



# IIEA ANNUAL REPORT 2024

ADVANCING PERIOD EQUALITY AND MENSTRUAL JUSTICE



Message from the Regional Director: Overview of 2024 performance

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## Acronyms

CDO s	Community Development Officer
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
DEFORA	Development Foundation For Rural Areas
EROnet	Enabling Rural opportunity Network
EYDI	Eagles Youth Development
FDG	Focus Group Discussion
IIEA	Irise Institute East Africa

MHE	Menstrual Hygiene Education
MHH	Menstrual Health and Hygiene
MHM	Menstrual Health Management
MOES	Ministry of Education and Sport
MOH	Ministry of Health
PPS	Period Positive Schools
TAYONEHO	Hope for Girls and Women in Tanzania
TPEN	The Period Equality Network
TWEFU	Twekonyere Foundation
UNBS	Uganda National Bureau of Standards
WASH	Water Sanitation and Hygiene
WEH	We Empower Her
YIEN	Youth Inclusion and Empowerment Network

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Our vision and mission**

Vision: A world in which women and girls achieve their full potential unlimited by Periods

Mission: Empower women and girls in communities to socially and economically pursue their life's goals and well-being through promoting period equality, by advocating for policy change through research, giving voice & power through diverse leadership and build grassroot networks for a community movement

### **Our reach**

In 2024, IIEA delivered its programs in over 10 Districts ( Designer to include a map or infographics of Uganda that shows where we operate) Jinja, Kampala, Mpigi, Mukono, Wakiso, Hoima, Kyegegwa, Kasese, Kumi, Isingiro Nakivale District and Rukiga.

### **Our Strategy – commitment to Period Equality**

Driven by IIEA 20-25 strategy, our work is defined by the theory of change that interlinks implementation of innovative and scalable high impact MHH solutions for girls and women, through leadership capacity building to equip the girls and women to voice and influence policy and practice, by strengthening community structural systems and institutional capacities collaborations and partnerships

with Government ministries and local Government and to build synergies for high impact .

### **Brief overview of the organization's MHH programs**

In 2024, IIEA made significant progress in scaling the Period Positive Schools Program, which strengthened partnerships with schools and working with special needs children. This program embraced the community readiness to change model to ensure sustainable and impactful MHH results. The Menstrual Justice Program, which addresses taboos and myths surrounding menstruation at all levels, fosters knowledge and understanding around issues that require the voices and power of girls and women to break societal and cultural biases and reduce the stigma and shame associated with menstruators. We also piloted women's business initiatives through our Economic Empowerment and Livelihood Program to boost reusable pads production among local initiatives for improved period management in rural communities. These programs were delivered through networks with grassroots organizations to build a strong movement for period equality and menstrual justice while advocating for policy change.

### **Summary of key achievements**

#### **The annual report highlights some of the key outstanding learnings that shaped the impact of our work:**

2024 marked a very significant year for IIEA, together with the Irise International a Global menstrual Justice report "Scarlet Mumerations", was launched this report is important to us because It is a new step, different from just hearing the phrase "We need to move beyond the product." It demonstrates how to move beyond focusing solely on the product while ensuring that products remain diverse and accessible. (This is especially important for donors and policymakers, as it shapes their expectations for funding applications and policy drafts). It considers the roles of different actors (e.g., how a donor organization's decisions influence activists and vice versa). It also enables us to understand the interconnected and ripple-like effects of each decision, highlighting why every contribution is significant when it comes to menstrual justice. This is the first time the menstrual justice framework is defined and explained practically based on stakeholders.

Complementing menstrual health education with product distribution to ensure menstrual equity. Through our PPS program, menstrual education was delivered to over 5,103 people, and over 1,000 girls were reached with products. This has shifted the attitudes and behaviors of boys, men, girls, and women, leading to increased responsiveness towards MHH.



*Above students after receiving products and left students during MHE session*

Strategic collaborations with legislators from Parliament of Uganda, Government line Ministries, including MOES, MOH, and the Ministry of Water, to ensure that advocacy for MHH and programming remains aligned with the key priorities of Government programs and interventions, thereby achieving the intended impact and sustainability. A major achievement from this approach was hosting representatives of legislators' from across the country to deliberate on MHH and secure buy-in for the establishment of a parliamentary forum to advocate for policies .

Strengthening an inclusive program approach that works with various categories, including pupils in primary and students in secondary schools, teachers, community leaders, parents, cultural and religious leaders, boys, and men. This holistic strategy enabled our programs to increase knowledge, tackle the root causes of discrimination against girls and women who menstruate, and garner support for MHH programs in schools, communities, and at the national level. This helped achieve the strategic goal of interconnected communities uniting around period and gender equality promotion.

### **IIEA 2024 IMPACT**

In 2024, our MHH programmes and projects measurably improved the lives of 12,388 directly and indirectly over 20,000 people through increased access to menstrual health and Hygiene education, product access, advocacy, strategic engagements and small Grants.

Increased access to Menstrual Health and Hygiene education (8703)

Contributed to access to menstrual products (4540)

Advocacy and Menstrual Health (3672)

Strategic engagements (12)

Small Grants, Capacity building, collective advocacy ( CSO's) – 40 Grassroot Organisations

## **CHAPTER TWO: RESULT AREAS AND OBJECTIVES, STRATEGIC INTERVENTIONS**

## **Result Area 1: Access to Comprehensive Menstrual Health Education, product range, SRH and GBV Services as well as safeguarding for young women and girls.**

### **Period Positive schools and community Programme – Strengthening stakeholder engagement.**

The Faroe & Sense funded PPS program, implemented in Jinja and Isingiro Districts in partnership with WEH, has utilized the Community Readiness to Change model to support the adoption of period-friendly school environments in over 52 primary schools, impacting the lives of more than 70,000 people, including pupils, teachers, and their communities. This progress has been driven by various interventions aimed at strengthening and scaling the program. During the 2024 phase of implementation, inception meetings were held in 13 new schools and 6 sub-counties, with the objective of introducing the project and securing buy-in from various stakeholders, including the CDOs, and mobilizing stakeholders to assess the readiness for menstrual health and hygiene (MHH) in their respective communities.

95 stakeholders including CDOs, Parish Chiefs, religious leaders, LC1 chairpersons, health officer, gender officers, opinion leaders from 6 sub-counties were engaged in focus group discussions to determine the menstruation related needs of each community, identify appropriate interventions, and explore ways to motivate influential leaders to take lead in creating the desired change. These discussions led to a better understanding of menstrual health needs, the development of tailored interventions, increased community engagement, stronger leadership commitment, strengthened partnerships, raised awareness, and initial action planning all of which laid the foundation for engaging communities in supporting improved menstrual health and hygiene practices.

### **Period Positive schools and community Programme – Establishment and Strengthening of community structures (Training of Trainers) .**

The project facilitated a 2 days MHH training of trainers for 20 new teachers in Jinja and Isingiro, including Nakivale refugee settlement, targeting 10 senior men and 10 senior women, with 14 trained by IIEA and 6 by WEH. Equally refresher trainings were conducted for 36 teachers from the older schools, targeting 21 senior women, 15 senior men, and science teachers. The teachers were trained to support adolescent girls and boys in their schools with menstrual health and puberty-related issues. The training covered topics such as puberty, anatomy, the menstrual cycle, pain, emotions, missed periods, and menstrual hygiene products. Participants also learnt effective facilitation techniques, including the differences between facilitation and teaching, the qualities of a good facilitator, and how to handle difficult questions. As a result, teachers were equipped with practical skills to create a supportive environment for students during their periods. These trainings empowered educators to foster a more inclusive atmosphere, ultimately enhancing the well-being and confidence of their learners. ***“During the refresher training for champions, the community champion from nkondo, primary school appreciated IIEA for introducing the project to the community. He emphasized that due to the trainings , men in the community have reliable menstrual health information***

**and are now actively taking responsibility and providing support to menstruating girls and women”.**



*Above photos taken during teacher training in Jinja*

At the community level, 14 community champions (7 male and 7 female) from the scaled-up 7 Period Positive Schools communities were identified with the support of the CDOs. These champions underwent a 2 days training on MHH and mastered how to become effective facilitators, while refresher training was provided for 36 community champions (10 men and 26 women) from the 9 PPS old project school communities. These trainings were designed to equip new community champions with the skills to engage their communities on MHH and refresh the old champions to ensure they retained the skills gained from the initial training, as well as update them on the latest safety approaches for conducting effective awareness events on MHM. The trainings also provided an opportunity for champions to expand their advocacy for Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) in their communities. These school and community structures were established and strengthened to enable timely response and engagement regarding MHH issues.



*Above photos taken during community champions training for the 14 newly selected communities.*



*Above photo taken during refresher training for community*

**Period Positive Schools & Community Programme – Menstrual Health education at community level.**

Through the community champions structures 2348 community members were directly reached, including 654 males and 1,694 females and indirectly 2257 community members, including 1,252 females and 1005 males were reached with MHH information. The purpose of the community engagement meetings was to raise awareness to break down the myths and misconceptions about menstruation in a communities, empower girls and women to take control of their bodies and build self-confidence, foster a supportive environment that encourages open conversations, provide resources for MHH and promote behavior change and encourage the adoption of menstrual hygiene good practices. As a result of these engagements communities have become more period friendly, for example while interacting with the Headteacher Kyomya primary school she mentioned that parents have become more responsible when it comes to MHM issues and this is attributed to the community engagement specifically the involvement of men but also the presence of talking compounds with period friendly messages where community learns from. **Quote:** *“During the refresher training for champions, the community champion from nkondo , primary school appreciated IIEA for introducing the project to the community. He testified that due to the sensitization efforts, men in the community have reliable menstrual health information and are now actively taking responsibility and providing support to menstruating girls and women*

### **Period Positive Schools& Community Programme- Access to Menstrual Health Education and reusable pads distribution in school.**

To ensure that adolescent girls remain in school, have continuity in their education, and access factually accurate information about periods, menstrual health education (MHE) and reusable pads were distributed to improve access. The programme facilitated MHE training sessions for 2,649 pupils, including 1,545 girls and 1,104 boys. Out of this total, 2,087 pupils were reached directly by IIEA, while 562 were reached by WEH in the Nakivale refugee settlement. The sessions were complemented by distribution of reusable pads to 940 girls, to ensure that they menstruate with dignity and avoid missing classes due to lack of sanitary products. Of the 940 girls, 706 received pads from IIEA and 234 from WEH in Nakivale.

The MHE sessions were designed to raise awareness and provide accurate information on menstrual health to both girls and boys in the targeted 15 primary schools. Among the participants, 50 girls had disabilities, including those with intellectual impairments, physical impairments, and sensory impairments (deaf and blind), also benefited. The objective of MHE for both girls and boys was to empower girls to manage their menstruation with dignity, while also involving boys in creating a supportive system for menstruating girls by addressing misconceptions about menstruation and blood. As a result, girls were empowered to experience menstruation with confidence. The products and knowledge they gained enabled them to be better prepared and equipped to manage their periods with dignity.

**Quote:** *“The chairperson of the school management committee at Namaganga Primary School expressed appreciation for the support provided by IIEA to both boys*

*and girls at the school. He shared that, in the past, boys and girls in Namaganga community were a burden to their parents. Boys lacked guidance, and girls often demanded sanitary pads that their parents could not afford. However, through the programme, boys are now educated on menstrual health management (MHM), are more disciplined, and girls now have reliable MHE knowledge and are provided with pads. He emphasized that this support has significantly empowered both the boys and girls in the community”.*

### **COVA Programme- Menstrual Health Education and Flow Cup Distribution**

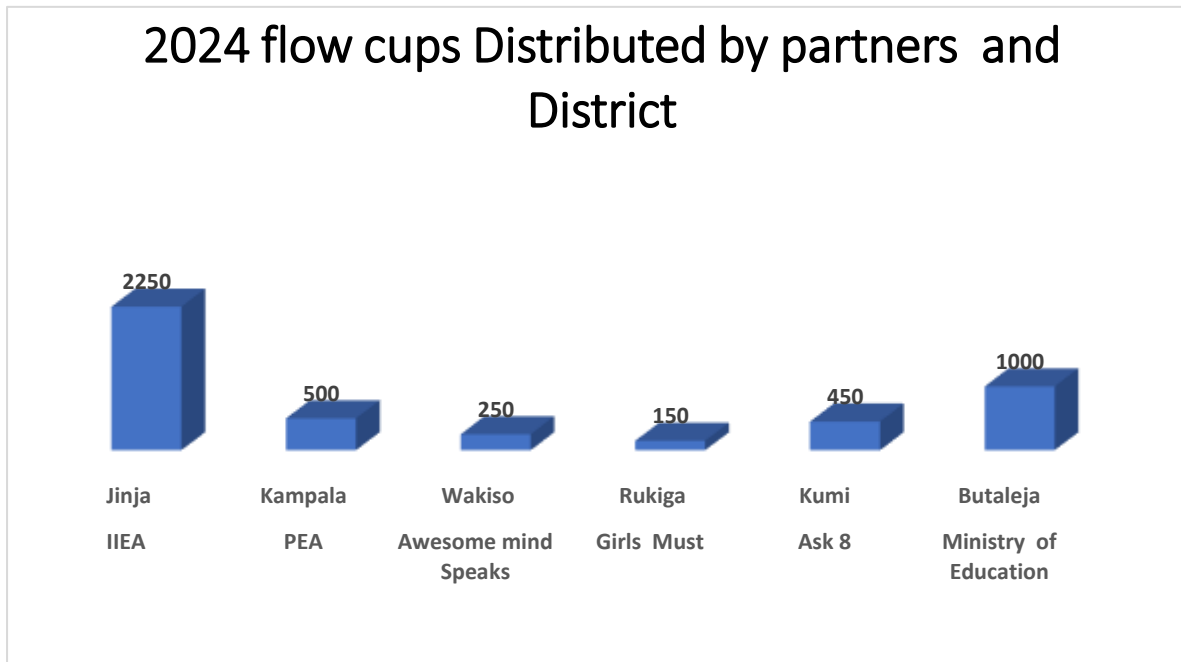
A range of products are provided under our programmes, targeting various age groups. Within the Cova programme, menstrual flow cups and menstrual health education are offered to secondary school girls and women. The aim is to enable these girls and women to gain accurate menstrual health education (MHE) and vital information about their personal health and development. This empowers them to adopt menstrual flow cups as a sustainable solution for menstrual health management.

In 2024, IIEA collaborated with several organizations to implement the flow cup project across seven districts in Uganda. The partnership's goal was to provide menstrual health education and distribute menstrual flow cups to universities, secondary schools, and mothers in Jinja, Kabale, Wakiso, Kampala, Rukiga, Butaleja, and Kumi. The project's implementation was carried out in collaboration with The Period Equality Network members, including Ask8 Development Initiative in Kumi, Period Equity Africa (PEA) in Kampala, Girls Must in Rukiga/Kabale, Awesome Mind Speaks (AMS) in Wakiso, and the Ministry of Education in Butaleja District. These partners played a key role in delivering menstrual health sessions and distributing the flow cups.

Over 4,200 individuals received menstrual health education, and 3,600 menstrual cups were distributed to secondary schools, tertiary institutions, and local factories such as Nytil and YMCA Jinja. IIEA reached out to 2,450 individuals with menstrual health management (MHM) and flow cup training, with 2,250 of these receiving menstrual flow cups in Jinja. The distribution of cups was handled by partners as follows: 500 by PEA, 250 by AMS, 150 by Girls Must, 450 by Ask8, and 1,000 by the Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES). Girls and women were equipped with essential knowledge about the use of flow cups, including how to insert, maintain, and remove them. Unlike reusable pads, the adoption of menstrual flow cups takes time and requires continuous follow-up to ensure that participants are using and maintaining the product confidently.

Follow-up sessions were conducted with 302 girls to gather feedback from users targeted by the Cova project. Most participants reported that they had fully adopted the use of menstrual flow cups, highlighting the benefits of comfort, convenience, and the economic advantages particularly the reduction in the monthly cost of purchasing pads. However, some participants still faced challenges with insertion and removal of the cup, which is common among new users. In response, IIEA organized a comprehensive refresher session on proper techniques for using the

flow cup. This session included step-by-step guidance and practical demonstrations to support the adoption process.



*Above students after receiving flow cups in Jinja and Kabale*

## **Result Area 2: Economic Empowerment and Gender Structural Strengthening**

In 2024, IIEA piloted boosting reusable pads production among local initiatives for improved period management in rural communities with funding from The Pad Project. The main objective of the project is to promote period management and access to sanitary products for women and girls in the Wakiso and Hoima districts. Through the strategic support and incubation of two Rise Up Entrepreneurs' businesses, enhancing their capacities to produce reusable sanitary pads. The project aims to implement targeted business training, design sustainable business structures, and develop marketing plans for scaling up production and increasing sales.

### **Obtain certifications of quality assurance standards from UNBS**

The project was launched with two implementing partners, Direct Hand Foundation and Tweekonyere Foundation. IIEA facilitated district inception meetings at Wakiso District Local Government Headquarters and Hoima District Local Government, where Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) were formally signed between Direct Hand Foundation and Wakiso District, and Tweekonyere Foundation (TWEFU) and Hoima District Local Government. This process ensured a mutual and clear understanding of the roles of the two women led business initiatives and the districts throughout the implementation process.

Through the Pad Project, IIEA is promoting women entrepreneurs by nurturing their business ideas. Standardization trainings were facilitated for the entrepreneurs and their production unit teams to equip them with the necessary skills to incorporate sustainable production processes into their menstrual pad manufacturing. This initiative aimed to enhance the quality and affordability of the products, ensuring they meet UNBS standards and market requirements. In the long run, this will enable the entrepreneurs to meet production standards and obtain certifications for their products, allowing them to compete in the market and meet national standard.

As a result, the entrepreneurs were able to identify existing gaps in their production processes, including raw material handling, storage quality of finished products, product packaging, hygiene in production units, and inadequate materials. These are the areas the entrepreneurs are currently addressing in order to prepare for inspection and eventually obtain certification.

### **Empowerment of the two entrepreneurs and creating sustainable business models in the menstrual health sector.**

Despite the progress made in the Menstrual Health Management (MHM) sector, IIEA discovered that most businesses lacked solid business concepts, their products did not meet national standards, and there was limited manpower to support production capacities. As a result, the two entrepreneurs were equipped with business development skills to better understand the value of their businesses, plan their operations, and develop sustainable business models. The entrepreneurs received training in branding, packaging, and marketing, which helped them understand key elements such as identifying partners, defining activities, articulating their value proposition, communicating with customers, segmenting their customer base, identifying key resources, determining channels, calculating costs, and projecting

revenues. A standout success story emerged from this intervention: the transition of the two entrepreneurs from operating as non-profit entities to adopting business models with clear business plans and marketable products. This shift has translated into a focused business development process, from refining products to developing clear operational strategies and understanding profitability of their initiatives.



*Above entrepreneurs in a training analyzing their businesses*

### **Increased access to affordable and high-quality menstrual products for women and girls in Wakiso and Hoima.**

Similarly, IIEA's mentorship and coaching for the two women entrepreneurs engaged in reusable pad production during the year significantly contributed to product refinement, ultimately enhancing the quality of their products. The capital injection support provided allowed the entrepreneurs to source quality materials and invest in the refinement of their products to meet national standards and remain competitive in the market. As a result, the initiatives have led to the development of high quality products tailored to the specific needs of their target customers(wakiso & Hoima).

However, this journey was not without challenges and valuable lessons. One significant challenge was accessing a consistent supply of high-quality raw materials, which caused delays in production. Despite this, through networking and partnerships, the businesses have been able to develop supply networks that will

need to be further nurtured and strengthened to ensure long-term, consistent high quality material supply.

*Above TWEFU showcasing their finished product after undergoing through the training.*



**Improved market strategies and higher demand for the improved branded reusable menstrual pads.**

On the demand and marketing side, IIEA played a key role in catalyzing the improvement of market strategies and increasing demand by equipping the entrepreneurs with practical skills. These skills included how to assess market demand, segmenting their target markets, and investing in branding and packaging. The training on branding, packaging and marketing was instrumental in the development of the two brands: Glow Up and My Dream. These two concepts have evolved into competitive market brands, with attractive packaging that is currently being further supported by engaging girls and boys in the communities where the entrepreneurs operate, stimulating greater demand for the products. To further boost demand and expand the market, IIEA will support the entrepreneurs by procuring their products and distributing them to girls within our programmes. This strategy aims to increase both the demand for and market reach of the products.

### **Result Area 3: Partnership Building and Policy Advocacy Influencing through Research, documentation and Learning**

**To scale up the menstrual health advocates training for 50 cultural and religious leaders' champions for change in communities to address period shame/taboo and break the cycle of socio-cultural norms and religious practices/restrictions that undermine the rights of menstruators in project site**

In line with IIEA strategy, we are collaborating with MHH partners to achieve a strong movement to advocate for period equality and menstrual justice within EastAfrica and beyond. This ambition is delivered through our menstrual justice programme that aims to strengthen capacities for MH advocacy among TPEN

partners to draw advocacy plans for continuous engagement. It also aims to establish and unpack the various forms of social norms and cultural behaviors in society that increase the vulnerability of women and girls to menstrual injustices through grassroots organizations using digital storytelling and feminist art. Lastly, to convene a regional menstrual justice knowledge-sharing and learning event for menstrual health actors at the grassroots, national, and government levels.; and target policymakers, cultural and religious leaders, community members and grassroots women and youth-led organizations, in-school adolescents, teachers, and donors with this information so that they will make the most effective choices.

### **Scaling MHH advocacy through the Menstrual Justice online academy**

Through our Menstrual Justice Online Academy, we supported 18 organizations from five member countries: Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Kenya, and Djibouti. The organizations in Uganda included Youth Inclusion and Empowerment Network (YIEN), Eagles Youth Development Initiative, Mothers Initiative Africa, Touch Ministries Uganda, Imarisha Dada Uganda, Dodi Community Foundation, Development Foundation For Rural Areas (DEFORA), Tujifunze Africa Foundation, Assorted Trends Africa, Joy for Children Uganda, Amity for Humanity Initiative-Uganda, Kaleke Kasome Foundation, and Enabling Rural Opportunity Network (ERONet). From Tanzania, the supported organizations were Tanzania Youth With New Hope In Life Organization (TAYONEHO) and Hope for Girls and Women in Tanzania. From Rwanda, we supported the I Matter Initiative, and from Kenya, the Toto Center Initiative and Drawing Dreams Initiative. These organizations gained advocacy skills to promote menstrual justice within their communities, aiming to drive policy shifts on Menstrual Health Management (MHM) and influence change across East Africa and beyond.

From the 2024 cohort, measurable impacts were realized. Advocacy plans were developed, and partners in Rwanda, Kenya, and Uganda were supported to implement MHH advocacy drives. These initiatives included campaigns, dialogues, distribution of menstrual products, and training to increase awareness among students and the wider community. In Uganda, the Eagles Youth Development Initiative (EYDI) supported school health clubs in Kijjude to integrate menstrual health education, and they also provided some girls with reusable sanitary pads. In Rwanda, I Matter Initiative conducted a survey with parents of students to gather comprehensive data on their knowledge, attitudes, and practices regarding menstrual health education. This survey aimed to increase awareness, offer education, and distribute menstrual hygiene products to girls, women, and parents to promote a period-friendly environment. The survey involved 16 parents, including 3 men and 13 women.



*Above photos of EYDI supporting school health club activities and distributing pads at the extreme rightmothers and fathers engaged by I matter Rwanda in KAP survey and products distribution for girls.*

## **Strengthen advocacy through TPEN grassroots Organisations**

In partnership with 3TPEN grassroots organizations; Touch Ministries, Awesome Mind Speaks, and Kaleke Kasome, which IIEA had trained and worked with during the first phase we developed advocacy plans that address the identified socio-cultural issues. Our goal was to achieve systemic change by engaging religious and cultural leaders, who act as gatekeepers of social norms, values, practices, and morals. A total of 56 leaders were engaged through targeted training and dialogues, where they gained more knowledge, shared experiences, and expressed a personal passion for menstrual justice. The leaders committed themselves to becoming champions of menstrual justice and pledged to collaborate and actively participate in the project. These discussions challenged negative interpretations of religious teachings and traditions surrounding menstruation, fostering a more inclusive understanding. The leaders were encouraged to promote positive practices within their families and communities. The discussions also fostered a sense of responsibility, where leaders were urged to hold themselves and others accountable for advancing menstrual justice and challenging harmful practices, such as early marriage. This accountability is essential for creating lasting change.



*Above interfaith and cultural leader training sessions by the 3 organizations*

## **Advocacy beyond EastAfrica-Pre-Menstrual Hygiene Day Webinar**

To commemorate the International Menstrual Health (MH) Day, IIEA hosted a webinar learning event in collaboration with Days for Girls, Joy for Children, IMATTER Initiative, Dwona Initiative, Women Initiative Djibouti, Drawing Dreams Initiative, Tanzania Coalition for Menstrual Health, and Simavi. The event, which took place virtually on May 28th, aimed to provide a high-level advocacy platform, bringing together menstrual health and hygiene stakeholders from national, regional, and global levels for a shared learning session focused on building a period-friendly world. During this space, stakeholders had the opportunity to reflect on milestones, contributions, and the vital role research plays in advancing evidence-based programming. The sessions provided an opportunity to share progress on approaches implemented in different contexts, aligned with period-friendly programs. Participants also discussed key monitoring indicators, both nationally and globally, to

improve reporting and exchanged powerful voices of impact from grassroots beneficiaries, helping shape the agenda for menstrual health. As a result of the webinar, there was a strong commitment to collaborative advocacy efforts and working together towards a period-friendly world. Participants demonstrated increased understanding and appreciation for the role of evidence-based research in MHH programming, and there was strengthened coordination among key players in East Africa and beyond, all driving towards the common goal of achieving period equality for all.



Above snapshot of pre-webinar speakers and topics

### Building policy engagement forums and platforms .

In collaboration with Hon. Nakut Faith, a woman Member of Parliament of Napak district, IIEA convened a high-profile consultative breakfast meeting aimed at addressing pressing period poverty and menstrual injustices affecting millions of adolescents and young women. The event brought together Members of Parliament, key government stakeholders from the Ministries of Education and Health, and representatives of civil society organizations. This meeting marked a significant step toward establishing a Parliamentary Forum on Menstrual Health, a platform envisioned to drive policy change and ensure menstrual health is prioritized on Uganda’s national agenda. The purpose of the meeting was to create a road map and garner support from other members of parliament and cabinet members on the formulation of a menstrual hygiene forum in Parliament. Honorable outlined objectives of the forum included; breaking taboos, improving access to menstrual health products, promoting sustainable practices, and advocating for policy reforms, including tax reforms for menstrual products value chains. The Key activities she

highlighted were needs assessments, policy dialogues, capacity building for parliamentarians, and partnerships with stakeholders. She also spoke about the proposed framework which aims to enhance legislative support and national commitments, ensuring effective advocacy and sustainable menstrual health policies for Uganda's women and girls. Forum activities will be prioritized in 2025 .



#### **Result Area 4: School- Community Based Leadership development program for girls.**

As part of strengthening our feminist leadership approach, 50 student leaders and 10 senior women teachers were identified and trained in two schools in Mpigi and Jinja by a feminist leadership consultant. The training aimed to build the girls' capacity in feminist leadership and menstrual health advocacy. After the training, the feminist leaders were involved in mapping and identifying gaps within their schools, as well as engaging with their communities to address the identified gaps. Using the IIEA WASH checklist, the leaders conducted an audit to assess the condition of WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) facilities in their schools. They used this evidence to develop advocacy activities aimed at engaging stakeholders to improve these facilities.

Previously, a consultant was identified to co-create 10 menstrual justice messages aimed at religious leaders to advocate for menstrual health during sermons, with the goal of reaching 1,000 members through implementing partners in various regions. The purpose of these messages was to raise awareness about the socio-cultural injustices surrounding menstruation and emphasize the role religious leaders can play in ending period shame resulting in advancing gender equality and social justice for women and girls. The following key messages were developed:

- Encourage communities to educate both men and women about the significance of menstrual health in Islam. Raise awareness about the physical and emotional challenges women may face during menstruation.

- Foster an environment where women feel comfortable and respected during menstruation. This includes refraining from stigmatizing language or actions and promoting an atmosphere of compassion and support.
- Support initiatives that provide menstrual hygiene products to women in need, both locally and globally. This aligns with the Islamic principle of charity (zakat) and ensures that all women can manage their periods with dignity.
- Advocate for policies that ensure workplace accommodations for women during menstruation, such as flexible working hours or access to menstrual leave where applicable.



*Facilitator Isabella Akiteng conducting training in Mpigi High school jinja (left) and Buyengo High school (right)*

## **Result Area 5 Institutional Capacity growth, strengthening & Development and Fundraising/sub -granting.**

### **TPEN Small grant Program strengthen advocacy and institutional capacities.**

In 2024, IIEA collaborated with 10 TPEN member organizations to deliver innovative projects aimed at contributing to period equality. The organizations included Faraja Africa Foundation, Girl Must Uganda, Rural Aid Foundation, Zamara Foundation, Tanzania Wote, Marahaba Music Expo, Child Aid Uganda, Arise Integrated Efforts, Hope for Single Mothers, and Dodi Community Foundation. They benefited from small grant programs and implemented in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Burundi and Rwanda. The projects adopted innovative approaches such as digital storytelling, music and art, a Swahili menstrual health app, and advocacy through a menstrual justice mural targeting single mothers with disabilities, policymakers, schools, teachers, caregivers, and school management committees. The initiatives were designed to cascade menstrual health management (MHM) awareness and challenge harmful social norms surrounding menstruation and menstruators. As a result, these efforts amplified awareness and encouraged dialogue about menstrual health in communities where such conversations are often restricted. The policy brief developed on menstrual health management (MHM) has become an important advocacy tool for stakeholders in the MHM space. While the Menstrual health song has become a global tool for dissemination of MHH concerns during global MHH events. Over 10,000 lives were improved through these initiatives, helping to break the silence and stigma around menstruation.

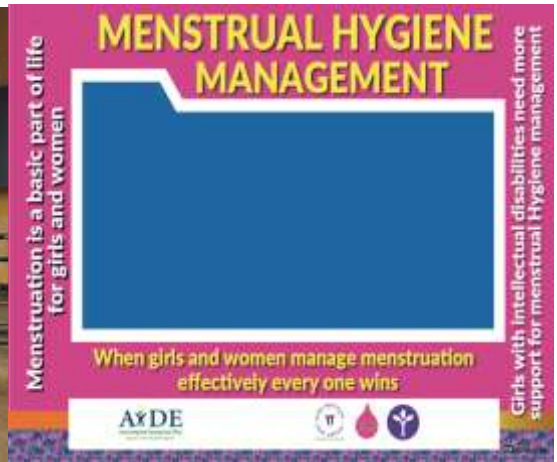




Photo gallery of various TPEN members engagements across the Regional

## Strategic engagements and Collaborations

### National MH-Day Celebrations in Butaleja District

On May 28th, IIEA participated in the national MH Day celebrations organized by the Ministry of Education and Sports in Uganda, held in Butaleja District. The day provided an opportunity for stakeholders to reflect on the progress made in promoting Menstrual Health and Hygiene (MHH) and to identify existing gaps and strategies for strengthening MHH education and strategic partnerships. This included discussions on resource mobilization, knowledge sharing, and the coordination of MHH interventions across the country. The following outcomes were achieved: Strengthened multi-stakeholder approach towards Menstrual Hygiene Management interventions and service provision. Addressing the need for improvements in MHM information sharing, strategies, and mediums, as well as packaging tailored for different categories of people, age groups, Adoption of an inclusive approach to MHM by involving men and boys in promoting menstrual hygiene for girls and women.



## **Irise International CEO maiden visit to Uganda IIEA**

From July 29th to August 2nd, 2024, IIEA hosted the new Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Irise International during her maiden visit to Uganda. The visit enabled her to familiarize herself with IIEA's operations and programs in the country. During her visit, she participated in various meetings with the Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES), TPEN partners, and she launched PPS Scale-Up Project 2024-2025. She also participated in field visits to two communities in Jinja, at Namaganga Primary School, a project school, to understand the impact of IIEA's work in both schools and surrounding communities. she also met with Jinja District Local Government to better understand how the Period Positive Project has supported local government initiatives. These engagements provided her with a deeper understanding of how programs are implemented and the collaborations nurtured to achieve the desired impact.



*Above photos taken during the launch of PPS scaleup below engagements at District and Namaganga primary school*

## **The Cova Retreat 2024**

In October 2024, IIEA convened a 5 day retreat from 4th to 9th that brought together 11 representatives and partner organizations implementing COVA project in Uganda; 6 of these were IIEA team, 4 from We Empower Her, and the Cova CEO to share experiences and forge ways to make The Cova project impactful. The focus was on training approaches, best practices, and resources used by Cova partners that could be beneficial to others and for the CEO Cova project to document stories of impact. This was an opportunity for implementers to receive technical support from the CEO. During this activity there were a series of check-in meetings with different stakeholders including line ministries (Ministry of Education- Gender unit), Jinja District Education department, and head teachers of some project schools. We were also able to have hands-on joint training sessions between WEH and IIEA in Pilkington College and Kakira community. We also held feedback sessions with both school going girls at Buwenge Seed and the Butangala community. The key outcomes from the retreat included strengthen partnerships between WEH & IIEA, the CEO, and stakeholders reaffirmed their commitment to support the scaleup of the project. We shared best practices, lessons learnt, and challenges which were addressed, during the feedback sessions, beneficiaries provided valuable insights regarding the project, this helped the implementers to refine approach.



*Photos taken during the retreat above left with all the team right with WEH below photos with MOES gender unit Technical Advisor*

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Stories of Change Flow Cup**

*My name is Vivian Namulondo, and I am 16 years old, currently in S.2 at Lwanda High School in Jinja. I want to share my experience with the flow cup, which was initially quite challenging for me. The first few times I tried it, I felt a lot of pain and*

*discomfort during both insertion and removal. Despite these difficulties, I remained determined to continue because I was frustrated with the issues I faced using cloth as menstrual products. Thanks to the consistent support and encouragement from the Irise team, I gradually adapted to using the flow cup. Now, I can confidently say that I am comfortable during my periods. This change has made a huge difference in my life I can focus on my studies at school without the constant discomfort and irritation I used to experience with cloths. I truly appreciate all the help I've received, it has empowered me to manage my periods with confidence. Thank you.*

### **Story of Change PPS**

*Headteacher at Namaganga Primary School Mr. Ngobi expressed deep gratitude to Irise team for selecting Namaganga Primary School as a beneficiary for PPS program. He highlighted several challenges the school faced before the interventions, such as high dropout rates, absenteeism, and girls leaving school due to early pregnancies. The school had poor and unhygienic toilet facilities, which further discouraged girls from attending school. However, with the support and guidance from IIEA , the school was able to make significant improvements. The advocacy for girls' education and empowerment has led to better academic performance and increased enrollment among girls. Last year, more girls passed with higher grades 8 students achieved Grade 1, 5 of whom were girls. There has also been a noticeable rise in girls' enrollment, which Mr. Ngobi attributes directly to the impact of the period positive school environment.*

### **Challenge, Lessons Learnt & Best practices**

#### **Lessons and Best practices .**

**Stakeholder Engagement:** Throughout implementation, we have learnt that engaging stakeholders such as district officials and community leaders right from planning to implementation stages is very important. This approach provides valuable insights into local customs, norms, and dynamics of their respective communities. The support from the stakeholders has enhanced our menstrual health awareness efforts, and their endorsement of the flow cup has significantly increased acceptance in the community.

**Integrating feedback sessions to improve flow cup adoption:** We have also learnt that persistent feedback sessions with project participants increases uptake. It helps in identifying areas of improvement and fosters trust between implementers and girls and women using flow cups.

**Period Poverty among public university students:** There are high rates of period poverty among students in public universities most especially amongst students on government sponsorship. This is attributed to the limited financial support from the government as a result they end up engaging in risky behaviors like sleeping with fellow male students to raise money for product.

**Continuous awareness & Advocacy:** There is need for continuous advocacy and awareness raising about the importance of menstrual health& hygiene and the

importance of engaging religious cultural and political leaders to champion such campaigns.

### **Looking forward: Our Priorities for 2025**

In 2025, IIEA will focus on strengthening the progress made and deepening the impact of our programs to drive further advancement towards achieving period equality.

**Policy-Level Engagement:** IIEA will support the establishment and operationalization of a parliamentary forum dedicated to Menstrual Health and Hygiene (MHH). This will include coordinating sessions to deliberate on key policy issues, such as the tax exemption on menstrual products (including flow cups and period pants) and the prioritization of MHH programs within national budgeting processes.

**Alignment of TPEN according to the Strategy:** Implementation of TPEN strategy, which will focus on aligning operations, coordination, and partnership interventions to drive progress towards shared goals. This alignment will ensure that all efforts are strategically coordinated to maximize impact and further the achievement of period equality and menstrual health goals.

**Scaling Programs:** Scaling of our programs, particularly PPS and COVA, will be achieved by expanding the scope of our operations and increasing coverage in schools and communities targeted by our programs. This growth will be contingent on the availability of funds and the expansion of our program portfolio.