



Maji Safi Group - May 2020

## **Dining for Women Interim Progress Report**

**Organization Name:** Maji Safi Group (MSG)

**Project Title:** A Holistic Approach to Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM)

**Grant Amount:** \$49,995

**Contact Person:** Dorothy Ochieng, Director of Operations

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### **Recap briefly what outcomes the project was designed to achieve.**

The goal of Maji Safi Group's Female Hygiene Program is to empower young women in the Mara Region to become more educated and better able to contribute to the economic growth of their community. Three objectives were identified to help us reach this goal: 1) To reduce school absences and build self-confidence related to menstruation. 2) To spread awareness about MHM to reduce the stigma surrounding menstruation. 3) To provide sustainable long-term access to female WASH products.

By the end of the two-year DFW funded period, MSG will positively have impacted the education trajectory of young women by encouraging female leadership, increasing self-esteem and reducing self-reported school absences related to menstruation to 20% or less, compared to the 39% reported in our 2017 baseline survey. Additionally, this program will reach approximately 321,600 radio listeners (including repeat listeners) and create MHM murals at partnering schools to spread awareness about MHM, which will in turn help normalize menstruation and decrease stigma. MSG will provide 1,500 young women with education about MHM and provide them with either reusable pads or menstrual cups. We estimate that 50% of the program participants (750) will decide to use a menstrual cup. With the availability of different menstrual products and better understanding of their own personal health, confidence will increase among program participants.

### **Has funding changed for this project? For example, have you received unexpected funding from another source?**

Funding for Maji Safi Group's project, A Holistic Approach to Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM), has not changed. The project continues to rely on funding received from DFW, as well as funding secured from other donors.

**Is your organization or project situation different than presented in the approved proposal? For example, new executive director, significant project staffing changes or NGO affiliation, loss of large funding, or other significant changes?**

Maji Safi Group (MSG) is a US 501(c)(3) with on-the-ground operations in the Mara Region of Tanzania. Initially, on-the-ground operations were conducted through MSG registering a non-profit LLC in Tanzania in 2014. However, in July 2019, Tanzania mandated that all non-profit organizations in Tanzania either register to become Non-governmental Organizations or close their operations, as non-profit organizations would no longer be recognized under a new 2019 law. Therefore, the MSG non-profit organization that had existed for five years was registered as a Non-Governmental Organization in order to continue running on-the-ground operations. This change to our registration status will change the way that MSG reports implementation of all activities and funding to the Tanzanian government. MSG was able to successfully re-register and is now recognized as an International NGO by the government.

Additionally, in early 2020, the MSG US Board of Directors decided that there will be a decrease in funding towards WASH education projects during the year 2020 as the focus of the organization is shifting towards expanding MSG's work in Menstrual Hygiene Management and digital health campaigns. The mission of the organization will remain the same, with women still at the forefront of educating their communities about positive health habits so they can continue to adopt improved health behaviors to keep their families healthy. However, the decrease in funding resulted in a retrenchment of WASH staff members as well as reduction of programs from 14 to ten. Our Community Health Educators and management team were reduced from 36 to 20. Of the 20 employees, 80% are female.

**Have the number of beneficiaries changed? To report this please refer to the original numbers in your grant proposal under *Number of women and girls Directly Impacted and population Indirectly Impacted*.**

The number of beneficiaries has not changed. MSG's project, A Holistic Approach to Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM), had a target of directly reaching 4,242 women and girls through face-to-face lessons and indirectly reaching 81,500 through radio shows in its first year of funding. During that period, MSG directly reached 5,683 women and girls and indirectly reached 284,000 women and girls.

**What challenges are you facing as you move forward with this project? How are you approaching these challenges?**

The first year of receiving funding from DFW was successful as we worked towards reaching our overall program objectives. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we have recently been forced to re-evaluate the implementation of all our programs, especially after the Tanzanian government announced the closure of all schools. While this public health decision is crucial to saving lives in Tanzania, it does significantly affect the implementation of our program funded by DFW since school pupils and large gatherings of community members are our main target population. Until the COVID-19 pandemic ends and schools are reopened, MSG will also be unable to continue implementing our original program plan, especially those aspects that take place in schools or with large gatherings of people. Our MSG office in Tanzania is currently closed, but our management team continues to work from home.

In addition to educating Tanzanians about Menstrual Hygiene Management, MSG educates about behavior changes to improve community health, specifically in the water, sanitation, and hygiene sector. This is

highly relevant in the current pandemic, and we have now put all our organization's efforts into fighting the spread of COVID-19 in Tanzania through health education campaigns. MSGs social media accounts have reached 30,634,050 unique East African social media users (primarily Tanzanians), had a total reach of 57,732,757 over the past six weeks, had 10,839,744 interactions (likes, comments, or shares) with followers, and had 13,560,032 views on the health videos that we have posted. During this same time, we have grown our social media following on Facebook from 81,000 to 88,500 and on Instagram from 1,500 to 5,700. We are also working with the local health authorities in large-scale public announcements, radio shows, and distributing educational pamphlets to raise awareness and combat the spread of this deadly virus. We are continuously monitoring the status of the COVID-19 pandemic and are committed to ensuring that we do our utmost to fulfill our commitment to DFW and to our Tanzanian community.

**Have you revised your original objectives since the project began? If so, why? What are your new objectives?**

Maji Safi Group has not revised the original objectives since our project began. However, due to the challenges mentioned above related to the COVID-19 pandemic, we are unsure if we can reach our original objectives. We are exploring new ways that we can promote our Menstrual Hygiene Management program during these unprecedented times.

**What progress have you made toward achieving your objectives? Please address each stated objective.**

Three objectives were identified to help Maji Safi Group's Female Hygiene Program reach its goal of empowering young women in the Mara Region of Tanzania to become more educated and better able to contribute to the economic growth of their community: 1) To reduce school absences and build self-confidence related to menstruation, 2) To spread awareness about Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) to reduce the stigma surrounding menstruation, and 3) To provide sustainable long-term access to female WASH products.

To reduce school absences and build self-confidence related to menstruation, MSG's Female Hygiene Program expanded our reach to primary and secondary school students in six wards throughout the Mara Region. This expansion was made possible by the funds received from Dining for Women to support our Female Hygiene Program and impact the lives of girls and women. MSG was able to teach 525 girls about MHM so they would have the knowledge, confidence, and menstrual supplies to continue attending school even while menstruating. Five hundred and twenty-five girls received education and mentoring weekly throughout the year, an educational booklet with information about puberty, and their choice of a reusable menstrual product – either a menstrual cup or a kit with reusable menstrual pads. School Health Clubs were concurrently established at two additional schools.

MSG spread awareness about MHM to reduce the stigma surrounding menstruation through hosting radio shows, painting MHM-related educational murals, and hosting public educational events aimed at engaging the community. Raising awareness about the use of menstrual cups was a highlight of spreading awareness about MHM. MSG increased the frequency and reach of female hygiene radio shows by airing 48 radio shows reaching a total of 284,000 listeners. Eight of the radio shows were aired at Rorya FM, which estimates their listenership to be 3,500 listeners per show, while 40 of the shows were aired at Sachita FM, which estimates their listenership to be 6,400 listeners per show. Two murals with MHM

content were painted on primary and secondary school walls visible to students and community members. These murals are used as educational tools and continue to spread awareness and reduce associated stigma about MHM.

Public events in which our program participants showcased their knowledge and taught their communities about MHM and other related topics were hosted throughout the year, reaching 1,732 community members. MSG also hosted a weeklong seminar held by Tanzanian Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) National Trainers from the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education. Many community stakeholders participated, including government officials, schoolteachers, and other partners, to learn about different aspects of MHM and how to teach MHM in schools and to community members. This was a very successful and popular seminar as all attendees returned to their communities equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to educate others about MHM and other topics related to female hygiene.

To provide sustainable long-term access to female WASH products, MSG incorporated menstrual cups into our Female Hygiene Program to give participants more sustainable and cost-effective options for MHM. We showcased menstrual cups in our curriculum, health clubs, educational murals, radio shows and live events throughout the year. The students in our Female Hygiene Program had already been exposed to learning about new menstrual products, such as menstrual cups and reusable menstrual pads, but with funding from DFW, MSG was able to offer interested students a supply of the product they wanted to use. The first step in accomplishing this was by our Community Health Educators first hosting information sessions with students and their guardians. When parents and teachers receive the same education about the benefits and challenges of menstrual cups as the students, they are more likely to support and encourage their girls to use their menstrual cups. When parents or teachers do not receive this same education, they can easily influence girls to not use them. Reusable menstrual products, such as menstrual cups and washable pads were discussed, and all questions were answered. Students who were interested in using either product received their product of choice. Those students will participate in focus group discussions throughout the school year facilitated by MSG's Community Health Educators and complete an assessment survey at the end of the DFW funding period to learn more about their experiences, the challenges, and the benefits they encountered while using the products. During this reporting period, 525 girls received their choice of either a menstrual cup or a kit with reusable menstrual pads.

**Do you anticipate any difficulties in completing your project in the timeframe outlined in your proposal?**

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, our MSG office in Tanzania is currently closed, but our management team continues to work from home. School pupils and large gatherings of community members are our main target population; therefore, implementation of our program has greatly been affected. Reported confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Tanzania are currently at 509, but there is a lot of uncertainty about the full extent of the pandemic's effects and how long it will continue to affect Tanzania. Until the COVID-19 pandemic ends, schools reopen, and community gatherings are encouraged, MSG will also be unable to continue implementing our program, especially the aspects that take place in schools or with large gatherings of people.