

IRFF UK: Girls Go Back to School in Uganda

Edward Hartley
August 14, 2024

Schoolgirls are returning to classes happier and are getting better grades, according to a senior teacher at Busambala School.

This is thanks to IRFF-UK's ongoing period poverty support efforts in the Kampala district near Lake Victoria's shoreline in Uganda.

Many girls experience period poverty as they lack access to menstrual hygiene products due to their cost.

'In Uganda... period poverty, or the inability to afford menstrual hygiene products, causes nearly a quarter of girls between the ages of 12 – 18 to drop out of school once they begin menstruating. School absence rates for girls triple when they are on their periods.'

[Global G.L.O.W., 2024](#)



Senior Teacher at Busambala Primary and Secondary School

"Before you came to our school, girls were using rags, paper, and even leaves. Many girls could not even attend school during their periods."

Senior Primary School Teacher, Busambala

Menstruation is sometimes misunderstood and considered taboo, not only in Uganda but in many countries. The stigma impacts their physical, mental, and emotional health.

The senior teacher explained in an interview with Sylvia (Senior teacher at Destiny Junior School) that girls who did turn up for classes often cried from pain or shame.

Destiny Junior School is a flagship project of IRFF-UK in the town of Kibiri, just south of the capital city of Kampala.



Jesca Kyaligamba carefully checking the hygiene pads

Jesca is IRFF-UK's representative in Uganda (Headteacher at Destiny School). She understands the girls' needs and is highly motivated to "spread the love" for students and pupils in Busabala and others beyond her own.

"Now the girls are clean, the girls are smart, and the girls are performing better in class than before we started working with Basabala Primary School."

Senior Primary School Teacher, Busambala

IRFF-UK has been instrumental in bringing awareness of this and other challenges girls face through the ongoing Girls Health and Support Project, or 'Girl-Child', as the locals call it.

"Sincere and deepest thanks to you all as your help has lifted a heavy weight from us teachers... Now they can attend classes, even during their periods, because they feel safe with the sanitary pads and panty liners and other products that you are providing."

Senior Primary School Teacher, Sylvia



Checking menstrual products with senior teacher Silvia (right)

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Can We Do More?

IRFF-UK is currently supporting some 400 girls in three schools in Uganda. But we would love to help many more. With your help, we know we can.

It only costs **£1** on average to supply **one girl** with disposable sanitary pads for **one month**.

So, a **one-off** donation of just **£5** will help keep **five girls** in school for a full month.

A **recurring monthly** donation of **£5** would **keep those five girls in school** for as long as you would like to support their education.

You could even set your own target for how many girls you would like to help out.

If you can, **please act now** by clicking on the '**Donate Today**' button. Your act of kindness could change their lives. Please know that every pound of your gift will be used for the girls.

Thank you!

(The IRFF-UK team)



Blog

May 21 2024

A Girl-Led Solution to Period Poverty: A Quarter-Year-Old Co-Founder of Girls for School Pads



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By Global Girls Glow

May 21, 2024



Menstruation is a normal part of life. But globally, girls face discrimination, stigma, and shame when they're on their periods — all of which keep them from accessing basic rights like education, health services, and full and equal participation in society. 18-year old GLOW Club alumni Kashish is changing the way her community thinks about periods, one pad at a time.

In Uganda, where Kashish is from, period poverty, or the inability to afford menstrual hygiene products, causes nearly a quarter of girls between the ages of 12 – 18 drop out of school once they begin menstruating. School absence rates for girls triple when they are on their periods.

Not only that — stigma surrounding menstruation keeps many Ugandan girls from participating in basic household or community activities while on their periods. Often, there is no space for them to ask basic questions about their bodies and how they function, which prevents them from understanding how to best manage their health.

As a high school GLOW Club student, Kashish began to realize just how much harm these issues were creating for women and girls in her community. In 2018, at the age of 13, she had the opportunity to attend the Global G.L.O.W. Global Summit in New York City: a convening of girl changemakers from around the world. It was there that Girls for School Pads was born.



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18-year-old Kashish is the co-founder of Girls For School Pads: a social enterprise in Uganda that sells low-cost reusable pads and uses the proceeds to send girls to school.

Girls for School Pads — a social enterprise and community impact project founded by Kashish and fellow GLOW Club member Patience — provides low-cost reusable sanitary pads to girls throughout Uganda while hosting free educational workshops and community dialogues about menstruation. All proceeds from pad sales go directly to funding girls' education.

Since its founding, Girls for School Pads has reached approximately 500 women and girls. 60 girls across three Ugandan cities are currently continuing their education through the Girls for School Pads scholarship program.

We recently caught up with Kashish to learn more about the long-term impact her project is having on the lives of Ugandan girls. Read on to hear how her advocacy work is challenging period stigma by improving access to sanitary pads and encouraging open dialogue about menstruation.

This interview has been condensed and edited for clarity.

What is menstruation like for girls in Uganda?

Me personally, I didn't have enough education about menstruation. When I got my period, I felt really uncomfortable. I cried. I didn't know what to do. Because even at home, no one would speak about it. We would just live our lives like it wasn't there. I didn't even know about pads!

This is the reality for many girls throughout Uganda. They don't even talk openly about it, even in their homes. While some of them are on their period, they are not allowed to cook or go near their parents, especially the male gender.

Most girls have issues maintaining their level of comfort with school during their periods. If a girl lacks pads, it can affect her education. For example, if she is supposed to go to school today and she gets her period and she has no pads, she won't go to school. Some girls have been bullied by boys. Boys will tell them, "You're disgusting," or "You're dirty." So to avoid all that, girls will take the week off school. Then some of their parents will say, "Why are you wasting my money? You are just at home." They tell them to drop out of school, so they end up dropping out.

How did you develop your idea for Girls for School Pads?

In GLOW Club, we would speak about the challenges girls face. I also gained skills, like leadership skills and counseling skills. Girls would come and ask me about menstruation and how to be comfortable with it, so I would guide and counsel them. My friend Patience and I had the opportunity to go to the U.S. to attend the Global G.L.O.W. Summit. We made a community action plan, and that's where we got the idea to start our project.



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Kashish leading a reusable pad-making workshop for local women in rural Uganda in 2018. Kashish conducted surveys and led community dialogues to launch her project, Girls for School Pads.

After we developed our idea, we returned to Uganda and carried out community surveys to learn more about how lack of access to pads affects women and girls. We first met with groups of women and spoke to them about their problems and how they manage their menstruation. They told us that for them, it's very difficult to balance their menstruation expenses and their household expenses. They said that buying a pad is very costly to them, so they resort to using cloth. They just get a piece of cloth and use it, which is not hygienic and can even be harmful to their health.

Since its founding, Girls for School Pads has used proceeds made by selling reusable sanitary pads to pay the school fees of 60 girls across three Ugandan cities.

Then we met with girls from the community. We sat them down and talked to them about periods. Most of them were very shy about it and didn't want to share about it. We even met a girl who at first lied and said that she hadn't started her period yet because she was too shy to share. Eventually, she opened up and said that at home, her dad doesn't give her mom money, so they use pieces of cloth.

Join the conversation to end period stigma by using hashtag #TalkAboutItPeriod and downloading our digital toolkit!

We informed both groups that using cloth fabric is not good and can cause health issues. We pitched our idea, and they were really thankful. They didn't even know that reusable pads exist.

How does the Girls for School Pads Project work?

Girls for School Pads provides menstrual health guidance, education, and materials to girls and the community at large. Over the past three years, we have been visiting communities and schools teaching girls about reusable sanitary pads and their menstrual health.

We make reusable sanitary pads out of locally available cloth and cotton. When visiting schools and communities where store-bought pads are difficult for families to afford, we provide demonstrations on how to properly wash and dry the pads so that all of the bacteria can be killed.

We sell the pads for 10,000 Ugandan shillings (approximately \$2.50 USD), and when washed properly they can be used for up to one year. Store-bought pads can only be used once, and will typically cost a local family around 50,000 shillings per month. The profits from our project have paid for my school fees, and have also helped pay for the school fees of 60 girls across Kampala, Fort Portal, and Gulu



Girls for School pads sells low-cost reusable sanitary pads in low-income communities. When washed properly, the pads can last for up to one year, preventing the health issues that can arise when using old



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who would not have otherwise been able to continue their education. *cloth for period management.*

We've also taught some women in our community how to make the reusable sanitary pads themselves. As a result, they make the pads and sell them with our logo on them. The women are able to earn a living, and also, it helps spread awareness. As people buy the pads, they learn about the background of our project. And also, the women earn money to help with their expenses at home and improve their standard of living.

What has been the impact of Girls for School Pads on your community?

Our Girls For School Pads Project has made a positive impact on the lives of girls. Girls can now openly speak about their periods. They educate their neighbors and other girls at school. They're able to advise other people.



Kashish leads educational workshops for girls in her community, encouraging them to speak openly about menstruation.

Also some men have changed the way they have been thinking about periods. Some fathers could not even look at their daughters when they were on their periods. But as we went on educating them, they saw no harm in being with your daughter while she's on her period. So it has really created a positive impact on society where girls have been embraced during their periods and have also embraced their periods.

What have you learned through this project, and what are your long-term goals?

Through this project, I have learned that I can make a change and so can other girls. I was very shy, but through this project I have developed myself, and now, I'm a role model to other girls.

Our goal for this project is for it to expand and keep on expanding, not only in Uganda, but to reach different girls in other countries. We also hope to one day develop a biodegradable sanitary pad that will be even more environmentally sustainable.

We believe we can make a global change with our project because we have started a chain. We help and teach people, and then they teach other people. So I hope our chain goes on. I hope that girls teach themselves, their friends, their relatives, and even their own children one day so that girls can live in a free world and be comfortable with their menstruation.

Global G.L.O.W. mentors girls around the world to become powerful advocates and confident leaders. Since inception, our GLOW Clubs have ignited the power of over 91,000 girls to do 3 transformative things: increase their confidence, strengthen their voice, and build their power. In honor of Menstrual Hygiene Day, support bold period advocates like Kashish at globalgirlsglow.org/donate.



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This transformation story has been made possible through our collaboration with Art of Child, who coordinate GLOW Clubs for girls throughout Uganda. Special thanks to GLOW Club Coordinator Rennie Bishanga, and to Kashish for encouraging girls to Talk About It. Period.



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We mentor girls to advocate for themselves and make their communities stronger.

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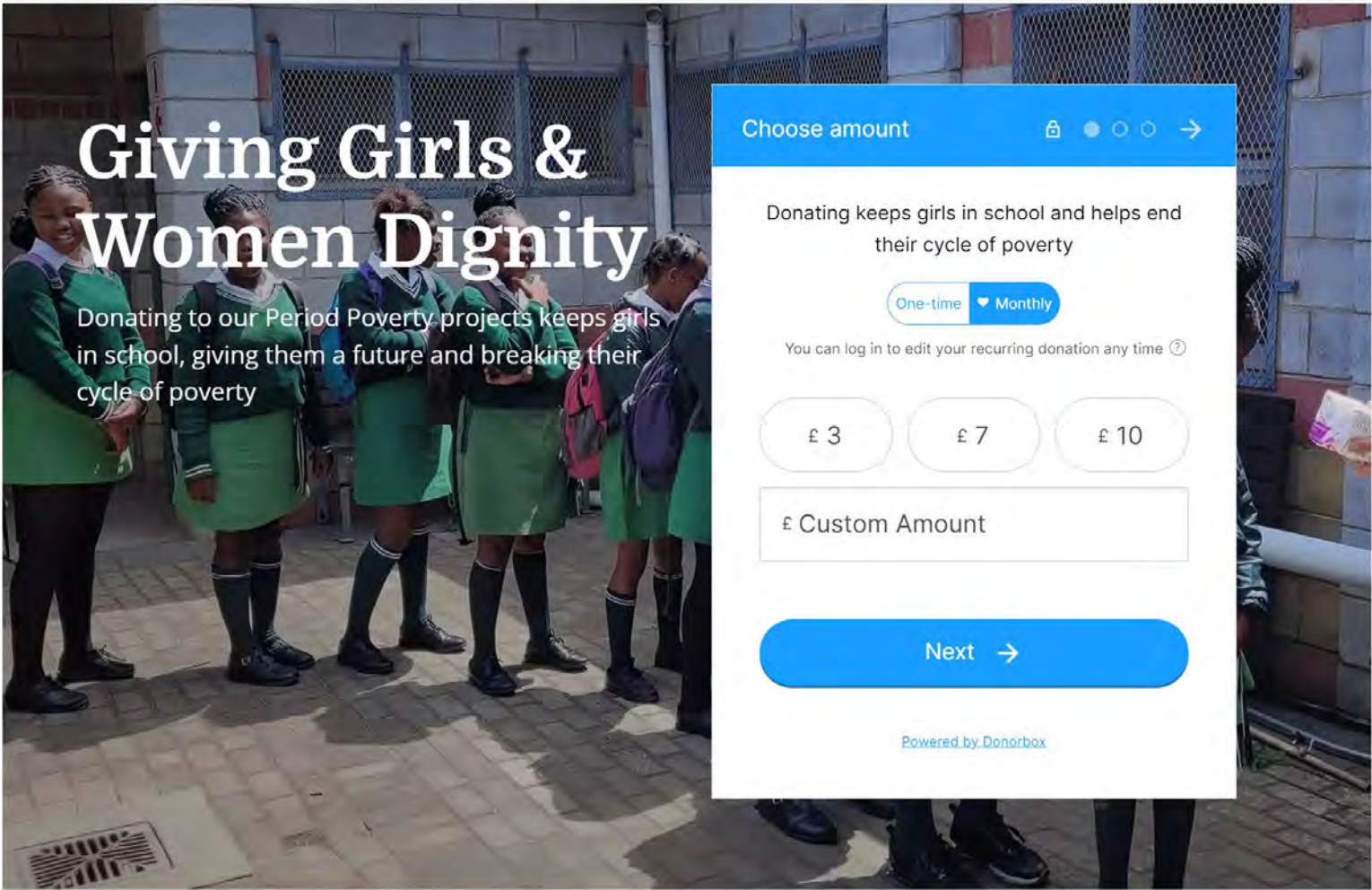
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Menstruation should not be a reason to hold anyone back in life. Donating a small amount today helps all girls and women fulfil their potential!



Supply sanitary pads for girls, ensuring they avoid shame and never miss school.



Equip an entire class of girls with enough sanitary pads, enabling every student to attend school without interruption.



Support IRFF UK in sending our team to schools and projects for comprehensive menstruation education sessions.

|| Yesterday was truly special as we set out to three communities to donate Reusable Pads. The experience was heartwarming beyond words. The communities of Wute, Logote, and Lawui in Akatsi, Volta Region, opened their doors to us with such warmth and gratitude.



joined by a dedicated seamstress, local leaders, and a compassionate nurse who spoke to the community in their own language, we not only distributed pads but also shared important information on their usage. We managed to distribute 430 pads amongst 3 communities, however, the need is greater than expected and many more communities still need our help! We made a heartfelt promise to return and reach out to those we couldn't help this time.

Vivian
Period Poverty Director in Ghana



Vivian
IRFF UK Period Poverty Director
in Ghana

“Thanks to IRFF UK, I never miss school. My family and I are hopeful for the future ahead.”

Destiny Junior School Student

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