



## Livingstone Tanzania Trust Menstrual Hygiene Management



### 64 Girls

Completed our MHM Pilot Programme



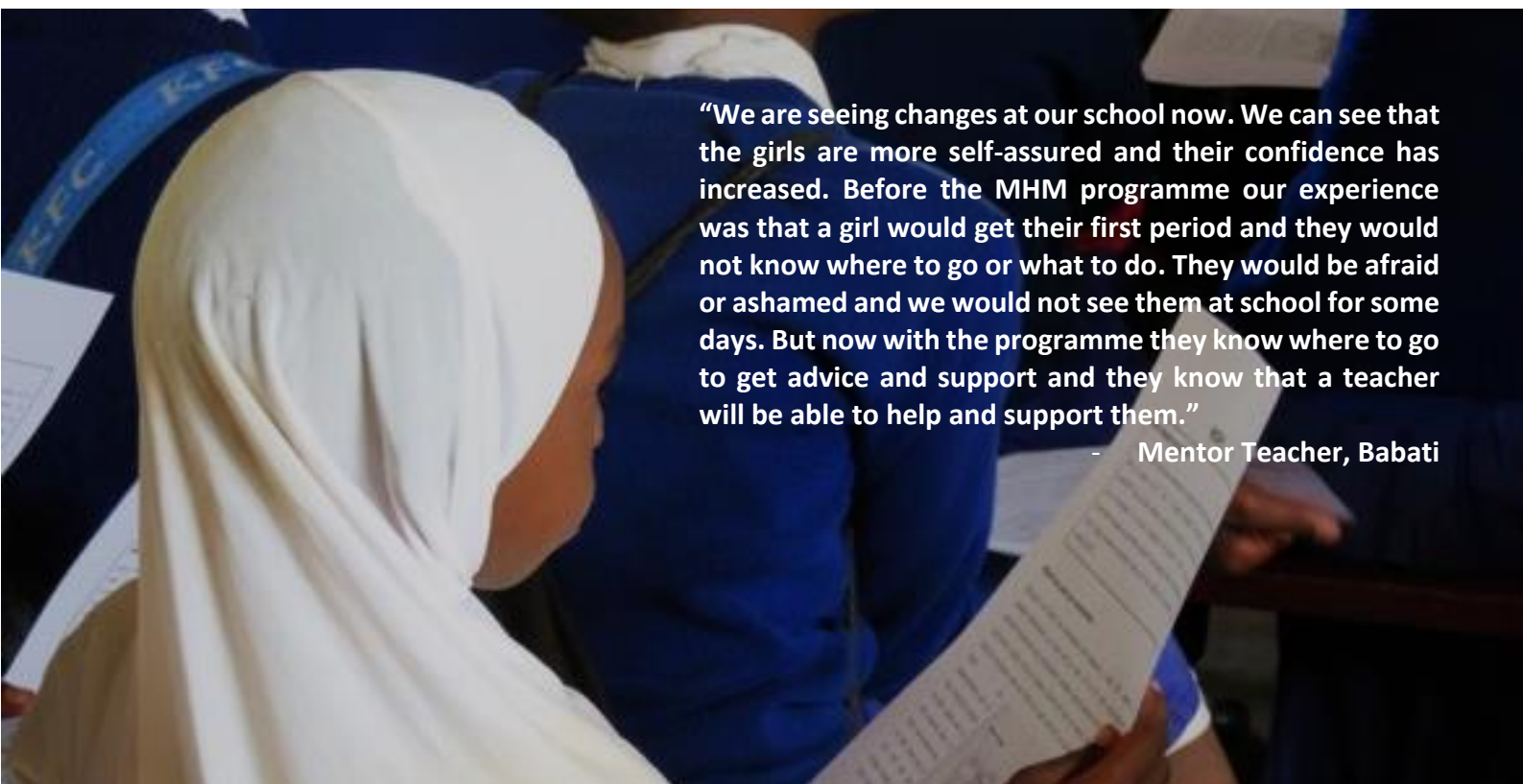
### 88%

Of girls reported feeling confident participating in classes as normal during their periods after completing the programme



### 90%

Of girls improved their knowledge on MHM and puberty through participating in the programme



**“We are seeing changes at our school now. We can see that the girls are more self-assured and their confidence has increased. Before the MHM programme our experience was that a girl would get their first period and they would not know where to go or what to do. They would be afraid or ashamed and we would not see them at school for some days. But now with the programme they know where to go to get advice and support and they know that a teacher will be able to help and support them.”**

**- Mentor Teacher, Babati**

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## The Importance of addressing Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM)

Menstruation is a natural, normal, and healthy process, yet across the world misinformation, stigma and secrecy continue to jeopardise girls' health and their ability to grow up confidently and well informed. In Tanzania only 1 in 4 girls has heard about menstruation before their first period and most girls lack basic knowledge about anatomy, menstruation and sexual and reproductive health<sup>1</sup>. This lack of information is perpetuated by the stigma and taboos surrounding menstruation, creating a culture of secrecy and resulting in girls feeling ashamed and uncomfortable talking to their family, friends or teachers about menstrual issues.

Our research in Babati highlighted the impact these factors have on girls' experience of menstruation and on their expectations of themselves. Just 15% of girls felt confident talking to those they trust about menstruation, resulting in girls adopting as fact many of the myths that are associated with menstruation. For example, 77% of girls believed it was harmful to run or dance during your period and girls told us about feeling unclean, embarrassed and ashamed as a result of starting their periods. It was particularly concerning to learn that 56% of girls believed you should avoid school during menstruation. This illustrates the hugely negative impact that barriers to MHM can have on girls as they grow up.

Officially, Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) is taught in schools in Tanzania. However, in practice, girls are unlikely to participate in any formal education on SRH or MHM. Support provided to girls tends to be limited to one-to-one discussions about using sanitary pads if a girl starts her period and ad-hoc information passed on by adults, often perpetuating misconceptions amongst women and girls.

Alongside a lack of education, the absence of gender inclusive WASH<sup>2</sup> facilities is a major barrier to MHM, particularly at schools. Issues of poor water access, privacy and hygiene make girls feel uncomfortable and self-conscious, often resulting in girls missing class time in order to change their pads at home or avoiding changing their pads at all, increasing their risks of urogenital infections.

The lack of education, combined with menstrual shame and poor sanitation facilities creates major barriers for girls, impacting confidence, self-esteem, development, attainment and ultimately affecting the long-term quality of life of women and girls.

## LTT's Integrated MHM Programme

Our programme for primary schools, developed in collaboration with local stakeholders, combines three main elements: education, safe spaces for conversations, and gender sensitive WASH facilities.

The programme aims to contribute to improved confidence, well-being and better health and educational outcomes for girls in Babati by focusing on:

- increasing knowledge and awareness about MHM and puberty,
- breaking down taboos, and
- creating enabling environments for girls to thrive at school.

## Programme Overview

The curriculum was developed in partnership with the local education authorities, mothers from the communities LTT works in, the local Girl Guides Association, Headteachers and teaching staff from local schools. This has ensured that material is relevant, relatable and appropriate for delivery in government primary schools in Babati as well as helping to build support for the programme locally. Through this process

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<sup>1</sup> Irise (2018) [www.irisie.org.uk/reports](http://www.irisie.org.uk/reports) & SNV (2014) Baseline Indicators on MHM in School

<sup>2</sup> WASH – Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

phraseology was adapted to be more contextually appropriate and to address perceptions that simply talking about puberty and reproduction would encourage promiscuity amongst young people.

The curriculum provides comprehensive, clear, and accurate information covering the following topics:

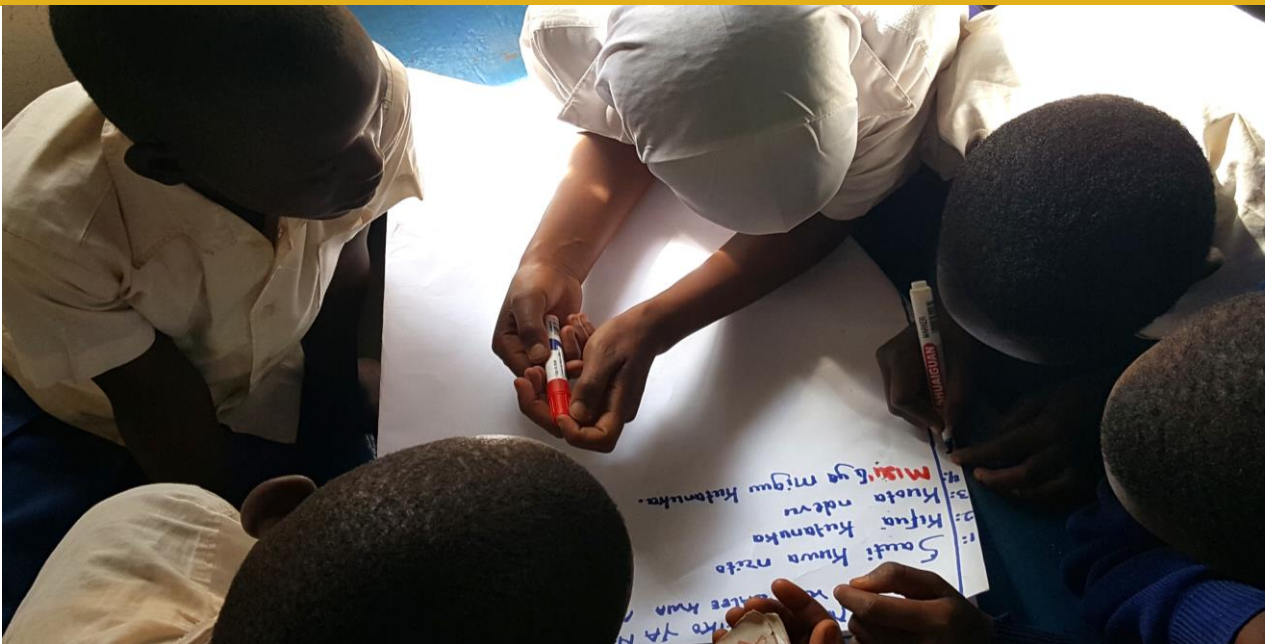
- The physical, social, and emotional changes that young people go through during puberty
- Menstruation and the reproductive cycle
- Myths, taboos, misinformation and accessing support
- Managing menstruation and safe use of menstrual products
- Supportive behaviour
- Gender roles and aspirations

The curriculum intentionally goes beyond MHM, discussing gender norms, rights and girls' aspirations for the future to support the empowerment of girls in school.

The curriculum is delivered over 10 weeks through Girl's Clubs and interactive workshops where the ground rules are co-created by the facilitator and the girls themselves. These safe spaces are vital for open and honest discussions and mutual support.

**“These sessions help girls to feel more open and to talk when there are problems. People should feel free and starting these conversations here helps people to feel more open and not to hide the difficult things”**

**-Mentor Teacher, Babati**



Girls Club Activities, Pilot School, Babati

The programme also focuses on raising awareness with teachers, parents, and boys so that misinformation can be corrected, and the challenges faced by girls are understood. By openly talking about these rarely discussed, often taboo and of course sensitive subjects attitudes and behaviour patterns can be changed and the shame or embarrassment felt by girls will disappear.

**“Before I had not seen that I needed to be aware about menstruation, it was an issue only for the female teachers and my only effort would be to tell a girl student to talk to one of the female teachers if I noticed a problem in class. Now I see that I need to consider my actions more and be more ready to support our students.”**

**-Male Teacher, Babati**

## Gender Inclusive WASH Facilities

The majority of sanitation and hygiene facilities in schools in Tanzania are not suitable for the specific needs of girls during menstruation. The cubicles are often too small to allow for movement when changing, there are no shelves or hooks to hang up clothes, the doors often do not close or lock properly and the facilities may be too dirty for girls to feel comfortable changing their pads. In addition, facilities lack privacy or safe disposal systems and often don't have access to water, making it impossible for girls to wash their bodies, clothes or reusable menstrual cloths. These factors compromise a girl's privacy, safety and dignity, particularly during menstruation.

Adjustments to existing WASH facilities are designed, in collaboration with girls in participating schools, to incorporate: an enlarged cubicle, allowing for changing menstrual products; a sloping floor with a drain to enable washing; wash basins to enable girls to wash their hands, clothes or menstrual cloths privately; an incinerator, accessible from within the cubicle, to safely dispose of used menstrual products; tiled floors and lower walls, to make the cubicle easier to clean and keep hygienic and a wall surrounding the toilet block to ensure privacy. In each school the girls adapt these changes to address the specific challenges they see in their schools. In addition, schools are provided with an emergency starter kit of sanitary pads to ensure essential menstrual products are available to girls when they need them.

**“The programme has been so useful to our young people. Now the girls have more knowledge and now they understand themselves better. They now have improved self-understanding and understand well about menstruation. We see the benefits to the girls every day in their activities at school”**

-Teacher, Babati

## Intended Outcomes

LTT will conduct pre and post programme evaluations using a combination of surveys, interviews, group discussion and observations to explore changes in girls' understanding and awareness and to assess how the creation of supportive environments for girls at school has contributed to changes in girls' self-confidence.

We would expect to see the girls gain significant increases in knowledge and understanding on

- puberty and menstrual health
- how to look after themselves during their period
- identifying false information about menstruation
- menstrual hygiene products and how to use them safely

In addition, we would expect to see greater confidence in the girls, seeing them share their knowledge with other younger girls, greater attentiveness in class and less absenteeism.

We would also expect to see teachers, parents and boys to have increased knowledge and understanding on

- puberty and menstruation
- how to support girls during their period
- identifying false information about menstruation

**“I now see menstruation as normal and a natural part of growing up, before I was thinking it was a disease, I was afraid and thought that you needed to see a doctor if you got it”**

-Student, Babati



The toilet facilities at schools will be adapted to meet the needs of the girls by ensuring access to safe, private and hygienic places for girls to safely manage their periods, enabling girls to feel more comfortable and at ease at school. Emergency supplies of menstrual products will be available, and replenishment will be being managed by the school.



Transforming WASH facilities for girls – Komoto Secondary School

### A story from a teacher

“Before the programme our experience was that as a girl started her period she did not know where to go or who to talk to, to get help, but now with the programme they know where to go for advice and support and they know that that person will be able to support them. Let me give you an example.

Last month a girl started her period unexpectedly and because of the sessions she’s been attending she went straight to find Kiera, the mentor teacher in our school, Kiera was able to talk to her openly and give her fresh pads, showing her how to properly fit them to her underwear and explaining about how often to change them. The girl was then able to sort herself and go back into class without anyone else needing to know what was going on. When the teacher returned to the classroom the girl was comfortable and was carrying on in the lesson as though nothing had happened.

This is a big change. Before she would have gone home straightaway, maybe making an excuse about being sick, and then she might not come back to school for a couple of days.

Because the support, advice and pads were there, she was able to stay at school and be ok. Girls don’t need to worry; they know there are people they can talk to whom they can trust and so it can be private rather than secrets and shame.

The girls are also better at supporting one another. In my class last week, I noticed a girl lending her fellow student a sweater and at the end of the class they went together to find Kiera. She had started her period and had a small leak on her skirt but with her friends support no-one else in the class noticed. The girls are now being ambassadors to one another. “