



Sani-Panti Instructions

The Sani-Panti project is fast approaching the most important of our projects. These simple but necessary sanitary pads are simple to make and are distributed to the young girls, who without them, often cannot attend school.

It is a widespread but unacknowledged problem that girls in Africa miss school and stay at home because of menstruation. According to UNICEF, one in ten schoolgirls in Africa miss classes or drop out completely due to their period, and substitute pads or tampons for less safe and less absorbent materials such as rags, newspaper or bark.

There are many aspects that link girls' attendance rates to their menstrual cycles. Firstly, the lack of affordable sanitary products and facilities for girls and women keeps them at a disadvantage in terms of education when they are young and prevents their mobility and productivity as women. Secondly, the lack of clean and healthy sanitation such as toilets and running water means that girls often do not have anywhere to change or dispose of pads safely and in privacy at school. Thirdly, the taboo nature of menstruation prevents girls and their communities from talking about and addressing the problem. Raising awareness and education to eliminate the stigma of menstruation is a large part of the battle.

UNICEF reports that "in countries where menstrual hygiene is taboo, girls in puberty are typically absent for 20% of the school year". Most girls drop out at around 11 to 12 years old, and miss school not simply because they fear being teased by their classmates if they show stains from their period, but also because they are not educated about their periods, and their need for safe and clean facilities is not prioritized. The idea that monthly bleeding is something shameful, polluting, or taboo may also encourage girls to avoid social contact during their period. Additionally, the cultural implications of menstruation as a stage in a woman's development may be used to take



girls out of school—the idea being that if a girl is ready for motherhood, then she is ready for marriage.

Menstruation is a reason for dropping out that can be added to the potential threat of sexual harassment from male teachers as girls develop. In either case, the result is girls lagging behind with schoolwork and performing badly.

Little Dresses for Africa has seen the need among the young girls and women and encouraged our sewers to take part in sewing and sending what we call "sani-panties". Improvements in sanitation can go a long way in combating the problem. The distribution of these washable pads and the discussion surrounding their use and the resulting good hygiene enables the girls to manage their periods more easily.

Please join us in this important project. Thank you!

Mulungu akudalitseni! *God bless your good works!*

For more information on how to get involved, please contact Rachel O'Neill at 734-637-9064.

www.littledressesforafrica.org