

School: University of Florida **Title:** Uman Na Power! (Woman is Power!) **Country:** Sierra Leone
Project Leader (UF): Khadija Kamara **Team Members (UF):** Sena Tamaklo
Project Date Range: July-Aug. '19

Abstract: Khadija Kamara has worked with We Yone Child Foundation (WYCF) in distributing school supplies to children attending We Yone School Kroo Bay for two years. She learned about their current reusable menstrual pad distribution program in the at-risk community of George Brook and of WYCF's aspirations to expand to Kroo Bay slums. Our team works with Days for Girls in Gainesville, Florida and decided to link these organizations to expand outreach and achieve mutual goals. Our team of three first generation West African-Americans will start a Days for Girls (DfG) reusable pad enterprise in Kroo Bay Slum, Freetown, Sierra Leone. Days for Girls Kroo Bay (DfGKB) will distribute reusable pads to girls attending secondary schools and discuss related topics (like menstruation) in an engaging and conversational manner with both boys and girls. We will increase community engagement by recruiting local women and men from community locales (churches and mosques) for our "Uman Na Power" (Woman is Power) celebration of womanhood that will discuss typically taboo topics and provide DfG reusable pads at subsidized prices. Our "Sabi U Uman" (Do You Know Your Women?) celebration for men will encourage conversations about menstruation.

Context: Within the last three decades, Sierra Leone has experienced a gruesome ten-year civil war, widespread Ebola outbreak and consistent natural disasters that left poor infrastructure and health outcomes. Consequently, Sierra Leone ranked 184 out of 189 in the UN Development Index and has a national literacy rate of 48.1% with the youth female illiteracy at 63.4%. Reproductive health is a major factor in girls' education due to the restrictions it imposes on educational advancement. Emory University's female empowerment project, "WASH", assessed menstrual hygiene management in Sierra Leonean schools and found 50% of females drop out of school due to poor sanitation and menstrual hygiene. Disposable pads are problematic financially and environmentally in Sierra Leone. A pack of 7-10 disposable pads cost approximately \$1.50. This is financially unsustainable given that 72 percent of the population are living on less than \$1 per day. Additionally, Sierra Leone has weak trash disposal infrastructure, leaving few ways to dispose of menstrual pads efficiently. Lack of resources cause many to use unsafe substitutes for pads that cause infections. Our project will empower women and girls in Sierra Leone to take charge of their reproductive health, continue their education and ultimately follow their dreams and aspirations.

Partnerships: WYCF has two primary schools located in George Brook and Kroo Bay. They were having issues with girls not coming to school on time because of "illness" due to menstruation. WYCF decided to empower their students. They networked, bought sewing machines and established a reusable pad manufacturing center at George Brook. WYCF wants to expand their reusable pad initiative to Kroo Bay. WYCF is committed to destigmatizing menstruation by teaching boys and girls about it. DfG is an NGO that empowers girls and women by providing long lasting reusable pads and sexual education. DfG has agreed that WYCF may use their educational materials to educate girls in schools. DfG's reusable pad kits include a waterproof underwear shield, liners, underwear, and washcloth. DfG pads have been distributed effectively in 127 countries including Sierra Leone. Since our team members are West African women and Certified Ambassadors of Women's Health, this project has a special place in our hearts. We frequently contact WYCF staff who have supported the trajectory of our project given their connection with the Kroo Bay community. Currently we are looking for extra funds through sponsorships and grants. These will be used to cover some travel expenses and as a safety net for other issues that might arise.

Phase 1: Educating and Equipping Project Implementers (December 2018-April 2019):

Our team will learn to make DfG reusable pads by volunteering weekly at DfG Gainesville. We will follow research protocols to conduct community focus groups under the guidance of Dr. Sarah McKune. In the meantime, each team member will continue project development. Sena Tamaklo will coordinate reusable pad dispersals and Khadija Kamara will organize focus groups. WYCF will complete the DfG enterprise establishment process and the team will recruit eight men and women to work at DfGKB. Additionally, the

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WYCF team will fundraise for DfGKB building costs and secure a location for DfGKB, making them the owners of the building.

Phase 2: Launching of Days for Girls Kroo Bay Enterprise (early July)

Our team will be self-funded in Sierra Leone for a month. We will assist with a two-week training prior to Kroo Bay's official launch to ensure quality and resolve concerns. The third and fourth weeks we are there, we will begin to manufacture the pads and get them up to DfG gold standard. To ensure DfGKB is sustainable financially and in outreach capability, reusable pads will be sold to local women at subsidized costs. Our target consumers are local and rural women, college girls, women's centers and hospitals. We plan to reach these women via popular national media outlets, local billboards, radio adverts, and community outreach. DfGKB will create jobs and income for staff who sew and sell pads.

Phase 3: Community Empowerment Celebrations (End June-Early July 2019)

We will introduce reusable pads to Kroo Bay women and men via community celebrations entitled "Uman Na Power" and "Sabi U Uman". The "Uman Na Power" celebration will target women and older women of the community. This community event will serve food and have a DJ. The central focus of this event is celebrating women and their bodies by providing health information and selling reusable pads. This event will occur at WYCF Kroo Bay's community center in the last week we are in Sierra Leone. We will recruit in the same manner we recruited in Phase 2.

Phase 4: Educating and Empowering Adolescents via Dispersals and Educational Presentations

DfG has premade culturally sensitive education materials for presentations to Secondary School (ages 15-18) and Junior Secondary School (ages 12-15) girls and boys. We will disperse free reusable pads to Secondary School female students and teachers, especially in the rural sector. DfGKB will continue to distribute free reusable pads once every four months to new Secondary Schools after we depart from Sierra Leone, allowing time to make new reusable pads. These pads can last up to four years. We will employ local adverts to reach local women during these dispersals in community spaces. During the four-month waiting period between pad dispersals, DfGKB will hold 2-3 educational presentations at boys' Secondary Schools.

Monitoring and Evaluation: Throughout our project, we will have evaluation points that will assess our general approach. We will ask WYCF staff, DfGKB staff, Secondary School girls and local Kroo Bay women verbally or through an evaluation form before, during and after our project for questions or concerns. We plan to recruit 50 women from "Uman Na Power" to take part in subsequent focus groups for feedback on the reusable pads. There will be four focus groups of 10-15 women in each group conducted with the help of minute takers, timekeepers, recorders, and community health care workers. This research will give us knowledge of barriers these women endure, useful to WYCF and DfG.

Challenges We Anticipate: Kroo Bay DfG staff must complete online trainings to become Ambassadors of Women's Health (AWH). Inadequate internet access hinders training completion. To overcome this barrier, staff will use WYCF's strong office WIFI to complete trainings. Teaching students about sensitive topics is also difficult so DfGKB staff will meet with each school's principal and send notes home to parents prior to educational presentations.

Benefits: Project Uman Na Power promotes peace by empowering girls to remain in school, increasing national literacy rates, likelihood of grade promotion, etc. It will destigmatize menstruation in the community and build local capacity by hiring community members and providing vocational training for making reusable pads. As West African-Americans with long term goals of supporting West Africa medically, this project enriches us academically and personally. The project is near and dear to our hearts given our deep seated personal and familial connections. We will arduously work to ensure the success of Project Uman Na Power with resilience, dedication, and passion.