ANNUAL REPORT

Prepared by the I Am a Girl team
ABOUT US

In 2019, our founder Kirabo Grace Desire was running a small farm on the outskirts of Mbarara in Western Uganda. She was fortunate to have a natural well on her land. The surrounding community was vulnerable, so she opened up the well for anyone to fetch water freely. One weekday afternoon, she was checking on the animals on the farm and found a young girl fetching water from the well.

She immediately sensed discomfort, unhappiness, and sadness on the young girl’s face. She decided to greet her, and in conversation, Desire asked why the young girl was not in school. The girl responded with teary eyes, explaining that she could not attend school because she was on her period and her mother could not afford pads. Her father was also pestering the mom to let her get married since she was supposedly old enough.

Desire asked the young girl to take her to her home. She spoke to her mother, who explained that she did not have any income and the husband was responsible for finances in the house. She showed the one cow in the compound that they had just received in the recent marriage of their older daughter, who was 15 at the time.

The mother, like the daughter, was heartbroken. Desire was heartbroken. She immediately set her mind to providing pads and menstrual care to girls, so they can stay in school and avoid being married off so young. She knew there were many more girls in need.
WHERE ARE WE?

Mbale is one of the most poverty-stricken regions in Uganda, where 43% of residents live below the poverty line. It is also estimated that 30% of girls miss school because they lack the resources to care for their menstrual days. Furthermore, many girls are forced into child marriages or transactional sex to support their family’s financial wellbeing. Over half of girls in Mbale have experienced gender-based violence (GBV) in their lifetimes. We aim to mitigate instances of GBV by increasing women’s access to opportunities, menstrual health education, mentorship, and intimate partner violence (IPV) resources.

WHAT DO WE DO?

I am a Girl’s mission is to eradicate household poverty and build healthier communities by empowering women with the tools to recognize their worth, care for their menstrual days, and ensure they stay in school.

- Reusable pad workshops
- Group counseling
- Village savings groups
- Women’s clinic
In 2021, it was difficult to reach schools during the Uganda COVID-19 lockdown. Many schools were closed for a significant period of time. We felt this program was too critical to put on pause, so we turned to out-of-school networks. We trained group facilitators on mental health and menstrual hygiene so they could each lead small groups of girls in their villages. There were five leaders, each with a group of 10 girls that they worked with for three months. We called these groups Care Groups, and they not only increased menstruation knowledge but built community and encouragement amongst young vulnerable girls.

Our reusable pad program is conducted in classrooms, where we can reach the largest audience of girls and boys. We teach each student how to sew a reusable pad, while simultaneously educating them on menstrual hygiene and gender stereotypes. Through this program we are able to reduce menstruation stigma, leading to higher rates of school attendance for girls.

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Mental health is a critical I Am A Girl initiative that we plan on expanding in 2022. In our survey conducted in March 2021, we found the majority of the community we serve suffers from psychological distress. While our six month assessment concluded that psychological distress was improved by our programs, we still have a long way to go to improve mental health in and around Mbale.

Through the Care Group program, we found a significant qualitative and quantitative improvement with the girls we serve. Our leaders were trained in Psychological First Aid, and as the program continued we saw the girls open up and work together to improve life circumstances. We hope to continue these programs and hire a full time mental health specialist in 2022 as part of our women’s wellness clinic.
Once the groups were properly formed, we brought in a basket weaving artist, to teach the women how to make their own baskets that they could later sell in the market. We have since sold approximately 150 baskets, bringing in $1,000 for these women and continuing our programs.

Two of the groups received 50 chickens, to be raised by the group collectively and as a means of income generation when they began producing eggs. We also trained the women on farming in small spaces, as they generally do not have access to a significant portion of land. In 2022 we plan on expanding these services to include beekeeping.

At the one year anniversary of each group, they will be eligible for small business loans. These loans will be managed by I Am A Girl but built on the collaboration and savings of each individual group. Each group will ultimately be self-sustaining.

The women’s wellness program is central to our programming as we move forward as an organization. The women’s wellness clinic will provide critical sexual and reproductive health services, and is considered an expansion of the programs we already provide in menstrual health and mental health. We are excited to bring the women’s wellness clinic to the women and girls of Mbale.
COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT

The community assessment presents the survey data from the I am a Girl follow-up survey, conducted six months following the I Am a Girl activity. A total of 217 people participated in data collection through random sampling. We gathered the data in September 2021.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

MENTAL HEALTH

BELIEFS ABOUT MENSTRUATION

CURRENT MENSTRUAL HYGIENE PRACTICES

GENDER NORMS

EXPERIENCES OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE
DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

- Participants were primarily women and girls (77%)
- Participants were mainly from Doko
- Most participants were ages 22 to 36
- The majority of female participants never completed primary school (61%)

Participants were mainly from Doko
- Bukonde 25%
- Doko 39%
- Jewa 26%
- Nabisolo 10%

- Ages 15-21
  - 166 girls
  - 49 boys

- Ages 22-36
  - 0 to 50
  - 100 to 150

- 26 girls never attended school
- 74 girls attended some primary school
- 52 girls completed primary school
- 11 girls attended some secondary school
The majority of women, 53%, reported no income. Women and girls who participated in IAG programs had increased access to clean water, medical treatment, and funds to cover school expenses.

Reported periods of not having enough clean water to use over the past six months

- Before the program: 64%
- After the program: 42%

Reported not being able to access medical treatment over the past six months

- Before the program: 79%
- After the program: 59%

Reported going without school expenses for fees, uniforms, or books over the past six months

- Before the program: 92%
- After the program: 48%
MENTAL HEALTH

At baseline, 77% of our sample met the criteria for severe psychological distress. Six months later, and only 41% meet the same criteria.*

*The Kessler-6 asks participants how frequently they have experienced specific symptoms in the past thirty days and presents a consistent range of responses ranging from “1 – All of the time” to “5 – None of the time”. The scale shows consistency across multiple socio-demographic variables and has been used previously in Uganda. Scores on this scale are summed for a total ranging from 0-30. A score of 6-18 indicates there is probably no severe mental illness, while a score of 19-30 indicates severe distress consistent with a diagnosis of severe depression and/or anxiety disorder.

DEVELOPING COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

In 2021, IAG implemented a community leader training program, where community leaders were equipped with the skills and materials to host a series of workshops with school-aged girls, including the following topics:

- What does it mean to be a girl?
- How can you navigate peer relationships?
- What is mental health, and what can you do when you feel sad?
- Menstrual health and hygiene
- How to make a reusable sanitary pad
- Goal setting and time management
BELIEFS ABOUT MENSTRUATION

Respondents assessed beliefs about menstruation in this study. Expressly, all respondents indicated whether specific statements were true or false. The **gold bar below shows the number of respondents who believed the statement to be true at baseline. The blue bar shows the respondents who believed the statement to be true at follow-up.**

- 66% of respondents believed menstruation is a disease at baseline, and at follow up 20% believed menstruation is a disease.
- 27% of respondents believed pregnant women menstruate at baseline, and at follow up 12% believed pregnant women menstruate.
- 33% of respondents believed menstrual blood comes from the stomach where food is digested at baseline, and at follow up 29% believed menstrual blood comes from the stomach.
- 72% of respondents believed that menstrual blood comes from the womb at baseline, and at follow up 23% believed menstrual blood comes from the womb.
- 63% of respondents believed that menstrual blood contains harmful substances at baseline, and at follow up 23% believed menstrual blood contains toxic substances.
- 70% of respondents believed that pain during menstruation is unhealthy at baseline, and at follow up 28% believed pain during menstruation is unhealthy.
- 55% of respondents believed that it is harmful to a woman’s body if she runs or dances during her period at baseline. At follow-up, 16% thought that it is harmful to a woman’s body if she runs or dances during her period at follow-up.
I know how to sew my own reusable menstrual products

Baseline

Yes 8%

No 92%

After IAG Programs

Yes 94%

No 6%

TEACHING GIRLS AND WOMEN HOW TO MAKE REUSABLE PADS

The foundation of IAG programs is our reusable pad workshop. We believe that all girls and women should have access to reusable menstrual hygiene supplies, no matter their income or background. We also believe that anything we provide should be sustainable.

Our reusable pad program has shown remarkable success. When we first started I Am a Girl, 92% of community members did not know how to make reusable pads. 74% of girls had missed school because of their period. And 61% reported being teased or bullied.

Six months later, 94% of our beneficiaries know how to make reusable pads, and 100% use them! Furthermore, only 38% missed school because of their period - a drastic reduction!
MENSTRUAL HYGIENE PRACTICES

Have you bought disposable sanitary pads from the shop in the past six months?

- Baseline: No 78%, Yes 22%
- After IAG Programs: No 72%, Yes 28%

Have you ever wanted to buy disposable sanitary pads from the shop but could not?

- Baseline: No 88%, Yes 12%
- After IAG Programs: No 35%, Yes 65%

I have used reusable sanitary pads in the past six months.

- Baseline: No 1%, Yes 99%
- After IAG Programs: No 56%, Yes 100%

My school has facilities for changing menstrual products.

- Baseline: No 99%, Yes 1%
- After IAG Programs: No 44%, Yes 56%
We see the value of growing our business through social media. We will place our efforts in growing our follower base and engaging our audience.

**MENSTRUAL HYGIENE PRACTICES**

I missed school in the last six months because of my period.

I have bled through my clothes because of my period.

I have been teased or bullied during my period.

**THANK YOU, DONORS!**

In 2021, the Flow.World donated 250 menstrual products for our community members. We are grateful for their partnership and the incredible services they provide. Check out more information at theflow.world
In Uganda, as in other sub-Saharan Africa countries, cultural practices perpetuating inequality between boys and girls still exist. Girls are socialized to become homemakers, prepared for future marriage and becoming mothers. Meanwhile, boys are socialized to become primary financial providers and heads of household and do not share the responsibility in the house. In our sample, we measured gender norms using items adapted from the Attitudes Towards Women Scale for Adolescents, used in Uganda. The 10-item scale measures gender attitudes among adolescents. We asked respondents to indicate whether they agreed with each statement related to how men and women act. We summed the scores to create a scale wherein a higher value means more equal perspectives of boys and girls, and a lower score is less equal.

**Women who participated in the program were 1.2x more likely to endorse more equal gender norms than people who did not participate (p<.001).**

Of the people who did not participate in I am a Girl programming, 52% endorsed equal gender norms according to questions such as...

- Do you believe girls should have the same freedoms as boys?
- Do you agree that, on average, girls are as smart as boys?
- Do you agree that swearing is worse for a girl than for a boy?
- Do you agree that boys are better at school than girls?
- Do you agree that more encouragement in a family should be given to sons than daughters to go to college?
- Do you agree that, in general, the father should have greater authority than the mother in making family decisions?
- Do you agree that it is all right for girls to carry condoms?

Of people who participated in the program, 88% endorsed more equal gender norms.
EXPERIENCES OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

Items about violence against women were adapted from the World Health Organization (WHO) Violence Against Women (VAW) study. Items estimate the prevalence of physical, sexual, and emotional violence against women. The WHO Multi-Country study on Women’s Health and Domestic Violence included data collection from over 24,000 women in 10 countries. Respondents were also asked about their beliefs regarding intimate partner violence (IPV) and their recent experiences of IPV. Questions were summed for a total IPV belief scale and IPV experience scale.

8% of people who did not participate in the program believed that husbands should not beat their wives. After the program, 39% believed husbands should not beat their wives.

Additional questions about IPV beliefs:
- Do you believe it is appropriate for a man to hit his wife if she does not care for the children?
- Do you believe it is appropriate for a man to hit his wife if she argues with him?
- Do you believe it is appropriate for a man to hit his wife if she refuses to have sex with him?
- Do you believe it is appropriate for a man to hit his wife if she burns the food?
- Do you believe a man beats his wife because he loves her?

People who participated in the program were 1x more likely to believe that husbands should not beat their wives.

70% of people who did not participate in the program believed it is appropriate for a man to hit his wife if she goes out without telling him.

40% of people who participated in the program believed it is appropriate for a man to hit his wife if she goes out without telling him.
EXPERIENCES OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

At baseline, 92% of community members surveyed reported experiencing some form of IPV. After participation in the program, 88% reported experiencing IPV in the past six months.

- 48% of nonparticipants had been denied affection or intimacy without explanation from their husbands.
- 33% of participants had been denied affection or intimacy without explanation from their husbands.

- 77% of nonparticipants had been physically hurt by their husbands.
- 39% of participants had been physically hurt by their husbands in the last six months.

- 89% of nonparticipants had been forced to have sexual intercourse when they didn’t want to in the past six months.
- 59% of participants had been forced to have sexual intercourse when they didn’t want to in the past six months.
HOW DID WE DO IT?

We were able to conduct reusable pad trainings and savings workshops for girls and women through the support of our friends and community. We received one grant from the American Women for International Understanding and community contributions from the Mpogo Islamic Center.

At I Am a Girl, we believe in complete transparency, which is why we have included a breakdown of our revenue and expenses below.

- Donations totaled 29.7% of our revenue, approximately $3,127.
- Grants from AWIU and MIC totaled $2,578.
- Fundraising events such as our annual dinner and virtual wellness events brought in $3,614, or 34.3% revenue.
- Revenue-generating activities such as apparel and basket sales brought in $1,212. I am a Girl gave these funds to the women who wove the baskets and their community savings group.

- The majority of our expenses went directly to our programs, with the implementation of the reusable pad program and women’s savings groups accounting for 51%, or $4,590.
- Operating costs, including our office rental, website hosting, and payment for our two local staff members, totaled 28% of our expenses or $2,548.
- Materials for basket weaving and the reusable pads totaled 12.3% of the budget or $1,100.
- Development costs went towards organizing the annual dinner, totaling $750.
THANK YOU!

On behalf of the entire I Am a Girl team, we want to say thank you for standing by our side for all of 2021! Our community, and our development partners, are integral to the work we do for women and girls in Eastern Uganda. We hope to see you all in 2022 as we continue to grow our programs and opportunities.