



# TOGETHER WOMEN RISE

Collective action for global gender equality

**Final Report January 2019 - July 2021**

## **'A Holistic Approach to Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM)'**



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

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### **Female Hygiene Program Overview:**

Maji Safi Group (MSG) officially started its Female Hygiene Program in 2013 after identifying the challenges girls and women face during menstruation in rural areas of Tanzania. One major aim of the program is to reduce menstruation-related absences of school-aged girls and thus enable them to reach their academic and professional dreams. MSG also recognized the need to involve boys and men in the discussion of MHM to reduce the stigma and cultural taboos that typically surround female hygiene; hence our School Health Clubs involve both boys and girls. The main focus of our Female Hygiene Program in schools is to tackle the following challenges:

- (i) Menstruation-related taboos
- (ii) Lack of proper education and information about menstruation and women's health
- (iii) Lack of menstrual products
- (iv) Lack of safe places to dispose of used menstrual products
- (v) Gender Equality



## **Project Impact Overview:**

This grant identified three objectives to help Maji Safi Group's Female Hygiene Program reach its goal of empowering young women in the Mara Region of Tanzania to be more educated about menstrual hygiene management (MHM) and better able to reach their goals and contribute to the economic growth of their community:

- (i) To reduce school absences and build self-confidence related to menstruation,
- (ii) To spread awareness about Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) to reduce the stigma surrounding menstruation, and
- (iii) To provide sustainable, long-term access to female WASH products.

To accomplish the first objective of reducing school absences and building self-confidence related to menstruation, MSG's Female Hygiene Program expanded its reach over the past two and a half years to primary and secondary school students in six wards throughout the Rorya District. This expansion was made possible by the funds received from Together Women Rise (TWR) to support our Female Hygiene Program and impact the lives of girls and women. MSG taught 765 girls about MHM, so they would have the knowledge, confidence, and menstrual supplies to continue attending school while menstruating. All 765 girls received education and mentoring weekly throughout the grant period, 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 eight additional schools – five were secondary schools (Bukama, Bukura, Ngasaro, Raranya and Sarungi Secondary School), and three were primary schools (Bwiri, Kinyenche and Kirongwe Primary School). Each School Health Club has a relatively small number of students to ensure that they receive instruction in an environment that is conducive to learning. After interested students had been identified at each school with the help of teachers, parents were notified. MSG then hosted a club-opening ceremony where WASH-related supplies (hand-washing buckets, soap, water storage containers, chlorine tablets, etc.) were presented, and the purpose of the School Health Club was explained to teachers, parents, and the selected students. The School Health Clubs are responsible for buying and replenishing WASH supplies and for teaching additional students through peer teaching.

To accomplish the second objective, 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 has been a highlight of spreading awareness about MHM. MSG increased the frequency and reach of female hygiene radio shows by airing 48 radio shows reaching 284,000 listeners in 2019. 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. In 2020, MSG stopped working with Rorya FM and instead moved to the much larger Bunda FM, which operates in eight regions (Mara, Simiyu, Mwanza, Kagera, Shinyanga, Tabora, Singida, and Katavi) with an estimated listenership reach of over eight million people. In total, MSG aired 29 female hygiene and COVID-19 radio shows in 2020 reaching an estimated 254,400 listeners. Twenty-one at Sachita FM with an estimated listenership of 6,400 per show and eight at Bunda FM with an estimated listenership of 15,000 per show. So, in total, MSG reached an



estimated 538,400 people through radio shows in 2019 and 2020. Four 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 were also used throughout the project in which our program participants showcased their knowledge and taught their communities about MHM and other related topics. This enabled the cross-generational sharing of knowledge to reach a total of 2,424 community members across four events in 2019 and one event in 2020.

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 civil-society partners. Participants learned about different aspects of MHM and teaching MHM in schools and to community members. This was a very successful and popular seminar as all attendees returned to their communities equipped with a district-wide plan and the knowledge and skills necessary to educate others about MHM and other topics related to female hygiene. It is important to note that in 2020, we were largely unable to hold community events due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but in April we identified that women and girls were disproportionately being affected by COVID-19. In response, we aggressively began teaching them how to prevent the spread of the disease and how to practice proper menstrual hygiene management during the pandemic. In accordance with social distancing protocols, lessons were taught to approximately 12,200 community members in 56 villages through loudspeakers and educational handouts.

Finally, to accomplish the third goal of providing 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, school health clubs, educational murals, radio shows, and live events throughout the year. The students in our Female Hygiene Program had already learned about new menstrual products, such as menstrual cups and reusable menstrual pads, but with funding from TWR, MSG was able to offer interested students a supply of the product they wanted to use. A critical step was for our Community Health Educators to host informational sessions about these products with teachers, students, parents, and guardians.

The purpose of involving parents, guardians, and teachers was to increase support, so they would encourage their girls to use menstrual cups. When parents, guardians, 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 during these sessions, and all questions were answered. Students who were interested in using either product received their product of choice. Those students participated in focal group discussions facilitated by MSG's Community Health Educators throughout the school year and completed an assessment survey at the end of the TWR funding period. This survey focused on learning more about their experiences, the challenges, and the benefits they encountered while using the different products. During the grant period, 765 girls received their choice of either a menstrual cup or a kit with reusable menstrual pads.



## **Measuring and Monitoring Success:**

Despite the challenges that came with the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the number of beneficiaries reached during the grant period did not change. The project had a target of directly reaching 4,242 women and girls through in-person lessons and indirectly reaching 81,500 through radio shows in its first year of funding (2019). During that period, MSG directly reached 5,683 women and girls and indirectly reached 284,000 women and girls. In the second year of funding (2020), we aimed to directly reach 5,748 women and girls through in-person lessons and indirectly reach 82,500 through radio shows. During that period, MSG directly reached 5,236 women and girls with MHM education. In addition, we indirectly reached 254,400 women and girls through radio shows with dramas about MHM and COVID-19.

In addition to educating Tanzanians about Menstrual Hygiene Management, MSG also teaches about disease prevention and behavioral changes to improve personal and public health. This education became even more relevant during the current pandemic, and for several months at the start of the pandemic, we put all our organization's efforts into health education campaigns to help fight the spread of COVID-19 in Tanzania. In the early months of the pandemic, MSG's social media accounts reached 40,686,432 unique East African social media users (primarily Tanzanians). MSG had 3,549,321 interactions (likes, comments, or shares) with followers as well as 15,433,649 views on the health videos we posted. During this same time, we grew our social media following on Facebook from 81,000 to 113,598 and our following on Instagram from 1,500 to 18,700. During our COVID-19 response, we also worked with the local health authorities to make large-scale public announcements, broadcast radio shows, and distribute 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 TWR and to our Tanzanian community.

MSG has continued to strengthen our collaboration with various partners, including menstrual product companies such as Saalt Cups, Anuflo Cups, Afripads, and Reliefline. We also continue to be a valuable stakeholder in the national MHM coalition and its task forces. The coalition works towards getting the government to recognize and prioritize MHM in Tanzania, especially in schools. Through the task force, MSG participated in a nation-wide research report called "Menstrual Health and Hygiene among Schoolgirls in Tanzania". The report was published in June 2021 through collaboration between UNICEF and the Ministry of Health. MSG received wide-scale recognition for our work from the government and other organizations that consider MSG a thought-leader and innovator in educating communities and providing access to MHM products, especially menstrual cups and reusable pads.

### **Menstrual Cup Student Survey:**

Twenty-nine girls from four secondary schools participating in our Female Hygiene Program were interviewed in April 2021 for the final survey about their preference for menstrual cups. Girls were eligible for participating if they had received a menstrual cup as their product of choice during the project. Ninety-seven percent of the respondents who were given the cup had started using it, and eighty-three percent had used the cup more than twice. Seventy-nine percent of the respondents



preferred to continue using menstrual cups for their monthly menstruation because they preferred the comfort the cup brings. Most respondents also stated that since they started using menstrual cups, their confidence had increased as they could participate in all school and community activity without the fear of staining themselves or someone knowing they were menstruating. Finally, the respondents stated that they preferred cups as those don't require too much water for cleaning. In addition, ninety percent of the respondents said they would recommend and had been recommending menstrual cups to other girls.

#### Female Hygiene Health Club Survey:

In March 2021, an end-line survey was completed in eight schools: Tina's Pre and Primary School, Majengo Primary School, Sota Primary school, and Kirongwe Primary School as well as four secondary schools: Bukura, Tai, Raranya and Katuru. Among the eight School Health Clubs, the highest number of club participants was 50, while the lowest number was 10. In total, 39 students participated in the survey from the seven health clubs. Over 70% of the health clubs had a school matron or patron involved in the club. Some proved to have a good relationship with their matron/patrons, which was an improvement from before we started the clubs. Additionally, most of the respondents (36) reported that their clubs had a meeting once a week, while three reported to have a meeting once a month.

Unfortunately, most of the schools that were surveyed still do not have a changing room for girls to use while they are menstruating. Furthermore, only two schools (Katuru and Kirongwe) have shown an effort to establish, repair, or maintain their changing rooms. Kirongwe Primary School has started building a changing room that is now in the final stages of construction. While Katuru Secondary School has an operating changing room, it is old and in disrepair. Among all seven Female Hygiene Clubs, none of them showed to be fully sustainable after MSG has moved on to other schools. Most responses mentioned that the clubs might not be sustainable because of:

- (a) Insufficient budget to allow for purchasing emergency pads for students
- (b) Insufficient funds to build or renovate a changing room for girls
- (c) School Health Club members often don't teach new students about proper MHM when they join.
- (d) School matrons or patrons do not participate well with students, especially regarding club activities that promote sustainability.

#### Important Lesson Learned:

Through the TWR project of introducing menstrual cups to young girls and women in a rural Tanzanian setting, we have learned that we must continue to raise awareness about MHM until the stigma is reduced and community interest increases. Additionally, as more girls and community members are exposed to a variety of menstrual products, we have learned that most people prefer reusable and environmentally friendly menstrual products because they are more cost-effective than disposable menstrual products. Additionally, most girls prefer reusable sanitary pads to menstrual cups, but the girls feel that both products have helped in raising their confidence and enabled them to participate in all school and community activity without the fear, anxiety, and embarrassment of soiling



outer garments or being teased. These positive effects ultimately impacted the educational trajectory of the young girls, as they felt more encouraged and capable of attending school during menstruation. However, girls still face an uphill battle. Despite the efforts and advocacy done through the project, the community and local government still lack the will to provide proper changing rooms with sufficient privacy for girls. Additionally, schools need better water supply on the premises and at their latrines. The lack of these WASH services hinders some girls' ability to stay in school for the entire day as they can't change or clean their materials if needed.

### **Challenges and Unexpected Events:**

The first year (2019) of receiving funding from TWR was successful as we worked towards reaching our overall program objectives. In 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we were forced to reevaluate the implementation of all our programs, especially after the Tanzanian government closed all schools in the country from May to July 2020. Maji Safi Group also closed its Tanzania office from March 19 to July 1, 2020. During this time, staff members worked from home. While this public health decision was crucial to saving lives in Tanzania, it significantly affected the implementation of our program funded by TWR since school pupils and large gatherings of community members are our main target populations. When schools reopened, we were able to restart our school program; however, we were unable to hold large community events and meetings as planned.

In July 2019, the government mandated that all non-profit organizations in Tanzania must register as International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) or close their operations. This affected MSG as our on-the-ground operations were conducted through a Tanzanian non-profit LLC registered in 2014. MSG reregistered successfully and is now recognized as an International NGO (INGO) by the government.

Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic presented unique challenges to our staff and forced some administrative changes within the organization. Dorothy Ochieng, MSG Director of Operations, evacuated back to the United States in March 2021 and then transitioned out of our organization. To fill this gap, MSG was lucky to hire Rachel Stephen for the position. Rachel is a Tanzanian native and came from Plan International's MHM project in Dodoma, Tanzania. She has 10 years of experience with working in community development and WASH in East Africa and is a national trainer of Menstrual Hygiene Management.

### **Personal Stories:**

- My name is Tina Odoyo, and I am a secondary school student in a Maji Safi menstruation health club. I have been part of the club for the last three years. I have learned a lot as part of the club, and I now feel confident to teach my sisters and junior girl friends about the changes they will experience and how to take care of themselves. This information is very important. This year has been very hard for everyone with the corona. Our school closed suddenly, and while at first it felt like a vacation, later, things became very hard. Many of the girls in my neighborhood couldn't get products for their periods because their families didn't have money. Others received unwanted attention from boys and men. Me and other girls from my club met to listen



to the Maji Safi radio shows and talk about the lessons. We also tried to help our friends with their problems. We talked to them about how best to stay clean and safe. I was so happy to have a product that is reusable, so I didn't have problems during the time we were closed down.

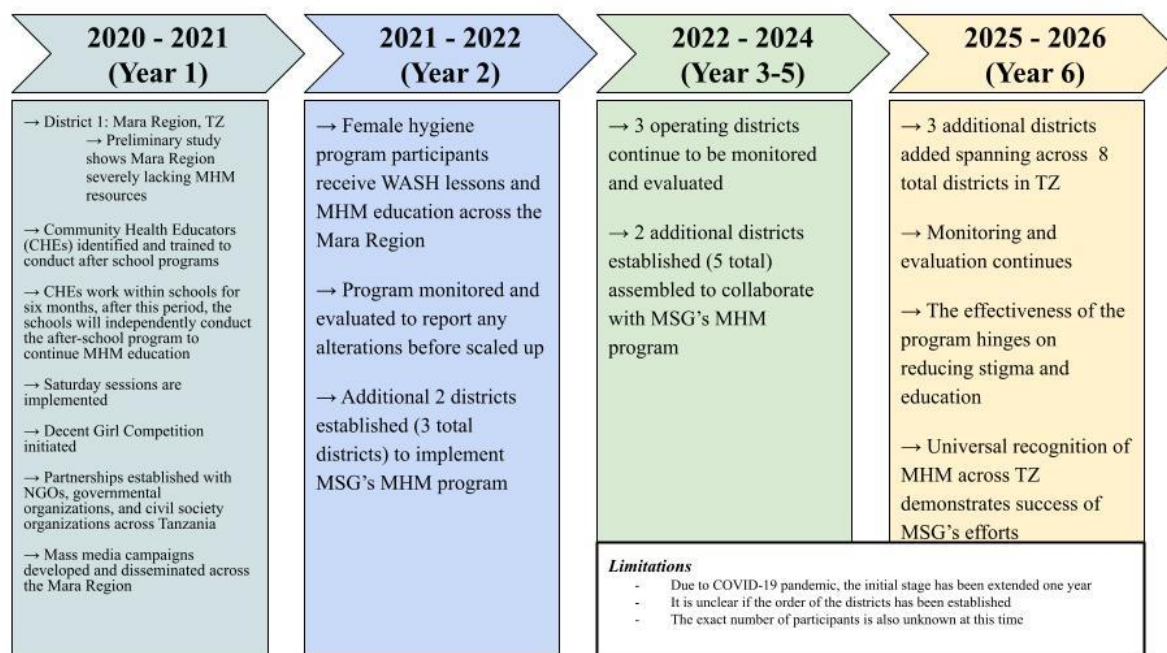
- “My name is Tatu Oliech. I am 16 years old and in my last year of secondary school. I started learning from Maji Safi Group in 2016. I come to the Female Hygiene Program every Saturday, so that I can learn more about personal hygiene while menstruating. We are taught a lot of other things as well, such as types of menstrual products to use, like tampons, reusable cloths, AFRIpads, and menstrual cups. I received a menstrual cup from MSG recently. I really like this menstrual product option because it gives me confidence when I wear it. I feel free to do my regular house chores and anything else. Even when I am at school, I can focus on my studies and play with my peers without worrying about leaking blood on my skirt or my pad smelling when I am on my period! The greatest benefit of the menstrual cup is that it is reusable for up to 10 years.”

### **Future Plans:**

MSG is planning to continue, and expand, the Female Hygiene Program as one of our four focus areas in our 2021-2025 strategic plan. We hope to use the lessons we have learned in the Rorya District to scale our school health club model to a regional level (eight districts). In 2021, we aim to advocate for MHM among government leaders at a regional level, conduct awareness raising activities (such as radio shows and community events), and establish school health clubs in two new districts. Our goal is to prove that our model is adaptable to other rural environments and cultures.







## Media:

- [Dropbox Folder with Pictures](#)
- Videos:
  - [Female Hygiene Program Overview](#)
  - [Interview with Female Hygiene Participant](#)