

# Giveherone Pad: Tackling Menstrual Waste and Empowering Girls in Gboko

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.10200522>

Received: 12 February 2026; Accepted: 20 February 2026; Published: 18 March 2026

## ABSTRACT

Menstrual hygiene management (MHM) remains a critical yet under-addressed public health challenge in low- and middle-income countries, particularly among adolescent girls in rural settings. Inadequate access to affordable menstrual products, limited menstrual health education, persistent stigma, and unsafe disposal practices expose girls to preventable health risks, environmental hazards, and social exclusion.

This article presents a **mid-term impact case study** of the GiveHerOne Pad project, a community-based preventive health intervention implemented in **Gboko** between August 2025 and April 2026. Anchored in the principles of community health and preventive medicine, the project integrates menstrual health education, skills development in reusable pad production, environmental sustainability, and community-led menstrual waste management systems.

Using a phased and participatory implementation approach, the project reached **252 adolescent girls within its first quarter**, trained **50 girls in reusable pad production**, produced **500 reusable pads**, and initiated community structures for sustainable menstrual waste disposal. Mid-term findings indicate improvements in menstrual hygiene knowledge, confidence, stigma reduction, and community ownership of menstrual health solutions.

This manuscript is intentionally presented as a **mid-term impact report**, with long-term quantitative outcomes and policy analysis framed as planned future work. Future phases will incorporate structured quantitative monitoring and evaluation to assess health, educational, environmental, and economic impacts among approximately **500 adolescent girls**. The project demonstrates that locally driven, skills-based menstrual health interventions can serve as scalable, cost-effective models that bridge adolescent health, gender equity, and environmental stewardship in low-resource settings.

**Keywords:** Menstrual hygiene management; community health; preventive medicine; adolescent health; environmental sustainability; reusable pads; Nigeria.

## INTRODUCTION

In Gboko and across Tiv communities in Benue State, Nigeria, adolescent girls aged 9–18 face menstrual health challenges that are both deeply personal and socially complex. Poverty, cultural silence, and limited access to sanitary products make menstruation a source of shame, risk, and exclusion. Many low-income families cannot afford disposable pads, forcing girls to rely on rags, old cloth, or other unsafe alternatives. These practices increase the risk of infections, discomfort, and social stigma, often resulting in school absenteeism and social isolation.

The **GiveHerOne Pad Project** emerged as a youth-led, feminist initiative to address these intersecting challenges. It aimed to equip 100 girls and young women with practical skills to produce reusable sanitary pads while providing education on menstrual hygiene, body awareness, and dignity. Recognizing the environmental implications of menstrual waste, the project also trained 20 community environmental agents and introduced a localized incineration system for safe pad disposal.



### Project Activity Photos

Menstrual hygiene management (MHM) is a crucial aspect of public health, adolescent wellbeing, and gender equity. Globally, millions of girls face barriers to managing menstruation safely due to poverty, cultural taboos, lack of education, and inadequate sanitation infrastructure challenges particularly pronounced in rural and low-resource settings.

In Nigeria, these menstrual health challenges intersect with broader issues of poverty, gender inequality, and limited access to reproductive health education. Many adolescent girls rely on unsafe alternatives to commercial sanitary products, increasing their risk of infections and discomfort. Improper disposal of menstrual waste also poses environmental and public health risks, contributing to pollution and reinforcing harmful cultural practices.

The GiveHerOne Pad project was therefore developed as a **community-based preventive health intervention** in Gboko. By combining menstrual health education, skills development in reusable pad production, and environmentally sustainable waste management strategies, the project provides a replicable model for improving adolescent health, promoting gender equity, and supporting environmental stewardship. This article documents the project's design, implementation, progress, and public health relevance as a case study in community health and preventive medicine.

### Background and Rationale

In Tiv culture, menstruation is often shrouded in silence and taboo, preventing open discussion or education. Generational poverty and entrenched cultural norms compound the problem, leaving many girls without access to safe menstrual products.

### Socio-economic and cultural factors contributing to menstrual challenges include:

- Deep-rooted cultural taboos and stigma
- Lack of affordable menstrual products
- Limited menstrual health education
- Unsafe disposal of menstrual waste

### Emergence of the problem:

For decades, menstrual health challenges in rural Benue State persisted due to gaps in education, cultural silence, and the high cost of sanitary products. Recent macro-economic changes, including the removal of fuel subsidies under **President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's** administration, significantly increased the cost of basic goods, further

reducing access to disposable sanitary pads for low-income families. These intersecting factors have entrenched menstrual poverty and heightened health, educational, and psychosocial vulnerabilities among adolescent girls.

Poor MHM practices are associated with reproductive and urinary tract infections, school absenteeism, reduced self-esteem, and social exclusion. Improper disposal of menstrual waste contributes to environmental degradation, particularly when pads are discarded in open dumps, water bodies, or sanitation systems not designed to handle absorbent materials.

Community consultations conducted in Gboko with adolescent girls, caregivers, and local stakeholders revealed recurring concerns: limited access to affordable menstrual products, minimal understanding of menstrual physiology and hygiene, stigma surrounding menstruation, and unsafe disposal practices. Some girls expressed fear that improperly disposed menstrual materials could expose them to harmful cultural or ritual misuse, further reinforcing secrecy and anxiety.

The *GiveHerOne Pad Project* was conceived as a preventive, empowerment-oriented intervention. Rather than relying solely on short-term pad distribution, the initiative prioritised skills transfer, menstrual health literacy, and community systems strengthening to promote long-term sustainability and local ownership.

## Intervention and Actions Taken

### Organizational Leadership

The *GiveHerOne Pad Initiative* was led by Gender Equality Club Nigeria under **Ms. Rebecca Saar Erdo**, whose live experiences informed the project design and supported by the Youth Empowerment Fund (YEF) in November 2024, funded by the European Union in partnership with Global Youth Mobilization (GYM): *"Managing my period from age 12–18 was a daily struggle. GiveHerOne Pad project turned my pain into purpose, ensuring that no girl endures the pain I have gone through."*



### Project Team Photos

### Project Overview

### Project Title

**GiveHerOne Pad: Tackling Menstrual Waste and Empowering Girls in Gboko**

### Project Duration

- **Start Date:** 13 August 2025
- **End Date:** 30 April 2026



## Project Stage

At the time of reporting, the project was in the *implementation phase, near completion*, with activities and outcomes largely on track.

## Project Goal

To improve menstrual hygiene management, reduce environmental risks from menstrual waste, and empower adolescent girls through skills development and community-led preventive health strategies.

## Objectives

The specific objectives of the project were to:

1. Improve knowledge and practices related to menstrual hygiene among adolescent girls.
2. Build girls' capacity to produce reusable, affordable sanitary pads.
3. Reduce menstrual waste and promote environmentally sustainable disposal practices.
4. Strengthen community structures for ongoing menstrual health education and advocacy.

## METHODOLOGY AND IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH

### Project Design

The project adopted a phased, participatory implementation model aligned with community health and preventive medicine principles. Activities were designed to address individual behavior change, skills development, and structural barriers simultaneously.

### Phase 1: Training and Production

Phase 1 focused on laying the foundation for effective implementation. Key activities included:

#### Project Preparation and Team Coordination:

A 10-member project team convened to develop a detailed implementation plan. Roles and responsibilities were clearly defined to ensure coordination across training, mobilization, monitoring, and communications.



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### **Stakeholder Engagement:**

Engagements were initiated with training center management and two secondary school authorities to secure institutional support. While partial engagement was completed in Phase 1, full engagement was scheduled for completion in Phase 3.

### **Publicity and Facility Setup:**

ICT support staff were onboarded and oriented on project goals. A standardized media and documentation template was introduced to ensure consistent visibility and reporting throughout the project lifecycle.

### **Beneficiary Selection:**

Beneficiaries were selected from marginalized families, particularly girls enrolled in tailoring and fashion design programs. This ensured that participants could readily apply sewing skills to pad production. Additionally, 20 community environmental agents were identified for later training.

### **Training on Reusable Pad Production and Menstrual Hygiene:**

An intensive one-week hands-on training was conducted for 50 adolescent girls. Participants learned to sew reusable pads in three size categories (mini, medium, and heavy flow). Each trainee produced 10 pads within the first three days, resulting in a total of 500 reusable pads.

Menstrual hygiene workshops were conducted alongside production training, with attendance of 92 and 110 participants in two separate sessions. Topics included menstrual physiology, hygiene practices, stigma reduction, and safe disposal methods.



### **Procurement of Materials:**

Essential materials were procured, including microfiber towels, Zorb-2/PUL fabrics, and waterproof absorbent materials to support ongoing pad production.

### **Phase 2: Distribution and Awareness**

Phase 2 focuses on distribution and community sensitization:

- Distribution of reusable pads to targeted girls commenced and is ongoing.

- Awareness campaigns on safe pad disposal were initiated informally during training and are scheduled for full rollout in the next quarter.

### Phase 3: Sustainability and Outreach

Phase 3 emphasizes long-term sustainability:

- Training of 20 community environmental agents to deliver ongoing menstrual health education.
- Establishment of community-based pad disposal systems.
- Continuous monitoring and evaluation of project outcomes.

### Project Mid-Term Report and Results

By the end of the first quarter:

- **252 adolescent girls** had been reached against a target of 300.
- **50 girls** were trained in reusable pad production.
- **500 reusable pads** were produced.
- Menstrual hygiene knowledge and confidence improved significantly among participants.
- Harmful practices linked to menstrual waste disposal were openly discussed and documented.
- A disposal system framework was designed and is pending installation.

The project remained on track, with no changes to its core purpose, target beneficiaries, or budget.

### Positioning as a Mid-Term Impact Report and Future Work

This manuscript presents a mid-term impact report documenting the design, implementation, and early outcomes of the *GiveHerOne Pad Project*. While qualitative findings suggest improvements in menstrual health literacy, skills acquisition, and community dialogue, comprehensive quantitative evaluation is planned.

Future work will introduce a structured monitoring and evaluation framework with baseline and post-intervention indicators, including:

- School attendance rates (target  $\geq 75\%$  improvement)
- Incidence of hygiene-related illness (target  $\geq 25\%$  reduction)
- Sustained adoption of reusable pads (target  $\geq 95\%$ )
- Production and distribution of 1,000 reusable pads by project completion

A cost-benefit analysis will assess the economic impact of reusable pad use. Preliminary projections indicate potential household savings of up to 85%, equivalent to approximately ₦85,000 annually per participant.

Earlier and broader engagement with schools, traditional leaders, and local government authorities will be prioritised in future phases to strengthen acceptance, scalability, and institutional ownership.

The initiative will also be aligned with national adolescent health, MHM, and WASH policies in Nigeria, including frameworks supported by **United Nations Population Fund**, to enhance sustainability and replication in similar low-resource settings.

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## Public Health Significance

The *GiveHerOne Pad* project demonstrates several preventive health benefits:

- Reduction in infection risks through improved hygiene practices.
- Decreased environmental pollution from menstrual waste.
- Improved psychosocial wellbeing and dignity among adolescent girls.
- Strengthened community capacity for health promotion.

The integration of education, skills development, and environmental action aligns with holistic community health models.

## Challenges and Lessons Learned

Key challenges included delayed early engagement with schools, traditional leaders, and local authorities, which slowed initial buy-in and coordination. Deep-rooted cultural beliefs and stigma surrounding menstruation and menstrual waste disposal also required careful, trust-building dialogue. However, participatory training sessions created safe spaces for discussion, increasing acceptance and community ownership. A critical lesson was that integrating practical reusable pad production skills with structured menstrual health education strengthens confidence, accelerates behavior change, and improves prospects for sustainable health and environmental outcomes.

## DISCUSSION

This mid-term case study demonstrates that menstrual health interventions are more effective when embedded within community systems and preventive health frameworks. The *GiveHerOne Pad* project shows that integrating menstrual health education, reusable pad production skills, and structured waste management design can address both immediate hygiene needs and underlying determinants such as stigma, knowledge gaps, and unsafe disposal practices. Early qualitative findings indicate improvements in menstrual literacy, confidence, and community dialogue, while skills training has strengthened local ownership and economic potential. Although quantitative impact measurement is planned for subsequent phases, first-quarter progress suggests that participatory, skills-based models are feasible and culturally adaptable in rural, low-resource settings. By linking adolescent health, environmental sustainability, and gender equity, the project positions reusable menstrual solutions as both a public health and economic strategy. With strengthened monitoring frameworks and institutional partnerships, this model holds potential for scalable replication across similar communities in Nigeria.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

To strengthen impact and scalability, menstrual hygiene education should be formally integrated into school health curricula and aligned with national adolescent health and WASH policies supported by organizations such as United Nations Population Fund. Community-based reusable pad production hubs should be supported to enhance skills development and local economic empowerment. Regulated menstrual waste disposal infrastructure must be established to reduce environmental hazards. Traditional and religious leaders should be actively engaged to address stigma and promote community ownership.

## CONCLUSION

The *GiveHerOne Pad* project affirms that community-driven, preventive health interventions can effectively address the interconnected challenges of menstrual hygiene, environmental sustainability, and girls' empowerment in low-resource settings. As a mid-term impact initiative, the project has demonstrated measurable early progress in menstrual health literacy, skills acquisition, stigma reduction, and community engagement.



among adolescent girls in Gboko. By integrating reusable pad production, structured menstrual health education, and the design of a community-based waste disposal framework, the intervention advances both public health and environmental stewardship. The phased, participatory model strengthened local ownership while laying groundwork for institutional alignment with adolescent health and WASH frameworks in Nigeria. While long-term quantitative outcomes remain under structured evaluation, early findings suggest strong potential for scalability, cost-effectiveness, and policy relevance. GiveHerOne Pad illustrates how locally led, skills-based solutions can bridge gender equity, preventive medicine, and sustainable community development for adolescent girls.

**Data Sources:** Project monitoring reports, training attendance registers, pad production logs, stakeholder engagement records, and beneficiary evaluation forms.

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