

# PADS FOR PERSONAL POWER

Menstruation is a natural part of a woman's life, but for some it is a disempowering experience. Sister Namibia hopes the transition to gaining control over it, will significantly contribute to an overall sense of personal self-determination.

May 28, 2014 was the first time the world celebrated Menstrual Hygiene Day: The choice for the day is based on the fact that May is the fifth month of the year, representing five days, or the average number of days (between 2-7) a woman menstruates per month. Twenty-eight also represents the average number of days in a menstrual cycle. Menstruating can be quite an ordeal for a great number of women.

In June 2013 *Sister Namibia* ran an article, "No pads, no school" reporting on the experiences of Lori Schipper, a Peace Corps volunteer in the Kavango region. She noticed many of her female students regularly missed school. Upon investigation Lori learned the cause was a lack of sanitary wear. She saw the founding of Empower Women in Africa, which supplied 1 800 girls with re-usable pads. Due to funding challenges and Lori's return to the USA the project could not continue. *Sister Namibia* is pleased to announce that the project has been revived. Early December will see 500 girls benefit from re-usable pad kits currently in the final stages of production.

## A brief desktop study reveals the following:

- The Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) in Uganda observes that menstruation is the most important factor affecting school dropout statistics among girls.
- World Bank statistics reveal that a girl misses up to four days of school every month due to her period. In total, she misses 10 to 20 percent of her school days. Many drop out of school after suffering the embarrassment of blood trickling down their legs or staining their uniforms and jibes from boys.
- UNESCO estimates that 1 in 10 African girls miss school during menses, eventually leading to a higher school dropout rate.
- A Ghanaian study found that girls' attendance increased substantially after receiving free sanitary pads and puberty education.
- 83% of girls in Burkina Faso and 77% in Niger have no place at school to change their sanitary menstrual materials.
- In Sierra Leone, girls who are normally active classroom participants sit in the back because they are worried about emitting an odor or leaking through their clothes while menstruating.
- A study in Kenya reveals that over 850,000 girls miss 6 weeks of school every year and women miss valuable work

hours. About 65% of women and girls in Kenya cannot afford sanitary pads

- In Uganda a study of menstrual management with focus groups with 12 to 17-year-olds in 20 primary schools in five districts found girls in rural areas miss up to eight days of study school term because they

on their periods. This was due to the lack of washrooms, of sanitary pads and bullying by

Sister Namibia is looking forward to conduct studies in Namibia to garner data on the situation in Namibia. We are also looking forward to conduct pre - and post - tests to evaluate the impact of the pads with those girls who are truly in need of them. We believe with menstruation not interrupting school attendance anymore, girls should be able to perform better academically. Moreover, we intend to run a small workshop in which we look at the reality of reclaiming ownership over their own lives and self-determination. In the past the girls' academic success was contingent on whether their period enabled them to attend important lessons and final exams as its arrival and force could often interrupt their intentions. The implicit conclusion to draw then for these girls are external forces such as nature, my financial status and even other people have the last say over my life.

The distribution of the re-usable pads go hand in hand with a mini workshop. It is our assumption that the practical experience of regular academic interruption, perhaps combined with cultural and economic limitations as well as family drama may have brought girls to the existential belief that external factors would always determine the outcomes in their lives. Our intention with the workshop is to quicken their sense of self-determination while giving them back control over their bodies and productivity.

By Vida de Voss

