

Menstrual Health is a Right, Not a Privilege: How Water For People Uganda is Catalysing a Period- Friendly World



Mariam and her friend Betty Nambowa strike a pose in front of the school's newly constructed improved latrine block

A daily reality with lifelong consequences

Every month, millions of girls and women in Uganda experience menstruation — a natural and healthy biological process. Yet, for many, menstruation is still accompanied by fear, silence, and struggle. It is often treated as taboo, resulting in stigma, limited access to products and facilities, and inadequate information.

Across rural Uganda and among the urban poor, the situation is dire. Girls often miss school during their periods due to inadequate menstrual hygiene facilities. Poor access to affordable products and a lack of private, clean toilets in schools contribute to absenteeism, discomfort, and embarrassment. According to UNICEF, one in ten African girls misses school during menstruation, which can add up to as much as 20% of the academic year. These missed days are not just numbers — they represent lost confidence, diminished educational outcomes, and disrupted dreams.

This silence around menstruation also impacts women in the workplace and communities. Without access to proper facilities or understanding from employers and peers, menstruation becomes a source of anxiety rather than a part of everyday life.

This must change.

As we mark Menstrual Hygiene Day on May 28, Water For People Uganda stands in solidarity with the global effort to create a world where periods are not a source of shame or limitation. The vision of a **#PeriodFriendlyWorld** goes beyond a catchphrase, it reflects a lasting commitment to equity and dignity. In such a world, menstrual health is normalized, stigma is eliminated, and everyone has the knowledge, resources, and facilities necessary to manage their periods with confidence and care.

Water For People's approach: Dignity through design

At Water For People Uganda, our work, rooted in dignity, goes beyond water and sanitation. We believe access to menstrual health and hygiene is a fundamental human right. It is not a privilege. Through partnerships with schools, communities, and local governments, we design girl-friendly toilets that include water, privacy, and safe disposal systems.

Menstrual health is often seen as a girls-only issue, but at Water For People Uganda, we also believe real change happens when everyone is involved. Through hygiene clubs and awareness activities, we actively engage boys in conversations around menstruation. This helps break down stigma and build empathy. As one pupil, Abraham Arinaitwe shared:

"I was surprised boys could be involved in activities about periods, but I'm glad we are. The incinerator has brought privacy and respect — not just for the girls, but for all of us."

By involving boys, we foster school environments where periods are understood, respected, and supported by the entire community — key to building a truly #PeriodFriendlyWorld.



Front and back view of the sanitation facility designed for girls which includes a bathroom and incinerator for Menstrual Hygiene Management

Mariam Nassanga's story



My name is Mariam Nassanga. I am 17 years old and in S.3 at Victoria Secondary School in Buikwe District. I am a Sanitary Prefect. My duty is to ensure that the school environment is clean, the students are smartly dressed, and the toilets are clean. Generally, it's all about sanitation and hygiene.

As a girl, you cannot avoid periods. I started having my periods when I was in Primary Five, so I am talking from experience. We used to dump our pads in the pit latrine, and others who were daring would put them out in the rubbish pit.

The boys would make snide remarks when they saw our pads as part of the rubbish. We would feel ashamed.

Yes, we had a bathroom, but not to this standard. When the emptiers would come to empty the toilets, they would sort out the pads and dump them in the open pit. The boys would insult us. I hate that boys would see our used pads.

The new girls' toilet is so modern it excites me; I can't wait to start using it! There are toilets, a washroom with water taps inside, and a drop hole that connects it to the incinerator. They have taught us how to dispose of our pads in the incinerator

Imagine after washing up we will no longer need to carry our used pads to the open pit, we can now throw privately into the incinerator, no one has to know that you are on your period.

I like the new facility because it makes my work as Sanitary Prefect easier. The incinerator is safe for the environment; it produces little smoke. When we have good toilets and bathrooms, it limits the chances of infections. Our health is going to be even better in the coming future.

Mariam Nassanga's story is a testament to Water For People's impact — showing how dignified toilet facilities and improved menstrual health education can empower girls not only to stay in school, but to feel proud and confident while there.

Call to action

Creating a **#PeriodFriendlyWorld** requires collective effort. Governments must prioritize menstrual hygiene in national policies and budget allocations. Schools need resources and training to provide safe, supportive environments. Civil society must continue to raise awareness, and men and boys must be included in the conversation to break harmful taboos.

Menstrual health and hygiene intersect with gender equality, education, public health, and economic empowerment. If we ignore it, we undermine progress in all these areas.

This Menstrual Hygiene Day, we ask: What kind of world do we want to build? Let it be one where no girl stays home because of her period, where no woman feels ashamed to speak openly about her menstrual health. Where products are accessible, education is universal, and facilities are safe and inclusive.

Together — with governments, educators, communities, and individuals — we can create that world. Together, we can build a **#PeriodFriendlyWorld**.

Author: Janet Olumbe



water for people
UGANDA

For more information



Water For People Uganda
Plot 15, Lugogo By Pass, Mviri Lane
P.O. Box 1420 Kampala



+256 (0) 393 216 512



uganda.waterforpeople.org