



## **PREFACE**

Various interventions have been undertaken to address the gender gaps in the education sector. Significant achievements have been scored through these initiatives towards improving girls' access, retention and performance. However, the gender disparities are still wide. It is clear however, that unless quicker and strategic action is taken to address these gaps, EFA goals are unlikely to be achieved.

One strategy that is being proposed is to take successful interventions to scale in order to ensure that a higher number of girls are reached. This has so far not been adequately undertaken. As a first step towards scaling up best practices, it is necessary to identify and document the most successful interventions in a way that can be taken up by education policy makers and other stakeholders.

One of FAWE's strategic objectives is to influence replication and mainstreaming of best practices. FAWE has undertaken to document its best practices with the aim of disseminating them to education policy makers and influencing mainstreaming of these interventions into education plans and programmes. FAWE, with its partners, will be holding a Ministerial Consultation in June 2004.

This booklet summarizes the successful work that is going on in Uganda to curb absenteeism and poor performance by girls as a result of poor management of sexual maturation. Research has shown that many adolescent girls particularly in rural areas spend up to four days away from school due to difficulties associated with menstrual hygiene. Lack of protective sanitary materials, poor sanitation, lack of water, lack of separate toilets etc., create fear and discomfort in these girls resulting in poor learning and performance in class. Uganda's exemplary work in addressing sexual maturation in relation to girls' education has made great impact in improving academic performance of girls in the 60 primary schools where the project was implemented.

FAWE hopes that this experience will inspire the replication of this best practice in sub Saharan Africa to the benefit of the continent.

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Forum for African Women Educationalists is grateful to  
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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

COPE	Complementary Opportunity for Primary Education
ESIP	Education Strategic Investment Plan
FAWEU	Forum for African Women Educationalists Uganda
GEM	Girls' Education Movement
MGLSD	Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development
MOES	Ministry of Education and Sports
PAF	Poverty Alleviation Fund
SM	Sexual maturation
SMM	Sexual maturation management
UBOS	Uganda Bureau of Statistics
UDHS	Uganda Demographic and Health Survey
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UPE	Universal primary education

# SEXUAL MATURATION IN RELATION TO EDUCATION OF GIRLS IN UGANDA

Lower enrolment and participation rates, higher dropout and absenteeism rates, and lower performance and achievement levels than those of boys characterize female education and training in Africa (Moock, Williams and Gustafson, 1991). In Uganda, gender disparities are evident at all levels with girls' schooling lagging behind that of boys. This is evidenced by the low literacy rates among women (55% of women) compared with 76% of the men (UDHS 2000–2001).

## **BARRIERS TO GIRLS' EDUCATION IN UGANDA**

In 1997, the Government of Uganda declared primary education "free" for up to four children (two girls and two boys) per family under the Universal Primary Education (UPE) policy. As a result, enrolment more than doubled, reaching 7.2 million in 2002. This has increased access and the gender gap has narrowed to 48% girls (Kwesiga, 2003).

Table 1: Primary school enrolment

	2000	2001	2002
Boys	3,395,554	3,528,035	3,721,135
Girls	3,163,459	3,372,881	3,633,018
Total	6,559,013	6,900,916	7,354,153

**Source: MOES, Education Statistics Abstract 2002.**

The challenge Government faces is to improve the quality of education that children are receiving. In response, the Government is using resources through the Poverty Alleviation Fund (PAF) to construct more classrooms, recruit teachers, and to purchase teaching and learning materials. Although this is an excellent start for child-friendly basic education, the promotion of girls' education is still relatively neglected. The majority of schools send girls home when they are caught up in this situation while at school (UNICEF, 2001). At secondary and tertiary levels, available statistics indicate, that the gap in enrolment still exists although it is narrowing (Education Statistics Abstract 2002).

Girls still bear many responsibilities in the home and society, such as food production, the economic well being of their families and others. These factors have contributed greatly to hindering the enrolment of girls. Yet education of girls has been identified as a major link to national development.

In Uganda, the phenomenon of dropout is not so different from that in other countries. Available statistics show that over the years, girls have continued to drop out in greater numbers than boys. Findings show that 50.4% of the dropouts in 1994 were girls, a proportion that increased to 51.7% in 2001 (UDHS 2000–2001).

**Table 2: Number of children who drop out of primary school**

Year	1994	1996	1997	1998	2000	2001
Males	200,460	299,357	865,246	673,426	607,902	616,230
Females	203,591	302,576	859,028	684,060	645,346	660,532
Total	404,051	601,933	1,724,274	1,357,486	1,253,248	1,276,762

Source: MOES, Education Statistics Abstract 2001.

Dropouts leave the school system for various reasons. This intervention focused on helping girls understand and manage the problems related to their sexual maturation.

## **THE INTERVENTION**

It was established that poor management of sexual maturation<sup>1</sup> leads to high levels of absenteeism and dropouts, particularly for girls. For example, girls were found to be distressed or uncomfortable because of wearing poor protective material during menstruation and this distracted them from full participation in class. Girls are also afraid of being teased by both boys and girls in case of an accidental leak, or fearful due to some negative attitude, myth or taboo about menstruation. As a result they do not learn to read and write freely because of insecurity and poor concentration (Kanyike and Piwang-Jalobo. 2002).

Only about one in four schools stock sanitary supplies for girls' access in case of a menstrual period that may begin while at school. In addition, the general menstrual hygiene practice, the poor sanitation facilities (particularly the lack of privacy offered by the communal toilets), and the inadequate water supplies in most of the schools offer little or no assistance to girls needing to change sanitary towels at school. Some schools fail to provide a disposal system, such as a bucket with a lid, or an incinerator. In the absence of these provisions, the most common option taken by girls who suffer menstrual accidents at school is to return home and stay there for the days the cycle lasts. This means that affected girls are absent from school for about four days per month, besides the other household obligations that call for their attention.

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<sup>1</sup> Sexual maturation refers to the sexual development and growth of a child from puberty (9–13 years) and adolescence (13–19 years) to adulthood accompanied by changes in their bodies and sexual organs.

Whereas a few schools have facilities to deal with the unexpected onset of menstruation at school (such as cotton wool or sanitary towels to provide protection, or a spare uniform that could be used in case of soiling), most do not have contingency plans. This intervention therefore addresses the low enrolment rates, low performance and achievement, and high dropout and absenteeism of girls as a result of poor management of sexual maturation or lack of information on sexual maturation.

### ***About the Project***

Forum for African Women Educationalists Uganda chapter (FAWEU) is implementing a Sexual Maturation Management Project aimed at putting in place interventions that address the management of sexual maturation which is aimed at improving girls' attendance, retention, completion, attainment and achievement in education. This is aimed at bridging the gender gap and ensuring that women are an integral part of the national resource base. The Rockefeller Foundation funds this project.

The FAWEU sexual maturation project is based on the findings of a Makerere University study also funded by the Rockefeller Foundation in 2001 on the management of SM in schools in Uganda. The study revealed poor sanitary facilities in schools, lack of information and guidance, above all a culture of silence over SM matters. It also revealed poor menstrual hygiene and management. FAWEU followed up the findings with a campaign to dispel the silence around SM, and to advocate for affordable sanitary towels to be available at the local market.

The project has been implemented in five FAWEU pilot districts: Kisoro in the South West, Kalangala and Kiboga in the Central, Katakwi in the East, and Nebbi in the North. These districts were selected because they had wide gender gaps at primary



and secondary school levels, higher numbers of out of school children especially girls and very low achievement in national examinations.

The project was implemented in 60 primary schools, 12 from each of the selected five districts. FAWEU selected the primary schools in consultation with the district education department using agreed criteria.

### ***Project Objectives***

The major goal of the project was to improve the management of sexual maturation among primary school girls in five districts of Uganda.

The specific objectives were:

- To raise awareness of sexual maturation issues among stakeholders.
- To improve water and sanitation in rural primary schools.
- To advocate for affordable sanitary towels.

### ***Project Target***

The project targeted all stakeholders with potential for impact on creating a favourable environment for enhancing proper sexual maturation management for girls with emphasis on menstruation management. These included pupils, teachers, school administrators, parents, Local Leaders (LC's) at parish, subcounty and district levels and central government officials in Ministry of Education and Sports, Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, and the Parliament of Uganda.

### ***Implementation Process***

A careful, consultative and participatory process was used in the implementation of the project. Being a pilot project of its kind in Uganda, FAWEU took time to study and design a suitable strategy with the participation of all the stakeholders. A multi-pronged approach to addressing the bottlenecks of sexual

maturation management for girls was eventually evolved. This involved advocating for policy reforms at the national level involving the Parliament of Uganda and Ministry of Education and Sports. At the district level, FAWEU coordinated and facilitated the Directorate of Education to appreciate the need to address sexual maturation management issues, select pilot schools to implement the pilot project and task one of the officers as a focal person to coordinate the activities of the project.

At school level, teachers, parents, school management committees and local leaders were sensitized about the importance of addressing sexual maturation management issues, an important aspect that has been ignored over the years.

FAWEU together with the teachers sensitized and involved pupils in appreciating and addressing sexual maturation issues. With the help of senior women teachers, teen clubs were formed to enable girls to take an active role in managing their sexual maturation issues through peer-to-peer learning (FAWEU Report, 2003). Emergency sanitary pads were provided to schools and girls and teachers were taught how to use and make local sanitary pads in a relatively safe and hygienic way. Sensitization materials like calendars and T-shirts with messages on sexual maturation management were printed and distributed in schools.

### ***Cost of the Intervention***

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Amount in US Dollars (\$)</b>
<b>Production of SM sensitisation materials</b>	
Production of SM sensitisation and training materials (SM Guide books T-shirts, Calendars, posters)	8447
Incinerators, sanitary pads	1474
<b>Sensitisation at school level</b>	
Sensitisation of school girls and boys	10,766
<b>Teen clubs</b>	
Establishment of Teen Clubs in 60 schools	11,965
<b>Training of teachers</b>	
Sensitisation and Training of teachers (5 teachers per each of 60 schools)	15,000
<b>Sensitisation for District officials</b>	
Sensitisation of District officials (15 per each of 5 districts)	4197
<b>Total</b>	<b>51,849</b>

## Outcomes and Indicators

Objective	Outcome	Indicators
1. To improve water and sanitation in rural primary schools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>60%</b> of resources for construction of separate latrines for boys and girls mobilized by parents. (inclusive of locally available materials, e.g., sand, bricks, aggregates &amp; stones)</li> <li>▪ A session on water and sanitation to create/improve awareness was included in the teachers training for each of the five <b>(5)</b> districts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>24</b> schools have made efforts to locally separate the latrines for both girls by dividing the stances with a temporary fence.</li> <li>▪ 120 teachers were sensitized and of these 50% have improved in water sanitation in their school.</li> </ul>
2. To raise awareness of sexual maturation issues among stakeholders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Awareness of district leaders during meetings introducing them to the project of SM</li> <li>▪ Campaign to dispel the silence around sexual maturation</li> <li>▪ Advocacy for affordable sanitary towels to be available at the local market</li> <li>▪ Emergency sanitary towels purchased and distributed to schools</li> <li>▪ Community workshops involving teachers, pupils and parents to open up dialogue on sexual maturation.</li> <li>▪ Organization of workshops to sensitize district leaders and parent representatives on sexual maturation issues to solicit their support for the project.</li> <li>▪ A teen camp with the theme: Sexual maturation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A Focal Person in each district was identified to monitor progress of activities.</li> <li>▪ Interventions have opened up dialogue on sexual maturation, introduced hygienic sanitary towels and provoked seeking of solutions to the poor sexual maturation management, at school and community levels.</li> <li>▪ <b>10</b> boxes of emergency sanitary towels were made available in each of the pilot schools.</li> <li>▪ <b>133</b> senior women/men teachers and school deputies (<b>47</b> females and <b>86</b> males) were trained in sexual maturation management issues.</li> <li>▪ <b>145</b> district leaders and parent representatives on trained in sexual</li> </ul>

Objective	Outcome	Indicators
	management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Boys sensitized that menstruation is normal and a responsibility to all.</li> </ul>	maturation management issues. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>75</b> pupils (<b>50</b> girls and <b>25</b> boys) in the company of a senior woman or man (<b>60</b> teachers) attended the camp.</li> </ul>
3. To advocate for affordable sanitary towels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Sexual maturation was in 2003 taken on as an advocacy issue.</li> <li>▪ Meetings held with MP's, Education Managers, community leaders, parents, girls and boys to dispel the silence and raise awareness around the issues.</li> <li>▪ FAWEU has advocated for cheaper sanitary protective materials.</li> <li>▪ Advocacy campaign to improve management of sexual maturation in <b>5</b> pilot districts.</li> <li>▪ Use of FAWEU Newsletter to highlight girls' voices through various programmes,</li> <li>▪ FAWEU participation in the media sensitization campaign in preparation for the National UPE conference</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>20%</b> of head teachers have considered including sanitary towels on the fees bill while others are still raising the issues with the school management committee.</li> <li>▪ <b>20%</b> of the pilot schools are accessing affordable sanitary towels from Cotton products a private company.</li> <li>▪ <b>30%</b> of men and fathers have realized their responsibility of providing sanitary materials.</li> <li>▪ <b>30%</b> of shops and school canteens have stocked, an indication that there's demand for them.</li> <li>▪ Website receiving e-mails and inquiries.</li> <li>▪ Reports of FAWEU's activities are carried in national media: radio, TV and print; FAWEU newsletter is posted to FAWE website.</li> </ul>

Whereas the head teachers are willing to provide emergency sanitary towels in the schools, some of the parents are not convinced that it is important to provide sanitary pads for the girls. Therefore more sensitization is still needed.

## ***Impact on Girls' Education***

### ***Raising awareness about sexual maturation issues among primary school girls***

- All the 60 primary schools where the project is implemented have appointed senior women teachers to coordinate sexual maturation issues for girls.
- In partnership with Straight Talk Foundation,<sup>2</sup> 50% of pupils in the pilot schools have accessed copies of *Young Talk* magazine. This magazine a periodical publication that addresses issues of sexuality and growth of young girls and listens to and answers their problems and challenges.
- Silence on sexual maturation issues has been broken. Through the approach of studying, understanding, and addressing the myths and beliefs on sexual maturation management, 30% pupils in schools (boys and girls) are able to talk about these issues freely and even with their parents and teachers. This has reinforced mutual support and understanding. This has demystified the myths that used to be held strongly on sexual maturation for girls especially menstruation.
- 20% of the pilot schools have prioritized purchase of sanitary materials for girls under their share of the capitation grant from the Ministry of Education and Sports. These sanitary materials are given to girls in emergency situations.
- 70% of girls have been trained on how to use locally available materials to improvise relatively hygienic sanitary

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<sup>2</sup> Straight Talk Foundation is a Ugandan NGO that has been working since 1993 to keep adolescents safe through behaviour change communication.

towels, especially in poor households that cannot afford sanitary towels. Girls are becoming more open to senior women teachers on menstruation management issues, for example asking for emergency sanitary towels from the school if they get their periods at a time when they are not prepared.

- A handbook on *Menstruation Management*<sup>3</sup> has been written in simple English and distributed to all the 60 pilot schools to help pupils understand most of the important issues about menstruation management.
- 60 school teen clubs (10 girls and 5 boys for each school) have been formed and a teen camp was organized involving pupils from pilot schools. In the teen clubs, pupils (especially girls) become advocates of better sexual maturation management, delivering messages to boys, teachers, parents and society at large. Messages have been communicated through songs, drama, trainings and talks. Some of the information from these has been publicized through television, newspapers and radios. Again this has been an effective way of breaking the silence about sexual maturation management issues.

### **Improving water and sanitation in primary schools**

- As a result of sensitizing and training by the project, the teachers, parents and school management committees recognize the importance of adequate water and sanitation in enhancing sexual maturation management for the girl-child in school. Schools that previously had one latrine block with each of the stances shared by boys, girls and teachers have now separated them to have sections for boys, girls

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<sup>3</sup> A FAWE publication on SM that pupils would be able to access and read after enhancing their reading skills

and teachers. This has improved privacy especially for the girls.

- Adoption of talking compound concepts (sign posts with instructional information, e.g., "Encourage adolescent girls to stay in school", "Keep compound clean", "Menstruation is an issue for girls and everyone", "Wash your hands after visiting the latrine", "Keep your body clean") has improved sanitation and the personal hygiene of the pupils. As a result, sanitation related diseases and related absenteeism of the pupils have been significantly reduced.
- 49 schools in all the five pilot districts have benefited from latrines funded by government and NGOs. This is attributed partly to the efforts of the district leaders after being sensitized on the impacts of poor water and sanitation on girl-child education.
- Some school management committees have budgeted for construction of additional screened latrine stances especially for girls.

### **Advocating for affordable sanitary towels**

- As a result of FAWEU lobbying, taxes on one category of cotton raw materials (paper pulp, cellulose fibres) has been removed, although the prices have not declined as had been expected.
- Cotton Products Manufacturers, a private enterprise manufacturing sanitary pads has supplied sanitary towels to FAWEU at a relatively reduced rate (about \$0.5 per packet of eight pieces). Previously, the price per packet was US\$1 (almost 50% reduction). FAWEU is distributing these to the pilot schools.



- The education sector review committee has been convinced to include emergency sanitary pads in the first aid facility for schools.
- The Parliamentary Committee on Social Services has been lobbied to allow sanitary pads be included in the package given to schools under the Universal Primary Education support. This issue is still under discussion in this committee.

## **WHAT MAKES IT A BEST PRACTICE?**

Girls have roles and disadvantages imposed on them by society that do not allow them to concentrate on studies as boys do. The sexual maturation management project is regarded as an effort to address underlying systemic/traditional disadvantages inherent in Ugandan society that limit the achievement of the girl-child education. The project has potential for putting girls and boys at the same level of achievement in education.

### ***Policy Environment***

Uganda's commitment to girls' education is shown in the 1995 constitution, which provides for the elimination of gender imbalances and injustices in all spheres of life while stressing the rights of women (Article 33). Article 30 provides for the right to education. It states that "*All persons have a right to education.*"

This presents not only a moral responsibility but also an obligation to government to ensure that all children (boys and girls) have equal opportunity and access to education. Addressing constraints to girls' education, like poor sexual maturation management, places this as a primary responsibility to government.

The Government of Uganda has been implementing the Universal Primary Education (UPE) Programme since 1997. Under UPE, all children (boys and girls) have an opportunity to access primary education paid for by the government. With such an enabling policy where girls have access to enrolment and support in schools, addressing all bottlenecks to girls' achievements in school, including sexual maturation management issues, becomes vital. The sexual maturation management project has received support from the districts where it is implemented because of its potential to address girl achievement issues, thereby contributing to the Millennium Development Goals.

The Government of Uganda has been supporting a programme of providing primary schools with basic infrastructure like classroom blocks, latrines, water tanks and classroom furniture. The Government is also implementing affirmative action initiatives for enhancing girls' education. For example, there has been a policy for adding 1.5 points for girls to join University. This was initiated to enhance girls' access to university education as well as enabling them to offer good academic courses.

With decentralized governance in Uganda, lower local government units at districts have flexibility to make bylaws and ordinances on issues affecting their development. The sexual maturation management initiative has been well accepted by the local governments in the districts where the project is implemented. This presents an opportunity for lobbying the very local governments to provide additional bye laws that support, for example, having senior women teachers in every school, and imposing additional taxes for providing emergency sanitary towels to schools as deemed fit.

## ***Ownership***

- From the foregoing, Government of Uganda is prioritizing girls' education as one of its major priorities. This presents a clear interest in addressing all the bottlenecks to effective girls education. Mainstreaming sexual maturation management practices in the education system is an opportunity that will cement the ownership.
- Goodwill towards dialogue, e.g., Parliament, MOES, districts, parents, etc.
- The sexual maturation management issues that the project is addressing are real and affect every rural household in the country. They are a silent concern to every mother and daughter. Every effort made to address them would contribute significantly to relieving the hardship of the affected, therefore enhancing ownership.
- The civil society in Uganda is waking up to champion justice and equal opportunity in all sectors. With sustained advocacy for addressing the silent sexual maturation management concerns and the negative impact to girls education, action from the civil society organizations like women groups, school committees and the private sectors is mushrooming.
- Schools are receptive to the ideas and approaches of addressing sexual maturation management. This is explained by the effort to have senior women teachers, committing some of their funds to providing sanitary towels and enhancing awareness about the subject.
- The pupils, who are the primary victims of poor sexual maturation management, have formed teen clubs and are intensifying awareness creation and advocacy. The project is creating a generation of open-minded girls ready to confront the factors contributing to poor sexual maturation management and thereby affecting girls' achievement in school. The pupils interact with their parents and have the capacity to convince them. This presents a fertile ground for ownership of such an initiative.

## ***Processes***

The pilot project adopted a participatory and consultative approach involving district and local leaders and school administrators in the five districts.

### **Step 1: Conducting studies to uncover the myths, taboos and practices on sexual maturation**

- A study on sexual maturation management in primary schools in Uganda funded by the Rockefeller Foundation (*Barriers to Participation in Schools*, Makerere University Kampala, 2001) singled out two key issues: low literacy levels and poor sexual maturation management levels, the latter affecting girls most because of the mismanagement of menstruation.
- FAWEU also undertook two studies to identify the causes of the gender gap in education and the extent of its impact on pupils in primary school (*Teenage Pregnancy and Primary Schooling*, 1999, and *Strategic Resource Planning for Girls' Education in Africa*, 1999). These studies show evidence that deteriorating performance and drop out rates for girls were linked to poor management of sexual maturation among other factors. This therefore calls for moving interventions in this area to the EFA agenda, in order to meet EFA goals of parity by 2005. "According to culture, our grand mothers used cloths, and other materials like leaves, banana fibres, for padding or even sitting on sand heaps during menstruation (FAWEU Report, 2002). In some districts, this culture is still strong especially the rural communities where girls still use some of these materials, hygienic or not. The disadvantage is that girls absent themselves from school during menstruation because they are not confident of the available materials. Many communities have never seen a sanitary pad and those who have are the ones in towns or the girls who have studied up

to secondary level and higher institutions of learning. There is therefore need to sensitize the parents to change the culture and encourage the girls to use sanitary pads.

**Step 2: Holding consultative meetings with district and local leaders and school administrators in the five districts**

The pilot project has adapted implementation methods derived from consultative meetings held with district and local leaders and school administrators in the five districts. An implementation information package highlighting the roles and responsibilities of district officials has been given to all stakeholders in the districts. Sensitization meetings for community leaders about sexual maturation were organized.

**Step 3: Setting up Teen Clubs**

Teen clubs were set up to enable girls take an active role in managing their sexual maturation issues through peer-to-peer learning. The teen clubs are involved in activities such as distribution of pads among themselves for girls, explaining to each other about sexual maturation issues and helping create awareness to the community/parents during school open days, through drama, music and poems. Club members are also encouraged to have some income-generating activities at school like gardening and weaving to be able to make some money and buy for themselves items like sanitary pads, underwear, pens, books and other school necessities in cases where parents cannot provide.

**Step 4: Lobbying Members of Parliament and other policy makers to take responsibility for sensitization and advocacy on issues concerning sexual maturation in their constituencies**

FAWEU held meetings with Members of Parliament (MPs) from the five focus districts to seek their support in influencing

education related policies. MPs pledged their support to the project and willingness to participate in sensitizing the community while visiting their constituencies. MPs agreed to analyse policies for gender sensitivity, with FAWEU's support, and to ensure that government policies on education are disseminated and implemented in real terms, and accountability made to the people on the impact of the policies.

### **Step 5: Raising awareness about sexual maturation issues among primary school girls**

This began with awareness creation among district leaders during meetings, introducing to them the project of sexual maturation, issues around it and above all to solicit their support for the project in their respective districts.

FAWEU worked with district officials who attended the meetings in each district to choose the 12 beneficiary primary schools in each district. The criteria were that the schools had to be located in the rural areas of the district, from the rural sub-counties of the district. District focal persons to assist with monitoring activities were also selected in their respective districts. These are persons in the education office being the District Education Officer or the Inspector of Schools for smooth implementation of the project in schools.

Training in issues related to sexual maturation management followed this. The main objective of this training was to create awareness on sexual maturation issues, impart life skills<sup>4</sup> and understanding of roles and responsibilities according to gender, and enhance communication skills. The discussion on sexual maturation issues emphasized menstruation management by primary school girls at all levels. Senior women and men teachers and deputies attended the training in SM management

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<sup>4</sup> Life skills such as assertiveness, negotiation skills, self-esteem, confidence building, self-awareness, coping with emotions, critical thinking, problem solving, creative thinking and coping with stress and empathy.

issues where demonstration on how to use sanitary pads was done.

Other measures included:

- While creating awareness on sexual maturation issues FAWEU worked hand in hand with Straight Talk Foundation in distribution of messages on sex education to primary schools. Every month Straight Talk would send FAWEU copies of its newspapers to take to schools.
- Emergency sanitary pads were provided to schools, entrusting the responsibility to senior women teachers, who were also taught to make local sanitary pads.
- Calendars and T-shirts with messages on sexual maturation were printed and distributed in schools.

### ***Stakeholder Partnerships***

- FAWEU is in partnership with Cotton Products (U) Ltd., a Uganda private sector incorporated in 1994, with the objective of manufacturing sanitary towels. FAWEU is working with this company to provide affordable sanitary towels. FAWEU has linked Cotton Products (U) Ltd to head teachers of primary and secondary schools and the communities where FAWEU is implementing her projects. Many schools have been able to buy sanitary pads, while some communities have accepted to be suppliers to schools in their districts.
- Government of Uganda is a major partner because the project is implemented in government schools. FAWEU is a member of the Ministry of Education and Sports (MOE&S) Gender Task Force. This is a multi-sector committee that overlooks the mainstreaming of gender in the education sector. FAWEU's findings on gaps in policies and their implementation are reported in the Task Force. FAWEU's status as the leading girls' education NGO earned her a place in the Education Sector Review Stakeholders'

Conference. The reviews are the policy and advisory arm of the sector, involving line Ministries, Donor agencies, education managers and NGO's. In the November 2003 review, the issues of sexual maturation were a priority both by the Gender Task Force and the Parliamentary Social Services Committee, whose members FAWEU had lobbied on the matter. It was proposed that the emergency sanitary pads be included in the school scholastic materials under the UPE capitation grant from the MOE&S.

- The schools are in the communities and the project committees are from the communities that run the affairs of the schools. In schools the teachers' representatives (parent-teacher associations, PTAs) and school management committees are required to take the lead in sensitizing other parents about menstruation.

## **LESSONS LEARNT AND CHALLENGES**

- Myths and traditions about sexual maturation management are strongly adhered to by women and girls. There is silent suffering. There is need to break the silence.
- After a little sensitization, there is a noticeable change in terms of people's knowledge, attitudes and perceptions about the myths and traditions about sexual maturation.
- Men, who are regarded as allies in enhancing girls' education, are not aware of the burdens and effects of poor sexual maturation management on girls' education. They need to be sensitized first, making it easy to get a breakthrough, because they control the resources.
- Behaviour change needs time and concerted effort to yield significant and sustainable impact. The tangible results of



improved management of sexual maturation cannot be visible in a short time.

- Effects of poor sexual maturation management are prevalent in more than 90% of the households in Uganda. This is a national problem that needs concerted efforts.
- The Government needs to be brought on board to understand these issues so that policies are put in place to address them
- Institutionalizing approaches to address poor sexual maturation management in government structures is the sustainable way forward. Government should set aside resources and structures to address this.
- It is necessary to invest resources in sensitization – even senior women teachers are not aware of the effects until they get revelations from the pupils.
- When pupils have access to sexual maturation information materials, they are able to read and understand issues of sexuality and growth. Girls are also encouraged to become more open to senior women teachers on menstruation issues.
- Sensitizing parents' representatives (PTAs) and school management committees about issues of sexual maturation gives an assurance that at the least sanitary pads will be considered in the school budget during school finance committee meetings.
- Community meetings and sensitization workshops play a great role in breaking the myths surrounding menstruation. When male teachers participate in these workshops they

are encouraged to take up roles and responsibilities where there is no female teacher.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR SCALING UP**

### ***Policy Environment***

- There is need to build a strong case based on researched information and statistics on trends in education, especially for the girl-child, factors that affect girls' achievement, a review of government education policies, and myths and cultural practices on sexual maturation management. This provides an entry point to addressing sexual maturation management issues.
- Sensitize and lobby governments (currently dominated by men) to understand and appreciate that this is a national problem affecting every household, hindering national literacy and national production, and ultimately hampering development.
- It is important to start small by creating a successful case study as a point of reference for others to understand and appreciate that this is a real problem. The case study brings to light the real issues, especially to the policy makers, and this provides grounds for helping government and households to take up their rightful responsibility in addressing these SM issues.
- In the long run, the sustainable approach is to institutionalize/mainstream the approaches to addressing sexual maturation management in the education system. This involves addressing curriculum development issues, using government structures from national to village level as a vehicle for addressing sexual maturation management issues, availing funds for provision of sanitary towels

especially for girls at school, and reducing/eliminating taxes on sanitary towels.

- One of the most effective means of responsibly *'breaking down the existing silence around sexual maturation'* issues is ensuring that the education system beginning with primary schools-engages effectively and sensitively with this work. The starting point in schools needs to be the development of a process that ensures that all children have access to accurate and appropriate information about sexual maturation issues.
- Whereas FAWEU lobbied for the reduction of taxes on cotton raw materials (paper pulp, cellulose fibres), the prices have not reduced as had been expected. It is important that government and policy makers put in place a policy to regulate the prices of sanitary pads because other dealers of other types (other than Cotton Products Ltd.) have kept the unit price high to about one dollar, which is still not affordable to many people, particularly the rural.

### ***Ownership***

- Since the government of Uganda is prioritizing girls' education as one of its major priorities, mainstreaming sexual maturation management practices in the education system as a way of scaling up will enhance and cement the ownership at all levels, from the ministerial level all the way down to the school and family level.
- Schools' receptiveness of the ideas and approaches towards sexual maturation management and the fact that in the pilot schools there were efforts to have senior women teachers committing some of their funds to providing sanitary towels is a good step towards institutionalizing and therefore creating ownership.

- Formation of such clubs as teen clubs whose membership consists of the pupils who are primary victims would help in creating awareness and intensifying advocacy for positive change towards sexual maturation. This creates ownership on the side of the pupils who are the victims. Further ownership is created because of the interaction pupils have with their parents and the capacity pupils have to convince their parents on issues like sexual maturation that directly affect them.
  
- The sexual maturation management concerns that the project addresses are real and affect every household in the country. They are a silent concern to every mother and daughter. Every effort should be made to sensitize every member of the family in order to contribute to relieving the concerns of the affected, therefore enhancing ownership.
  
- The civil society in Uganda is waking up to champion justice and equal opportunity in all sectors. With the mushrooming of many more civil society organizations, sustained advocacy for addressing the silent sexual maturation management concerns and the negative impact on girls' education, through such organizations provides opportunities for creating solid ownership of the project.

### ***Processes***

- Studies to uncover the myths, taboos and practices on sexual maturation should be carried out. These should focus on 2 key issues: low literacy levels and poor sexual maturation management levels, the latter affecting girls most because of the mismanagement of menstruation.
  
- Consultative Meetings with district and local leaders and school administrators should be upheld to marshal participation of stakeholders and ownership of the project.

Because of the differences in the communities, the implementation methodology should always be derived from the consultative meetings with the district and local leaders and school administrators and communities.

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- Sensitization should be undertaken at all levels of the community: parents, teachers, pupils and community leaders about sexual maturation, how its poor management directly or indirectly affects them and the roles and responsibilities of each in overcoming the problems.
- Establishment of Teen Clubs should then follow, to enable pupils particularly girls take an active role in managing their sexual maturation issues through peer-to-peer learning.
- Focal persons at appropriate levels – district, county, sub-county and village should be appointed. They should all be trained in SM management.
- Lobbying of policy makers should be sustained with the aim of introducing a policy on price regulation of sanitary towels.
- Sensitization of Members of Parliament on the poor SM management and its effects on girls' education should be carried out to empower them, in turn, to sensitize and advocate for issues concerning SM management in their constituencies.

### ***Structures***

Existing structures at the Ministry of Education should be used. The Directorate of planning should incorporate SM management in the ministry's programmes and budget. Its management can be housed in one of existing units like the Ministry's gender unit, Life skills unit etc. This should be repeated at all government levels to the district and lower

levels. At the school levels, existing structures like school clubs, PTAs, teacher focal points, should be utilized. In other words, all existing structures that ease information flow need to be utilized.

### ***Partnerships***

These include the ministries concerned, the policy making bodies at national and district level where bylaws are made, lower local leadership, the civil society organization, the community, the schools leadership, the pupils, and both print and electronic media, which is key for information dissemination to large sections of the people in relatively short periods of time. Partnerships with religious institutions would be of great value in attempt to scale up the project, because religious leaders interact with their folk more often and enjoy great respect in the community. Besides, they have the capability of mobilizing and sensitizing the population. All partners should have clear roles and responsibilities and understand the linkages with one another.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Management of sexual maturation is a critical issue in the life of girls and it has serious negative impact on girls' education if proper attention is not given to it at all levels from the government all the way down to the school and family levels. It has been shown that poor management of sexual maturation leads to high levels of absenteeism and distress for girls leading to poor performance and increased dropout. Schools have a responsibility to provide proper sanitation, water, adequate toilets and sanitary towels for those who cannot afford them. In addition, girls should be empowered to be able to cope with sexual maturation. Uganda, has successfully implemented a sexual maturation programme in five districts using existing

government structures. All other governments in sub Saharan Africa can replicate this model.

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