

Family Background, Menstrual Hygiene Management and Girls' Education in Uganda

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Uganda has for a long time since 2007 provided universal primary and secondary education, which was made compulsory for all learners of school-going age, in all parts of the country. The introduction of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, where education was made a stand-alone goal in Goal 4, was welcomed by all actors in the society right from the government to local communities. The government has for a long time provided tuition requirements for all boys and girls in both primary and secondary schools in the Universal Primary Education (UPE) and Universal Secondary Education (USE) schools, in addition to the provision of facilities, scholastic materials like text books and the payment of staff salaries.

However much education has its own goal, the target of ensuring that all girls and boys complete free and equitable quality primary and secondary education resulting in relevant and effective learning outcomes may not be achieved in Uganda. This is especially true for not only rural areas but also for girls, particularly the adolescent girls who are facing the challenge of menstrual hygiene management.

In rural areas, it is believed that education “has gone to the dogs.” All the necessities for the provision of quality education have always remained insufficient. One finds schools with one or two classroom blocks, and the bulk of pupils studying under trees. Many rural schools lack teachers because no teachers wish to serve in such schools, where the small salaries provided by the government are never supplemented with parental contributions. Such schools offer neither accommodations nor transport facilities to teachers.

The situation is made worse for the girls. In many of these schools there are not enough latrines and where they are present, they are greatly dilapidated. The latrines are shared between the boys and girls, and there is no privacy. This makes it hard for the menstruating girls to use the latrines, compelling them to decide to take leave whenever they are menstruating. Many schools lack water sources within the premises in addition to the lack of hand washing facilities.

The problems concerning the menstrual hygiene management are worsened by the lack of parental support due to cultural beliefs, where parents cannot freely talk about menstruation as it is considered a taboo. Poverty too has led to inaccessibility to sanitary pads, thus girls end up using unhygienic materials or prefer to stay at home to avoid embarrassment as their clothes may be soaked with menstrual blood. The challenge of being mocked by boys too makes girls miss school. Many boys laugh at the girls, who consequently feel uncomfortable about attending school.

In order to address the situation, both government and non-government actors have undertaken measures to increase awareness about the menstrual hygiene management among all stakeholders including the girls themselves, the boys, parents, school managers, religious leaders, and local communities. The president of Uganda has been committed to improving the menstrual hygiene management through the provision of facilities to the Universal Education schools and the offering of sanitary pads to the adolescent girls in order to stay in school and attain quality education and lifelong learning.



Pupils of a primary school showcasing the reusable pads and carrying bags they have made themselves.

