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The Potential of the RUBY Cup

“Before I got the cup, I found it really difficult when I was in my period to go to school. I really feared shame if I was seated and the blood can smell. Really, I had that fear. But since I received the cup, I can put on the cup and it can just hold the blood. It cannot come out and spill everywhere, and I can even change my cup at school.”

**Beneficiary, Imvepi
(female student)**

CARE International and WoMena Uganda conducted a menstrual cup (MC) pilot implementation project in Imvepi Refugee Settlement, funded by European Union Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid (ECHO). This is the second pilot that WoMena has conducted on the use of menstrual cups (the Ruby Cup brand) with refugee women in Uganda. Based on findings from previous studies and Menstrual Health Management (MHM) projects conducted by WoMena, the project’s goal was to improve the capacity of female beneficiaries to safely and effectively manage their menstruation with a menstrual cup called “Ruby Cup”, and to improve general knowledge and perceptions around menstruation in the community. The pilot was integrated into CARE’s existing gender-based violence sector support programs in West Nile and was prompted by evidence of a strong linkage between Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) and Gender based violence (GBV) in various CARE assessments.



The Menstrual Diaries

The women and girls in the pilot kept menstrual diaries where they documented their experience using the Ruby Cup.



The Entries

- **87%** of women and girls reported using the menstrual cup consistently throughout the 3-month trial period.
- **94%** of respondents said they felt “very satisfied” with the comfort of using the Ruby Cup.
- Mastering insertion is a process, WoMena normally recommend at least six menstrual cycles because it takes time to get used to the cup and to master the techniques of inserting and removing.
- Practise makes perfect as the women got more used to the cup, they started using it more consistently.
- Data from the menstrual diaries show a decline in participants reporting feeling bad when using the menstrual cup, last entries reported feeling either “good” or “very good” when using the cup.
- Women started feeling more comfortable and stated that they cannot feel it when wearing it.

The Resource Best Choice

“When using cloth pads I had to use a lot of water because the water would get dirty fast from blood. Then I had to wait for it to dry which could take up to two days, meaning I had to really think ahead how I would manage when that was drying. Now with the Ruby Cup I can just wash with a little water during my cycle and at the end I boil to disinfect it.”



Saving money: Many of the women narrated that they used to sell a part of their food ration to buy disposable pads, some not only for themselves but for other female family members. The total saved over 1 year is **102,800UGX (approx \$27.40)**. Now they could save that money or food ration.



Water Use: Beneficiaries also reported the Ruby Cup uses significantly less water for cleaning than Reusable Menstrual Pads and cloth pads.

The Ruby Cup also requires less personal cleaning as the cup is collected in the vaginal cavity and very little, if any, leaks out. This means less water is needed for personal cleanliness and bathing.



1 Litre (33oz) of water is needed to boil and disinfect the Cup once per cycle, whereas reusable pads and cloth pads can take up to **15 Litres** of water each day per pad to ensure all blood has been washed out and the cloth is clean.



ECO Friendly: “As women our periods have an impact on the environment , sometimes we burn pads or bury them this cant be good for the environment.”

Reduced substantial waste compared to pads that are made from cotton which is a nutrient and water thirsty plant.



Freedom: Women could wear what they wanted and did not have to worry about potential leaks or exposure of pads or re usable mesntrual pad. Women have the confidence to talk about menstruation with family members and friends since the project started.



Joy: Women are happy to be able to do normal activities during their periods while wearing the cup, they are doing house work, going to school, walking long distances, biking and playing football.



Resilience: One of the women reported that she normally experiences her menstruation during every food distribution and had been getting wounds due to walking long distances to food distribution points and queuing long to receive her food ratio, now with the use of the menstrual cup, she feels very comfortable and can travel to distributions without fear of odour, stains, or sores.



Comfort: Women can also move freely and comfortably with the cup. Women were not missing out on important social events.



Security: Women felt free and confident and are no longer constantly checking themselves in case of stains.

Hygiene: Women loved the easy hygiene steps including:



Washing hands with soap before and after.



Inserting and removing the cup.



Wash the cup with with soap when emptying cup and boil the cup between periods.



Keeping the cup clean in a bag or tin in a clean place.

“More women want to use the Ruby Cup”

Recommendations for Scale-Up



Time

Seeing that it takes practice to become a comfortable and confident menstrual cup user, we recommend 6-12 months as an optimal follow up period for project participants to try out their cups.



Engaging the power holders

Local, traditional, religious and community leaders, both male and female, should be actively engaged and encourage men and boys to support women and girls during their menstrual cycle and in general hygiene.



More education and sensitization

Education and sensitization of the menstrual cup is an important priority. Women and girls, preferably separated within their different age groups, community leaders, men and boys need to be educated about the use and importance of the cup.

Education on the difference between menstrual cups and birth control as well as breaking down myths and cultural perception.



Access

Increase access to the Ruby Cup for more women and girls.

Increase access to information about how to use the ruby cup in preferred languages.

The pilot was integrated into CARE’s existing gender-based violence sector support programs in West Nile and was prompted by evidence of a strong linkage between Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) and Gender Based Violence (GBV) in various CARE assessments. CARE collected information on refugee girls engaging in transactional sex to buy pads. Married women reported being beaten by their husbands because they cut blankets to manage their periods. Many report how the lack of MHM options prevents women and girls from “living” normally as they have to “sit in the sand” and wait when they have their periods. This pilot provided 80 refugee women and girls of reproductive age with a MHM kit (including menstrual cups) and training on MHM and menstrual cup use. The age composition ranged from the ages of 15-30 years old; (25 were adolescents ages 15-18, 41 were 19-25 years, and 34 women were 26-30 years). In addition, 20 females received specialised training to become trainers.