	32%	16%
Menstruation is a secret issue that should not be openly discussed	65%	10%	55%	45%

This change in attitude among boys and girls and other respondents can be affirmed by the remarks received from a female teacher:

“We included the boys in the clubs. In fact, there are more boys in the club than the girls. They are actively involved. We have had incidents in which when a girl soils her dress, the boy will remove his sweater and give it to the girl to cover up the stains. Now the boys are also involved in cleaning the bathrooms for the girls and after cleaning, they know they shouldn’t move around there. The boys even carry water to the girls’ bathroom. They also leave as soon they put the water because they know that the girls need privacy.” **Female teacher – Tororo**

Some of these findings also illustrate change of attitude towards shame associated with menstruation. Respondents mentioned that it is no longer an issue that brings shame to the girl anymore; not even in situations where the girl soils her dress. The boys readily offer support.



Boys and girls making re-usable sanitary pads together at school.

Despite the tremendous shift in attitude towards menstruation, the end evaluation also highlighted that there is still quite some work to be done to change the attitudes of boys and men. At the end of the project only 12% of boys believe that girls/women should not be restricted from doing certain roles during their menstruation. This implies that the majority of boys interviewed (88%) want the girls restricted from doing certain roles during menstruation. Further, even as high as 45% of boys still believe that menstruation is a secret issue that should not be openly discussed. The results depict that despite the progress made, changing attitudes will take a long time and Plan will continue to support the change of attitude of boys towards menstruation. Similar efforts need to be scaled further at national level.

Anticipated Result 1.2: At least 78% of targeted girls and women (85,568) are using sanitary pads and exhibiting hygienic behaviours.

- Findings showed an increase in the usage of appropriate sanitary materials from 87% at baseline to 96% during the end term evaluation.
- The usage of re-usable pads increased by 33% from 1% at baseline to 34% at end line evaluation. The material most preferred was “Always” (57.4%) followed by local re-usable pads (20.5%) and AFRIPads (13.9%). The results indicate a reduction in usage of unhygienic sanitary materials.
- Results also revealed that 100% of the girls/women interviewed were practicing appropriate hygienic behaviour during menstruation with 83% showering three times or more, and 16% showering twice a day. For the schools sampled, 100% mentioned that they scrub the bathrooms and toilets at least three times a week to limit infections. Most of the sampled schools (75%) had clean latrines but with an unpleasant smell.



- Menstruation is normal, be proud of it and do not absent your self from school
 - Use of unclean materials during menstruation can cause infection. Use clean and dry materials only
 - Know your menstrual cycle and always carry emergency sanitary pads to avoid embarrassment and inconvenience
 - Bathe using clean water and soap at least 3 times daily during your periods.
 - Boys !!! Menstruation is normal . Support girls to manage it
- This Project is supported by Australia & the Netherlands**

Anticipated Result 1.3: Increased visibility and awareness on MHM within the district and national level forums.

To support all women and girls in Uganda to practice good MHM and break down associated taboos and myths, Plan International Uganda joint forces with other organisations like WaterAid, IRC, NETWAS and the Ministry of Education that formed the MHM Coalition. During the implementation of the Bloody Serious Matter project, the MHM Coalition was, with the support of Plan International able to achieve the following results:

- On the 28th of May (MHM Day) 2015 the MHM Coalition presented a MHM charter to the Speaker of Parliament Hon. Rebecca Kadaga who endorsed it by appending her signature. The charter was also been endorsed by five government ministries and 35 civil society organisations. The Ministry of Education and Sports is custodian of the charter.
- Further, Plan International Uganda is a member of the National MHM Task Force (A group of NGOs who are part of the MHM Coalition) that mobilised stakeholders to petition Parliament on MHM in schools. In January 2015, the government through the Ministry of Education responded by pronouncing guidelines/ circular for each school to plan for emergency sanitary pads for girls, provision of emergency uniforms and among others pain killers. Some schools sampled during the final evaluation study acknowledged receiving the circular and were actually implementing it. This is a commendable undertaking for Plan International Uganda and indeed the MHM project.
- Finally, through advocacy engagements between the Ministry of Education and Sports and MHM project, the Government through the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development has exempted taxes on sanitary towels and the materials used to make them. This is expected to reduce the price of pads by about 50% to about UGX 2,000 from UGX 3,500. It's no doubt that this will contribute immensely to enhancement of access to hygienic sanitary pads and accomplishment of the project ideals of girls' completion of school.

MHM Charter commitments

1. We will develop an Issues Paper on Menstrual Hygiene Management to inform the National Development Plan and Post 2015 Development Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals.
2. We shall conduct research on and promote private/public sector partnership in Menstrual Hygiene Management to sustain effective advocacy, resources allocation and increased access to affordable and appropriate sanitary materials.
3. We shall develop a national and global knowledge hub for information sharing and adoption of good menstrual hygiene management practices.
4. We shall empower girls with life skills to manage their menstruation including making their own sanitary pads.
5. We will empower both boys and girls to understand and appreciate menstruation and manage the social and practical challenges associated with menstrual hygiene.
6. We shall bring on board teachers as well as parents and guardians to fulfil their roles and responsibilities in the promotion of menstrual hygiene management.

Finally I knew what was happening to me

When I was eleven years old, I suddenly saw blood on my dress. I was in classroom and everyone started laughing at me. I started to cry because I had no idea what was wrong with me. I even thought I was dying. I didn't confide in anyone about it, because I felt very ashamed. When this happened I went home immediately. I did not know what was happening to me and neither did I know what I could do to stop the bleeding. The children from my class even followed me home and continued laughing at me and mocking me saying, 'come and have a look, Akello has blood on her dress'. At home I did not tell my stepmother. She would accuse me of having pre-marital sex and then she would tell my father and they would be angry at me. I quickly washed my dress and knicker because a friend, girl next door, had told me that my father would go blind if he saw the blood on my clothes.

When I had had my periods a few times, I gathered courage and told my grandmother about it. My grandmother told me that all girls suddenly bleed sometimes and that it is normal. I was reassured a little bit, but I still didn't know what to do about it. Grandma told me that I should put rags of clothes in my knickers to help contain the bleeding a little bit. Once, grandmother gave me money to buy sanitary towels. I was so glad that it protected against leaking, but unfortunately my family has no money to buy the pads every month. They are really expensive: 3000 shillings for a pack. For years, I stayed home from school during my periods. I hated missing lessons, since I had the ambition of becoming a lawyer. At home I couldn't help fetching water and cooking; and neither could I play with my friends or play football with my brothers, which sometimes, I really liked to do. I could only lie in bed and tell my stepmother that I was sick.

In 2013, Plan started Health Classes at school. One of the teachers was trained to become a Health Teacher and the children learned everything about hygiene and changes in the bodies of boys and girls, which included periods. Finally, I knew what was really going on with me when I was bleeding every month. It was very important: All boys in class learned that it is normal for all girls to have menstruation periods. Since these Health Classes started, boys no longer laugh at girls who get problems with blood leaking. We (girls) feel more secure. The project also involved building separate girls' toilets and a special area where girls can wash when they are in their periods. The trained Health Teachers also sell washable sanitary pads, AFRIpads, that can last for at least a whole year. After the health teacher had educated us about menstruation, I gathered courage and talked to my stepmother about periods. She also didn't have any idea what is caused menstruation among women every month. No one had ever told her about it. I explained to her what happens to the body when a woman is experiencing her periods, and also told her about AFRIpads. My stepmother asked how much it costs and talked about it to my father. My father then bought a pack for us. In my class, I am now one of the few girls that can talk about menstruation with their fathers. I'm very happy with the AFRIpads. Every day I go to school as normal and help fetch water and cook at home. I can also play football, my favourite game, comfortably without any fear; no longer miss lessons at school and fellow pupils no longer laugh at me and other girls. I'm also able to support other girls when leaks occur during class by talking to the Health Teacher who is able to provide an emergency pad. My friends and I are able to make these pads from cotton every Friday at the Health Club. I'm glad that children no longer laugh at girls when they soil their dresses during menstruation periods.

(Agnes is a 16 year old former pupil of Abia primary school that benefited from MHM project in Alebtong District).

Objective 2 Increasing access to affordable and hygienic sanitary pads among rural women and girls in Tororo, Lira and Kamuli.

Planned activities to achieve objective 2	Conducted activities by the end of the project
Targeted marketing campaigns by AFRIpads for So Sure product in Tororo, Lira and Kamuli.	In a bid to stimulate brand awareness AFRIpads conducted market activations. To this effect 51,166 kits were sold.
Establishment of distribution network for So Sure by AFRIpads in Tororo, Lira and Kamuli.	3 distributors (2 in Lira, 1 in Tororo) and 321 outlets were established as part of the distribution network.
Training of 252 local entrepreneurs (185 women and 67 men) and 6720 girls and how to make reusable pads from local materials.	284 local entrepreneurs (youth and women groups, retail shop owners, tailors ,local pad sellers) orientated on MHM and pads making.
Training of 252 local entrepreneurs on market-ing and business skills and how to share knowledge on good MHM practices.	284 local entrepreneurs (youth and women groups, retail shop owners, tailors ,local pad sellers) trained on marketing and business skills.

Besides the noticeable increased knowledge, attitudes and practices regarding MHM, access to affordable menstrual pads has also increased in the target communities. Thanks to Plan who has taught teachers, students and entrepreneurs how to make reusable pads with local but hygienic materials. And thanks to AFRIpads that successfully conducted market activation activities and has set up a distribution chain for their SoSure menstrual pads in Tororo, Kamuli and Buyende.

Anticipated results 2.1: Established distribution network of AFRIpads (SoSure Reusable Sanitary Pads) in Tororo, Lira and Kamuli.

During the implementation of the project Plan International learned that although the SoSure product of AFRIpads is very much appreciated by the target communities, a large percentage of the girls Plan was targeting simply could not afford them. During the implementation of the project AFRIpads also changed it views on subsidizing their products which meant the product would become more expensive. AFRIpads also learned that it was too expensive to distribute the pads directly to the individual AFRIpads dealers in the remote villages.

As a result Plan started focussing more on training teachers and Village Health Extension workers on how to train girls and boys to make their own re-usable sanitary pads from local products, and AFRIpads changed their distribution strategy by setting up three distributors in the bigger towns in Lira and Tororo. Smaller rural outlets (shops) would buy their SoSure products from the distributors. In total 321 outlets were selling SoSure products in December 2020.



So Sure

Anticipated result 2.2: 180 AFRIpads dealers trained.

A total of 139 people were trained in making of local pads and becoming a sales agent for AFRIpads. All these trained people reported improved skills in marketing and saving as a result of the training from Plan International Uganda. However, only 45% of them remained selling SoSure or locally made re-usable sanitary pads. Reason this is that as both products can be used for over a year, they don't need to be replaced soon and as a response their market was saturated quickly. A lot of the people living in their community also could not afford the SoSure pads of AFRIpads.

Although all active AFRIpads dealers reported having had an increase in their income associated with the AFRIpads business, it should be noted that these were too few to make viable business for AFRIpads as a business enterprise. However, regarding economic empowerment and improving lives, two of former AFRIpads dealers interviewed in Tororo had managed to invest in other areas with the skills they acquired from business skills training. One of them bought land and was engaging in gardening and selling the harvested produce, while the other bought a goat that eventually was able to help accumulate profit to buy a cow. She was also able to buy a solar panel where she does phone charging as a business. All in all, there has been diversification in their business activities made inspired, and made possible, by this project.

Anticipated result 2.3: 69.000 MHM kits sold.

In the end evaluation that was conducted in June 2019 it was indicated that around 51,166 AFRIpads SoSure kits have been sold. The relatively low sales of the SoSure pads of AFRIpads was reportedly attributed to the high prices set by dealers. As a result some girls and women were unable to purchase the SoSure pads. They preferred the disposable ones that were comparatively cheaper, although only in the short run.

Anticipated result 2.4: 255 local entrepreneurs (70 men and 185 women) trained how to make and sell local reusable pads.

To accelerate the increase in access to hygienic pads 284 local entrepreneurs (youth and women groups, local tailors and Village Health Team (VHT) members) were empowered to make re-useable sanitary pads in collaboration with the district local governments in Kamuli, Tororo and Lira and linked to the suppliers of MHM materials. However, because these products are so durable, the market to sell these products saturated quickly. As a result only 50 of the trained entrepreneurs continued and received additional business and marketing training.

Anticipated result 2.5: 6720 girls trained how to make reusable pads for themselves.

To reach those who cannot afford SoSure pads, Plan adopted the approach in 2017 to train women, girls and boys to make re-usable menstrual pads. Throughout the duration of the project Plan taught 2,059 women, 1,890 men, 3,275 girls and 2,097 boys how to make sanitary pads locally. They were given practical skills in making pads using thread and needles. They were shown which kind of cotton is suitable to use for the liners and shields and they learned which type of polythene material to include in the shield to prevent leaks and irritation.

Anticipated Result 2.6: Increased volume of sales of local pads by the local entrepreneurs.

In total 3,408 locally produced re-usable pads were made and sold among girls and women in local communities. Many more women and girls were reached by training them on how to make their own re-usable sanitary pads.

“Before nobody knew me in the community. Now I am proud people call me ‘mama pad’ because they know I have the skills to sew hygienic re-usable pads. I have taught my peers and other young girls how to make their own pads and how to manage their menstruation.”

(Alice 11 years old, Kamuli)



Handmade re-usable sanitary pads

Objective 3 Increasing access to equitable gender friendly WASH facilities among girls and boys in Tororo Lira, and Kamuli.

Planned activities to achieve objective 3	Conducted activities by the end of the project
Construction of 54 girl friendly latrine blocks.	69 inclusive latrine blocks constructed by contractors in primary schools. Lira (23), Tororo (11) and Kamuli (35).
Rehabilitation of 20 boreholes at the target schools.	34 inclusive boreholes constructed within 100-300 meters radius of schools.

Anticipated result 3.1: 54 girl friendly latrine blocks constructed & Anticipated result 3.2: 20 or more rehabilitated boreholes at schools.

Plan constructed 69 girl-friendly latrine blocks and rehabilitated 34 boreholes in the target schools. All latrines are constructed conform the Ministry of Education Standard's guidelines and all girl latrines include an MHM room with access to water, a mirror, and cloth rail to enable girls to wash themselves. All constructed school latrines have a curtain wall for increased privacy whilst in use and have handwashing facilities near the latrines for increased hygiene. Health club members were in charge of maintaining the hand washing facilities as well as cleaning the latrines.



A latrine facility at Abia Primary School in Kamuli District clearly showing the toilet use instructions

“Access to safe latrine with privacy was a challenge at school. Boys, girls and teachers in my school used to share a 5 stance latrine. During break time we used to queue to use the latrine. This was terrible is you had your menstruation as we had no WASH room for bathing and changing of pads. For that reason I often skipped my afternoon lessons or stayed home all together when I was having my period. Now that Plan has constructed the girl latrines I have privacy to bath and change my pads. I no longer have to miss my afternoon lessons and am no longer worried to go to school when I am have my period.” (Rosemary – 10 years Tororo district)



3. Sustainability of project activities

The achievements of this project are very likely to be sustained beyond the completion of this project as Plan strengthened local community structures and local government structures to continue improving access to MHM information, products and facilities. Below you can find the highlights of how Plan ensured project results are self-sustained and how the impact will continue to grow after this project has ended:

- After receiving training of Plan, School authorities now allocate 10%-20% of their annual budgets towards operation and maintenance of their WASH facilities as well as procuring of materials for making emergency pads as part of the art and crafts session.
- 50 Local entrepreneurs including tailors, Youth and women groups will continue to make and sale pads in their communities.
- The 34 waterpoints constructed for this project are all handed over to the district government. Maintenance of the waterpoints is handed over to water user committees who will establish an affordable user fee which could be set aside to cover maintenance costs.
- 158 School Health Clubs have decided on their own to break menstrual taboos en inform people in their community on good menstrual practices through community theatre.
- MHM is now part of the national school curriculum thanks to the support of Plan and other international NGO's. As a result the Ministry of Education is rolling out MHM education to all schools in Uganda!

4. Lessons Learned & Recommendations

Plan International has taken the following lessons and recommendations when developing the new MHM project in Uganda:

- Involvement of boys and men as champions in change was very effective to facilitated the demystification of taboos and myths surrounding MHM. In future MHM project Plan will involve men and boys even more.
- Community theatre for development has proved to be effective low cost high impact approach to break taboos and provide MHM information to all generations. The drama skits attracts mass population and facilitate social awakening on the norms, culture surrounding MHM.
- Teachers are very key in conveying of menstruation information to girls & boys in schools. Because teachers are transferred often to other schools it's important to train at least 4-5 teachers per school to ensure MHM expertise remains at a school.
- Working with a private company like AFRIpads was very valuable as they were able to set up a sustainable supply chain for MHM products. However, in the future an affordability assessment of the target group will help us to determine if the product is affordable for the girls and women Plan is aiming to reach.

5. Multiplier effects & Next steps

The Bloody Serious Matter project has been a flagship project of Plan International and many other Plan Country Offices have learned from this project and started implementing MHM projects themselves. Plan International also shared the lessons learned of this project with other WASH organisations during conferences and through publications. In Uganda Plan International, in partnership with Ministry of Education and Sports, also trained 52 community based organisations on MHM to scale up MHM activities throughout the country.

This project contributed to a shift in the attitudes on MHM in the wider WASH sector. Although the funding of the National Postcode Lottery has been utilized and this phase of the project is completed, Plan International will not stop to implement menstrual hygiene management projects. We have seen the impact of this project to improve the position of women and girls and also know there are many more women and girls that are in need of this support. Currently we are already implementing MHM activities as part of our wider WASH projects in Ethiopia, Zambia, Uganda, Indonesia and Nepal. Moreover, Plan International Netherlands has decided to use part of the Lottery's unearmarked funding to scale up the Bloody Serious Matter project activities in Kamuli District in Uganda for the coming two years. During these two years we will intensify our search for new funding to implement even more MHM activities in other districts in Uganda and in other countries.

6. Communication about the project in the Netherlands

Overview per year:

- **2016:** 'Bag to School' campaign with project ambassadors Pip Pellens, Neelie Kroes, Caro Emerald and Giovanca Ostiana.

To generate free publicity, Pip Pellens, Neelie Kroes and Caro Emerald have been involved as project ambassadors. They visited the project in Uganda in order to be able to speak to the press from personal experience and to collect appealing content (film and photo material). The trip led to a lot of media attention in the written press as well as on radio and television). Moreover, the content developed during the trip could be widely disseminated in the media.

In addition, as part of the project, a unique fair trade clutch (handbag) was developed, which was launched by the project ambassadors during a press event in the Bijenkorf. This so-called 'Bag to School clutch' was sold online and in the Bijenkorf. The proceeds of the sale benefited the project. The launch and the associated online campaign ensured a large media reach.

The National Postcode Lottery was mentioned as often as possible in all communications surrounding the ambassadors' project visit and the launch of the clutch. On an information tag in the clutch and on the in-store displays in the Bijenkorf department store, the lottery's logo was visible, and the lottery was also mentioned by name and logo in the social campaign and the print ads in women's magazines Happinez, Margriet and Opzij. The free publicity campaign alone reached more than 8 million people. The 'Bag to school clutch' and information about the project were also included in the benefits diary that the Postcode lottery sends to its than 2.7 million participants annually.

- **2017:** One against 100

In May 2017, Plan had a central role in the program 1 against 100 (average 1.5 million viewers). During the program short videos were shown, including videos about the project 'Een bloedserieuze zaak'. On the website of program 1 against 100 a special page was created about Plan and the project in Uganda with of course attention for the role of The Lottery. In addition, a Facebook campaign in collaboration with Sanoma around the Bag tot School-clutch led to new visibility for the project.

- **2018:** Harmful myths about menstruation

In 2018, the project was brought to the attention by means of various social media posts about prevailing (harmful) myths about menstruation in countries such as Uganda. Through these posts traffic was generated to articles on the Plan International website about the project. In addition, WASH expert Mascha Singeling wrote a column about her visit to the project in Metro (reach 800.000). On International Menstrual Hygiene Day (May 28th) a video about Menstrual Hygiene in Uganda was launched via social media.

- **2019:** Research on Menstrual Shame/Poverty

In order to create a new communication peak, Plan conducted research in 2019 among 1000 Dutch girls and young women between the ages of 10 and 25. The research investigated the extent to which menstrual shame and menstrual poverty occurs in the Netherlands. Through the research, the subject was made topical and relevant to the Dutch press, thus forming a bridge for editorial attention for the project in Uganda. This turned out to be a very successful strategy, the subject was taken up by many national media. In the press release and in all communications surrounding the project, a link was made directly to the project page with a detailed description of the project and a reference to the National Postcode Lottery in both text and logo.

- **2020:** Advertisements and Animated Video

In December a full page branded article will appear in NRC. The article describes the results of the project and explains why attention to menstrual hygiene is so important for the future opportunities for girls. The article closes with a special thank you to the participants of the Postcode Lottery for making the project possible. In December Plan International Netherlands has also started the process to develop a short animation, which will describe Plan International's Menstrual Health & Hygiene (MHH) Approach. This animation will be released on Menstrual Hygiene Day on the 28th of May 2021.