



Summary

The solar recycled bag is an initiative of Smart Girls Uganda and it resulted from learnings from previous projects. The production of the solar bag provides an opportunity to recycle waste from the slum and rural areas of Uganda, while also contributing to improving the economical livelihoods of their vulnerable women who are stay home mothers, survivors of GBV, finally changing the lives of adolescent girls through improved menstrual hygiene management and opportunity to study thus increasing the chances of staying in school.

The recycled solar Smart bags are comprehensive durable and waterproof back bags made out of recycled plastic with educational programming designed with and for young people in Uganda. The bags have the tested and piloted incorporation of a solar powered lamp onto the bag to enable school kids to continue their studies at home, and also light them along the way to and back home if they go or leave school late as well as keep them safe from assault. This bag is designed for school kids aged 9 to 14 years in rural areas.

The bags for girls are sold and distributed with a pack of reusable, a pads sewing kit and a booklet with customized information for the girls, the smart bags for boys come with a booklet with content customized for them. In each bag will place in a pair of reusable masks and bottle of sanitizer.

Items on and in the bag when sold or distributed.

ITEM
Solar Bag
Reusable Pads (Eco Smart Pads)
Booklet
Reusable Masks
Pads sowing Kit (needle & Thread)
A bottle of Sanitizer

Background

In Uganda, a country where most families are below the poverty line, what seem like regular everyday occurrences in the west are quite often major issues. Every month millions of women struggle to deal with issues surrounding menstruation. Sanitary pads are simply too expensive and out of their reach. They, therefore, have no choice but to use pieces of old foam mattresses, cut blankets, old and unclean T-shirts, leaves, mud, animal skin, toilet paper, bark cloth rags and even chicken feathers instead of a sanitary towel. A culture of shame and embarrassment forces them to keep silent about this practice which is responsible for a significant proportion of illnesses and infections associated with female reproductive health. Rags that are unclean cause urinary and vaginal infection. Very often serious infections are left untreated. This is a common incident in most slum and rural areas. Menstruation management remains a daunting challenge in the life of many adolescent girls and women alike. Although various partners, mainly NGOs have provided reusable sanitary towels, a high number of young girls still don't use them because they have no sense of confidence and capability of carrying menstrual hygiene products/tools to and from school hence unable to manage their menstruation while at school. They are forced to keep out of school and be home to be able to easily access facilities to manage their menstruation.

Gender inequality remains a significant constraint to development in Uganda. Girls face discrimination right from birth, with sons preferred over girls in most societies in Uganda. Girls are often excluded from education as they are expected to focus on household chores and

caregiving for their younger siblings. A girl is most likely to be denied from attending school, forced to marry and subjected to violence and her voice undervalued. This limits their chances – disproportionately affecting the girls and eventually deprives the nation of the energy and talent they need to progress.

The introduction of universal primary education in Uganda shows that initial primary enrolment and attendance rates have increased since 2000, and are high for boys and girls from all social backgrounds, but only one third of students survive to the end of primary education as more girls drop out more rapidly than boys. Various challenges account for girls dropping out of school in Uganda. Over 35% of girls drop out of school due to early marriage and 23% drop out due to pregnancy . At times parents face financial difficulties and feel unable to take care of girls in terms of school materials, and sanitary pads. External factors such as limited support in doing school work and studying, could also lead to a loss of interest in school all together. The reality is that most homes in rural areas do not have access to light and so pupils cannot study.

Access to electricity in 2013 at national level in Uganda is very low with 15%, but only 7% in rural areas . Uganda’s electricity sector is marred with a number of challenges such as power theft, insufficient supply, geographical isolation and high infrastructure costs that have inhibited rural communities from gaining access to electricity.

SmartBag4Girls Project (History)

In 2018, the foundation was awarded a grant of USD 50,000 through the UNFPA Innovation to design, produce and distribute 5,000 menstrual hygiene packs (Smart bag). The process of distribution of the bags included educating girls on sexual reproductive health issues, self-defense, self-esteem, personal hygiene, and sanitary pads sewing lessons.

In 2019, 5,837 bags consisting of a pack of reusable Eco sanitary pads, pads making starter kit and a booklet on MHM, translated to the local language were distributed to young girls in select districts located in the rural eastern and central regions of Uganda. The districts are;- Kalungu, Kiboga, Luweero, Lwengo, Lyantonde, Masaka, Mityana, Mpigi, Mukono, Wakiso, Nakasongola, Rakai, Iganga, Bugiri, Buyende, Kamuli, Kaliro, Namutumba, Luuka, Namayingo and Mayuge.

During the distribution activities, a total of 6,347 people were reached. These mainly consisted of young girls aged between 12-17years, 508 people were parents and guardians of young girls.

The parents and guardians were engaged in sessions of teaching them about their role in ensuring properly managed menstrual hygiene for their children as a way of keeping girls in schools.

Scaling the Smart Bag

From the successful proof of concept of the Smart bag under the SmartBag4Girls project, this concept note proposes to scale up and expand the production of more quality bags, reach more vulnerable young girls in particularly refugee areas. The project is aimed at;-

- Providing low-cost menstrual hygiene management kits to young girls in refugee areas so that they better manage their menses and stay in school.
- Training and improving the menstrual hygiene management skills of young girls in refugee areas.
- Providing menstrual hygiene management facilities in schools in refugee areas
- Increasing awareness among parents, guardians and teachers in refugee schools and communities on the importance of proper menstrual hygiene management for young girls.

The Approach

Results from the proof of concept/pilot showed that the provision of the pack is a clearly accepted approach to enabling young girls to manage their menstruation better and therefore stay in school while in their menstruation. The bags are made out of African Fabric and other semi-plastic material which makes them dump-proof and attractive and appear as normal bags. However, we learned that with the use of this material, the bags were not waterproof enough for the girls to carry especially during the rainy season. Therefore, using results tested a prototype bag made out of a combination of recycled plastic and African fabric, we were

supported by UNFPA Uganda to partner with **Reform Africa**¹ to provide more durable, waterproof bags that can be used even in the rainy season.

Using existing community structures such as LCs, VHTs, and religious leaders, the project will through mobilisation and sensitisation, increase awareness among parents, guardians and teachers in the refugee schools and communities on the importance of proper menstrual hygiene management for young girls.

Deliverables from concluded project supported by UNFPA and Impact beyond UNFPA.

During the project, 1500 Smart bags and 1500 packs of reusable pads, were produced and distributed to 1500 girls in communities of refugee in central and western region districts by 2020. 1000 were recycled bags and 500 were recycled solar smart bags that were specifically distributed in Kyaka 11 refugee camp. With consultation with local leaders, these beneficiaries will be identified from primary & lower secondary schools goes as well communities for non school going girls.

The overall outcome of this project was increased and sustained attendance of school and sustainable health management by young girls in vulnerable communities. Increased awareness among rural refugee communities particularly parents, teachers and guardians on the importance of proper menstrual hygiene management as a way of ensuring girls attain their education, they are empowered and safe from violence and prevents early/child marriage and pregnancy among girls.

This concluded project also attracted more sales/support for the recycled solar smart bag from the private sector and international organizations. This year we have successfully sold and impacted 12,400 bags directly and impacted 24,800 young girls with the smart bag . That have sold as below.

NB- For sales- with bag we sale we leave a margin to make another we give out for free.

¹ A social enterprise based in Mpigi Uganda that transforms plastic waste into sustainable, waterproof and durable bags with locally sourced resources

BAG SALES 2020 SUMMARY

CLIENT	BAGS BOUGHT
Duke – UNICEF Accelerator support	2274
Gold Eagles Foundation South Africa	5200
Islam at Work Uganda	2600
Office and online sales	2151
TOTAL	12,400

With Sales we have been to employ 50 women in the slum areas of Bwaise and Kawempe, with this employment they have gotten out of situations of poverty, gender based violence, drug abuse and sex work hence with an increase of production of more bags sees us employing and empowering more women in such situations.

NOTE – We are also currently scaling impact in South Africa, Tanzania, Kenya and Ghana. This comes with the fact that UNFPA Uganda has truly mentored and supported our innovation and growth process. With more numbers we will see attraction of more support to create even greater impact.

Comparative advantage of this initiative

The Smart Bag is an affordable, durable, environmentally sound solution that is made by girls and women for girls. It is also an innovative approach that increasing knowledge and skills. The pads are long-lasting and sustainable because they are made with appropriate material. The designs are not fixed for the pads and girls are encouraged to tailor it to their own size, shape, and menstrual flow and skin type after we train them. Individuals will be able to easily repair and replace personal pads, and it is possible for some girls to create a small income by selling them if they want to. The MHM booklet also contains a menstrual calendar for the girls to track their periods. Training equipment and products from the training remain with the trainees to enable them to continue with the practice. The constructed facilities could also serve as water

points for both the school and the community. The solar bag will help eliminate school drops due to lagging behind of school work and light the home after the girls are finished with reading.

Project Goals and Objectives:

Goal: To promote school retention of girls while improving their menstrual hygiene and uplifting the livelihood of urban-rural poor women, in addition with some boys that need an access of a school bag with reproductive health information.

Objectives:

1. To increase study time and improve academic performance of school girls (primary five-primary 7) and school boys in rural areas in Uganda.
2. To improve earnings and facilitate startups for 100 urban poor and refugee women or youth indeed of work.