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EKIBADHA: OUR PERIODS MATTER

PILOT STUDY REPORT

The data collection for the pilot study of *Ekibadha: Our Periods Matter* project was conducted in Maina Parish, Mayuge District, between July and August 2019 by the two interns, Mr. Paul Kasu and Ms. Victoria Naula.

The following report has been written by Mr. Paul Kasu and Ms. Victoria Naula after completing the data collection and has been revised by all the organizations involved in the pilot development, Swedish Organization for Global Health (SOGH), Uganda Development and Health Associates (UDHA) and ARCHIVE Global.

Acknowledgement

The interns' sincere gratitude goes to UDHA, SOGH and the ARCHIVE team for the continuous support and facilitation that enabled the smooth running of the activity from the start until the last day. The interns have seen this as a great opportunity to serve their own people.

Introduction

SOGH is a Swedish based NGO that focuses on reducing global health inequities through evidence-based action and international partnerships.



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UDHA is a Ugandan registered NGO that is dedicated to improving access to health care to underserved communities, youth, women and children.

ARCHIVE is an American registered NGO that uses strategic interventions to the built environment to improve health outcomes in vulnerable communities around the world.

SOGH and UDHA, which are already working together on a project on maternal and newborn health in Uganda, decided to expand their partnership since they both were interested in knowing more about menstrual health in rural South-East Uganda. To explore the topic from a different and important new angle, SOGH connected with ARCHIVE to learn about living infrastructure's impact on menstrual health. Two surveys were developed, one focusing on women's/girls' personal experience with menstruation (referred to as the SOGH survey) and one on the housing structures where women/girls live (referred to as the ARCHIVE survey). The surveys have the purpose to gather baseline data that could be used to develop a community-based project to improve menstrual health within the communities in Mayuge District, Uganda.

Activity's goals

The main goal of this data collection was to understand the social, cultural and environmental context that impacts women and girls who menstruate. The survey developed by SOGH focused on understanding women and girls' personal experience with menstruation and its relation with the local perception on the topic. The survey developed by ARCHIVE focused on the living environment, which has a direct impact on menstrual health management.

This data will allow a better understanding of women's and girls' needs, which is necessary in order to develop a project that benefits the communities and has a long lasting impact.



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Place of activity

The surveys took place in the five villages of Maina parish (Mpungwe Sub County, Mayuge district), called Mwezi, Kyete, Bulondo, Girigiri and Maina. While running the surveys, it was discovered that Mwezi village had been split into two separate villages creating a new one known as Kabere. This put the total number of villages to six.

The transient village method was used in selecting the respondents in order to avoid bias arising from linearly (house to house) situated respondents.

Time of activity

The data collection commenced on July 11th, 2019 and ended on August 7th, 2019. In total, fifteen visits were conducted within this period. It became convenient to work over the weekend in order to interview school girls who could not be tracked on weekdays. A typical day started at around 10am in the morning and closed at about 3pm in the afternoon.

Targets for the surveys

| | ARCHIVE survey | SOGH survey |
|-------------------------------|----------------|-------------|
| Interviews per village | 2 | 20 |
| Total interviews | 12 | 120 |

Surveys were conducted among women and girls who are actively menstruating and, in case of the SOGH survey, were at least 14 years old (in case of a minor, consent was taken from both the girl and her legal guardian) or, in case of the ARCHIVE survey, over 18 years old. In addition,



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for the ARCHIVE survey the women interviewed were residents of the home that was the subject of the survey.

Methodology of data collection

Community Health Workers (CHWs), working for the other SOGH-UDHA project (Mama & Family Project) and attached to a particular village, were contacted a day in advance and plans were made for the visit. CHWs helped the interns traverse the village easily, this fostered acceptance and trust of the women/girls since CHWs are highly trusted and respected within the communities.

A single participant was approached at the time. The survey's aim and objectives were explained before starting the interview together with assuring confidentiality. Consent to participate was then recorded.

Ms. Victoria worked with the SOGH survey conducting interviews with women/girls. Mr. Paul worked with the ARCHIVE survey gathering information both from the participant and by observing the infrastructures and surrounding environment. After completing his primary assignment, he helped Ms. Victoria by running some SOGH surveys himself.

Open Data Kit (ODK) designed digital questionnaires were used to collect the data. Completed surveys could be shared with the SOGH and ARCHIVE teams easily as soon as wifi was available. This made work much easier and fun to do for the surveyors.

Confidentiality

Audio confidentiality was ensured while conducting each survey and written consent obtained before the commencement of the interview. Just one participant was interviewed at a time, this



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gave the woman/girl confidence in responding and opening up hence disclosing the correct information required by the survey.

Constraints and challenges

The following constraints and challenges were met by the interns while conducting the work:

- ✓ Unfriendly weather was encountered with heavy rains being the culprits; although too much sunshine was also a problem to some extent;
- ✓ Breach of privacy by family members barging into the interviews from nowhere putting the respondents at a hard time to continue;
- ✓ Poor roads leading to the water sources made it hard to take the pictures required by the ARCHIVE survey, something that tested the interns' perseverance;
- ✓ Resistance from men, who also wanted to sign as witnesses, delayed the whole process because the intern had to pause and start afresh the whole consent;
- ✓ Cultural beliefs and inadequate male involvement in menstrual health, despite the work done so far on community engagement and behavioural change towards women's health within the SOGH-UDHA maternal health project;
- ✓ Some women/girls were expecting some type of compensation for their participation, which was not available;
- ✓ Misinformation within the community members that the project is looking for people who need help led to people feeling left out and thinking the interns were selective, yet they were simply following the selection criteria;
- ✓ Technological hitches of the android device that played tricks sometimes over trivial issues, but luckily the Menstrual Health Project Manager at SOGH was able to solve them.



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Conclusions

The activity was conducted successfully despite the challenges encountered as described above. In communities where the local political leadership was aware and supportive of the specific project activities, data collection run smoother and there was a higher request by the community to learn more about the project.

One point that should be highlighted more is the historical poor involvement of men on this topic. Increasing male involvement would positively impact the financial and emotional support women and girls receive from men in their communities, which consequently will improve their menstrual, and overall, health care.

The communities have expressed their hope for the project to start soon and the interns believe the information gathered will surely help guide the creation of a project that is sustainable and meets the needs of the locals.



Left Picture: Ms. Victoria (with the red tablet in her hands) interviewing a woman for the SOGH survey (consent to appear in the picture was given);

Middle Picture: Mr. Paul taking measurement of a latrine for the ARCHIVE survey;

Right Picture: Ms. Victoria and Mr. Paul, the interns, holding the android devices used for the surveys.