



SOS MENHEMA: Menstrual Hygiene Program Report

[Project delivery at Project Hope UK](#)



Table of Contents

Foreword	2
Project Overview	3
SOS MENHEMA X Project Hope UK	5
Project Objectives	5
Project Scope and Deliverables	6
Key Milestones	10
Budget Overview	11
Evaluation and Monitoring	12

Foreword

As a non-profit organisation, *Public Health en Afrique (PHA)* prides itself in working towards achieving sustainable, effective public health interventions at the grassroots level. As an organisation, we strive to achieve PHA's mission of 'Putting Africa First' in all programs and public health interventions.

As a region, Africa is plagued by various public health issues. All of these require a resilient, robust public health system. Such a system needs interventions that put the local communities first. Upon evaluation of the menstrual hygiene statistics in the African region, we learn that more than 10% of school-age African girls do not attend school during menstruation (Anbesu & Asgedom, 2023), particularly in Sub-Saharan African countries, where menstruation among school-age girls and women is a neglected issue.

Therefore, we are driven to develop a sustainable menstrual hygiene program (*SOS MENHEMA*) as one of PHA's first region-based initiatives. The PHA team designed, implemented, and delivered a program encompassing all four PHA pillars: **Environmental Health, Mental Health, Ethics and Maternal & Child Health**. Through this, the aim is to run a program that holistically addresses period poverty using the socio-ecological health model.

By publishing this report, we will give more insight into how resources were invested into the program and its impact on Project Hope UK. We are so proud of the team, mainly the volunteers and project coordinators who have expertly assisted with the delivery of this program. We are incredibly grateful to our grantor, *My Sister's Keeper Foundation (MSKF)*, for their support and partnership in making the project possible.

We look forward to future collaborations!

Project Overview

Menstrual hygiene management is a significant public health issue globally. It still faces **cultural, religious, and social** barriers in many low and middle-income countries. The critical barriers to adequate menstrual hygiene management include:

- Inadequate knowledge of menstrual hygiene management
- Lack of access to appropriate menstrual absorbents due to poverty or cultural practices
- Environmental challenges, such as access to clean water for sanitation and hygiene
- Poor infrastructural planning in schools
- Limited public health resources and funding that target women and girls

SOS-MENHEMA

The above-chosen project name, “SOS”,- evokes the need for an emergency.

“Menhema”- our shortened abbreviation for the term menstrual hygiene management.

Thus, our project name is SOS-MENHEMA.

We delivered an SOS-Menhema program in rural South Africa, from September - October 2024. The program aimed to apply the program objectives and operational activities in a small-scale population to evaluate its efficiency. The learnings from this will be used to improve the program further and deliver it on a larger scale to a broader population.

Many women and school-aged girls face limited access to vital information and resources on menstrual health, compounded by social stigma and a lack of safe hygiene practices. This lack of awareness and inadequate access to reusable menstrual products, clean water, and

sanitation negatively impacts girls' health, education, and self-esteem, especially in areas where menstruation is stigmatised (Tohit & Haque, 2024).

Facility leaders and community members often need more knowledge to provide supportive environments; culturally relevant resources are scarce (Lansing et al., 2023). Addressing this requires a community-centred approach that raises awareness, provides essential resources, and fosters open dialogues to promote menstrual and mental health while considering environmental impacts.

SOS MENHEMA X Project Hope UK

The program was run at Project Hope UK from September - October 2024

Primary Target Audience: Secondary school girls at Project Hope UK.

Secondary Target Audience: Boys, school staff, and the broader community.

Internal Stakeholders: PHA Co-Founders, PHA Team (volunteers & project co-ordinators), Palesa Pads.

External Stakeholders: Schools, the broader community, Student Families, local government, and PHA grantor.

Project Objectives

The project's primary goals for the SOS MENHEMA program

- Educate school communities on menstrual health, tackling misconceptions and stigmas surrounding menstruation.
- Distribute reusable and environmentally friendly menstrual products to girls and women in remote areas.
- Build confidence and self-esteem in participants by addressing menstrual health as a fundamental human right.
- Engage with school administrators, local leaders, and community organisations to ensure program alignment and sustained impact.
- Raise awareness of the environmental impact of disposable menstrual products, promoting sustainable choices.
- Encourage girls to advocate for menstrual health rights within their communities.

Project Scope and Deliverables

The SOS MENHEMA program aims to address period poverty and promote menstrual health awareness among young women and girls, particularly in underserved, remote communities. It will provide sustainable, reusable menstrual products to participants, empowering them with menstrual health education, environmental awareness, and community support.

The program will foster a supportive, stigma-free environment around menstrual health. SOS MENHEMA will contribute to improved health outcomes, gender equality in education, and sustainable menstrual product use.

Deliverables:

- Menstrual Health Education Sessions
 - Develop and conduct regular menstrual health workshops for schools and community groups, addressing stigma, health practices, and self-care.
- Sustainable Product Distribution:
 - Provide reusable menstrual products to all female program participants, with training on their use, hygiene, and maintenance.
- Environmental Awareness Campaigns:
 - Run campaigns in schools and communities that link menstrual health with environmental sustainability, highlighting the benefits of reusable products.
- Monitoring and Evaluation Report:
 - Track participant feedback, school attendance records, and product usage to assess program impact, documenting findings in quarterly reports.
- Program Expansion Strategy:
 - Develop a plan for scaling the program to additional schools or regions based on evaluation insights and community needs.

Focus Group

Once approval was given from the school and parents/guardians, a focus group was held on 28 September 2024. The focus group was held on Saturday, with the date and time approved by the school.

The focus group aimed to generate information on the target audience's knowledge, experiences, and views on the socio-ecological impact of menstruation on young girls, boys and their local communities. Age range was 14-16 of school-aged kids from Grade 8 - Grade 10.

When conducting the focus group session, a novel approach that tailored to the age of the target demographic included the use of ice breaker exercises that involve physical movement to encourage optimal participation from the attendees. Additionally, commonly held and popular tropes and myths concerning menstrual health and hygiene were presented by PHA members as well as brought forward by the participants in order to discuss and separate the factual evidence from the misinformed stories that commonly circulate in areas with low access to health knowledge.

Workshop

The workshop session adopted the same approach as the focus group session with the addition of health information flyers that were distributed to all participants as well as a detailed discussion concerning the contents of said pamphlets. A healthy portion of the workshop session was also spent on recapping the key events and information that was shared during the focus group session to serve as a refresher for participants who attended prior and as a starting point for the new participants who had opted to only join in the workshop session.

No pad products from Palesa Pads were purchased during this program iteration, as leftover products were available from the previous program. The workshop included handing out

reusable menstrual pads (50) to the girls who attended. The session involved gaining further insight into the following:

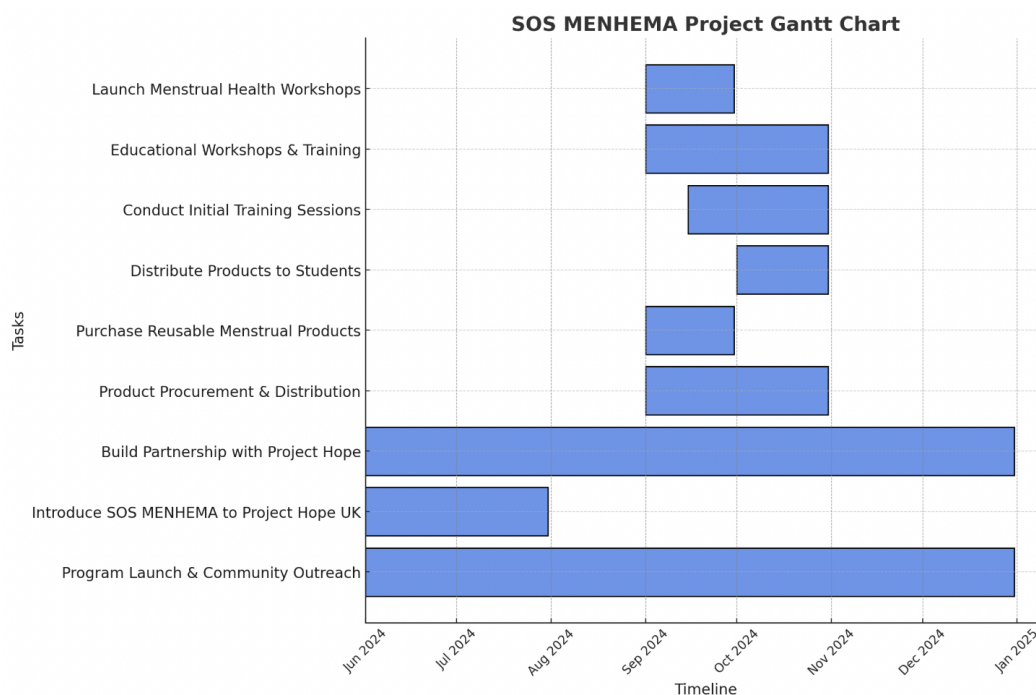
- Assessing the level of knowledge and awareness among young girls/boys and their communities regarding menstruation, menstrual hygiene, and related health issues.
- Explore the attitudes and cultural stigmas associated with menstruation in the community. Understand how these attitudes affect girls' self-esteem, social participation, and mental well-being. Understand how this indirectly affects the boys' perceptions.
- Understand the menstrual hygiene practices among young girls and women in the community. Assess if these practices are safe and hygienic. Understand the level of knowledge boys have about menstrual hygiene.
- Examine the financial implications of menstruation on girls and their families, including the cost of menstrual products and potential loss of income due to missed school or work. Understand the potential economic differences between boys and their families.
- Explore the community's ecological impact of menstrual product disposal practices. Assess whether there are sustainable and eco-friendly menstrual product options available and used.
- Identify the support systems for girls during menstruation, including the role of parents, schools, and community organisations. Evaluate the effectiveness of these support systems. Understand the current support the school currently offers these girls.

- Uncover the cultural norms and traditions related to menstruation and assess their influence on girls' experiences. Understand the impact culture has on menstrual stigma within the community.
- Seek input from participants on potential solutions or initiatives that could address the socio-ecological challenges related to menstruation in their community. What resources, programs, or changes would be most beneficial?

Key Milestones

Below is a timeline of significant project milestones:

- **Program Launch & Community Outreach (June 2024 - Ongoing):**
 - Introduce & produce SOS MENHEMA to Project Hope UK
 - Build and continue to develop a partnership with Project Hope
- **Product Procurement & Distribution (September - October 2024):**
 - Purchase an adequate amount of reusable (N = 50) menstrual products and distribute them to participating students.
 - Conduct initial training sessions on product use, care, and personal hygiene practices.
- **Educational Workshops & Training (September - October 2024):**
 - Launch menstrual health and environmental education workshops for students, teachers, and community members.



Budget Overview

Total Budget: R15,000

PHA received a grant of R2365.8 (US\$ 136.21) from *My Sister's Keeper Foundation (MSKF)* in September 2024 to support the delivery of the *SOS Menhema* project at Project Hope UK. Other contributions/donations equated to a total of R13,765 (US\$778.73) for the program's implementation. The funds received were used in totality to deliver the program effectively.

Significant Costs included the development & Printing of Menstrual Hygiene Resources, food & Drinks (Focus group & workshop) and Overhead Costs such as PHA team Travel Reimbursement, PHA team uniform (caps), project coordinator wages and Staff Police Clearance.

Evaluation and Monitoring

The project's progress and success was measured by:

- Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)
 - Number of reusable menstrual products distributed
 - Number of community members attending menstrual health focus group and workshop
 - Percentage of participants able to identify the environmental impact of disposable menstrual products
- Monitoring Method
 - The delivery of the focus group and collection of survey data

What worked well

- The holistic approach of addressing menstrual hygiene from multiple dimensions, including education, access to products, and environmental sustainability, was influential in creating a well-rounded program that addressed the diverse needs of the community.
- Collaborating with Project Hope UK provided valuable resources, expertise, and support for program implementation. They helped leverage trust with the children and provide a safe space for program implementation.
- Partnerships and collaboration within the PHA team were evident and played a significant role in the success of the program's iteration.
- Empowering young public health professionals as peer educators and advocates for menstrual hygiene was a successful strategy for promoting behaviour change and challenging menstrual stigma within the community.
- Peer educators played a crucial role in disseminating information, facilitating discussions, and promoting positive attitudes towards menstruation.

- In future iterations, more focus may be on upskilling LOCAL community leaders as advocates for young people.

Areas for Improvement

- Implementing a more robust data collection and monitoring system for ongoing assessment of program activities, outcomes, and impact.
 - Regular monitoring and evaluation will help track progress, identify challenges, and make informed decisions for program improvement.
 - In addition, communicating and streamlining these processes to the PHA team will alleviate future confusion.
- Engaging with community members, including girls, boys, school staff, and local leaders, should foster ownership and buy-in for the program.
 - Barriers such as lack of resources (personnel & funding) created obstacles to providing a widespread approach to the intervention.
- Despite efforts to reach all community members, there may be marginalised groups, such as girls from low-income families or rural areas, who face barriers to accessing program resources and services.
 - Future efforts should ensure equitable access to menstrual hygiene education and products for all girls and women, especially considering the young people who cannot afford school.
- While partnerships and collaborations were instrumental during the grant period, there is a need for long-term sustainability planning beyond the initial funding.
 - Developing sustainable funding streams, building local capacity, and institutionalising program activities within existing systems are critical for ensuring the program's continuity.
- Consideration of additional KPIs to collect in the future
 - Percentage of target population (e.g., girls in participating schools) with access to sustainable menstrual products;
 - Percentage increase in menstrual health knowledge among participants (measured through pre- and post-program surveys);

- Number of environmental awareness materials distributed or sessions held with a focus on eco-friendly menstrual solutions.
- While the pilot programs delivered in 2024 were successful in its target communities, there may be opportunities to scale up and replicate the program in other settings.
 - Documenting best practices, lessons learned, and program impact can facilitate replicating successful strategies in new contexts and communities.
- Establishing a reporting schedule to the relevant stakeholders (school and grantor) at the end of the program delivery.

References

Lansing, A. E., Romero, N. J., Siantz, E., Silva, V., Center, K., Casteel, D., & Gilmer, T.

(2023). Building trust: Leadership reflections on community empowerment and engagement in a large urban initiative. BMC public health, 23(1), 1252.

<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-023-15860-z>

Mohd Tohit, N. F., & Haque, M. (2024). Breaking the Cycle: Addressing Period Poverty as a Critical Public Health Challenge and Its Relation to Sustainable Development Goals.

Cureus, 16(6), e62499. <https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.62499>