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**Innovative Ideas: Innovative Projects and Programmes
in Education: Provision of Sanitary Towels to Needy
Girls in Public Primary Schools in Kenya**

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PROVISION OF SANITARY TOWELS TO NEEDY GIRLS IN PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN KENYA

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Abstract

One of the goals of education is to achieve gender equity towards empowerment. This is in line with Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Social cultural economic and political factors have tended to affect children especially girls' enrolment, participation and retention in school particularly in the developing countries. Despite the introduction of Free Primary Education in 2003 and Free Secondary Education in 2008, girls continue to be disadvantaged in education. Sexual maturation process has been identified to have a negative impact on the education of both boys and girls. One of the strategies to enhance and retain girls in school is the provision of sanitary towels to needy girls especially in public primary schools, towards ensuring girls retention and effective participation in education.

Keywords: Education, Gender equity, empowerment, sanitary towels, developing country.

Background to Provision of Sanitary Towels

A need assessment survey was undertaken by Girl Child Network (GCN) on gender equity and equality following the introduction of Free Primary Education in Kenya. A girl absent from school due to menses for 4 days in 28 days (a month) loses 13 learning days equivalent to 2 weeks of learning in every school term. In a year (9 months) a girl loses 39 learning days equivalent to 8 weeks of learning time. A girl in primary school between grades 6 and 8 (3 years) loses 24 learning weeks out of 108 weeks. Within the 4 years of high school the same girl loses 156 learning days equivalent to almost 31 weeks out of 144 weeks of learning in secondary

school. In addition, this lowers her self-esteem, militates against girls' retention and transition in schools and leads to poor performance.

A major consideration is enrolment in primary and secondary schools in Kenya as shown in table 1.1. below.

Table 1.1. Enrolment in Public Primary and Secondary Schools, 2008

	Primary	Secondary	Total
Girls	4,205,113	635,698	4,840,811
Boys	4,358,709	746,513	5,105,222
Total	8,563,822	1,382,211	9,946,033

In Kenya public primary schools have over 500,000 menstruating girls from primary grade 6 to grade 8, while a majority of the girls in secondary Form One to secondary Form Four are already menstruating. A further consideration is that it is estimated that about two fifths (2/5ths) of the girls are from "able families" and are able to access sanitary protection. However, a majority of the other category of the three-fifths (3/5) girls are from rural poor families, in urban informal settlements and others are refugees.

In June 2008, the Ministry of Education received from Procter & Gamble sanitary worth Kshs. 3.2m to be distributed to public primary schools nationwide. Girls from 177 public primary schools spread over the country are to benefit from this kind gesture. Since then, a total of 177 teachers from the schools have been trained on sexual maturation, an exercise that revealed concern to enhance attendance through retention so as to ensure completion for both boys and girls. There was also an urgent requirement to find out from the schools themselves why both boys and girls do not attend schools.

Target Population

The project aims to assist needy girls in public primary schools. The following are the categories of schools selected for the purpose:

- Schools from arid and semi –arid areas.
- Schools in pockets of poverty.
- Schools from the urban informal settlements.
- Most vulnerable schools (orphans and very poor).
- Internally displaced areas.
- Special schools- (mentally & physically handicapped).

What is the Girls Sanitary Towels Campaign

The girls' sanitary campaign aims at providing pads to needy girls in schools as follows:

- 12 packets of Sanitary Towels per year.
- 3 underpants.
- Transport of Sanitary towels to schools.
- Enhanced puberty education.

Training of Teachers on Sexual Maturation and Puberty Education

A teacher in each of the 177 targeted schools was trained on sexual maturation and puberty education. The objective of the workshop was to sensitize and orientate teachers from the selected schools on gender and education, hygiene and sanitation to enhance the girls' personal hygiene. This was through training of teachers from selected schools with the aim of keeping more girls in schools through proper management of the menstruating process.

The following key areas that were covered in the training:

- Gender issues and concerns in education.
- Physical and sexual changes that accompany puberty.
- Emotional changes among boys and girls and identification of early and late maturation for boys and girls.
- Role of teachers in identifying ways of assisting adolescents to overcome the challenges they undergo during puberty.
- The menstrual process, management of periods, usage and disposal of sanitary towels.
- Guidance and counselling and life skills education.

Participants were trained in three groups as follows: Group 1: 23rd – 24th March; Group 2: 26th – 27th March; and, Group 3: 30th – 31st March, 2009. The target was one teacher from each of the 177 public primary schools selected to benefit from the sanitary towels donated by Procter & Gamble and 145 schools were in attendance (82%). Also in attendance were Ministry of Education and TSC gender officers, as well as organization that provide sanitary towels. This provided an opportunity to find out the needs of schools in general and girls in particular.

Project Implementation

The project is a joint venture between Ministry of Education and Procter and Gamble. The Ministry trained the teachers on puberty education. Procter and Gamble provides the sanitary pads free, while the Ministry of Education distributes the pads to schools.

Distribution of sanitary pads is done as follows:

- (a) Sanitary pads are distributed at the beginning of the term.
- (b) Each girl is provided with four (4) packets of Always sanitary pads.
- (c) Procter and Gamble transports pads to three collection areas, that is; Nairobi, Mombasa and Kisumu. DEOs in Central, Eastern and Rift valley provinces, and the Director of City Education, Nairobi collect the pads from Nairobi. DEO's from Coast Province collect the pads from Mombasa, while DEOs in Kisumu and Western Provinces collect the pads from Kisumu.
- (d) DEOs distribute sanitary pads to the targeted schools.
- (e) The PDEs and DEOs ensure that sanitary towels are distributed to schools.
- (f) The Ministry of Education and Procter & Gamble monitor distribution of the pads.

Achievements of the Project

The greatest achievement of this project is the increased enrolment and attendance of school by girls in the targeted schools. The project is affecting girls positively and teachers attest to this. Teachers are thrilled that girls are more confident and concentrate more in class even during menses. They also take part in extracurricular activities including sports, which they would otherwise shy away from when menstruating. In addition, schools are more sensitive to the needs of girls including sanitary towels disposal.

Another major achievement of the project is that the girls and boys have become more open with their teachers through the puberty talk sessions. Girls also assist each other to demonstrate proper use of the pads. In addition, that universities and teacher training colleges have realised the need to address aspects such as sexual maturation and sanitary pads and how they affect girls' education. Universities and teacher training colleges have now requested that they too be considered in the provision of sanitary towels as there are female students who are every needy.

Discussion with teachers reveals that some schools have since set up the following:

- Changing rooms near the toilets where pit latrines have no doors or have big cracks.
- Rooms for keeping pads for girls within the school.
- Girls clubs where they discuss hygiene and menstruation issues.
- Girls' toilets have now been a major consideration in several schools.
- Water and sanitation is now a key aspect in schools.

In addition, the following has been noted:

- Schools have reported that they received pads from other organization such as FAWEK, Girl Child Network, World Vision, Heart Felt Foundation.
- Certain organizations conduct training for both boys and girls on sexual maturation and puberty education.
- Teachers reported and reaffirmed that indeed girls' skipped school during menstruation due to lack of sanitary pads, and that provision of sanitary towels keeps girls in school.
- Majority of teachers have indicated that there are problems of disposal of sanitary pads. However, pit latrines are still the most commonly preferred and ideal method of disposal of the used sanitary towels in a majority of schools.

Challenges in Project Implementation

Despite the success of the project, a major challenge has been the number of schools (130 public primary schools) and girls (20,000) reached by the project as compared to the 20,000 public primary schools and an estimated 600,000 girls, and none of the public secondary schools. Universities and teacher training colleges have requested for samples to give to some of the very needy students. It is not possible to distribute sanitary towels to all these institutions, yet this is a worthwhile project that can be easily replicated in schools and other institutions.

The concerns of teachers and schools in the targeted schools are as follows:

- Some of the sanitary towels did not reach the beneficiaries, the girls in targeted schools due to delay by DEOs to distribute the pads.
- Pads are not distributed on time, that is, at the beginning of the term.
- Unlike some organisations that also distribute pants, the MOE and P& G programme does not provide pants to girls, yet some girls do not have them and this is a major challenge.
- Provision of some expired sanitary towels in schools by other organizations.
- Lack of support from head teachers and teachers to girls in need of support in schools.
- Other teachers who were not selected for the workshop may need to be informed as well.
- Limited time to do conduct the sexual maturation training as there is need for more discussion on health, hygiene and sanitation.
- Transfer of the trained teachers from the schools.
- Need to identify needy girls in the schools.
- Need to prioritize more schools, both primary and secondary, that could benefit from sanitary towels.
- Certain schools receive assistance on sanitary towels from more than one organization while others do not benefit and yet have needy cases.

In addition, there are concerns of the Special needs schools. These include:

- Teachers from special schools have pointed out that among the mentally handicapped learners, a special pad would be more appropriate as they tend to remove the pads and sometimes could end up putting them in the mouth. Teachers have recommended for a special provision that should be made for the category of the learners that is appropriate.
- A problem has been noted among the learners who are visually impaired. It is observed that they have a problem in the usage and disposal of the ordinary sanitary towel. Once again, teachers recommend that these learners also require special attention.

Recommendations for the Ministry of Education and Procter & Gamble on the Project

Teachers and schools have recommended the following to enhance the effectiveness of the hygiene and sanitary programme in schools:

- Need for the Ministry to monitor and evaluate sanitary towels distribution in schools. These includes:
 - Who provides sanitary towels to schools and in the area;
 - Quality of sanitary towels;
 - Disposal systems; and,
 - Whether needy girls receive sanitary towels.
- Need to train education officers in PDE and DEOs offices on this and other programmes that have a direct bearing on school attendance and retention.
- Need for more sanitary pads in other primary and secondary schools.

Purpose of the Sanitary Towels Campaign

- To raise Awareness on the effect on girls education caused by lack of Sanitary Towels.
- To Mobilise Resources to meet the Project Objectives.
- To distribute Sanitary Towels to over 600,000 Girls in Kenya.
- To Partner with others to lobby for more financial support.

Who Supports the Sanitary Towels Campaigns

Since the campaign began, it has been supported by several organisations including the following:

- Procter & Gamble
- Faith Based Organizations
- Civil society Organizations
- Embassies Various societies in Kenya
- Golf Clubs
- Banks
- Insurance companies
- Private Schools

Project Visibility and Future Prospects

To meet the challenges of the need for sanitary pads, Procter & Gamble have been providing additional sanitary pads worth Kshs. 3.2 million per term. In addition, to ensure that the pads reach the girls on time, Procter & Gamble has been taking the sanitary pads to the PDEs offices

in Coast, Nyanza and Western provinces to make it easier for DEOs to pick them at the regional level and distribute to the targeted schools. The Ministry has also provided temporarily storage facilities for some of the sanitary pads in Nairobi at the Kenya Education Staff Institute (KESI). Gender and Education is also a key aspect in all courses on management at KESI.

Best intervention strategies that can enhance both girls and boys access and retention in schools such as sanitary towels can be aligned within other KESSP IPs such as HIV and AIDS, guidance and counselling, life skills, infrastructure and others. In addition, the project is gender inclusive in that teachers are trained on puberty education and thus are able to assist both girls and boys through adolescence. In addition, the project has identified the need to training more teachers in both primary and secondary schools on hygiene and sanitation, life skills education and the need for a gender friendly school environment.

Acknowledgements

I wish to state that this project was not an individual orientation but a Ministry of Education initiative with support from Procter and Gamble, Girl Child Network and other organisations that have greatly supported the education of girls' in particular. I acknowledge with much gratitude the assistance offered by the then Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Education Professor Karega Mutahi in advancing the education of all children in public schools in Kenya. Special mention is made of Mercy Musomi, the Executive Director Girl Child Network for her commitment in education for the most part girls education. Above all, Procter and Gamble provided immense funding including provision of sanitary towels, assistance by professional consultants in the training of teachers on management of the maturation process, distribution of sanitary pads and monitoring and evaluation of the project.

Notes

Dr. Geoffrey Wango was the Gender Officer in the Ministry of Education in 2007 - 2011, Gender in Education Investment Programme was one of the 23 Investment Programmes in the Kenya Education Sector Support Programme (KESSP) that aimed to enhance Education in all sectors in Kenya. Dr Wango is now a Lecturer in Counselling Psychology, University of Nairobi. His research interests include Counselling, education, policy, leadership and management. Email. gwango@uonbi.ac.ke.

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APPENDIX I: GUIDELINES ON PROVISION OF SANITARY TOWELS TO NEEDY GIRLS IN SCHOOLS

Preamble

These guidelines have been formulated to enhance effective coordination of distribution of sanitary towels in schools.

Rationale

Concerns have risen on the uncoordinated activities that have resulted to the need of bringing together various organizations with a view of ensuring that quality sanitary towels are distributed in schools, and needy girls reached nationwide especially the marginalized areas.

Challenges encountered have included:

- Lack of criteria for provision of sanitary towels to girls in schools
- Duplication in distribution of sanitary towels in schools
- Alleged sub standard and/or expired sanitary towels being distributed in schools
- Schools used for research purposes in developing sanitary towels
- Lack of standardized data for distribution activities making it difficult to measure impact of the initiative
- Failure to reach the very needy girls in certain areas
- Lack of accountability mechanisms on the part of the school to the organizations resulting to girls not actually receiving the sanitary towels

Guidelines on provision of sanitary towels will cover three main aspects, that is:

- i. Access to sanitary towels for girls in schools;
- ii. Quality of sanitary towels distributed to girls in school; and,
- iii. Coordination of distribution of sanitary towels in schools.

a) Access to Sanitary Towels for Girls in Schools

1) Schools

Schools that may benefit from sanitary towels include:

- Schools in informal settlements areas of major towns such as Nairobi, Kisumu, Mombasa, Thika, Nakuru, Eldoret and other areas.
- Schools in the Arid and Semi arid areas.
- Schools in pockets of poverty around the country.
- Needy girls in emergency cases, including Internally Displaced Persons and refugees.
- Girls with special needs.

2) *Criteria for Selection of Girls to Benefit from Provision of Sanitary Towels*

Provision of sanitary towels to girls will be guided by the following principles:

- Only girls who have reached the menstruating age should be provided with sanitary towels
- Only needy girls will be provided with sanitary towels
- Girls to be provided with sanitary towels will be identified beforehand by a team of teachers. Such a team may constitute a sanitary towels committee made up of 4 - 8 members as follows: deputy head teacher / senior teacher (chair); teacher counsellor; teacher (boarding); matron / school nurse; and other teachers as members.
- The criteria for selection of girls to benefit from free sanitary towels will include the following:
 - Girls from poor homestead or displaced homes
 - Orphaned and most vulnerable children
 - Displaced homes
 - Girls from emergency areas, floods, war torn areas and girls with special needs
- Sanitary towels will be issued to girls using a format as prescribed in Appendix I below. The girl to whom the sanitary towels have been issued will duly sign the form.

b) Provision of Sanitary Towels to Girls in Schools

- Only quality sanitary towels by bona fide manufacturers should be distributed in schools
- All sanitary towels distributed to schools should have the Kenya Bureau of Standards (**KEBS**) trademark
- All sanitary towels should have a manufacturers date and an expiry date clearly displayed
- All sanitary towels packets should be clearly labelled **NOT FOR SALE**
- All persons distributing sanitary towels to girls in school will demonstrate to the girls how to make use of the sanitary towels.
- All persons or organizations providing sanitary towels may offer support services in addition to the sanitary towels. This may include:
 - Disposal of sanitary towels
 - Provision of panties
 - Provision of latrines for both girls and boys
 - Provision of water and other sanitation

c) Coordination of Distribution of Sanitary Towels in Schools

- Any organisation that distributes or supplies sanitary towels to girls in schools should have an authorized letter from the Ministry of Education
- All letters of authorisation to distribute sanitary towels to girls in schools will be granted by the Ministry of Education on the following conditions
 - The organization must be registered as appropriate with the relevant authorities such as Non Governmental organization (A copy of registration certificate should be presented with the application letter).

- A letter of endorsement such as from the National Council of Non Governmental Organizations
- An application letter to the Permanent Secretary requesting to carry out the activity stating the period and area of operation (primary or secondary schools, and nationwide / province / district.
- Such an organization when granted authority will require the organization to report to the respective Education Office and obtain further clearance. DEOs will ensure that anyone distributing sanitary towels in their area of jurisdiction have an Authority Letter from MOE and issue another letter to school on the same.
- Schools will be required to request for (a) Letter of authority from the Ministry of Education; and, (b) Letter of authority from the District Education Office, before they can allow an organization to distribute any sanitary towels in the school
- DEOs will be required to keep a schedule of all organizations distributing sanitary towels and the schools receiving such assistance in their districts.

d) Distribution of sanitary towels within the school

- The teacher should maintain a termly schedule for issuance of sanitary towels.
- The Head teacher in liaison with the teacher in-charge should regularly identify menstruating girls in the school.
- The head teacher shall arrange for proper storage of the sanitary towels. Where storage is not adequate in the school, the Head Teacher can liaise with neighbouring health facilities for storage.
- The School Management should ensure that the guidelines in the distribution process are implemented in the school.

e) Disposal of sanitary towels

It is essential that used sanitary towels be properly disposed to enhance for health and environmental hygiene.

The following are some of the ways through which sanitary towels may be disposed (Appendix IV:

- Burying
- Pit Latrines
- Disposal Bins
- Burning

**APPENDIX I1: MANAGEMENT OF THE SEXUAL MATURATION PROCESS
TEACHERS TRAINING WORKSHOP PROGRAMME**

Day	Time	Activity	Facilitation
	4.00 p.m.	Arrival and Registration	
Day I	8:00 – 8:30am	Session One <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Registration ◆ Administration Issues ◆ Workshop Objectives ◆ Fears and Expectations ◆ Working Principles 	Ministry of Education and Procter & Gamble Consultant
	8:30 – 9:00am	Opening Remarks on Sanitary Towels Campaign: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ministry of Education ▪ Procter & Gamble ▪ Update on Sanitary Towels Campaign Program 	MOE and Procter & Gamble
	9:00 – 10:30am	Session Two Gender Issues and Concerns in Education	Dr. Geoffrey Wango, Gender Officer, Ministry of Education
	10:30 – 11:00	TEA BREAK	
	11:00 – 1:00	Session Three <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Introduction to Sexual Maturation and Reproduction Health as a Basic Right ▪ Definitions: Adolescent, Growth, Development 	Consultant
	1:00 – 2:00	LUNCH BREAK	
	2:00 – 3:00pm	Session Four Human Development: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Physical Development for girls and boys; ▪ Emotional development for boys and girls; and, ▪ Management of the Human Development Processes in Adolescents 	Consultant
	4:00 – 4:30	TEA BREAK	

	4:30 – 6:00pm	Session Four (Cont.d) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Plenary Discussions ▪ Demonstrations on use of Sanitary Towels 	Consultant
Day	Time	Activity	Facilitation
Day II	8:00 – 8:15am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Registration • Administration Issues 	MOE and Procter & Gamble
	8:15 – 8:30am	Recap of Day 1	
	8:30 – 9:30am	Session Five Guidance and Counselling, Mentoring and Life skills	Facilitator
	9:30 – 10:30am	Session Six Role of Parents / School / Wider Community in Positive Management of the Sexual Maturation Process	Facilitator / Consultant
	10:30 – 11:00	TEA BREAK	
	11:00 – 12:00am	Session Seven Group Work: Strategies / Interventions / Modalities on Sexual Maturation at School Level	Consultant
	12:00 – 12:45am	Session Eight <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Plenary Discussions ➤ Development of School Action Plans ➤ Way Forward & Evaluation 	Consultant / Facilitator
	12:45 – 1:00	Closing Remarks	Ministry of Education
1:00pm	LUNCH AND DEPARTURE		

Appendix IV: Suggestions of Sanitary Towels Disposal

Method	Advantages	Disadvantages
Pit Latrines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Very Common - Free (cheap) - Convenient - Hygienic - No blockages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Toilets can get filled up quickly - Smell - Pollution
Rentokill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hygienic - Convenient - Transportable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expensive - Pollution if dumped inappropriately
Bins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cheaper than Rentokill - Convenient - Hygienic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pollution if dumped inappropriately - Smell
Burning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cheap (free) - Very common - No blockages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pollution if done inappropriately - Culture inhibitions as some communities do not accept burning of blood
Burying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cheap - Very common - No blockages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In areas where there are floods, this procedure can lead to pollution of water and also exposure to buried items. - Culture inhibition as some communities do not accept burying of blood

