



Liliane
Fonds



IMPROVING MENSTRUAL HEALTH AND HYGIENE FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Pilot Study Key Findings

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This pilot study was supported by Liliane Fonds and conducted by AFRIpads in collaboration with local partners in Uganda: Katalemwa Cheshire Home, IDIWA, AVSI Foundation, and YPDDF throughout 2024.

AFRIpads, established in 2010, specializes in manufacturing reusable, high quality menstrual products to address the needs in Africa on affordability and accessibility. Recognizing the unique difficulties faced by women with disabilities, this initiative aimed to address menstrual health gaps through reusable pad distribution and comprehensive training tailored to disability-related needs. AFRIpads has reached 6+ million women and girls across Africa and the Middle East.

Liliane Fonds has empowered children with disabilities in Africa, Asia, and Latin America for 44 years. Their collaborative efforts have driven both individual support and systemic change as they work towards equal rights and opportunities for children with a disability by empowering not just children but their carers as well. By working through local partner organizations, their vision is an inclusive society in which all children and young people can participate, regardless of their disability. Liliane Fonds believes participation is not a privilege - it is a right.

Some rights reserved. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial- NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-ND). This publication should not be used, published or redistributed for purposes primarily intended for or directed towards commercial advantage or monetary compensation, with the exception of educational purposes e.g. to be included in textbooks.

Permission requests or partnership requests can be directed to info@afripads.com.



AFRIPADS PILOT PROGRAM FOR GIRLS AND WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This pilot study sought to improve Menstrual Health and Hygiene (MHH) management for girls and women with disabilities. The initiative distributed 205 reusable AFRIPads kits and underwear and provided menstrual health training, focusing on identifying the unique needs of those with disabilities and identifying approaches that would make for more inclusive MHH programming.

The study highlighted key outcomes, including a 15% increase in school attendance during menstruation, enhanced hygiene practices, and improved self-confidence among participants. Participants reported a 30% increase in the feeling that they had enough information about MHH at the endline.

95% of participants were very satisfied or satisfied with the AFRIPads reusable pads and

listed comfort (84%), reusable (77%) and not leaking (76%) as their top 3 most important factors in a menstrual product.

Participants experienced a 40% reduction in leaking as compared to previous menstrual materials they were using, and the lack of materials or fear of leaking was no longer their main reason for missing school as compared to the baseline.

Persistent challenges such as inadequate sanitation facilities and disability-specific needs were identified but were not fully addressed in this study, providing actionable insights for future studies and programs. The role of the caregiver is extremely important. The need for caregiver education, inclusion and support also remains a top priority and cannot be excluded from MHH programming.



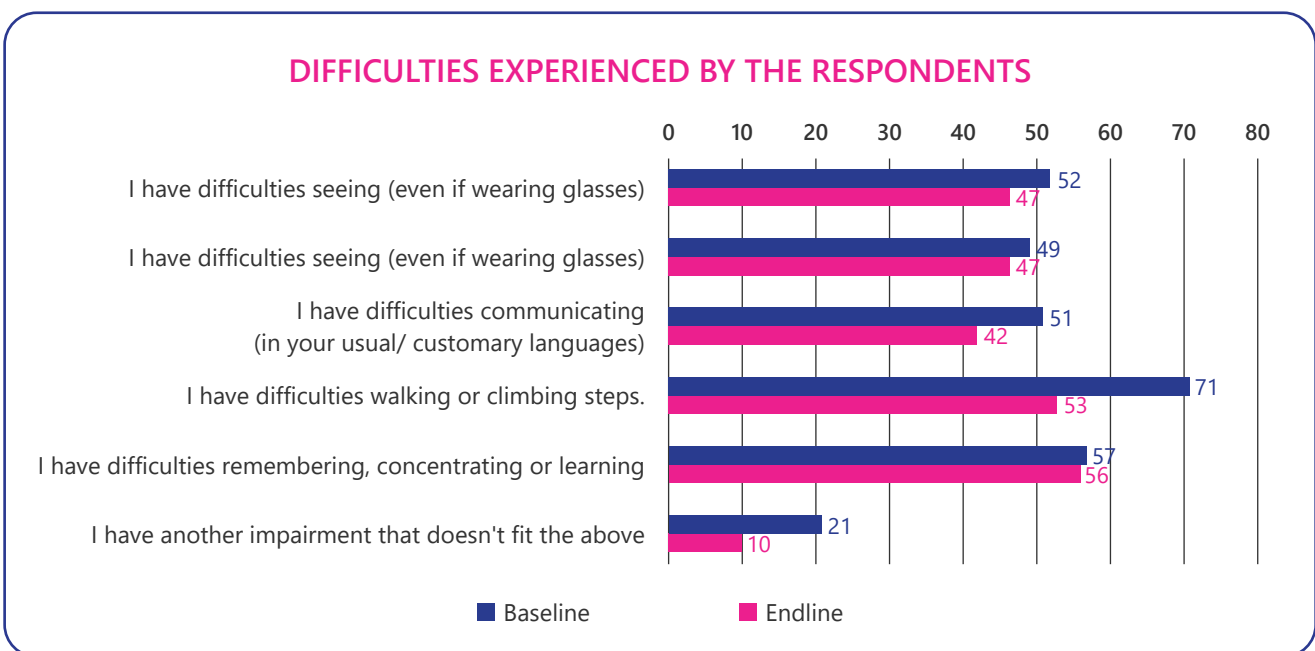
METHODOLOGY AND INTERVENTION

PURPOSE

To learn what unique challenges menstruators with disabilities face. To include persons with disabilities in the focus groups, needs assessment, training and product testing phases. To test the appropriateness and acceptability of AFRIpads reusable pads and to learn what features work best and what adjustments could be needed for the target group. To determine an effective and sustainable training model that is inclusive and manageable for local partners and caregivers.

PARTICIPANTS

- Baseline: 205 participants (all women and girls with an impairment), aged 9–44; Endline: 191 participants
- 52% required support for the following difficulties as reported by participants:



INTERVENTION

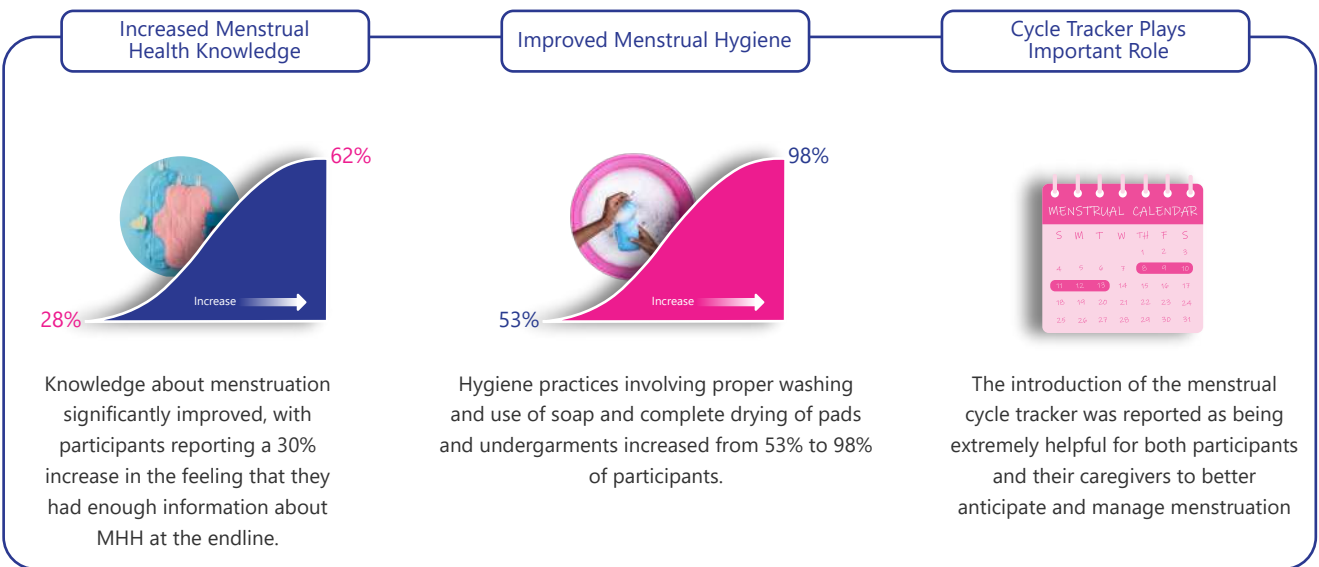
- Carried out quantitative surveys and focus groups which assessed menstrual knowledge, hygiene practices, product satisfaction, and disability-specific challenges at baseline and endline.
- Distributed of AFRIpads kits containing 5 reusable pads and 1 pair of underwear.
- Led training sessions for participants, caregivers, and community members on menstrual hygiene and disability-specific adaptations.
- Participants used the products for 3 to 4 months.
- An additional 200 kits were distributed to the caregivers for use.



KEY FINDINGS

1

IMPROVED MENSTRUAL KNOWLEDGE AND HYGIENE PRACTICES



“Before, I didn’t know how to manage reusable pads. Now I wash them properly and store them safely,” shared a 17-year-old participant.

Important Note: The majority of participants reported needing support to manage menstruation. Caregivers need all the same information as participants. The fact that AFRipads gave caregivers the pads to try as well had a positive effect on the study and on the participants’ experience. This was also noted by local staff leading focus group discussions.

2 SUPPORT AND DISABILITY-SPECIFIC NEEDS

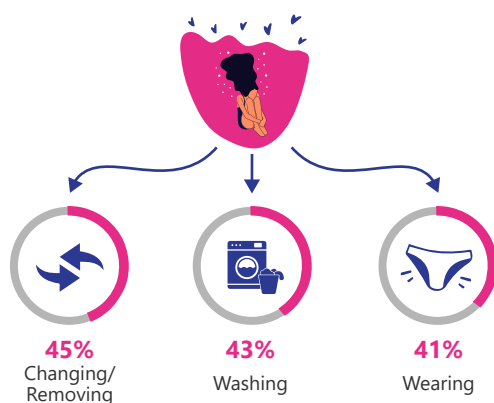
- 68 participants always needed assistance during menstruation, particularly with drying pads and tracking cycles.
- Period trackers helped visually impaired participants manage their cycles effectively through the support of caregivers. One mother said, **“The tracker lets me predict my daughter’s cycle, so I can prepare everything she needs.”**

Recommendation: A tactile element could be added to distributed period trackers so that visually impaired girls and women can use a tracker independently.

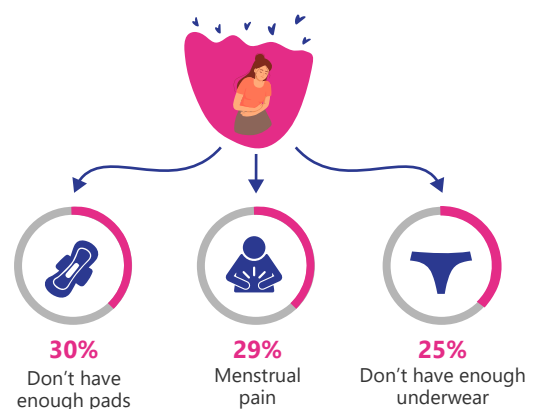


- < *“I was shy to talk about periods with my mother, but during the trainings, I realized that she was okay with me sharing my experience and give me support.”*
- < *“My self esteem during my periods has improved, because before trainings, even leaving the house during my periods was hard, because I thought people would laugh at me, which was not the case. Currently I can perform my duties without shame and discomfort.”*
- < *“Having a good support system at home, another person that knows where I keep my menstrual materials, so that even when I am not feeling well, she is able to locate my materials and assist me.”*

SUPPORT NEEDED DUE TO IMPAIRMENT-BASELINE



WHAT ARE THE MAIN CHALLENGES YOU FACE DURING MENSTRUAL PERIOD-BASELINE



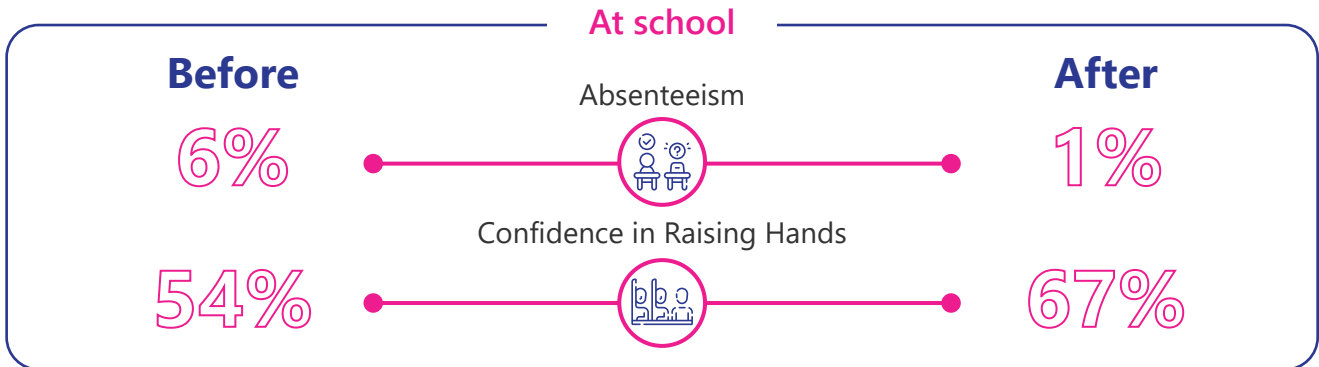
Girls and women reported top issues being lack of pads, underwear, and not able to manage their menstruation alone.



- < *“Due to my disability, changing frequently during periods is difficult. I have to ask for help and then ask for help to manage the cloth or dispose of a sanitary towel. Sometimes I don't have enough and leak often.” (18 year old woman, physically impaired, Baseline)*

3

ENHANCED CONFIDENCE AND PARTICIPATION



“I no longer hide in the house during my periods. I feel confident walking to school knowing I’m prepared.” said a 15-year-old with a visual impairment.

4

PRODUCT SATISFACTION AND USAGE

- Only 10% of participants experienced some kind of leaking at endline compared to 51% at baseline using other materials.
- 76% of participants preferred reusable pads for comfort and cost savings.

A mother shared, **“My daughter no longer asks for money to buy pads every month. It’s a relief for the whole family.”**



- Participants reported a drop in number of times they had to change their menstrual materials (due to being full or leaking) from 4+ times a day to 3 times a day.
- At the endline we see that lack of materials or fear of leaking is not the main reason anymore why girls are missing school.



“We see an increase in doing daily activities, partially due to the AFRIpads products and also due to changes in confidence, as shared in their open answers. Especially less leaking is vital in doing your activities. Lack of product is still present but has decreased significantly. Other materials are still needed like more underwear and soap.”

A local staff member implementing the pilot study and focus group discussions.

5

SANITATION AND ACCESSIBILITY REMAIN AN ISSUE

- Dirty and inaccessible toilets pose major challenges:
 - 52% needed support using home latrines, and 44% faced similar issues at school.
“Sometimes I crawl to the toilet, which is very uncomfortable during my period,” shared a participant with mobility challenges.
 - Many visually impaired participants expressed fear of infections from unclean facilities, with one stating, **“I can’t tell if the toilet is clean, and it makes me anxious every time.”**



< *“During my periods I find problems since we use the washroom with many people and they just bump into me while I use the place of convenience. I feel a bit uncomfortable.” (26 year old woman, visually impaired, Baseline)*

WHY ARE THESE FINDINGS SIGNIFICANT FOR THOSE WITH DISABILITIES?

The confidence and understanding around knowing when 1) their period might start, 2) how to manage it hygienically, with support but also as much autonomy as possible, and 3) with a product that that does not leak, cause infection, or take a lot of effort to wash and dry all contribute to reducing the “double stigma” that women and girls with disabilities face. This double stigma refers to the fact that they already encounter social exclusion or restriction due to their disability and then additionally due to the stigma and taboos around menstruation.

- Changing, washing and drying provide additional challenges for people with visual or physical impairments.
- The need to change less frequently (but hygienically) and not worry about leaking can have a significant impact on quality of life and confidence.





RECOMMENDATIONS

1

○ TAILOR MENSTRUAL PRODUCTS AND TRAININGS FOR DISABILITIES AND SPECIFICALLY PER DISABILITY CATEGORY

- There is a need to understand the specific challenges and needs per disability category. While some specific challenges for those with visual, hearing or physical disabilities were clarified through the study, it was not consistently documented.
- Participants reported preferring reusables, but would like to have/access a mix of reusable and disposable products.
- They would benefit from having more than the 5 pads and 1 underwear to limit the amount of washing and drying per cycle.
- Product feature recommendations included:
 - Reducing thickness for faster dry time and to avoid bunching
 - Diaper type fit
 - Larger pads for heavy flow and added fasteners for greater security
 - A tactile element so visually impaired users can easily differentiate the pad sizes

2. ENHANCE SANITATION INFRASTRUCTURE

- Advocate for clean, disability-friendly toilets with ramps and private changing spaces at schools and homes.
- Provide soap, buckets, and storage materials as standard support tools.

3. EXPAND COMMUNITY EDUCATION AND ALWAYS INCLUDE CAREGIVERS

- Conduct broader training for caregivers, teachers, and community members to foster supportive environments for girls with disabilities.
- Include modules on reducing menstrual stigma and creating inclusive spaces in schools and communities.
- Where possible, provide caregivers with the same menstrual products, trackers and education so that they can be as informed and supportive as possible.
- Offer refresher training sessions on menstrual hygiene and management in a way that caregivers can also join and not be restricted due to their caregiving duties.





CONCLUSION

The AFRIpads and Liliane Fonds pilot program demonstrated the transformative impact of tailored menstrual health interventions for girls and women with disabilities. By addressing critical gaps in knowledge, hygiene, and accessibility, the initiative significantly improved participants' quality of life during menstruation. Continued focus on infrastructure, education, and adaptive solutions will further empower this underserved group, ensuring sustainable menstrual health and hygiene management.





Address: Plot 28 Ntinda View Crescent
Naguru, Kampala, Uganda

Email: Info@afripads.com

Web: www.afripads.com