

## UsichanaWangu Kwanza

Thubutu Africa Initiatives is educating communities and breaking taboos about menstruation to reduce school dropouts among adolescent women and young girls

### BACKGROUND

A study conducted by the SNV Netherlands Development Organization in eight Tanzanian districts in 2014 found that 82% of female students ages 10 to 15 reported insufficient knowledge about menstruation. Among these adolescent girls and young women (AGYW), 50% missed 4 to 5 days of primary school per month, a cumulative loss of up to 45 school days per year. Thubutu Africa Initiatives (TAI) conducted its own baseline study in October 2016 in Shinyanga and Kishapu districts and found that:



- 82% of AGYW report insufficient knowledge about menstruation;
- 70% of AGYW miss school during menstruation;
- 84% of AGYW use scraps of old towels, sponges, newspapers, and tree leaves for menstrual hygiene;
- 70% of AGYW who dropped out of school did so because of difficulties with menstrual hygiene management or because their schools lacked sufficient menstrual hygiene facilities;
- 100% of school matrons confirmed that menstrual pads were not provided to girls at school.

### PROBLEM

Lack of education on menstruation and resources for menstrual hygiene management (MHM) leads to absenteeism among female students that too often results in them dropping out of school entirely. Thubutu Africa Initiatives (TAI) – from the Swahili word “dare” (Dare to be your own change!) – is using data to develop a MHM toolkit to educate AGYW, parents, and teachers. By fostering open conversations, TAI hopes to combat taboos surrounding menstruation and ultimately keep AGYW in school.

### SOLUTION

UsichanaWangu Kwanza, or Virginity, is a project that seeks to address the information gap among AGYW, parents, and teachers about menstruation and menstrual hygiene in the remote areas where TAI works. TAI is strengthening the capacity of six schools, 35 teachers, 700 AGYW, and 400 community members and parents in managing menstrual hygiene in Kishapu and Shinyanga districts for about 6 months. Their Menstruation and Hygiene Innovation Toolkit is empowering girls (and their parents and teachers) with useful information about menstruation and MHM and enabling them to make better decisions for their own well-being.



Community outreach in preparation for the outdoor cinema in Kadoto B

## PROCESS

TAI is educating AGYW and community members/parents on MHM through interactive and educational public video campaigns, including outdoor cinema events. This venue has proven to be very effective because it also reaches parents, who makes decisions about what to buy in a household. To address the culture of silence and the stigma and taboo surrounding menstruation, the events include dialogues between TAI staff and parents. These conversations have resulted in the communities themselves proposing new solutions to address the challenges facing their daughters.

For in-school use, TAI has developed and distributed a MHM toolbox that will allow AGYW at six schools to learn about MHM through materials that include emergency sanitary pads, educational videos, and games. In addition to these educational tools, TAI has also been providing access to sanitary pads at lower-than-market prices.

To further increase access to MHM supplies by AGYW, TAI is training local, female entrepreneurs to make and sell reusable sanitary pads; and is using survey data to advocate for free sanitary pads at schools among Local Government Authorities (LGAs), including decision makers at community, ward, and district levels. By continuing to track the impacts of the UsichanaWangu Kwanza project, TAI will be able to offer concrete, evidence-based solutions to MHM problems that impact many adolescent girls.

## OUTCOMES & IMPACT

The impacts of TAI's educational campaign are already being felt in the districts where they are active. Outdoor cinema events in six villages have reached over 2700 people, and nearly 400 AGYW have gained access to sanitary pads as a result of having had a parent attend such an event. These results are being carried into schools, as well. While survey data at a non-participating school showed that nearly all the AGYW used rags for MHM, a school that had benefited from the interventions described here saw a near-complete shift to use of sanitary pads. Ultimately, TAI hopes to see a drop in absenteeism and school dropout as a result of these interventions.

## KEY COLLABORATORS

Jonathan Kifunda and his team at Thubutu Africa Initiatives received a \$24,400 grant from the Data for Local Impact Innovation Challenge (DLIIC) to support the UsichanaWangu Kwanza MHM project. More at <http://thubutuafrica.org>.

The Data for Local Impact Innovation Challenge (DLIIC) is providing financial and technical support to this project. DLIIC is fostering data-driven innovations through small grant challenges for youth and entrepreneurs. Visit [www.dlinnovationchallenge.com](http://www.dlinnovationchallenge.com) or follow DLIIC on Twitter @DLInnovation for more information.

