

**CHALLENGES FACING GIRLS IN PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN ACCESSING  
SANITARY TOWELS IN KASIKEU DIVISION IN MAKUENI COUNTY**

**BY**

**FAITH MWENDE**

**REG NO. N69/64619/2010**

**A PROJECT PAPER SUBMITTED TO THE INSTITUTE OF ANTHROPOLOGY,  
GENDER AND AFRICAN STUDIES IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN  
GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT STUDIES OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI.**

**2013**

## DECLARATION

This is my original work and has not been presented to any other university or institution for the award of a degree.

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Faith Mwende**

**REG NO : N69/64619/2010**

This project paper has been forwarded for examination with my approval as the university supervisor.

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Isaac Were**

## **DEDICATION**

To almighty God for His invaluable and unending providence, I am so appreciative of your protection and guidance. To my beloved family and friends who stood by me and believed in me. Your support greatly encouraged me. My supervisor, Isaac Were I dedicate this project to you for the guidance you provided me with. Thank you all.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Introduction .....	1
1.2 Statement of the problem .....	3
1.3 Study objectives .....	4
1.3.1 Overall Objective .....	4
1.3.2 Specific objectives.....	4
1.4 Justification of the study.....	5
1.5 Scope and limitations of the study .....	5
1.6 Definitions of key terms .....	6
<b>CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1 Introduction .....	7
2.2 Economic challenges .....	7
2.3 Socio-cultural challenges .....	10
2.4 Policy Frameworks in place to address implementation of sanitary towels.....	15
2.5 Theoretical Framework .....	16
2.6 Assumptions .....	17
<b>CHAPTER THREE : METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>18</b>
3.1 Introduction .....	18
3.2 Study Site .....	18
3.3 Research Design.....	20
3.4 Study Population .....	20
3.5 Sample Size & Sampling Techniques .....	20

3.6	Data Collection Methods.....	20
3.7	Data Processing & Analysis.....	22
3.8	Ethical Considerations.....	22
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS.....</b>		<b>23</b>
4.1	Introduction .....	23
4.2	Demographic characteristics .....	23
4.3	Economic challenges .....	24
4.4	Social challenges .....	30
4.5	Strategies to address challenges faced by girls in accessing sanitary towels.....	34
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....</b>		<b>40</b>
5.1	Introduction .....	40
5.2	Summary .....	40
5.3	Conclusion.....	41
5.4	Recommendations .....	41
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>		<b>43</b>
<b>APPENDICES .....</b>		<b>437</b>

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

I wish to express my sincere and unreserved gratitude to my university supervisor, Isaac Were, for his unmatched academic guidance and brilliant theoretical input in the entire research process. His consistent re-direction helped to shape this study to a great success; I humbly salute all your efforts to see this process through.

I wish to convey my special thanks to the entire teaching staff of the Institute of Anthropology, Gender and African Studies who gave me an insight into the study topic, the Chairman of the Faculty Post-graduate Studies Committee and the entire staff who critiqued my work to shape my ideological build-up. I am indebted to your candid and unreserved inputs to see me through the proposal and project development stages.

My unrivalled gratitude goes to my informants in Kasikeu Division of Makueni County for the insurmountable input of information into this study. Your ideas were such an asset to me and the broad academia; thank you so much and be blessed. To the local administration, thank you and be blessed for the cooperation throughout the study period.

I also deeply appreciate my baby sister Grace, my great friends Everlyne and Margaret for their continued support and motivation to keep pressing on. For your motivation, I say thank you.

I remain profoundly grateful to all my classmates for the time and ideas shared, there was high value in meeting and debating with you often, you remain such significant assets in my life and I wish you all the best in your endeavors.

## **ABSTRACT**

This was a cross-sectional study on challenges facing girls in public primary schools in accessing sanitary towels in Kasikeu division in Makueni County. Specifically, the study sought to identify the challenges faced by girls in public primary schools in accessing sanitary towels and identify strategies put in place to address challenges faced by girls in public primary schools in accessing sanitary towels.

The study was guided by the Social Exclusion Theory advanced by Starrin *et al.*, (1999). Social exclusion attempts to make sense out of multiple deprivations and inequities experienced by people and areas, and the reinforcing effects of reduced participation, consumption, mobility and access among others. Sampling was purposively done to reach girls who are menstruating and within classes five and eight of upper primary in Kasikeu division and to identify key informants to the study. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions and analyzed thematically guided by the study objectives.

The findings indicate that the average cost of commercial sanitary pads were way above the affordability of the primary school girls compounded by high poverty level in Kasikeu division, poor families lack adequate clothing that could be converted into home-made sanitary rags, lack of sanitary towels has a direct bearing on absenteeism. Similarly, the study established inadequate knowledge amongst girls and parents around menstruation hygiene management and lack of open discussion around the subject so mystified in secrecy amongst the people of Kasikeu.

The study concludes that the high prevalence of poverty in Kasikeu division has constrained most girls and their parents from accessing the sanitary towels. Socially, lack of privacy for changing menstrual materials, leakage from poor quality materials, lack of resources for washing such as soaps, limited education for girls on menstruation and the taboo nature of menstruation are found to be constraint factors in the study.

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

<b>CBO'S</b>	Community Based Organizations
<b>FAWE</b>	Forum for African Women Educationalists
<b>FAWEK</b>	Forum for African Women Educationalists Kenya
<b>FAWEU</b>	Forum for African Women Educationalists Uganda
<b>FGD's</b>	Focus Group Discussions
<b>GCN</b>	Girl Child Network
<b>KESSP</b>	Kenya Education Sector Support Programme
<b>MoE</b>	Ministry of Education
<b>MDG's</b>	Millennium Development Goals
<b>MoPND</b>	Ministry of Planning & National Development
<b>NACOSTI</b>	National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation
<b>NGO's</b>	Non – Governmental Organizations
<b>STCC</b>	Sanitary Towel Campaign Coordinating Committee
<b>SEU</b>	Social Exclusion Unit
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Education Fund
<b>UNIFEM</b>	United Nations Development Fund for Women
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom
<b>WRC-DI</b>	Women's Research Centre & Development Institute



# CHAPTER ONE

## BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

### 1.1 Introduction

Menstruation for girls without access to sanitary towels and underwear combined with inadequate sanitary facilities is a major contributor to girls dropping out of school. Studies have established that the discomfort experienced by girls who lack access to sanitary towels during their menses affects school attendance and ultimately their performance (Ochido *et al.*, 2009). Additionally, taboos and silence associated with menstruation in many communities mean some girls are in any case unable to ask their parents for money to buy sanitary towels, and forced to find ways of getting money on their own (UNICEF, 2009).

Menstruation is perhaps one of the most regular individual female experiences, but in sub-Saharan Africa, the experience impacts general society negatively due to the absence of products required by women and girls to cope with menstrual flow. In sub-Saharan Africa, millions of girls, in particular, that reach the age of puberty are highly disempowered due to the lack of access to sanitary wear. Many of the girls from poor families cannot afford to buy sanitary pads. Worse still, cultural and social attitudes render discussion of menstruation almost impossible (<http://thinkafricapress.com>).

During a study conducted by FAWEU (2003), girls reported that menstruation is a taboo subject even within their own families, describing a ‘culture of silence’ with regard to their menstruation and menstruation management. They reported being unable to discuss menstrual issues with their mothers and certainly not with their fathers. Not being able to talk about their experience and

having limited information means that menstruation becomes something shameful and something to hide, and is consequently ignored in families, schools and communities (FAWEU, 2003).

On the other hand, socialization of girls on issues of menstruation and menstruation management has not received adequate attention in the past, despite the fact that gender disparities in participation and achievement/attainment have been shown to start at adolescence (Abagi & Odipo, 1997). It has also been revealed that drop out and repetition rates are higher in upper primary school. The taboo nature of menstruation prevents girls and their communities from talking about and addressing problems regarding menstruation management and raising awareness and education to eliminate the stigma of menstruation.

The Kenya Education Sector Support Programme (KESSP) 2005-2010 has highlighted the important role played by sexual maturation and hygienic menstruation practices in promoting participation of girls and boys in education (FAWE, 2006). For every girl, the first period is a confusing experience especially if she does not have proper sanitary wear. It has been observed that many girls drop out of schools in upper classes because of lack of sanitary wear or protective materials during menstruation.

The purpose of the study was to establish the challenges facing girls in public primary schools in accessing sanitary towels in Kasikeu Division, Makueni County. Even with the first launch of the sanitary towels campaign in February 2006, the enactment of the Gender Policy in Education in July 2007, the establishment of the Sanitary Towels Campaign Coordinating Committee (STCCC) in May 2008 and the recent launch of the national sanitary towels initiative in March 2012, a majority of girls in public primary schools in Kasikeu Division do not have access to sanitary towels during their monthly period.

## **1.2 Statement of the problem**

Study findings have shown that about 1 in 10 school-age African girls do not attend school during menstruation (Shangwa, 2011). This suggests that girls are forced to be absent during their menarche and thereby lose critical learning time. On average, about four to five days per month can be lost due to lack of access to sanitary towels. In many poverty stricken families, sanitary towels are simply too expensive and can receive less priority when compared to other household needs such as food.

Further, studies conducted by FAWEU (2002) reveal that only about one in four schools stock sanitary supplies for girls' access in case of a menstrual period that may begin while at school. According to culture, our grandmothers used cloths and other materials like leaves, banana fibres for padding or even sitting on sand heaps during menstruation. In some communities, this culture is still strong especially in rural communities where girls still use some of these materials. The disadvantage is that girls absent themselves from school during menstruation because they are not confident of the available materials.

A girl absent from school due to menses for 4 days in 28 days (a month) loses 13 learning days equivalent to 2 weeks of learning in every school term. In a year (9 months) a girl loses 39 learning days equivalent to 6 weeks of learning time. A girl in primary school between grades 6 and 8 (3 years) loses 18 learning weeks out of 108 weeks. Within the 4 years of high school the

same girl loses 156 learning days equivalent to almost 24 weeks out of 144 weeks of learning in High school!! This is a clear indication that a girl child is a school dropout while still in school.

Despite the continued call for attention to the significance of addressing menstruation management in schools, a majority of girls in public primary schools continue to face numerous challenges in accessing sanitary towels.

This study therefore sought to explore challenges facing girls in public primary schools in accessing sanitary towels and was guided by the following questions:

1. What are the challenges faced by girls in public primary schools in accessing sanitary towels?
2. Which strategies have been put in place to address the challenges faced by girls in public primary schools in accessing sanitary towels?

### **1.3 Study objectives**

#### **1.3.1 Overall Objective**

- To explore challenges facing girls in public primary schools in accessing sanitary towels in Kasikeu Division in Makeni County.

#### **1.3.2 Specific objectives**

1. To identify the challenges faced by girls in public primary schools in accessing sanitary towels;
2. To identify strategies put in place to address challenges faced by girls in public primary schools in accessing sanitary towels.

#### **1.4 Justification of the study**

Findings of this study are important in adding literature available on girls' access to sanitary towels or how lack of sanitary towels affects their uptake of schooling in public primary schools.

At the school level, teachers, parents and school management committees will be sensitized about the importance of addressing menstruation management issues in public primary schools given the breadth of the findings of the study.

The Findings of this study may be used by GCN, FAWEK and other stakeholders in the formulation of projects that will help the dissemination of emergency sanitary towels, education on use of locally available resources to produce sanitary towels and provision of water and sanitation in rural public primary schools.

At policy level, should the recommendations of this study be adopted by MoE and the STCCC, they will be used in establishment of guidelines to ensure girls in public primary schools have access to sanitary towels.

#### **1.5 Scope and limitations of the study**

The study focused on the challenges facing girls in public primary schools in accessing sanitary towels. The study was limited to Kasikeu Division in Makueni County. The study used small sample size given its qualitative approach limiting the generalisability of the study findings however, data collection methods have been triangulated to yield rich data that answer to the study questions.

## **1.6 Definitions of key terms**

**Access:** Refers to the opportunity or right to make use of something in this case sanitary towels.

**Challenges:** Refers to problems/barriers/hindrances/obstacles facing girls in accessing sanitary towels.

**Menstruation management:** Refers to various methods used by menstruating girls during their periods to absorb the menstrual flow.

**Performance :** Refers to the academic and non-academic curriculum attained by pupils in terms of marks they manage to acquire after each class.

**Sanitary towel:** It's an absorbent pad worn by menstruating girls to absorb menstrual blood.

**Sexual maturation :** Refers to the sexual development and growth of a child from puberty (9-13 years) and adolescence (13-19 years) accompanied by changes in their bodies and sexual organs.

**Social exclusion:** stigma and discrimination experienced by girls who do not have access to sanitary towels and also because they come from impoverished families.

**Taboos:** Cultural and negative social attitudes, beliefs and superstitious concerning menstrual blood and menstrual management.

**Unhygienic:** Poor quality / inappropriate/substandard methods of containing menstrual flow such as old rags, leaves, pieces of blanket or even toilet paper.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter describes common challenges facing girls in public primary schools in accessing sanitary towels. The review has been done across the following topics: economic challenges, socio-cultural challenges and policy frameworks in place to address implementation of sanitary towels. The chapter finally presents the theoretical framework and the assumptions that guided the study.

#### **2.2 Economic challenges**

Menstruation is managed differently according to cultural, social and economic contexts (Sommer & Kirk, 2008). For young girls in poor, rural settings who often receive minimal instruction on what menstruation is and how it can be managed, the experience has been described as frightening, confusing and shame-inducing. It is therefore important to understand how girls cope with menstruation in settings where access to sanitary towels is poor.

The length of primary school is relatively long (8 years) and for many children, particularly those in rural areas, age of entry into the school system is normally delayed (Kariuki *et al.*, 2000). Consequently, adolescence sets in while children are still in primary school. Girls who are unable to afford sanitary towels resort to inappropriate methods of containing their menstrual flow such as old rags and pieces of blanket, toilet paper or even leaves. Some girls do not use anything at all. These methods are unhygienic and a health hazard. The alternative methods do not adequately contain menstrual flow and this lead to unpleasant odours which negatively affect a girl's confidence and expose her to ridicule and exclusion by her peers. Such a girl may

withdraw from taking part fully in class and extracurricular activities. A large number of girls skip school during the period (Kariuki *et al.*, 2000).

Most of the girls in rural public primary schools cannot afford to buy sanitary towels, cotton wool or any other form of protective supplies to use during their menstrual period (FAWE, 2001). This forces them to feign sickness and skip school when they are menstruating. Their mothers and female relatives are not in any better position to afford to buy sanitary towels for themselves and go through the same suffering when they have their own monthly periods.

In many poor families, providing adequate clothing for the whole family can be a challenge (Kanyike & Piwang-Jalobo, 2002). Hence finding used fabric rags from which to make home-made sanitary pads can be very difficult. Insufficient or inadequate sanitary protection can be very embarrassing for a girl attending school during her monthly period. This is made worse if her school clothing is flimsy, worn and/or too small for her. Soiled uniforms can provoke ridicule from boys as well as from other girls, putting her at great risk of experiencing stigma and discrimination.

According to studies done by (Adhikari, 2007) in Nepal, 66% of girls used reusable cloths to absorb menstrual flow during menstruation, the use being significantly higher among rural than urban school girls. The vast majority of women and girls in Nepal use rags, usually torn from old saris. Even in the houses, a culture of shame forces girls to find well hidden places to dry the rags. These places are often damp, dark and unhealthy and rags that are unclean can cause serious infections.

A study conducted by (MC Mahon *et al.*, 2011) in Nyanza province, Kenya revealed that among the many methods for managing their periods, girls most frequently said they folded, bunched up



or sewed cloth, including cloth from shirts or dresses, scraps of old cloth, or strips of an old blanket. Cloth was reported to frequently leak and cause chafing, which made school attendance difficult particularly as the day progressed.

In another related research conducted in rural schools in Uganda, most girls are found to be distressed or uncomfortable because of wearing poor protective material during menstruation and this distract them from full participation in class (Kanyike & Piwang-Jalobo, 2002). 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 girls do not learn to read and write freely because of insecurity and poor concentration.

Research conducted by FAWE Ghana (2001) revealed that items used in the management of menstruation include sanitary towels, tissue paper, used cloth or cotton wool. Because of poverty, majority cannot afford to buy sanitary towels during menstruation. The study further revealed that most of the schools did not have facilities to make menstruating girls' comfortable.

From a very practical perspective, girls who lack adequate sanitary materials may miss school each month during their period. If girls attend schools which – as many do – lack adequate latrines and water supplies to comfortably change sanitary pads and wash themselves in privacy, they may be unable to remain comfortably in class during their menstrual cycle (Kirk *et al.*, 2006). In southern Sudan, for example, the lack of sanitary protection during menstruation is often mentioned as a barrier to girls' regular attendance in school. There is very limited availability of commercial sanitary products and those that exist are financially out of reach for most women and girls.

A survey carried out by WRC-DI in Makueni County in 2009 indicated that the discomfort experienced by girls who lack access to sanitary pads during their menses affects school attendance and ultimately, their performance. Those with no access to sanitary pads use handkerchiefs/pieces of cloth, tissue paper or nothing. The proportion of girls who have no adequate and sufficient access to pads and toilet facilities inevitably translates to loss of school days every time they have their periods (Ochido *et al.*, 2009). Besides this, 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.

In another related research conducted by Forum of African Women Educationalists, Uganda (FAWE U, 2004) revealed that poor management of sexual maturation 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 has distracted them from full participation in class. Girls are also afraid of being teased by both boys and girls in case of 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 & Piwang-Jalobo, 2002).

### **2.3 Socio-cultural challenges**

Menstruation is hidden in secrecy, and often it is concealed or ignored. However, because of the influence of the sanitary product industry, menstruation is less surrounded by myth and secret than it has been, but is continually stigmatized in many cultures, religions and societies (Zhang, 2005). In his study on “menstrual experiences of marginalized migrant girls”, Zhang reported that girls expressed concern on sanitary towels advertisements on television. The girls alleged that television adverts showed sanitary towels that could suck dry all menstrual blood but use

blue water not blood. Girls said that they did not believe the advertisements because they cheated the audience (Zhang, 2005).

Study findings from Kenya (Kariuki *et al.*, 2000), identified that only a small number of girls do learn about sexual maturation and menstruation practices from their mothers. Girls in rural areas and a few from the urban schools when interviewed, said that nobody has talked to them about menstruation and they had just overheard their sisters in law talking amongst themselves. Interviews with rural mothers revealed their surprise and embarrassment that they should discuss such a topic with their daughters and in fact one mother asked how one would initiate such a discussion with her daughter (Kariuki *et al.*, 2000).

A study carried out by WaterAid in Nepal (2009) showed that the socio-cultural challenges are based on concepts of “pollution” surrounding menstruation. Restrictions during menstruation that limit daily activities and routine are widely practiced. These manifest from beliefs that a woman during her menstruation is ritually dangerous which can result in them spoiling food and plants, biological and social processes. 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 (UNICEF, 2009).

Research conducted by Shangwa in Zimbabwe (2011) revealed that a majority of rural girls use white old cotton cloths from worn out t-shirts or sheets. The reason being that there is a superstition that has been passed on for generations that warns girls against leaving any trace of menstrual blood for someone to see, for it can be tampered with and one might not be able to bear children when you grow up and get married. Therefore because of that, girls ensure that

they use a white cloth because it becomes easy to see that the blood is well gotten rid of when washing.

According to a study commissioned by WaterAid (2005) in Ethiopia, menstruation is a taboo topic especially among certain ethnic groups. In Gumuz society, when a girl menstruates for the first time, she is sent away from her family to live in isolation or with other menstruating girls for varying lengths of time. The consequences of this practice can be as far-reaching as causing girls to fall behind a year or drop out of school altogether. Even when girls are not subjected to menstrual isolation, lack of sanitary towels, poor hygiene and sanitation in schools combined with restrictions on mentioning menstruation, especially to male teachers, mean that missed classes and affected academic performance are common for menstruating girls (WaterAid, 2005). Many girls though physically present in school are unable to perform well due to poor concentration and attention resulting from constant worry (WaterAid, 2009).

A 2009 UNICEF study found that girls miss 20 percent of the school year in areas where menstrual hygiene and management is taboo. 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 and sanitary towels is not prioritised. The idea that monthly bleeding is something shameful, polluting, or taboo may also encourage girls to avoid social contact during their period.

A study conducted by (Kariuki *et al.*, 2000) in rural schools in Kenya revealed that menstruation is part of the Standard six Home Science curriculum but the pupils indicated that the lessons were factual explanations of sexual maturation focusing mainly on the reproductive system. Both

female and male teachers felt embarrassed teaching about sexual maturation and menstruation practices in mixed gender classes.

### **2.3.1 Menstrual hygiene as a taboo**

Menstrual hygiene is a ‘big’ taboo although there are differences by country, culture, ethnic group, social class or family, the oppression of women has its effect on issues concerning reproductive health and other issues related to the reproductive system and its functions and processes. Most striking is the restricted control, which many women and girls have over their own mobility and behavior during menstruation due to their ‘impurity’ during menstruation, including the myths, misconceptions, superstitions and (cultural and/or religious) taboos concerning menstrual blood and menstrual hygiene.

Remarkable is also that the education by parents concerning reproductive health, sexuality and all related issues is considered almost everywhere as a “no-go” area. In the Bible, there is an explicit reference to the impurity of women during their menstruation. In the Jewish tradition, menstruating women and everything that they touch is considered to be impure. Among Hindus, menstruation is considered ‘polluting’. During the menstruation period, women and girls are not allowed to visit a temple, pray, or cook. They are not allowed to touch anybody and have to stay away from their family, because they are seen as impure. Among Muslims, menstruating women are prohibited from touching the Koran and praying during a minimum of three and a maximum of seven days; they are also not allowed to enter the mosque, to fast, or to have sex. In ancient Greece Pliny the Elder also wrote about this in *Naturalis Historia*. These ideas still play a role in several cultures, as a result of which women and girls get various restrictions imposed on them

during their menstruation period. Examples from a few countries demonstrate this. For instance, in Bangladesh, menstrual blood is seen as ‘the greatest of all pollution (Blanchet, 1987).

Menstruating women must stay inside as much as possible; they are not allowed to prepare food or to work in the rice fields. Sex (and sharing a bed with their partner) and praying or reading the Koran are prohibited during this period. On the other hand, the first menstruation of a girl is celebrated. Family, friends and acquaintances are invited for this occasion, special rituals are carried out, and particular dishes are served (Bosch & Hutter, 2002).

In Nepal, the Kumari, girls who have the status of living goddesses (incarnations of the goddess Kali), are believed to lose their divine strengths when they start menstruating; they lose their status of living goddess immediately. In western Uganda where people keep cows, menstruating girls and women were not allowed to drink milk. It was believed that menstruation would affect the production of milk from the cows to get bloody milk. In the eastern Uganda, menstruating girls and women were not allowed to plant groundnuts during the planting season, because this would affect the yield. In central Uganda menstruation was supposed to be a top secret only known to yourself. In Sierra Leone, it is believed that used sanitary napkins can be used to make someone sterile.

In southern Africa, “menstrual blood of women is dangerous to men and also to the fertility of cattle and of crops” (Kuper, 1982: 19). Among the Maya and in ancient Japan menstruating women had to isolate themselves in “women’s huts” to carry out rituals and exchange experiences and wisdom. In that period, the men took over the daily chores of the women. This custom still exists in some Asian, African and South American cultures. In Ethiopia and among

certain tribes in Nigeria menstruating women must isolate themselves in menstruation huts, because it is believed that menstrual blood pollutes the home.

## **2.4 Policy Frameworks in place to address implementation of sanitary towels**

Though Kenya has made significant progress towards universal access to education in line with the MDGs, access to sanitary towels for girls is a challenge as without these the girls are forced to miss some days of schooling every month.

The Gender and Education Policy has indicated issues of water and sanitation, availability or not of sanitary towels for girls as some of the factors that hinder attempts to reduce and eventually eliminate disparities (Republic of Kenya, 2007). In addition, the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 2 indicates that measures sensitive to particular obstacles blocking girls' access to education such as improving access to sanitary facilities need to be implemented (UNIFEM, 2002).

The Sanitary Towels Campaign Coordinating Committee was established on 14<sup>th</sup> May 2008 at the Kenya Institute of education in the stakeholders meeting on provision of sanitary towels to girls in schools, entitled "gender and education: establishing the status of gender equity and equality in primary schools in Kenya" hosted by the Ministry of Education and the Girl Child Network (<http://www.fawe.org>).

The Kenyan government commitment to support girls' education by introducing a scheme to introduce free sanitary towels in schools was highlighted in the Friday Daily Nation on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2012, where the government in collaboration with GCN launched the national sanitary towels initiative titled "keeping the girl child in school, empowering the future". This report was

also aired on Citizen Station at prime time on 8<sup>th</sup> May 2012 and emphasized on the need to provide free sanitary towels to girls from disadvantaged families and backgrounds.

Steps have been taken to address the needs for sanitary care in South Africa. In February 2011, President Jacob Zuma during the State of the Nation Address committed government to the provision of sanitary towels to indigent women and school girls. (<http://thinkafricapress.com>).

From the reviewed literature, it has been proved beyond doubt that girls in public primary schools face economic and socio-cultural challenges in accessing sanitary towels. Even with the above mentioned policies frameworks in place, a majority of girls in public primary schools in Kasikeu Division do not have access to sanitary towels during their monthly period. The limited availability of literature about the topic under study particularly in Kenya is a strong indication that research need to be conducted in this area.

## **2.5 Theoretical Framework**

### **2.5.1 Social exclusion theory**

This study was guided by the Social Exclusion Theory. This theory was advanced by Starrin *et al.*, (1999). It is a multidimensional explanation to people's exclusion from given activities due to poverty and general lack of resources. Social exclusion attempts to make sense out of multiple deprivations and inequities experienced by people and areas, and the reinforcing effects of reduced participation, consumption, mobility and access among others.

The UK's Social Exclusion Unit (SEU, 2001) states that social exclusion includes poverty and low income, but is broader and addresses some of the wider and consequences of poverty and used the concept of social exclusion in explaining why some groups do not benefit equally from



state service provision or remain chronically deprived. Lack of Access to commodities can be perceived as key elements in the process of social exclusion/inclusion.

### **2.5.2 Relevance of the theory**

Lack of access to sanitary pads during menstruation has become the undeclared basis for the social exclusion of young girls contributing to disempowerment and health risks which is explained by 'inaccess' element of the theory.

Girls in rural public primary schools are disadvantaged because they do not have access to sanitary towels and also because they come from impoverished families which social exclusion theory clearly outlines as a source of inequality and a phenomenon leading to lack of participation. These aspects answer to the first objective of this study.

The theory advocates for multiple and multi-stakeholder intervention strategies that can economically and socially empower the disadvantaged groups in the society hence answering the second objective of this study.

### **2.6 Assumptions**

1. There are challenges faced by girls in public primary schools in accessing sanitary towels during their menses;
2. There are strategies put in place to address challenges faced by girls in public primary schools in accessing sanitary towels.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This section introduces the research site, research design, study population, sample size & sampling techniques and data collection methods and analysis. The section finally presents ethical considerations that guided the study.

#### **3.2 Study Site**

The proposed study was carried out in Kasikeu Division of Makueni County. Mukaa District has a total of four Divisions mainly Kasikeu, Kilome, Kiou and Kiima Kiu. Kasikeu Division has a total of forty public primary schools. This study was limited to four public primary schools namely; Kiumoni, Muua, Kwambeo and Kwakatia.

##### **3.2.1 Primary enrolment in Makueni County**

The Primary school going population aged 6-13 years was 47039 in 2010 and comprised of 23906 males and 23133 females. This cohort was expected to rise to 49749 by the year 2012 with a total of 25283 males and 24466 females. The total primary enrollment in 2010 was 293957 with 52 percent for boys and a lower 49 percent for girls (Ministry of Planning & National Development (MoPND), 2009).

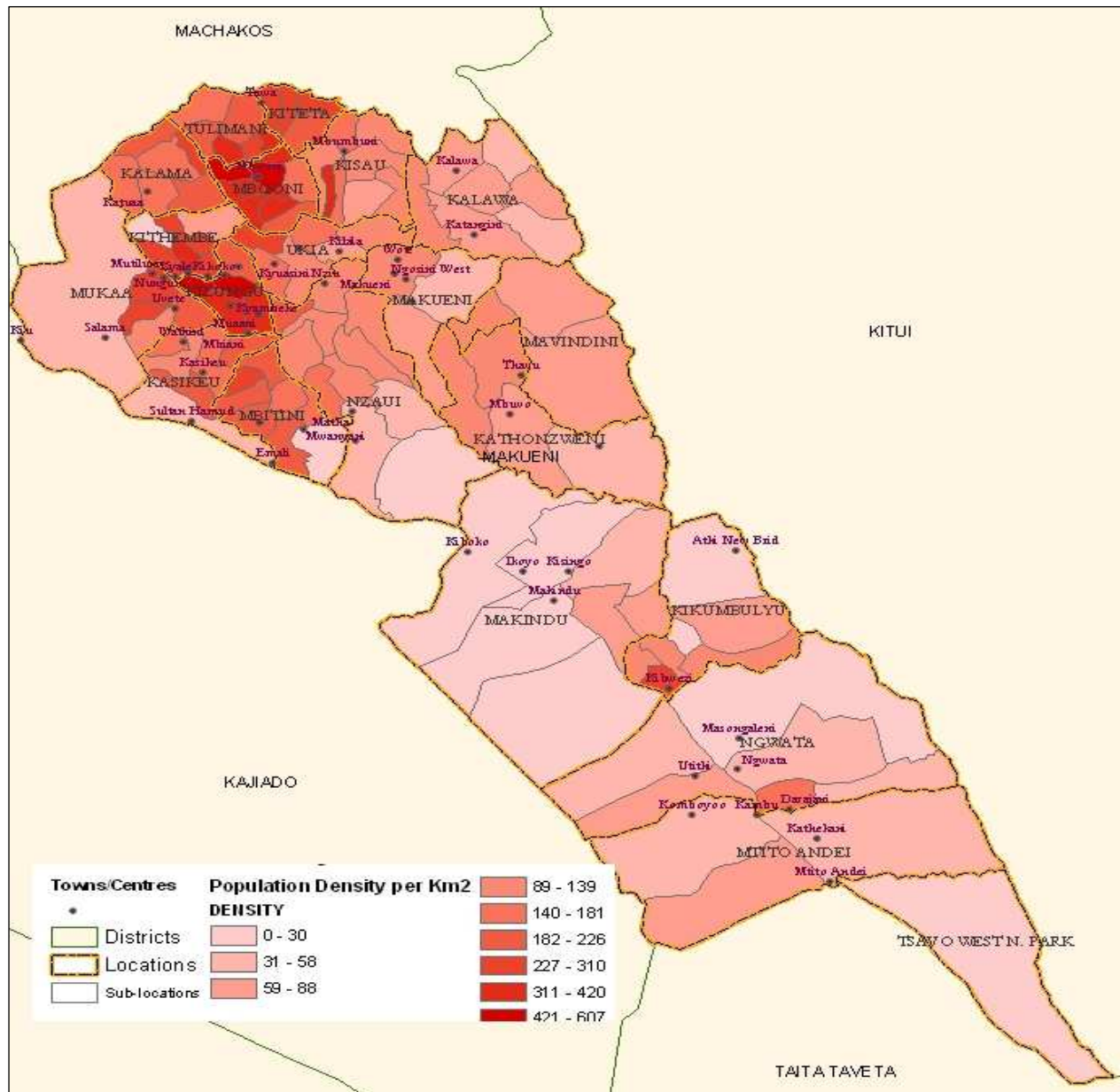
##### **3.2.2 Poverty analysis**

The Ministry of Planning and National Development (2009) identifies poverty as a major development challenge in the County. The poor constitute about 64.3 per cent of the total population. A major effect of poverty is the high rate of school dropouts, as parents cannot meet the education costs. The poor are vulnerable to nutrition related illnesses and respiratory

infections due to poor shelter. Young girls are forced into early marriages and therefore denied access to education.

### 3.2.3 Major economic activity

A majority of the people depend on agriculture and livestock production and informal sector for their livelihood. Agricultural production however varies over the years depending on the amount of rainfall received per year (MoPND, 2009).



**Figure 3.2.4: Map of Makueni County showing Kasikeu Division, location, administrative areas and population density pattern**

**Source:** Ministry of Planning & National Development 2005 – 2010

### **3.3 Research Design**

The study was a cross-sectional exploratory study using qualitative methods. In-depth interviews, focus group discussions and key informant interviews were used in collecting data. Data collected were analyzed according to themes guided by the study objectives.

### **3.4 Study Population**

This study targeted all girls in public primary schools in Kasikeu Division. The unit of analysis was the individual informant defined as a girl in class (5-8). Majority of the primary school girls in class (5 – 8) are aged between 11 – 14 years. This group was targeted in the study because it consists of girls who have started menstruating.

### **3.5 Sample Size & Sampling Techniques**

Forty girls were drawn across four public primary schools in Kasikeu Division for in-depth interviews. Informants for in-depth interviews were purposively sampled based on their experiences with menstruation. Key informants were purposively sampled based on professionalism and understanding of the topic under study. FGD participants were purposively recruited to the study based on their interest to further discuss the challenges faced by girls in accessing sanitary towels.

### **3.6 Data Collection Methods**

#### **3.6.1 In-depth Interviews**

These were conducted with forty girls ages 11-14 drawn across four primary schools in Kasikeu Division. Selection of girls was done by the researcher who held meetings with girls in class 5-8

to identify girls who had started menstruating. The interviews yielded information on economic and socio-cultural challenges faced by girls in accessing sanitary towels. In-depth interview guide (Appendix, 1) was used to collect data.

### **3.6.2 Key Informant Interviews**

These were conducted with one teacher per school, one official from the Gender Desk in the MoE, the executive director FAWEK and the executive director GCN. The key informants were selected based on professionalism and understanding of the topic under study. The key informant interviews yielded data on the issue of accessibility to sanitary towels as an issue of concern in rural public primary schools. It was also important in giving recommendations to be put in place by various stakeholders regarding protective materials in rural public primary schools. Key informant interview guide (Appendix, 2 for institutional officials of MOEST, FAWEK & GCN) and (Appendix 3 for teachers) were used to collect data.

### **3.6.3 Focus Group Discussions**

One focus group discussion was carried out per school. The FGDs were carried out with class five girls in Kiumoni, class six girls in Muua, class seven girls in Kwambeo and class eight girls in Kwakatia primary schools respectively. The focus group discussions yielded information on economic and socio-cultural challenges faced by girls in accessing sanitary towels. An FGD guide (Appendix, 4) was used to guide the discussions.

### **3.6.4 Documentary Sources**

Documentary analysis of secondary sources was used to supplement primary data and to inform the orientation of the problem under study. The available literature on challenges facing girls in public primary schools in accessing sanitary towels was examined and used to contextualize the discussion. As a matter of fact, most of the relevant documents from the internet, magazines, media and books were made use of throughout the entire period of the study.

### **3.7 Data Processing & Analysis**

Data obtained were analyzed thematically. A descriptive approach was used where statements that reinforce arguments within the themes have been presented in verbatim. There was no use of scientific software given the qualitative approach of the study.

### **3.8 Ethical Considerations**

The Researcher acquired a research permit from the Ministry of Education through the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI).

The participants were taken through the purpose and objectives of the study and any other concern before the interview takes off. The researcher sought informed verbal consent with the respective schools' head teachers. Informed consent was directly sought from the children after receiving head teachers consent. The participants were also informed of their right to disqualify themselves from the study at any stage in the interview process. The researcher has maintained confidentiality of the study participants through the use of pseudonyms.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study across the following areas; the economic challenges, socio –cultural challenges and strategies that are put in place to address challenges faced by girl in accessing sanitary towels in Kasikeu Division in Makueni County. Discussions in cross reference to past findings and emergent issues have been carried to contextualize the study outcome and the broad challenges facing girls in accessing sanitary towels theme. The demographic characteristics of the study participants have also been presented.

#### 4.2 Demographic characteristics

##### 4.2.1 Age of the respondents

In the study, 9% were aged 11, 31% were aged 12, those aged 13years comprised 35% while those aged 14 years comprised 25% as summarized in figure 4.2.1 below:

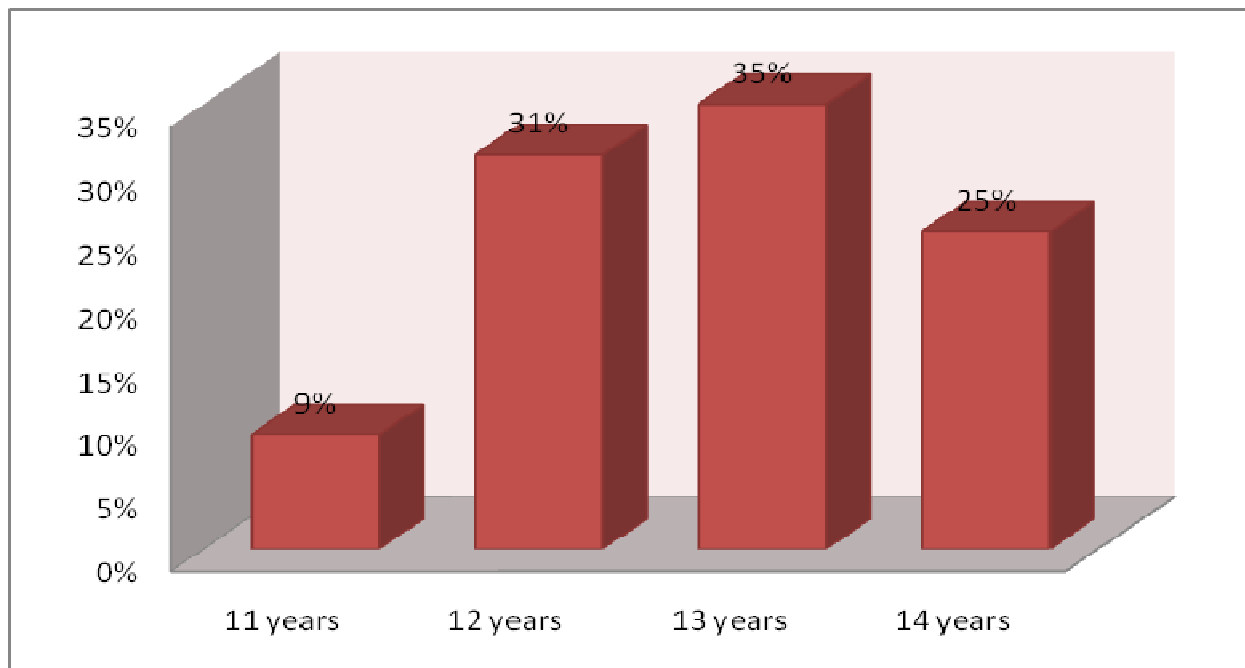


Figure 4.2.1: Age of the respondents

### 4.2.2 Education level

In the study, 14% of the respondents reported being in class five, 23% being in class six, 42% reported being in class seven while 21% of the respondents were in class eight. Cross tabulation of the grades versus experience with sanitary towels was statistically negligible. The findings are summarized in figure 4.2 below.

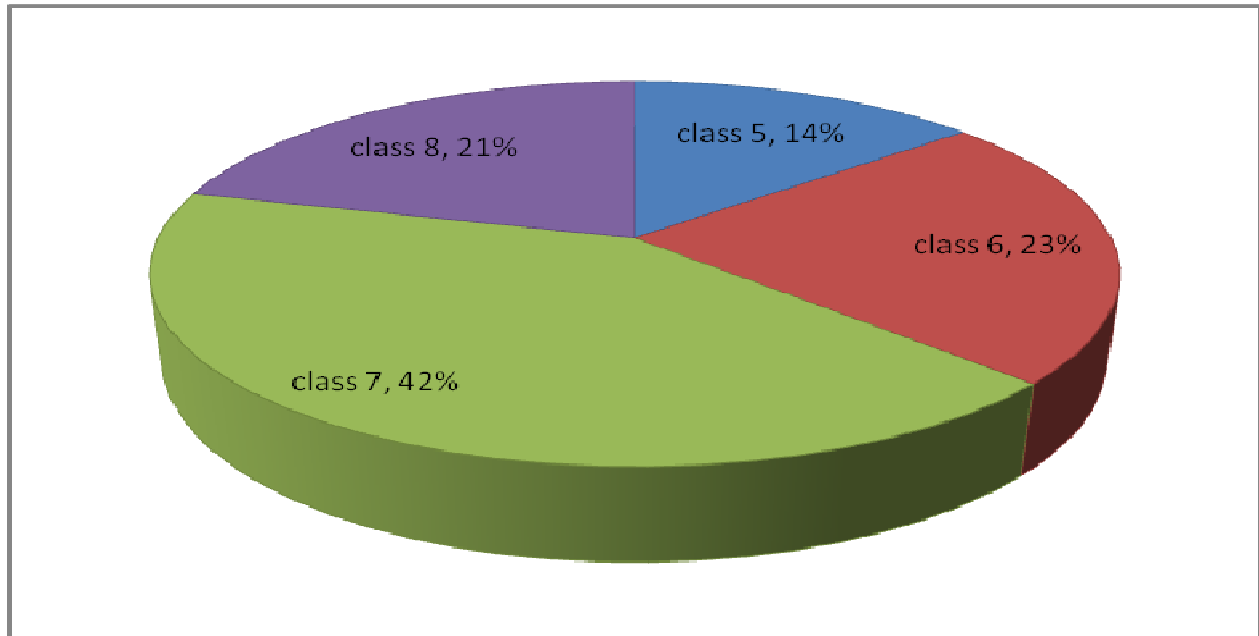


Figure 4.2: Education level of the respondents

### 4.3 Economic challenges

#### 4.3.1 Expense of commercial sanitary pads and use of alternatives

In the study, it was established the high costs of sanitary towels compels the girls to use materials that are deemed cheap and easily accessible within their environments oblivious of the health risks. Both key informant interviews and focus group discussions revealed that girls who are unable to afford sanitary towels resort to inappropriate methods of containing their menstrual flow such as old rags and pieces of blanket, toilet paper or even leaves. Some girls do not use anything at all.



*“Sometimes these girls stuff rags made out of old cotton clothes as sanitary towels regardless of the danger of leakage and infection that these materials may expose them to...it is the best they can access and afford given the high economic vulnerability of both the girls and their parents, pads are seen more as luxurious commodity”.***(interview with a teacher in Kasikeu).**

*“it is not every month that we get certified sanitary pads, we lack the money to buy them so we use what we can easily assemble, sometimes the home-made pads leak and we feel embarrassed so we do not report to school till we get dry (the menses are done)..”***(FGD with pupils in Kasikeu Division).**

The consensus from the interviews above indicate a trend where girls in Kasikeu division have devised an economic coping strategy to deal with high cost of sanitary towels, however, in-depth interview revealed that whereas girls frequented these alternatives, they decried the odours and the inability of the methods to contain the menstrual flow. In essence, the study established that these methods are unhygienic and a health hazard. The alternative methods do not adequately contain menstrual flow and this lead to unpleasant odours which negatively affect a girl's confidence and expose her to ridicule and exclusion by her peers making large number of girls to skip school in Kasikeu division.

In a previous study by Kariuki *et al* (2000) on sanitary pads and education influence amongst girls, it was established that poor quality materials used as pads are more likely to keep girls out of school due to fear of being ridiculed by their male colleagues, the use of such poor quality pads was largely contributed to by lack adequate financial resources for better pads amongst the rural girls as is the case in Kasikeu division in this study. The findings are also in concurrence with those of MC Mahon *et al.*, 2011) in Nyanza province, which revealed that among the many methods for managing their periods, girls most frequently said they folded, bunched up or sewed cloth, including cloth from shirts or dresses, scraps of old cloth, or strips of an old blanket.

*“Sometimes am forced to buy tissue paper and that is especially when I do not want to miss my exams at school and I have my menses on...its just embarrassing but I cannot*

*afford the ‘real’ pads such the ones we see on posters around major shops” (An interview with class seven girl in Kasikeu).*

*“I used a lot of folded cotton clothes before an NGO began supplying the school with sanitary pads, I have no parents and my guardian is poor too, she cannot afford our meal and pads every month, sometimes I could miss classes if I had heavy periods” (An interview with class eight pupil in Kasikeu).*

The findings above are in concurrence with the previous work of Ochido *et al* (2009) that established that those with no access to sanitary pads use handkerchiefs/pieces of cloth, tissue paper or nothing. The proportion of girls who have no adequate and sufficient access to pads and toilet facilities inevitably translates to loss of school days every time they have their periods.

It can therefore be concluded that because pads are not always available, primary school girls in Kasikeu Division are forced to use cotton wool, cloths (including socks), tissue paper, pages torn from school exercise books, and pieces of sponge torn from mattresses to manage their menstrual flow. This has far-reaching health implications for the many adolescent girls concerned.

#### **4.3.2 Poor families and inadequate clothing for rugs**

The study findings revealed that whereas the use of alternative clothes was fast an option for a majority of the families, some girls especially at the lower level of education reported having to sit back home all through the menstruation period due to unavailability of convertible clothes pointing to high levels of poverty in Kasikeu. This is specifically tied to the fact that there could be difficulties getting the appropriate cotton materials for folding a temporary ‘pad’ as in the consensus from FGD below:

*“Some people come from families where there is no cloth to tear or spare for menses, you have to use maybe something uncomfortable as banana fibre folding, it is that time most girls would rather stay and sit intact than walk to school” (FGD with girls in Kasikeu).*

From the research findings, it appears that women and girls in rural areas, who are often the poorest and cannot afford to buy sanitary napkins catch their menstruation blood in cloths. Washing the cloth is problematic, because the women and girls must often walk to distant spots near a river. As a result, women and girls run an increased risk of becoming victims of sexual violence and abuse. Frequently, there is no possibility of properly drying the cloth, because nobody, especially men, should see any sign of the menstruation (shame-based culture). The consequence is that women and girls mostly have to hang it in well-hidden, often unhealthy places and use moisture and damp cloths.

*“It is not unusual to visit some of the primary schools and notice soiled clothes for girls who either are using poor quality sanitary towels or are not just protected from the flow”*  
**(An interview with MoE official in Kasikeu)**

The findings serve to reinforce the work of Kanyike & Piwang-Jalobo (2002) who posit that some girls get it difficult to even access fabric to make home-made pads thus consistently embarrassed about their menses, a factor largely contributed by poverty.

#### **4.3.3 Lack of school sanitary facilities**

The study sought to know how the schools are equipped to deal with the menstruation of adolescent girls within Kasikeu. Significant to establish was the availability of facilities such as cotton wool, pads, and any other menstruation management tool. Moreover, the availability of equipped toiletries and water in the girls’ toilet was also assessed. The findings indicate that while the school management generally recognized menstruation as deterrent to poor girls’ attendance and performance at school, there were hardly any resources allocated to cater for the girls’ needs and overreliance on donor and government occasional; provisions had overshadowed the process.

*“While there is a government steering committee on sanitary pads, a lot of rural schools are ignored, it is hard for school administration to allocate any funds toward girls’ sanitary projects because it is still considered a non essential engagement even when girls continuously miss classes” (An interview with FAWEK official).*

*“Our toilets have no water, we use pit latrines, you cannot take a bath in the latrines even when you feel soiled, the school facilities are downgraded, we have to go for early lunch to freshen up, sometimes we just miss classes because we lack where to change” (FGD with girls in Kasikeu).*

In a study conducted by FAWE Ghana (2001) revealed that items used in the management of menstruation include sanitary towels, tissue paper, used cloth or cotton wool. Because of poverty, majority cannot afford to buy sanitary towels during menstruation. The study further revealed that most of the schools did not have facilities to make menstruating girls’ comfortable. Similarly, Kirk *et al.*, (2006) points to lack of adequate latrines and water supplies for girls to comfortably change sanitary pads and wash themselves in privacy; they may be unable to remain comfortably in class during their menstrual cycle.

#### **4.3.4 Lack of sanitary towels and absenteeism**

The study findings indicate that inaccessibility to sanitary pads by cost implications leads to high absenteeism from school by a lot of girls in Kasikeu Division. This is due to lack of comfort that menstruating girls experienced during their cycles.

*“I keep away from school during my menses because I hardly access sanitary pads to wear on that can help control my flow (An interview with a class seven girl at Kasikeu division)*

*“I feel uncomfortable without pads and my flow is on, it can embarrass you before your classmates so I tend to keep off classes during such times” (An interview with a class six girl at Kasikeu).*

In another related research conducted by Forum of African Women Educationalists, Uganda (FAWE U, 2004) revealed that poor management of sexual maturation 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 has distracted them from full participation in class.

In the study, girls who reported to school during menstruation with poor quality materials unable to hold their menstrual flows expressed being unable to wholly concentrate in class during lessons and this resulted into negative performance. While the chain of events build up to lack of access, the consequences have a direct bearing in the girls' active uptake of school activities and class work as in the interviews below:

*“Sometimes parents push to go to school because they see menstruation as normal to all girls...the problem arises when you feel unsettled in class because either you have no pads or using low quality materials that cannot absorb the flow, you hardly get to concentrate in class”*(**Interview with a class eight girl in Kasikeu**).

*“I realized that I tend to concentrate less in class during my menses and this has a way of eating into my class assignment scores because I lack the proper sanitary pads to contain my menstrual flow”* (**Interview with a class six girl in kasikeu**).

The key informants in the study also observed that absenteeism or mere lack of concentration in class occasioned on girls without sanitary towels had adverse effects on the performance at school given the fact that most girls had to be cautious so as not to be noted by boys seated around them in classrooms or just soil their school uniforms with menstrual blood. The key informants were of the opinion that parity in the performance of girls and boys especially within the rural areas as Kasikeu would require that menstrual discomfort caused by lack of sanitary towels is addressed as a matter of urgency by the government, parents and non-governmental stakeholders.

*“There is that bit of discomfort within classrooms and performance, it is a very acute problem in the rural schools and has been found to largely affect the performance of girls due to poor concentration in class”* (**An interview with GCN official**).

In previous studies on menstruation and performance of girls, WaterAid (2009) established that many girls though physically present in school are unable to perform well due to poor concentration and attention resulting from constant worry, hence, the findings emerging from Kasikeu division stand to complement these previous conclusions.

## **4.4 Social challenges**

### **4.4.1 Menstruation and secrecy**

The study findings established that menstruation is not a ‘loudly’ debated affair amongst the girls in Kasikeu. It is an occurrence that the society generally would want treated discretely and great ‘silence’. Whereas some discussion amongst menstruating girls is allowed and socially sanctioned, these must happen in secret places away from the boys, men and children. Most striking is the restricted control, which many girls have over their own mobility and behavior during menstruation due to their ‘impurity’ during menstruation, including the myths, misconceptions, superstitions and (cultural and/or religious) taboos concerning menstrual blood and menstrual hygiene.

*“It is quite obvious that a lot of suffering some of these girls endure result from cultural secrecy surrounding the menstruation, they do not want others to learn that they are menstruating because their norms prohibit such talks (An interview with FAWEK official).*

*“It is believed that talking about one’s menstruating is likely to cause infertility in future, so girls choose to be silent, selective of places where they can go and deal with it as top secret occurrence, in this way, we find it challenging even to ask for the pads” (FGD with girls in Kasikeu).*

The findings of the study therefore indicate that menstruation is hidden in secrecy, and often it is concealed or ignored hence making it uneasy for girls to access the pads in Kasikeu division. In a previous study by Zhang (2005), on secrecy and menstruation, he concludes that because of the

influence of the sanitary product industry, menstruation is less surrounded by myth and secret than it has been, but is continually stigmatized in many cultures, religions and societies.

Similarly, Bosch & Hutter (2002) in their study point that menstruating women must stay inside as much as possible; they are not allowed to prepare food or to work in the rice fields. Sex (and sharing a bed with their partner) and praying or reading the Koran are prohibited during this period. On the other hand, the first menstruation of a girl is celebrated. Family, friends and acquaintances are invited for this occasion, special rituals are carried out, and particular dishes are served. Among Hindus, menstruation is considered 'polluting'. During the menstruation period, women and girls are not allowed to visit a temple, pray, or cook. They are not allowed to touch anybody and have to stay away from their family, because they are seen as impure. Among Muslims, menstruating women are prohibited from touching the Koran and praying during a minimum of three and a maximum of seven days; they are also not allowed to enter the mosque, to fast, or to have sex, thus the cultural secrecy in Kasikeu division is reminiscent of various cultural and religious beliefs.

Restrictions during menstruation that limit daily activities and routine are widely practiced. 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 (UNICEF, 2009). Research conducted by Shangwa in Zimbabwe (2011) revealed that a majority of rural girls use white old cotton cloths from worn out t-shirts or sheets. The reason being that there is a superstition that has been passed on for generations that warns girls against leaving any trace of menstrual blood for someone to see, for it can be tampered with and one might not be able to bear children when you grow up and get married

#### 4.4.2 Lack of knowledge

Knowledge surrounding the onset of menstruation, the frequency, management and timings is important in planning for the menstrual cycle. However, the study findings indicate that this knowledge is hardly received and in case of any, it is dismal and put in a manner that is culturally and socially appropriate with a lot of reserved language being used by mothers on their girls about menstruation. The key informants in the study and focus group discussion consensus reveal that for young girls in poor, rural settings who often receive minimal instruction on what menstruation is and how it can be managed; the experience has been described as frightening, confusing and shame-inducing.

*“These young girls are not taught on how to manage their menstrual flow, the parents and girls do not easily discuss the topic because it is a taboo to talk about matters regarding sexual maturity, they receive menses ill-prepared and it gets hard for them to manage” (An interview with MoE official in Kasikeu).*

*“Most of us learn about menstruation when playing with older girls or when we see our elder sisters with pads, our teachers and parents never talk to us about the hygiene around menstruation and even about the pads” (FGD with girls in Kasikeu).*

Study findings from Kenya (Kariuki *et al.*, 2000), identified that only a small number of girls do learn about sexual maturation and menstruation practices from their mothers. Girls in rural areas and a few from the urban schools when interviewed, said that nobody has talked to them about menstruation and they had just overheard their sisters in law talking amongst them.

Whereas parents might be said to be culturally prohibited from discussing sexual matters with their children, a potential source of knowledge at school was established not to fair any better in this discourse. Girls interviewed in the study reported that teachers simply talked about the menstruation as an indicator of sexual maturity amongst girls in comparison to male biological developments at adolescent stage without having the social dimension of management and cycler preparation.



*“We are always taught the characteristics of adolescent boys and girls and that is where the term menstruation is mentioned, there is nothing further than those differences on which girls are mentored or taught on” (An interview with a class seven girl in Kasikeu).*

*“I have realized that our female teachers want to handle girls who are menstruating in private especially when they are soiled, they never set the girls aside to teach them on the management of menstrual cycle” (An interview with a class eight girl in Kasikeu).*

A study conducted by (Kariuki *et al.*, 2000) in rural schools in Kenya revealed that menstruation is part of the Standard six Home Science curriculum but the pupils indicated that the lessons were factual explanations of sexual maturation focusing mainly on the reproductive system, thus, it seems that not a lot has changed in the sexual and reproductive health approach teaching in primary schools across rural Kenya exemplified by Kasikeu division experiences.

#### **4.4.3 Social ridicule**

Insufficient or inadequate sanitary protection can be very embarrassing for a girl attending school during her monthly period. This is made worse if her school clothing is flimsy, worn and/or too small for her. Soiled uniforms can provoke ridicule from boys as well as from other girls, putting her at great risk of experiencing stigma and discrimination. The study established that girls who have just a pair of uniform stay at home when the dresses get soiled, even more debilitating is the fact that boys tend to ridicule their classmates experiencing menses especially when it becomes a ‘public’ knowledge.

*“It is such an embarrassment for a group of boys in your class to start teasing you because they have realized that you can hardly contain your menstrual flow, some say that you are very fertile while some say that you are poisonous to men, so when we cannot afford the pads, the best thing is to stay away from school” (FGD with girls in Kasikeu).*

*“The stigma that comes with the menstrual cycle experience makes it difficult for these girls to ask for assistance around sanitary towels, they feel odd and most of the times resort to any materials just to avoid ridicule”(An interview with a teacher in Kasikeu).*

In another related research conducted in rural schools in Uganda, most girls are found to be distressed or uncomfortable because of wearing poor protective material during menstruation and this distract them from full participation in class (Kanyike & Piwang-Jalobo, 2002).

Girls are also afraid of being teased by both boys and girls in case of 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 & Piwang-Jalobo, 2002).

*“Many of us miss school during that time of the month because we use pieces of cloth that often stain our dresses and it is so embarrassing,” (Interview with a class six pupil in Kasikeu).*

A 2009 UNICEF study found that girls miss 20 percent of the school year in areas where menstrual hygiene and management is taboo. 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 and sanitary towels is not prioritized.

## **4.5 Strategies to address challenges faced by girls in accessing sanitary towels**

### **4.5.1 Ministerial campaigns and menstrual hygiene**

The study established that Ministry of Education under STCC has been at the forefront of improving access to sanitary towels amongst needy girls. This is in a bid to ensure that parity in performance between girls and boys is achieved and menstrual cycle absenteeism is eliminated in totality.

*“The ministry through constrained with funds has worked with a number of stakeholders to bring the sanitary towels closer to these girls and even distribute the same in schools,*

*it is a project with very tangible effects on the retention of girls at school throughout the school terms, I must regret though that the supply is quite low” (An interview with MoE official in Kasikeu division).*

*“We have formed a kind of partnership with local schools to ensure that girls from such arid areas do not miss classes due to lack of sanitary towels, so we mobilize a number of stakeholders to contribute toward the cause” (An interview with GCN official).*

These efforts are commensurate with the provisions of the Gender and Education Policy which has indicated issues of water and sanitation, availability or not of sanitary towels for girls as some of the factors that hinder attempts to reduce and eventually eliminate disparities (Republic of Kenya, 2007). In addition, the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 2 indicates that measures sensitive to particular obstacles blocking girls’ access to education such as improving access to sanitary facilities need to be implemented (UNIFEM, 2002). The issue of menstrual hygiene has the growing attention of women in developing countries; this applies to both individuals and self–help groups. Menstrual hygiene seems to be an insufficiently acknowledged problem in relation to MDG 7, especially in official programmes. From research, it becomes clear that the lack of menstrual hygiene in many countries in Kasikeu division is perceived as an urgent problem and that several grass roots initiatives are trying to find a solution.

Indeed, the Sanitary Towels Campaign Coordinating Committee was established on 14<sup>th</sup> Many 2008 at the Kenya Institute of education in the stakeholders meeting on provision of sanitary towels to girls in schools, entitled “gender and education: establishing the status of gender equity and equality in primary schools in Kenya” hosted by the Ministry of Education and the Girl Child Network (<http://www.fawe.org>).

#### 4.5.2 Community advocacy

Breaking the superstitions and myths surrounding menstruation and access to sanitary towels require a well groomed approach to local actors and cultural custodians. This is because of the sensitive nature of the topic that has already been declared a taboo-talk as the consensus from FGDs and key informant interviews revealed in the study.

*“We must open up the society around Kasikeu to talking about menstruation and menstrual hygiene, we must find a community agreed solution to stop ridicule and prohibitions around menstruation, in this way, the community can be mobilized to locally assemble affordable pads or even be introduced to re-usable pads without the fear of rejection” (An interview with FAWEK official).*

*“Our parents and the community at large should be sensitized about the biological nature of menstruation, they need to stop associating it with bad omen, and they must be trained on how to teach their adolescent girls the basics of menstrual hygiene” (FGD with girls in Kasikeu).*

In a previous study related to sanitary towels, the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) in Uganda observes that menstruation is the most important factor affecting school drop-out among girls. According to them, the cause lies in a combination of poverty, local customs, cultural traditions and taboos. FAWE Uganda organizes workshops to facilitate discussion and have an open dialogue in which girls and women feel free to talk about issues such as menstruation and menstrual hygiene. This has led perceptibly to a wider distribution of sanitary napkins by the retail trade, a fall in prices and a larger effective demand. It can therefore be concluded that the initiatives of involving the community members in the sanitary towel mobilization and sensitization process is likely to yield fruits toward change of attitude and increased access to pads by many girls.

#### 4.5.3 NGO campaigns

Non-governmental bodies play a significant role in provisioning of sanitary towels to schools, thus, the study established a number of faith and community-based organizations have come to partner with schools in improving the toiletries, girls' knowledge on menstrual hygiene and overall access to sanitary towels amongst the pupils.

*“There is a strong network of faith based institutions and community based organisations that have to the rescue of the girls having realized that a number of them would stay out of school for sheer lack of sanitary towels, the interventions are varied and minimal; but have contributed a big inch in making access feasible to many poor girls” (An interview with MoE official).*

*“Sometimes we receive donations from church organizations and at least that compensates for lack of funds....it helps to keep a number of us in school for a long time” (FGD with girls in Kasikeu)*

In a previous effort to sensitize the public on the interaction between education and access to sanitary towels, one of the non-governmental actors GCN launched the national sanitary towels initiative titled ‘keeping the girl child in school, empowering the future’ emphasized on the need to provide free sanitary towels to girls from disadvantaged families and backgrounds.

#### **4.5.4 Teaching life skills**

Life skills sessions for adolescent girls are held regularly in the school. Attendance is always high and the girls themselves propose topics for learning. The teachers actively participate in these forums. In the study, the uptake of life skills is seen in some schools as a way of breaking the cultural barriers and obstacles that have blurred the menstrual debate as explained by a ministry official in the interview below:

*“Life skills helps us to dig into problems that may deny these girls appropriate learning space and time such as menstruation, it is an opportunity to share experiences and also have teachers guide the process, we have found the life skills very effective in opening up girls to speak about their menses and ask for assistance” (An interview with MoE official in Kasikeu).*

*“I have come to appreciate the input of life skills in my understanding of menstrual dynamics, but even more importantly, I can now discuss with my parents and ask for money to buy pads” (An interview with a class five girl in Kasikeu).*

The findings around life skills teaching point to the need to widen the geographical coverage of the intervention within rural areas where sexual and reproductive health talk area socially censored as taboo topics. In this way, more girls and parents at large can appreciate the need to help with menstrual process and reduce its bearing on the education of girls in school.

#### **4.5.5 Re-usable sanitary towels**

Reusable sanitary towels are given to the neediest teenage girls. Reusable sanitary pads are found to help girls to stay in school full time instead of missing one week a month during their menses. The study established that schools where girls receive sanitary pads, they are more confident, more vocal, and more empowered. Moreover, stakeholders approved the adoption of these brand of towels as being both economically and environmentally convenient in places like Kasikeu where poverty prevalence rate is very high and there are hardly adequate toilet facilities to allow easy disposal of sanitary pads.

*“Reusable pads are also environmentally friendly than the disposable type and the training provided covers safe disposal and management aspects as well” (An interview with GCN official).*

*“Reusable sanitary pads is something we are working so hard to make a permanent feature of our intervention in the discourse of keeping girls in school, it is convenient and the requires just bit of training for end users” (An interview with MoE official).*

The study findings show that economic and socio-cultural barriers are so prevalent in denying girls access to sanitary towels in Kasikeu division. In particular, expense of commercial sanitary pads, lack of resources for washing such as soaps, absenteeism where girls stay at home rather than attending school, unhygienic ways to dry menstrual materials at school, inadequate waste

disposal facilities, leakage from poor quality materials and limited education for girls on menstruation are but a number of challenges identified and discussed in the study.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.0 Introduction**

This study set out to identify the challenges faced by girls in public primary schools in accessing sanitary towels in Kasikeu Division. The study also sought to determine the strategies put in place to address challenges faced by girls in public primary schools in accessing sanitary towels.

The study was guided by the social Exclusion theory advanced by Starrin et al (1999). Social exclusion attempts to make sense out of multiple deprivations and inequities experienced by people and areas, and the reinforcing effects of reduced participation, consumption, mobility and access among others.

This chapter gives a recap of the findings from data collected and presented in the previous chapter.

#### **5.1 Summary**

This study has assessed challenges facing girls in public primary schools in accessing sanitary towels. In specific, it assessed economic and social challenges faced by girls in accessing the sanitary towels while at the same time examined the strategies put in place to address the challenges that girls in primary school face in accessing sanitary towels. Economically, the study identified lack of money and the resolve to use alternative clothe rugs as pads amongst girls in Kasikeu, the expensive commercial sanitary pads and girls inaccessibility, poverty and absenteeism from school due to lack of pads. Generally, the high prevalence of poverty in Kasikeu division has constrained most girls and their parents from accessing the sanitary towels.



Socially, lack of privacy for changing menstrual materials, leakage from poor quality materials, lack of resources for washing such as soaps, limited education for girls on menstruation and the taboo nature of menstruation are found to be constraint factors in the study.

## **5.2 Conclusion**

In the study, the participants reported a great interaction between the social and economic challenges to accessing sanitary pads experienced by girls in primary schools. The study established that the average cost of commercial sanitary pads were way above the affordability of the primary school girls compounded by high poverty level in Kasikeu division, poor families lack adequate clothing that could be converted into home-made sanitary rags, lack of sanitary towels has a direct bearing on absenteeism. Similarly, the study established inadequate knowledge amongst girls and parents around menstruation hygiene management and lack of open discussion around the subject so mystified in secrecy amongst the people of Kasikeu, social ridicule from boys and inadequacy of life skills in some of the primary schools to be amongst contributing factors. The study therefore sees ministerial and non-governmental interventions; community advocacy and awareness campaigns and increased life skill teaching to have an impact in increasing access to sanitary towels.

## **5.4 Recommendations**

1. Improve accessibility, availability, affordability and acceptability of menstrual sanitary materials in rural schools through line ministries: The ministry in charge of trade to waiver taxes to reduce the retailing cost while the ministry of education should use its chain to reach rural schools with sanitary towels and increase girls' retention at school.
2. Advocate and create community awareness on sanitary towels: To make sure that menstrual sanitary material is introduced in a culturally appropriate manner

(acceptability) careful planning and involvement of actors who speak the local dialect or language, know the cultural context and have in-depth knowledge of the local customs, habits and lifestyle of girls and women is essential in Kasikeu division.

3. Encourage safe development of local sanitary towels: The development of affordable sanitary napkins and other protection materials used for menstrual hygiene of good quality, which can be produced in the developing countries. For the production of sanitary napkins the use of locally available materials (such as papyrus, sisal, etc.) must be sought and used as much as possible. Moreover, it is essential that producers of sanitary napkins are willing to transfer their advanced technology to locally established small businesses that will produce the sanitary napkins).
4. Engage with non-state actors to increase access to sanitary towels: active involvement of women's organisations and other stakeholders, such as community-based organisations (CBOs), local 'significant' women, health care staff, to ensure there is adequate supply of sanitary towels to girls in primary schools.
5. Menstrual hygiene information provision: Provide information in schools about personal and menstrual hygiene within the framework of 'comprehensive sexual education', not only to boys and girls, but also male and female teachers
6. Provide girls who are starting to menstruate or have already begun their menstruation with menstrual hygiene protection material for free or at least at an affordable price, particularly in the higher forms of primary (5 - 8), this will encourage permanent school attendance of girls and contribute to the prevention of child marriages.

## REFERENCES

- Abagi, O. (2006). In Chege, F. and Sifana, D. (Eds.), *Girls' and Women's Education in Kenya: Gender Perspectives and Trends*. UNESCO's Publication.
- Abagi, O. & G. Odipo. (1997). *Efficiency of Primary Education in Kenya: Situational Analysis and Implications for Educational Reform. Discussion Paper DP004/97*. Nairobi: Institute of Policy Analysis and Research.
- Adhikari P. (2007). *Knowledge and Practice Regarding Menstrual Hygiene in Rural Adolescent Girls of Nepal*. Kathmandu University Medical Journal, issue No. 19.
- Blanchet, T. (1987). *Meanings and rituals of birth in rural Bangladesh*. Dhaka, Bangladesh: University Press.
- Bosch, A. & Hutter, I. (2002). *Adolescent in rural Bangladesh*, *Bevolking en Gezin*, 31, 2, p. 67–94.
- FAWE (2004). *Scaling up Good Practices in Girls' Education*. FAWE, Nairobi.
- FAWE (2005). *Gender Responsive Pedagogy. Handbook for Teachers*. FAWE, Nairobi.
- FAWE Uganda (2003). *Creating Opportunities for Girls' Participation in Education in Uganda. Presentation at Transforming Spaces: Girlhood, Action and Power Conference*, Montreal, November 2003.
- FAWE (2002). *The ABC of Gender Responsive Education Policies; Guidelines for Developing a Gender Responsive Plan*. FAWE, Nairobi.

FAWE (2002). *Improving Sexual Maturation Management among Primary School Girls in five FAWEU Pilot Districts in Uganda*. FAWE, Kampala.

FAWE (2000). *In search of an Ideal School for Girls*. FAWE, Nairobi.

Kirk, J. & Sommer M. 2008. *Menstruation is on Her Mind': Girl-Centered, Holistic Thinking for School Sanitation*. New York: UNICEF.

Kirk, J. & Sommer M. 2006. *Menstruation and Body Awareness: Linking Girls' Health with Girls' Education*. Royal Tropical Institute (KIT) special on gender and health.

Kariuki, M. & E. Kakonge (2000). *Case Study on the Impact of Institutional Management of Menstruation on Girls Participation in Primary Education*. FAWE 2002- Annual Report. FAWE Nairobi.

Kanyike F. , D. Akankwasa & C. Karungi. (2004). Menstruation as a Barrier to Gender Equality in Uganda. Insights Education. <http://www.id21.org/insights/insightsed03/insights-issued03-art03.html>. Accessed 20<sup>th</sup> April 2012.

Kuper, A. (1982). *Wives for Cattle: Bridewealth and Marriage in Southern Africa*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (2005). *Kenya Education Sector Support Programme 2005-2010*. Government Printer, Nairobi.

Ministry of Planning and National Development: *Makueni District Development Plan 2008-2012*, Government Printer Nairobi.

Mugenda, Olive (2000). *An Exploratory Case Study of Sexual Maturation Process and Practices among Pupils in selected Primary Schools in Kenya*. Nairobi: Bureau of Educational Research.

Ochido O. , D. Lango & A. Kerubo : *Increasing the Safety and Dignity of Girls in Educational Institutions and in the Community: A Survey carried out in Makueni County, Eastern Kenya* (WRC Development Institute, June 2009). Nairobi: WRC-DI.

Odaga A & W. Heneveld (1995). *Girls and Schools in Sub-Saharan Africa*. The World Bank, Washington D.C.

Rob P and Chege F. (2003). *Finding our Voices: Gendered and Sexual Identities and HIV/AIDS in Education*. Nairobi: Bureau of Educational Research

Stewart L. & Mutunga P. (Eds.). *Life Skills, Menstruation and Sanitation. What's (Not) Happening in Our Schools?* Harare: WLC.

United Nations Development Fund for Women (2002). *Progress of the World's Women 2002: Gender Equality and the Millennium Development Goals*. New York: UNIFEM.

UNICEF (2005). *The State of the World's Children: Childhood under Threat*. New York.

UNICEF (2009). *No Pads, No School. Girls' Education Going Down the Toilet*. New York.

UNESCO (2003). *Gender and Education for all. The Leap to Equality. EFA Global Monitoring Report 2003/4*. Paris: UNESCO.

UN (2000). *The Millennium Development Goals*. New York: UN.

University of Oxford (2009). *Impact of the Provision of Sanitary Pads for Girls' in Developing Countries*. Saïd Business School. University of Oxford.

Republic of Kenya (2007). *Gender Policy in Education*. Nairobi: Ministry of Education.

Shangwa (2011). *A Case Study of the Girl Child and Menstrual Management*. Harare: Zimbabwe.

World Bank. (2005). *Toolkit on Hygiene, Sanitation and Water in Schools*. World Bank: Washington DC. Retrieved from: [www.schoolsanitation.org](http://www.schoolsanitation.org). Accessed 20<sup>th</sup> April 2012.

WaterAid. (2009). *Is Menstrual Hygiene and Management an Issue for Adolescent School Girls?* Nepal: WaterAid.

WaterAid. (2005). *Sanitation Provision in Benishangul-Gumuz Regional State (BGRS) Schools: Girls and Women's Experiences*. Ethiopia: WaterAid.

Zhang J, (2005). *Menstrual Experiences of Marginalized Migrant Girls*. Beijing, China.

<http://thinkafricapress.com/health/girls-education-threatened-lack-sanitary-facilities>. Accessed 18<sup>th</sup> May 2012.

<http://www.fawe.org/about/work/education/index.php>. Accessed 18th May 2012.

## Appendix 1: In-depth Interview Guide

### In-depth Interview Guide for Primary School Girls

#### General Information

1. Name (optional) : \_\_\_\_\_
2. Age (optional): \_\_\_\_\_
3. Class:
4. What is your understanding of menstruation? how is menstruation referred to in your own mother tongue?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Were you informed about menstruation before you started experiencing it?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. How is menstruation viewed in your culture? Is any there taboo about menstruation? How do you feel about that?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. Have your parents ever talked to you about menstruation & sanitary materials to be used during menstruation?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. If yes to the Q.7 above, did you ask them first or did they volunteer the information?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. What problems of menstruation do you face and how do you cope with them?(probe around stigma, pains, ridicule from boys, teachers' reactions etc)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
10. What do you use and like to use when you have your menstrual periods? (probe on where they receive the pads,. How often and at what cost)

---

---

11. How often do you change the protective material and/or the pad? Is the material reusable? How often do you wash the protective material? How many times are able to use the same protective material in a month?

---

---

12. What do you do with used protective material? (probe on re-use and disposal)

---

---

13. Does your school provide enough privacy to you when changing and disposing protective materials? (is there a special room? Where do you do this?)

---

---

14. Do you think that it is important for boys to be taught about menstruation?(please explain)

---

---

15. When you are menstruating, are you able to concentrate in class? If not why?

---

---

16. How has it been like doing examinations while you are menstruating?

---

---

17. What do you think should be done to address challenges faced by girls in public primary schools in accessing sanitary towels?

---

**Thank you for your response.**



## Appendix 2: Key Informant Interview Guide

### Interview Guide for Institutional Officials of MOEST, FAWEK and GCN

#### General Information

1. Name: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Sex:

3. Government or non-governmental organization?

---

---

#### Challenges faced by girls in public primary schools in accessing sanitary towel

4 Do you think the issue of accessibility to sanitary towels is of concern in rural public primary schools? (probe on how it interacts with learning of girls)

---

---

5. What efforts have been made by the government to address issues of access to sanitary towels for young girls in the education sector? (probe around policy issues and supply of the towels, target groups and the effectiveness of the systems in place)

---

---

6. What campaigns have you been engaged in to especially address to the issue of menstruation and accessibility to sanitary towels among primary school girls?(who are your target groups? Why this group? Are the success levels to your expectations?)

---

---

7. What has been the reaction of society (parents, colleagues, pupils, churches and teacher?)

---

---

8. What recommendations would like to see put in place by stakeholders regarding protective materials and hygiene among girls in rural public primary schools?

Parents: \_\_\_\_\_

Teachers: \_\_\_\_\_

Government: \_\_\_\_\_

Church: \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

Other:\_\_\_\_\_

9.Do you think the topics of menstruation, menstruation management and hygiene are adequately covered in primary school curriculum? Please explain

---

10.Do you think the syllabus provisions on the subjects are in line with the societal expectations?

---

11.Have you experienced any problems encountered by teachers, parents or pupils regarding menstruation related issues? If yes, please explain

---

12.Is parents/teachers interaction crucial in demystifying the stigma associated with menstruation and enabling them to be better informed and understand the needs of girls? Please Explain

---

13. What do you see as your role in ensuring that menstruating girls in rural public primary schools have access to sanitary towels and adequate latrines and water?

---

14.What recommendations would you make to the schools to create safe and friendly environments where girls discuss about menstruation related issues without fear?

---

15.Make any general observation about challenges facing accessibility to sanitary towels among girls in your school that may not have been captured in this questionnaire?\_\_\_\_\_

---

**Thank you for your response.**

### Appendix 3: Key Informant Interview Guide

#### Interview Guide for Primary School Teachers

##### General Information

1. Name of School (optional)\_\_\_\_\_

2. Sex:\_\_\_\_\_

##### Challenges faced by girls' in public primary schools in accessing sanitary towels

3. For how long have you been in this school?\_\_\_\_\_

4. What are the challenges faced by menstruating girls in your school?(within the school and community at large)

---

---

5. How does lack of access to sanitary towels affect a girl?

▪ Academically\_\_\_\_\_

---

▪ Socially\_\_\_\_\_

---

▪ Psychologically\_\_\_\_\_

---

▪ Other (Specify)\_\_\_\_\_

---

6. How adequately do you think the subjects of menstruation, management of menstruation and hygiene are covered in various subjects?(is it part of teacher-pupil discussion? How is it handled around the community? What gaps are there in this discussion? )

---

---

7. Are there clubs in your school that encourage open dialogue and give girls opportunities to share their issues without fear particularly topics on menstruation, menstruation management and hygiene? If Yes please explain

---

---

8. Has a girl ever approached you with a problem concerning menstruation that they are experiencing? How do you handle such cases?

---

---

9. What is generally observed by girls who menstruate and have difficulties in sanitary pad access?

---

---

10. Have you had an experience with girls who miss classes or fail to participate in extracurricular activities due to insufficient sanitary material to manage daily menses?

---

---

11. How did you find out that they missed classes or failed to participate in school activities due to menstruation?

---

---

12. Have you had an experience with girls who are unable to attend school due to inadequate facilities (both latrines and water), or shame caused by menstrual accidents? If Yes please explain/give example.

---

---

---

13. Have you ever reported the issue to the head teacher?

---

---

14. In your opinion whom do you think is best suited to teach menstruation management and hygiene to girls?

---

---

15. Have you ever summoned the parents to these girls that have missed classes due to menstruation related issues? (How do they handle these issues as parents or guardians?)

---

---

16. What would you do to change the societal attitude of not addressing menstruation and access to sanitary towels as a key impediment in girls' education?

---

---

17. Are there guidelines/policies in your school to provide and supply sanitary towels to girls? If yes give more details.

---

---

18. What else needs to be done to address challenges facing accessibility to sanitary towels among girls in your school?

---

---

19. In your opinion, how would you wish the challenge of lack of easy access to sanitary towels to be addressed in:

(i) School

---

---

(ii) Country

---

---

**Thank you for your response.**

## **Appendix 4: Focus Group Discussion Guide**

### **Focus Group Discussion Guide for Primary School Girls**

1. What is menstruation? How was your first experience?
2. How is menstruation viewed in your culture? Is there any taboo for menstruation? How do you feel about that?
3. What was your first menstruation experience like? Have your parents ever talked to you about menstruation & sanitary materials? (Who introduced the talk, what was the focus, were you free?)
4. Do you have access to sanitary materials? If so where do you get this from? If not how do you cope?
5. How often do you change the protective material? Is the material re-usable? How often do you wash the protective material? How many times are you able to use the same protective material in a month?
6. What do you do with used protective material? (How and where do you dispose of it?)
7. Does your school provide enough privacy to you when changing and disposing protective materials? (How is this effected?)
8. Are there separate latrines for girls and boys? How many latrines are available for girls in your school? Are the latrines enough for all the girls? Are you comfortable going to the latrines? If not why?
9. How does menstruation affect your class concentration?
10. How has it been like doing examinations while you are menstruating? (Do you think you could do better with good sanitary pads at that time?)
11. Have your teachers ever mentioned topics of menstruation outside the classroom? (What do your teachers tell you about menstruation? Where and how is explained?)
12. What are your challenges in accessing the sanitary towels?
13. What do you think should be done to address challenges faced by girls in accessing sanitary towels in public primary schools?

