

## PCV Lizzie works with her students to make sanitary pads.

I began my time in Uganda determined to help girls and women. While I was looking for a project that I could bring to my female students to help them, I discovered re-usable menstrual pads (rumps); a project whose sole focus is on women, and satisfies fundamental needs. Reusable menstrual pads are made from cotton materials, such as t-shirts and towels, which are used then washed and reused.

The needs addressed with reusable menstrual pads are economic, health-related and environmental. To begin, many women in Uganda cannot afford the expensive store bought sanitary pads. Since these pads are disposable, it is a constant and forever increasing expense on people who are already spread too thin financially. In comparison, reusable menstrual pads are much more affordable since they are made from locally available materials that are rather inexpensive.

When a woman is unable to afford the store bought pads, she resorts to the use of rags, toilet paper, newspaper, socks, etc. The use of these alternatives will generally lead to embarrassing leaks or infections due to the unhygienic state of the materials. Finally, reusable menstrual pads are also environmentally friendly. The disposable pads are used then thrown in the trash or down the latrine. Since these disposable pads take an extremely long time to decompose the pads generally fill up the latrine or cause clogs rendering the latrine unusable. When a disposable pad is thrown in the trash this can mean it can end up in the local lakes and rivers as well as gardens and farms.

With these needs in mind, I decided to start a program to address these issues by teaching girls and women to provide for themselves. The reusable menstrual pad program consists of a brief presentation about menstruation, a question session, a step by step walk through of the pad instructions, time for each girl to make her own pad, and finally cleaning instructions. The presentation focuses on the menstrual cycle and female reproductive body parts. During the presentation, the presenter walks through each phase of the menstrual cycle discussing the functions of the relevant body parts. Following the presentation, there is time for questions where the girls can ask about anything pertaining to female hygiene, the menstrual cycle, and any other issues the girls may face today.





Photo: Girls making Pads in class

This is an opportunity to dispel local myths about menstruation and pregnancy as well as address a topic that is rarely discussed in Uganda.

I've been able to partner with many Peace Corps volunteers across Uganda in a sustainable program that I'm proud to endorse. Through this program, I have been able to work with over 7000 girls and women. Many have become peer educators and trainers who will be able to carry on this program without my help for generations to come.