

# Tool Kit on Making Re-Usable Sanitary Pads in Uganda









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*Ending Violence, Building Power*

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## 1.0 Who We Are

### About the Women's Probono Initiative

We are a feminist not-for-profit organization based in Kampala, Uganda with a reputation of boldly advancing equity, and challenging discrimination and violence against women and girls, through advocacy and creative lawyering. Established in 2018, WPI was formed partly out of the recognition that there were hardly any female lawyers that were actively engaged in public interest litigation (PIL), even for cases that addressed the rights of women and girls. The absence of female litigators meant that male lawyers, with all their credentials, could articulate the facts, but not necessarily communicate them from a position of experience and deep understanding of the lived realities of women and girls.

In addition to providing legal

representation, in its quest to challenge patriarchy in all its forms, and at its root, WPI has delved into the research, engaged with communities, policymakers and other organizations in the women's movement to re-assess the meaning of gender equality, to highlight the centrality of sexual and reproductive health and rights to the empowerment of women and girls, to challenge the sense of complacency that has come with increased numbers of women in various positions, and to lead the call for efforts towards a new feminist agenda that champions full autonomy for women and girls.

### Our Vision

A just and equitable society where women and girls are free from all forms of discrimination and violence

## | Our Mission

To advance gender justice through promoting autonomy, voice and influence of women and girls in legislation, policy and practice.

## | Our Values

- **Accountability:** We are accountable to our clients, communities we work with and to our partners.
- **Non-discrimination** We believe in equality of all persons, and demonstrate this through our active implementation of diversity and inclusion in our clients and networks.
- **As a feminist organization,** we deliberately and consistently work to be an organization that values equity, celebrates diversity and challenges all forms of discrimination. The work is aimed at challenging power relations by centering women's voices

and agency. We therefore apply an intersectional lens in all our work. We believe women should be equipped to determine what justice is in their own terms.

- **Dignity:** We believe and uphold the dignity of all individuals, and particularly strive to create a workplace that will provide an environment in which all who encounter us are left feeling respected and treated in a dignified manner.
- **Transparency & Integrity:** We are open and transparent in all we do, and in our communication. We are particularly keen to be transparent stewards of resources that are entrusted to us for our work. We also strive to build relationships based on trust and mutual respect. We trust that our clients, partners and staff will maintain their commitment to our mission and vision, and will be held accountable to high standards in this regard. We are our sister's keeper.



## 2.0 Toolkit Overview

The purpose of this training tool kit is to provide girls and women with the skills, knowledge, and access to resources that they need to launch into sustainable Income generating activities.

The training toolkit includes modules on menstruation, menstrual hygiene and management options and steps on making reusable sanitary pads. At the completion of the training program, each participant is expected to know the steps of making reusable sanitary pad and the basic knowledge in sexual and reproductive health generally.

### 2.1 Purpose of the Toolkit

- a)** To give clear guidance and steps on how to make reusable sanitary pads in order to create more and better skilling opportunities for young people as a source for future use.
- b)** To provide information related to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in Uganda i.e. Menstrual Hygiene and Health.
- c)** To show the women and girls how to make use of the toolkits and taught how to sew the pads together as well as how the pads can be re-used.



## 3.0 Menstruation

When most people think of the menstrual cycle they think of the time in the month when a girl or women is menstruating. While this is an important part of the menstrual cycle it is only one of the four phases. During her reproductive years, a woman or girl's body is constantly experiencing a phase of the menstrual cycle. All women and girls have two ovaries. Each ovary holds hundreds of thousands of tiny eggs. When a girl begins going through puberty she will start her menstrual cycle. The menstrual cycle is the process through which the female body releases mature eggs and prepares for fertilization. The length of the average menstrual cycle is 28 days but its normal for a cycle to be anywhere between 21-35 days long

### 3.1 Phase 1: Menstrual Phase (Menstruation)

#### Day 1-7

This phase is often referred to as a period. Women and girls experience periods when their egg has not been fertilized. During the menstrual period, a woman or girl's body is shedding blood and tissue from the walls of the uterus as well as the broken-down, unfertilized egg. The bloody fluids exit the uterus through the cervix, flows into the vagina, and out of the vaginal opening. Uterine and abdominal muscles contract to push the blood and tissue out. It's this contracting that sometimes causes women and girls to feel pain and cramping in their abdomen and lower back during their menstruation.



### 3.1.0 Phase 2: Follicular Phase

#### Day 8-13

This is the time when the body sends out hormones signaling the ovaries to prepare an egg to be released. The hormones also cause the walls of the uterus to thicken, building up a soft lining of blood and tissue. If the egg is fertilized, it will implant itself into the soft uterine lining where it will develop into a fetus.

### 3.1.1 Phase 3: Ovulation

#### Day 14-20

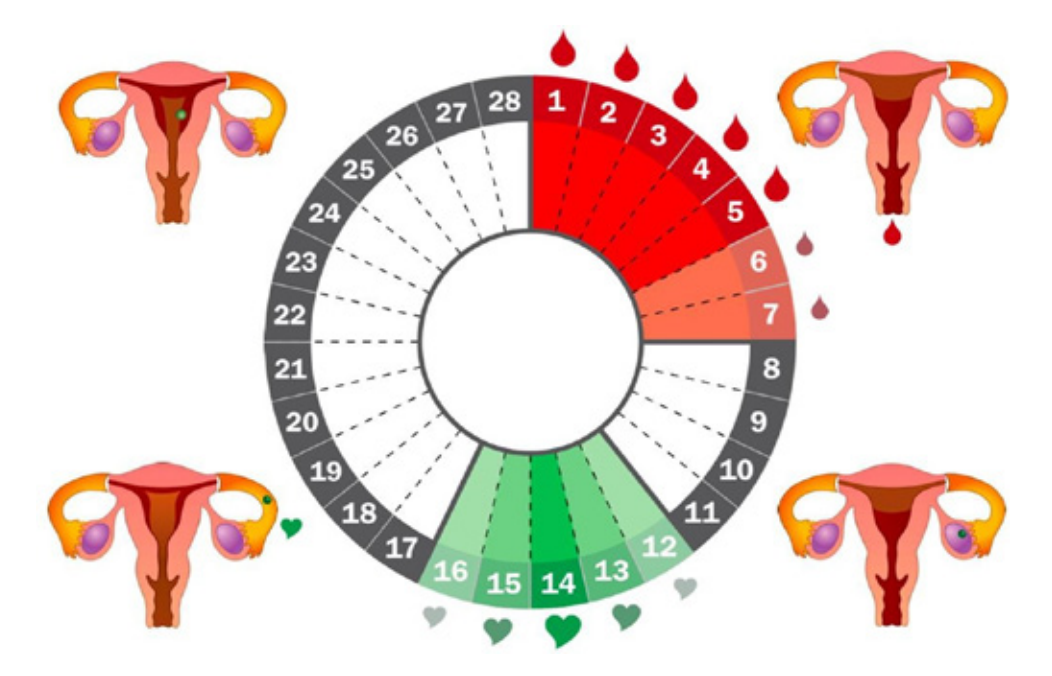
Ovulation occurs when the egg is released from the ovary into the fallopian tube and begins moving down to the

uterus. It typically takes about 5 days for the egg to reach the uterus. During this time the uterine walls continue to thicken. This is the phase when a woman or girl is most likely to get pregnant.

### 3.1.2 Phase 4: Luteal Phase

#### Day 20-28

During the luteal phase, the egg is completing its journey to the uterus. If the egg has not been fertilized it will start to break down. The extra layer of blood and tissue that had formed along the uterine walls will also begin to break down and prepare to exit the body during menstruation.



Pictorial of the menstrual phases as explained above



## 4.0 Menstruation - How Our Inside Affects Our Outsid

The menstrual cycle is normal and healthy. A woman or girl's body goes through physical and hormonal shifts throughout her cycle that can affect how she feels both emotionally and physically. By learning more about how these shifts affect women and girls, they can be more prepared.

### a) Cramping

Many women and girls experience cramping during the menstrual phase of their cycles. As mentioned earlier, during the menstrual phase the uterine and abdominal muscles contract to push the menstrual fluids out of the uterus. Similar to how our arms can feel sore after carrying heavy jerry cans from long distances, the uterine and abdominal muscles can feel tired and painful as a result of the contractions. While cramps can be very uncomfortable, they are normal and are not cause for alarm.

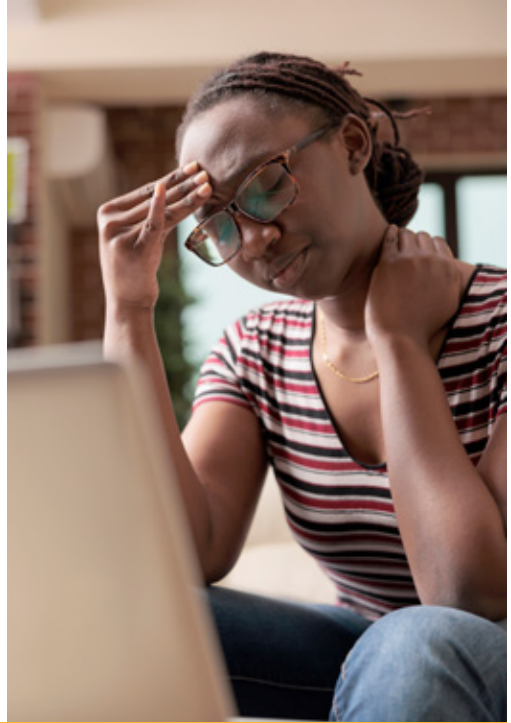
One solution to cramping is to put a smooth stone in the hot sun and then place it on your lower abdomen or back. Exercise and physical activity can also help relieve cramping. Staying hydrated by drinking lots of water is also a good way to avoid cramps. If a woman or girl is experiencing pain during her menstruation it is also safe for her to take painkillers. If a woman or girl is experiencing severe cramping and pain, she should visit a health clinic.

### b) Hormones

Women's hormonal levels fluctuate during their menstrual cycles. Hormones are natural chemicals that affect the way that we feel and how our bodies function. The fluctuation of hormones can affect girls and women in different ways. They can make her feel tired, sad, or short-tempered, increase her sex drive, or produce acne on her skin. All of this is normal and cyclical.



Some women and girls like to keep track of their menstruation to determine whether they are experiencing emotional or physical changes that are in line with their menstrual cycles. If she knows that she tends to feel tired or irritable during a certain phase of her cycle, a woman or girl can be better prepared to handle her cycle when it comes.





## 5.0 Menstrual Hygiene Management Options

Different women may choose different options for menstrual hygiene depending on comfort, preference, affordability, culture, and many other factors. Proper menstrual hygiene should always include the following:

- a) Wash hands before and after handling menstrual products & body parts
- b) Only use clean menstrual hygiene products & panties
- c) Change underwear/panties every day
- d) Change menstrual hygiene products regularly, as directed

- e) Properly dispose of all menstrual products
- f) Bathe regularly and properly throughout the menstrual cycle

### Some of the Menstrual hygiene materials include:

- a) Disposable sanitary pad
- b) Tampons
- c) Menstrual Cups
- d) Reusable pad
- e) Menstrual cloth



The disposable sanitary pad



Tampons



Menstrual Cups



Reusable/Washable Pads



## 6.0 Steps of constructing/making the Reusable Sanitary Pads

### 6.1 Element of Liner Construction



Image of unfolded and folded liners

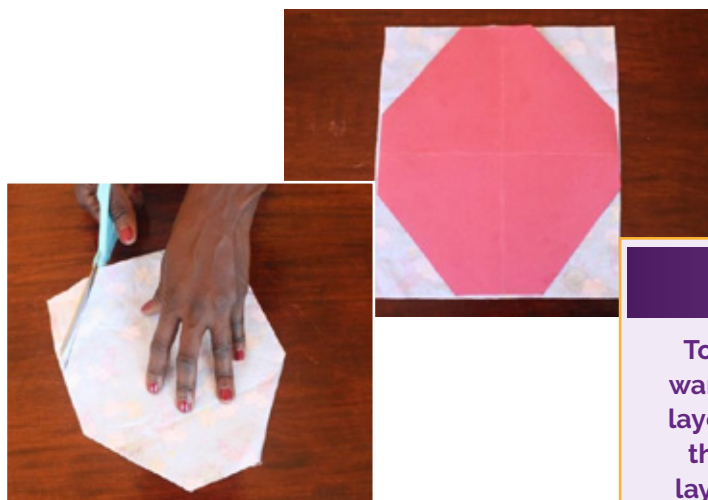
#### ❖ Step one: Cutting Liners

- 1 Lay the Absorbent Cotton out of a flat surface. You can iron it lightly if it is badly wrinkled.
- 2 Cut long strips of Absorbent Cotton 8 ¼ inches (21cm) wide.
- 3 Lay out one strip of flannel right-side facing up. Place a second strip of the absorbent Cotton on top of the first right side-side facing down.

- 4 Cut the strip of the absorbent Cotton into 9 inch pieces. Each cut will yield a double layer of  $8\frac{1}{4} \times 9$  inch (21x23 cm) piece. This is enough for one liner. Each liner requires two pieces of the absorbent Cotton.



- 5 Place the pattern template on top of the two pieces of absorbent Cotton. Ensure that the absorbent Cotton pieces are 'right-side-facing.' Cut away the triangle corners of the absorbent Cotton pieces.



### Tailor's Tip

To save time, you may want to stack additional layers of flannel and cut the corners from four layers at one time. Just be sure the cuts are accurate on all layers.

Now you're ready to sew your liner!





### Tailor's Tip

Experienced sewers can sew using a 1/8 inch seam allowance. Be sure the seam securely catches both layers

#### ❖ Step two: Sewing Liners

- 1 Using a scant 1/4 inch seam, sew around the edge of the liner. Leave a 2 inch opening for turnin. Trim a bit at corners to remove bulk

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- 2 Turn the liner right-side out. Make sure to gently push out the corners.

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- 3 Optional- Iron the liner. Ironing is recommended for three reasons: it will be easier to do the next step (edge-stitching), you can ensure the corners are fully pushed out prior to edge-stitching, and the finished piece will look nicer.

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- 4 Sew an edge-stitch around the entire liner approximately 1/8 inch from the edge. Be sure to securely stitch the edge at the two-inch opening. Examine the edge to verify a good seam all around.

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- 5 Stitch a straight stitch down the length of the liner where each of the folds will be made.



## 6.2 Element of Shield Construction



Images of a Completed Shield

### ❖ Step One: Cutting Shields

**1** To cut out the shield material, put your shield template in the corner of your fabric with the wing close to the hard edge and the pocket area close to the cut edge. Trace the template using chalk.

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**2** After you have outlined the shield shape place your template on the fabric next to the outline. You should place the template so that the wings of each shape are next to one another. Trace the shape and continue drawing the shield shape along the cut edge of the fabric.

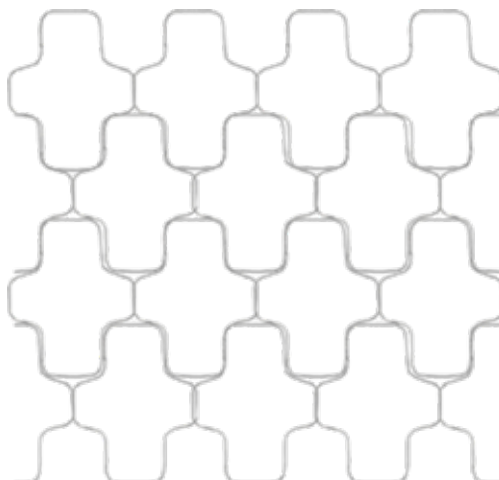
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**3** When you finish drawing that row, take your template and place it above the previous row, nesting the pocket area of the template in between the pocket areas of two of the traced shapes.

**4** Continue in this manner until you have your desired number of shield shapes. Do not forget to leave an allowance of material to cut pockets.

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**5** You should use the same tessellation method when cutting shield shapes out of the plastic. You do not have to cut pockets out of the plastic lining.





## ❖ Step Two: Preparing Pockets

The pockets are located on either end of the shield and are designed to hold the liner in place. You have two options for how to make pockets.

### Option One - Cutting Individually

- Cut each pocket individually, creating  $4\frac{1}{4} \times 5$  inch (10.8 x 12.7 cm) pieces of cotton fabric.
- Fold the piece of fabric in half to  $4\frac{1}{4} \times 2\frac{1}{2}$  inches (10.8 x 6.35 cm).
- Sew a line of stitching along the fold to add strength; place the stitches approximately  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch (0.64 cm) from the fold.



### Option Two - The Speed Method

- Cut a strip of fabric 5 inches (12.7 cm) wide by any length.
- Fold the piece of fabric in half lengthwise yielding a doubled piece measuring  $2\frac{1}{2} \times$  the original length of your fabric.
- Sew a line of stitching along the fold (approximately  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch from fold); this will strengthen the edge of the pocket.
- Then cut the strip into  $4\frac{1}{4}$  inch pieces (10.8 cm). Each piece is one pocket measuring  $4\frac{1}{4} \times 2\frac{1}{2}$  inches (10.8 x 6.35 cm).

### Tailor's Tip

The pocket width of  $4\frac{1}{4}$  inches (10.8 cm) is slightly larger than the shield width – this is intentional. The slightly wider pocket ensures it is securely sewn into the seam. Excess width will be trimmed off during shield construction

### ❖ Step three: Sewing the Shield

- 1 Start with two cotton pockets and two cotton shield pieces. Mark one of the shield pieces with a few long-basting stitches. When finished, this will be the bottom side of the shield; however, as you see in these instructions, this piece will be on top as you sew and progress through most of these steps. Watch the pictures. From this point further, this will be referred to as "The Stitch Mark."



- 2 Fold one pocket along the sewn seam and insert it between the shields (shield pieces right- sides-facing), placing the fold-edge of the pocket towards the shield-center, align the pocket with the sides and flat end of the shield. Place the second pocket at the other end. Baste along the pocket side, with a ¼ inch seam allowance as shown. We will call this piece the 'Shield Sandwich.'



- 3 Take the piece of plastic and trim it by clipping the corners of the plastic at all four pocket corners, as shown.



- 4 Lay the piece of plastic on a flat surface. Put the shield sandwich on top of the plastic with the "The Stitch Mark" showing on the top side.



- 5** Baste the plastic in place with a basting stitch in the same manner the pockets were basted. This will help you make sure that the plastic stays in place as you construct the shield. You can do this by sewing over the top of the previous basting stitches. Basting stitches must be within the  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch seam allowance or the shield will be too small.

### Tailor's Tip

Be sure not to puncture holes in the plastic other than the holes created from stitching. The plastic is a waterproof barrier that protects against leaks. If the plastic has small holes it is less effective at preventing leaks.

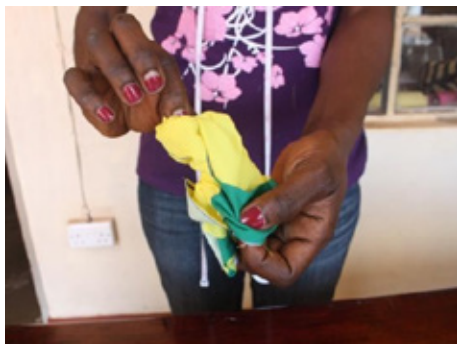
- 6** Sew down the length of each side using a  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch seam, leaving both ends open. Keep all layers flat; there should be no bubbling between layers.



- 7** Trim the seam in the entire stitched area. Do not trim in the openings at the top and bottom of the shield. Trimming is most easily done with large sewing scissors. Be careful not to cut your seam while you are trimming.



- 8 Turn the fabric right side out using your fingers to gently push out the rounded wings.



- 10 Stitch across each end of the pocket ends of the shield. Keep the ends as wide open as possible.



- 9 Fold the pockets to the bottom of the shield (the side with "The Stitch Mark"). Using your fingers, gently spread the unstitched end as wide open as possible.

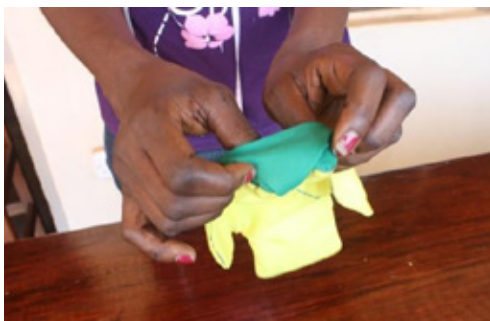
### Tailor's Tip

Remember that the shield has a layer of plastic inside in order to prevent leaks. The shield **CAN NOT** be ironed or the plastic will melt and the shield will be spoiled.



- 11 Trim the seams at the corners of the shield, as shown. Tapering decreases the bulk and, when the shield is finished, will minimize the thickness in these areas. This will give the final garment a nice, professional look.

- 12** Turn both pockets to the top of the shield (the side of the shield without the "The Stitch Mark").



- 13** Thread the sewing machine with a pretty colorful thread such as bright pink. Stitch  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch from the edge of the shield. Keep especially close to the edge all along the pocket. The pocket opening must remain as wide as possible to allow for multiple liners to be inserted at the same time.



- 14** The finished width of the pocket should be  $3 \frac{1}{2}$  inches, and the width of the opening should be  $3 \frac{1}{4}$  inches

Do an extra back-tack at the fold-edge of each pocket. Use a ruler to measure the finished shield; it should measure  $9 \frac{1}{2}$  inches long and  $7 \frac{3}{4}$  inches wide (24 x 20 cm).

- 15** The shield is now ready for the snap to be attached. Snaps are sewn onto the wings of the shield and should be centered  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch from finished edges.

- 16** Take a pencil and mark the placement of the snap before sewing. This will help ensure that your snap will close easily without putting unnecessary strain on the shield.



- 17 Ensure that the snaps are facing the right direction prior to inserting them to the wings.



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