



Irise International

Annual Report 2013/14

www.irise.org.uk

Many thanks to Naomi Rouse for her help compiling this report

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Letter from the Chair

This year we were saddened to hear about the death of Maya Angelou, whose famous poem 'Still I Rise' inspired our name. She was a woman, an African American, a single mother and a sex worker. Conventional thinking would whisper that she was nothing but she proved the world wrong. She challenges us to see through the illusions of status and wealth and to search for possibility and potential in unexpected places.

Her poem 'Still I Rise' is all about empowerment. In the words of the great lady herself, "each time a woman stands up for herself, without knowing it, possibly without claiming it, she stands up for all women."

As we review a year of exceptional growth I hope Maya Angelou's legacy will continue to live on in Irise's work to support the education and empowerment of women and girls.



Dr Emily Wilson-Smith
Chair at Irise International

Introduction

This Impact Report outlines Irise's work towards our objectives in 2013-14. When we refer to Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) we use the definition outlined by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2012); good MHM is defined as:

- Access to necessary resources (e.g. menstrual materials to absorb or collect menstrual blood effectively, soap and water)
- Facilities (a private place to wash, change and dry re-usable menstrual materials in privacy during menstruation, and an adequate disposal system for menstrual materials)
- Education about MHM for males and females.

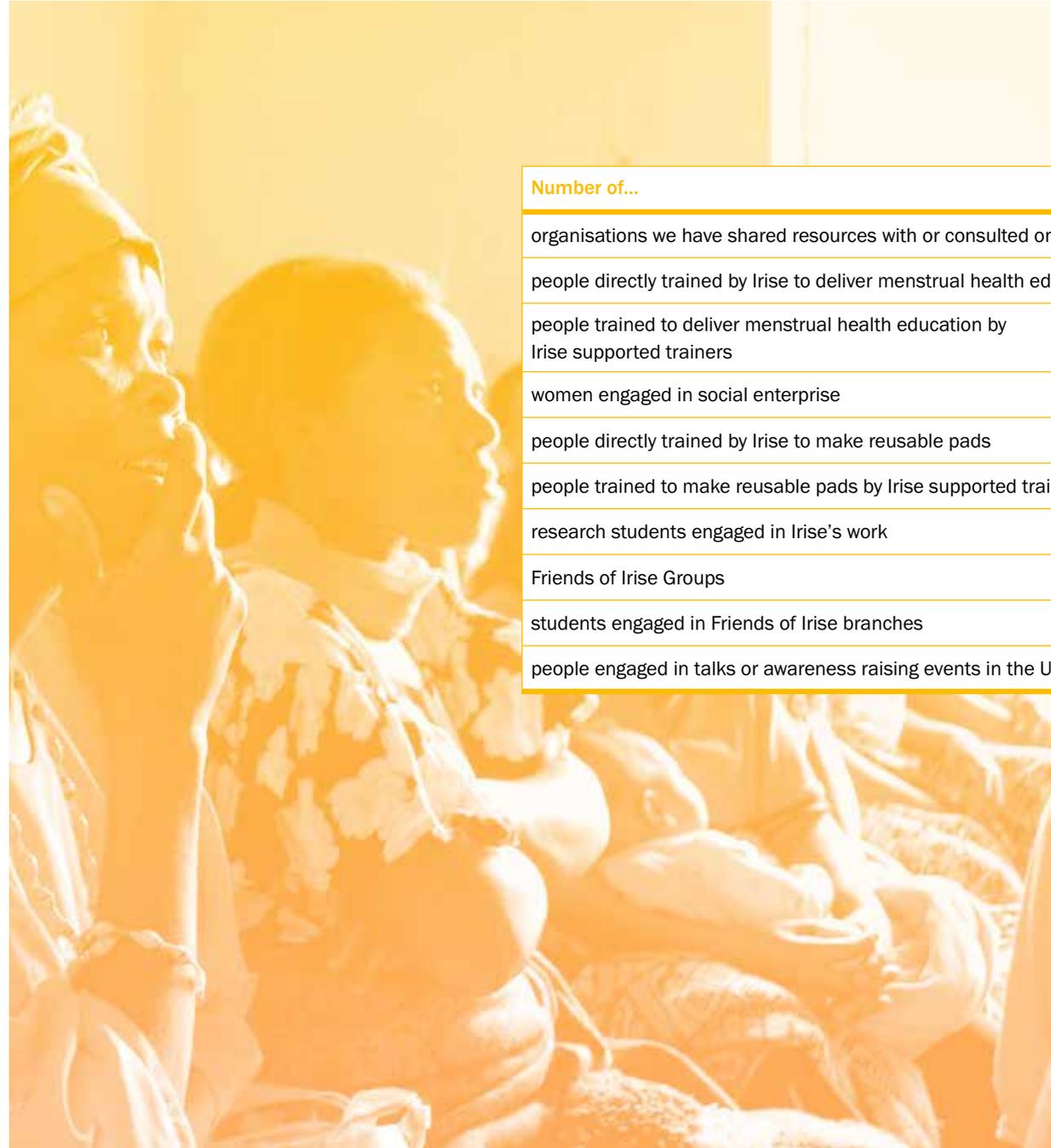
Irise International currently focuses on the provision of a sustainable sanitary product and the delivery of high quality menstrual health education. The organisation is underpinned by research expertise and uses robust research techniques borrowed from the disciplines of public health and epidemiology in order to ensure interventions are effective.

Achievements

This section describes the progress made between September 2013 and September 2014 towards our four specific objectives.

Objectives

1. Developing and delivering high quality menstrual health education in East Africa
2. Delivering an affordable menstrual hygiene product in East Africa
3. Generating an evidence base to inform the development of MHM programmes in East Africa
4. Raising awareness about MHM nationally and internationally in the broader context of women and girls' education and empowerment



Number of...	Total
organisations we have shared resources with or consulted on MHM	30
people directly trained by Irise to deliver menstrual health education	1080
people trained to deliver menstrual health education by Irise supported trainers	972
women engaged in social enterprise	50
people directly trained by Irise to make reusable pads	191
people trained to make reusable pads by Irise supported trainers	81
research students engaged in Irise's work	6
Friends of Irise Groups	6
students engaged in Friends of Irise branches	50
people engaged in talks or awareness raising events in the UK	730

Image: Women attend an Irise Workshop in Kasese District

Objective 1:

Delivering and scaling high quality menstrual health education in East Africa

Developing Replicable Menstrual Health Education Resources

During this year, Irise finalised and launched its first Menstrual Hygiene Toolkit at the London Centre for International Development. The toolkit has now been shared with thirty other organisations through online consultancy and adopted beyond the East African context by Fundacion Sodis in Bolivia and Green Tara in Nepal.



Image (left): School girls participate in a lesson about puberty

The Irise Menstrual Hygiene Toolkit was developed from three years of data and field testing, and consists of four resources designed to enable other organisations to replicate the Irise model including assessing menstrual hygiene needs in the community and monitoring the impact of a menstrual hygiene project:

- **Menstrual Health Education Resource:** was developed based on the anonymous menstruation-related questions of over 1,000 East African school girls.
- **Reusable Pad Training Resource** includes step by step instructions for making two popular designs.
- **Developing a Menstrual Hygiene Programme Resource** designed to aid community based discussions about addressing MHM.
- **Evaluation Toolkit** includes a validated questionnaire for assessing and monitoring menstrual hygiene practices in East African schoolgirls.

Sixty representatives from academia and the NGO sector attended the launch of the toolkit at the London Centre for International Development, demonstrating the growing interest in the issue of Menstrual Hygiene Management.

Image (above): A schoolgirl completes a questionnaire about menstrual hygiene

“Irise Founder, Emily Wilson-Smith, told her story as I was waiting to give my talk. All around the room stood various representatives of NGOs and government agencies and other groups, many of whom were engaged in some way with programmes that provide this sort of assistance. As Emily recounted the way that her interest in providing sanitary care to poor school girls had developed, I remembered the origins of my own work and the resistance that our team met. I marvelled at how far we have come. At Irise last night, young women and men took for granted that sanitary care is important and needs a judicious solution, not an insensitive dismissal.”

— Professor Scott World
Chair Entrepreneurship and
Innovation at The University
of Oxford

Direct support for Community Based Organisations (CBOs) to deliver menstrual health education within their own communities

Irise directly trained 1080 people in East Africa to deliver our Menstrual Health Education Workshop and we facilitated the further training of 972 people through our trainers. This included a large training session for the Women and Girls' Can Initiative in Masaka, Uganda through our local partner Revelation Children's Ministry's International and teaching delivered in local schools by our Friends of Irise group at Kampala International University.

Consultancy with the charity Theatre for a Change resulted in a long term partnership with two Irise project workers providing on the ground support in Malawi during August 2014 to help develop a new MHM Programme. Research prior to the fieldwork indicated that despite evidence that Menstrual Hygiene is an issue for many girls in Malawi there is currently little work being done to address it. Irise has since been in contact with a number of other organisations who wish to develop a sustainable menstrual hygiene programme within Malawi including Build A School and TickBird Women and will be collaborating with them in the coming months.

The Irise Project Workers also benefitted from training given by Theatre for a Change's International and Malawian Directors on their participatory teaching methods which have proven very effective in engendering behaviour change around HIV and AIDs. These methods will be used to develop our existing Menstrual Health Education Resource into an accredited course that improves knowledge about menstruation and tackles stigma. This is part of work to pilot a 'Train the Trainer' approach with CBOs which will commence in 2015.

Objective 2:

Delivering affordable menstrual hygiene products in East Africa

Setting up local social enterprises producing a high quality, sustainable sanitary product that is affordable to the end user

Following on from our grant programme in 2012 when three Community Based Organisations (CBOs) were given small grants to pilot a reusable sanitary product with their communities, we gave further grants to two of these CBOs to run pilot social enterprises producing reusable sanitary products. One pilot is in Kasese District, Uganda in partnership with Luhwahwa Youth Foundation and the other is in Jinja in partnership with Revelation Children's Ministries International.

In the last year the Kasese based enterprise has provided 340 girls in 8 schools with locally made reusable pads and delivered Menstrual Health Education to 400 girls in the same schools. The production of pads involves over 30 women from the local community and has developed to allow them to fit this work around their other commitments.

Following a week of intense business training with one of Irise's business advisors the social enterprise was registered as Irise Uganda Limited and entered a commercial pilot. Two representatives of Revelation Children's Ministries International and three representatives of Irise International were invited to form the governing body. The reusable sanitary pad was also registered with the Uganda National Bureau of Standards. It was agreed that Irise International would remain the majority shareholder during the pilot period.

To date, the enterprise in Jinja has conducted outreach sessions in 20 schools, sold 40 kits and received orders for 2,700 kits over the next 3 months. It currently provides part time employment to 20 women and a supervisor.

"I am a married woman with four children. I like this project because it is an eye-opener for me. It unites me with my fellow women and it teaches me business."

Image: A woman learns to make a reusable pad as part of work to develop a local social enterprise

— Betty Ageno a part-time worker at Irise Uganda Limited, Jinja

Supporting Community Based Organisations wishing to train women and girls to make reusable pads locally

Our pilot work concluded that a social enterprise model was preferable to informal sanitary pad production because:

- It is difficult to standardise the quality of the pads
- There is a very small profit margin on products and if the equipment is not used efficiently enterprises lose money rather than generating an income.
- Buying equipment in bulk enables the final product to be affordable. Informal groups struggle to buy enough equipment to take advantage of the discounts and struggle with managing the cash flow required to buy in bulk.
- The transport costs for distributing products on a small scale threaten the small profit margin of an informal enterprise.

However we continue to offer training on making a reusable product to organisations which are developing Menstrual Hygiene Programmes and wish to explore the different options. In the last year Irise facilitated and funded training workshops for 191 people on how to make a reusable sanitary pad and delivered training to a further 81 people during sessions funded by host organisations. In the long term we will offer organisations the option of applying to join the Irise franchise and set-up a formal enterprise locally.

Developing methods to enable even the poorest girls to access our product

Market research suggested that women and girls were not able to pay more than 4000-5000USh (£1.00-1.25) upfront for their sanitary products. Product development was therefore focused on producing a pad that was within this price range (currently 1800USh or £0.45 per pad). The enterprise choose to package two types of kit, a mini kit with 3 pads and a transport bag for women with limited money and a maxi kit with 6 pads and a transport bag for NGOs wishing to supply girls with a menstrual hygiene kit that would meet their needs for many months. Irise Uganda Limited also plans to have individual pads for sale so that women and girls can buy them to sample the product or to supplement their kits.

Irise International is also piloting a payment scheme for schools where girls pay small monthly instalments (1000USh

per month) and receive a new kit (3 pads and a transport bag with 'top-up' pads also available) every term. The school gets to keep 100USh commission per payment per girl but must underwrite the scheme (alternatively a partner NGO can do this). There is room in the scheme for 1 in 10 girls to default without the school or NGO losing money and if all the girls pay the organisation underwriting the scheme can make a small profit for the participating organisation. The results of the pilot will be available by June 2015.



Image: Women dance to mark the end of a week of Irise training

Objective 3:

Generating an evidence base to inform the development of menstrual hygiene programmes in East Africa

Conducting our own research programme alongside our project work to establish to impact of improved menstrual hygiene on girls' outcomes

Following on from our pilot study in 2011-2012 we developed a protocol for a large scale study to assess the impact of a MHM programme on schools girls' absenteeism, knowledge of menstruation and activities of daily living and self-esteem during menstruation. The study will commence in October 2014 under the joint supervision of Kampala International University and The University of Sheffield. A trial steering committee was also recruited including:

- Dr Emily Webb from London School of Tropical Medicine, a statistician with expertise in research in Uganda
- Professor Sue Mason from The University of Sheffield, a professor of emergency medicine with expertise in health service research
- Dr Amina Nakimuli from Kampala International University, Chair of Foundation for Girl Child Empowerment

Supervising and supporting other research on this neglected issue

Irise organised the supervision of four students this year. A baseline survey of menstrual hygiene practices in Kasese District in Uganda was completed and found that 74% of girls believed that pain during a period is a sign of illness and 43% believed it is harmful to run or dance during your period. Girls also reported that menstruation impacted on their daily activities (with 32.1% unable to walk far) and self-esteem (with only 28% of girls feeling happy with themselves during menstruation). An association between lack of knowledge and low self-esteem was noted.

One of our researchers also continues to collaborate with a previous student to develop her work on menstrual hygiene in the context of human rights. This was submitted for publication and the findings were publicised on our social media. The paper summarises a document search and analysis of 813



Image: Women at the end of a week of training

UN human rights documents which identified 'a vicious cycle of silence' surrounding menstrual hygiene and its impact on the human rights of women and girls.¹

Contributing evidence to the international dialogue about the importance of menstrual hygiene

Irise's research team published a paper entitled 'Education. Period. Developing an acceptable and replicable menstrual hygiene intervention' in *Development in Practice* presenting our pilot work on this issue. Relevant research reports were also published on *The White Rose Consortium* where they are available to the academic community and *INSPIRES*, Irise's report on our pilot work to develop a solution to MHM has been downloaded 1363 times. Irise representatives also attended the 2nd Global Virtual Menstrual Hygiene Conference and participated in online debates throughout the day.

¹ The full report can be accessed at: <http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/80597/>

In 2015 Irise researchers have received invitations to speak at the 2nd Federation of African Medical Students Association (FAMSA) East African Scientific Conference on Menstrual Hygiene in the context of Reproductive Health and to attend and submit abstracts to The Society for Menstrual Cycle Research Annual Conference: Menstrual Health and Reproductive Justice: Human Rights Across the Lifespan.

Two Irise trustees were also participants in research being undertaken by Professor Chris Bobel of The University of Massachusetts to explore the recent surge in menstrual hygiene activism in the Global South.

Objective 4:

Raising awareness
about the importance
of menstrual hygiene
in the broader
context of women
and girls' education
and empowerment

**Participating in relevant
international campaigns**

Irise International contributed to the first international Menstrual Hygiene Day, which engaged over a hundred partners around the world. Irise worked closely with the organisers, WASH United, to develop the Fact Sheets used during the campaign and took responsibility for compiling the Uganda specific factsheet. Our Chair participated as a guest

'speaker' in a twitter debate and Irise posted a series of blogs on Girls' Globe in the build up to the day. On the day itself our student group at The University of Sheffield organised a speaker night and invited three academics to share their work on Menstrual Hygiene. In Uganda, our student group at Kampala International University, organised a march through the university and town. They involved four local schools and a local band in the parade and the town clerk was the guest of honour. Students were encouraged to donate money so that children at a local disabled school could be provided with free pads in a gesture of solidarity.



Image (left): Schoolgirls concentrate on a lesson about menstruation

Image (above): Schoolgirls evaluate the teaching they have received

“We used to use old t-shirts and other cotton fabric as sanitary towels...other girls use dried maize cobs as tampons, toilet roll, absorbent leaves, etc. Some choose to not bother going to school at all, especially those whose periods lasted longer usual.

The shame of blood leaking through your skirt, boys calling you names, sores and infections, to mention but a few, makes you hate being a young healthy woman.

When we were introduced to disposable sanitary pads, in 1999, they were unaffordable. It was like mockery. You do not ask a child who lives on one meal a day to spare money to buy these towels. In my eyes, disposable sanitary towels were a luxury.

For many girls in Uganda and other developing countries, there is a monthly prison: that time of the month where they regret being young and healthy because they cannot afford basic needs.”

— Excerpt from ‘Menstruation. Education. Poverty: A Ugandan’s Teenager’s Tale’ on Girls’ Globe by Irise Advisor Joannie Nakawawa

Supporting and expanding of Friends of Irise student groups in Uganda and the UK

Friends of Irise work to raise awareness about women’s rights and gender related issues on University campuses and fundraise to support Irise Internationals’ work. The Friends of Irise group at The University of Sheffield trained 15 volunteers who delivered 22 lessons on gender and development in 3 local schools. The team also took part in a Values day at Sheffield High School for Girls. Friends of Irise also ran workshops at two national Medsin Conferences and launched ‘Friends of Irise’ as a national medsin activity. (Medsin are an international network of students who care about global health issues.) Friends of Irise groups were also established at The University of Manchester, The University of Cardiff and The University of Birmingham and will begin their activities in September 2014.

In Uganda, in addition to the activities that took place on Menstrual Hygiene Day, Friends of Irise at Kampala International University trained 20 Trainers of Trainers from the student population and delivered teaching on menstrual hygiene in five local schools, reaching a total of 350 girls. They conducted training on making reusable pads with 3 local women’s group, reaching a total of 120 women.

Staff

Irise International is a young organisation currently leveraging research grants to cover the cost of running the organisation, ensuring very high levels of cost effectiveness during this start-up phase. The organisation is underpinned by research expertise and uses robust research techniques borrowed from the disciplines of public health and epidemiology in order to ensure interventions are effective.

Founding members Dr Calum Smith and Emily Wilson are based in Uganda Project Coordinators and also work part time as Research and Teaching Associates at Kampala International University. Emily has a BSc in International Health from the University of Bristol and a medical degree from the University of Sheffield. She is an Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Sheffield and has nearly ten years of experience of women's health and development. Calum has degrees in International Health and Medicine from the University of Bristol and has experience working in Nepal, Uganda and Kenya looking at issues related to global health inequalities.

The organisation is currently registering as an International Non-Government Organisation (NGO) in Uganda. Previously project work has been delivered through local partner organisations but an Irise Uganda team is becoming necessary to offer ongoing support and training and to coordinate evaluation and monitoring. The Irise Uganda Board will comprise of representatives of key partners already engaged in Irise project work and individuals with relevant first-hand experience of life as an East African girl. A Ugandan financial manager, project coordinator and administrator will be recruited in 2015.

Plans and targets

Direct Programme Action

- To develop our Menstrual Health Education Resource into an accredited Menstrual Health Education Course and to run the course every three months in Kampala.
- To generate funding to support Community Based Organisations to train on our course and then deliver menstrual health education in their communities every year.
- To complete the pilot period for the social enterprise in Jinja and finalise a replicable process for setting up a social enterprise unit under the Irise umbrella.
- To generate a fund to support the poorest school girls' access to Irise sanitary products.
- To develop an alternative product line with the social enterprise in Jinja producing underwear for sale in Ugandan and the UK.
- To collaborate with the TickBird Women Enterprise in Malawi in order to supply sanitary pad kits in Malawi and to include their soap in our kits.

Research

- To run a twelve month study to assess the impact of a menstrual hygiene programme on school girls' absenteeism, knowledge of menstruation and self-esteem and daily activities during menstruation.
- To evaluate the social enterprise at the end of the pilot period.
- To engage international and local students (A total of 15 during the year) in data collection for our study and supervise and develop their own research on the topic.

Advocacy

- To produce an animation communicating the importance of menstrual hygiene.
- To participate as active partners in the second Menstrual Hygiene Day.
- To present at the Third Virtual Global Menstrual Hygiene Conference and at The Annual Conference of The Society of Menstrual Cycle Research.
- To expand our Friends of Irise groups to include two other cities in the UK and to promote the scheme in Sub Saharan Africa through the Federation of African Medical Students Association (FAMSA).

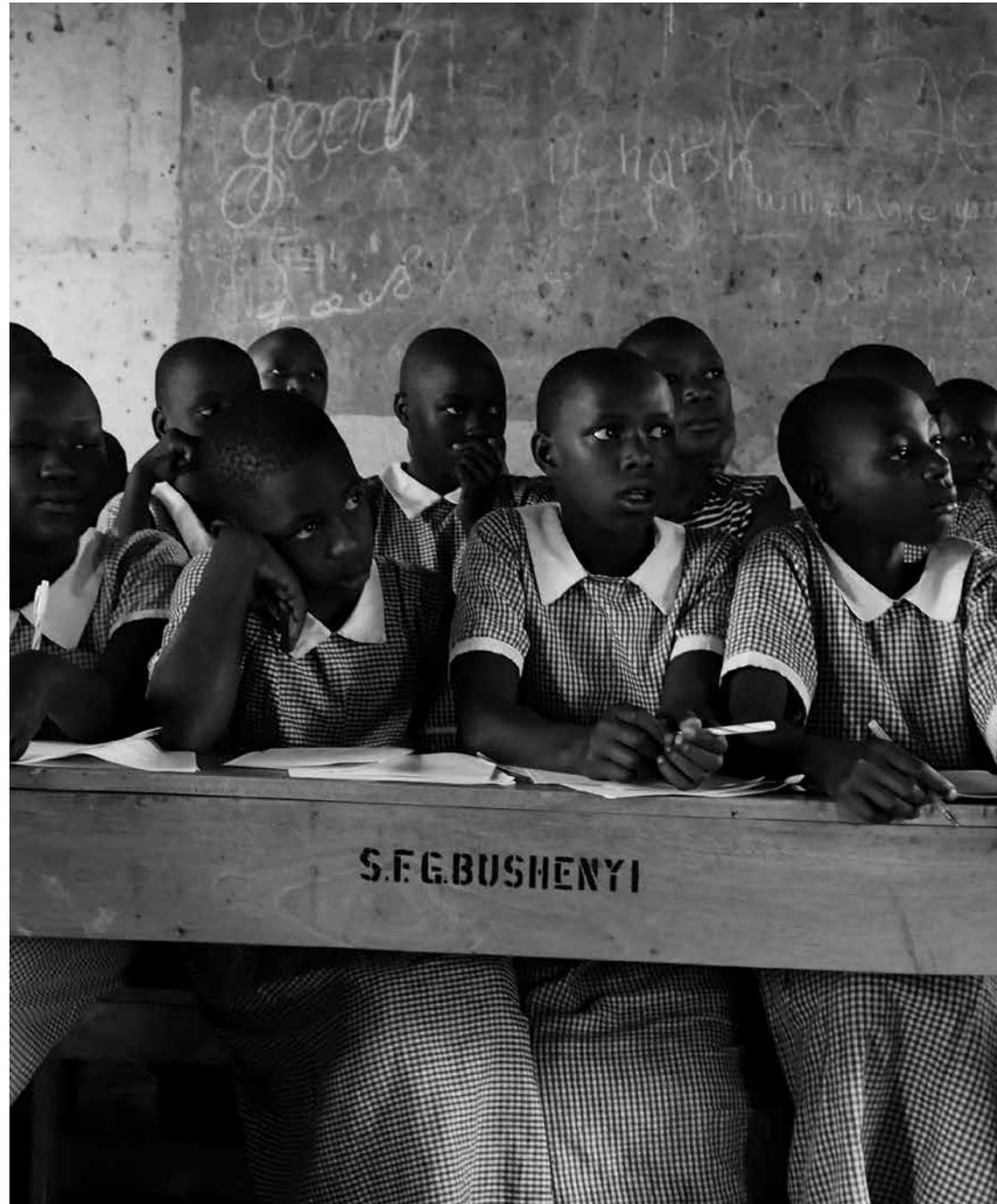
Structure, governance and management

Board of Trustees

Irise International is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). It is governed by its Founding Constitution. The Board of Trustees constitutes three people who together are responsible for the management of all the affairs of Irise International. Trustee Meetings are held every three months. Trustee recruitment is through nomination by an existing trustee and is voted upon. No other organisation or body has the right to appoint trustees of the charity. Irise has a Board of Advisors who are recruited based on their expertise in a particular area. They are not responsible for the running of the charity but attend the Annual General Meeting, review strategic documents and are available to advise the trustees when required. New advisors are nominated by a trustee and voted upon. If the vote is in their favour, an invitation to become an advisor and an outline of the role is issued.

Trustees Responsibilities

The Board of Trustees is responsible for ensuring that all activities are within UK law and fall within agreed charitable objectives. Its work includes setting strategic direction and agreeing the financial plan.



The Trustees are responsible for maintaining proper accounting records which disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charity and enable them to ensure that the accounts comply with the requirements of the UK's Charity Commission. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charity and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

Risk Management

The Trustees actively review the major risks, which the charity faces on a regular basis, together with an annual review at the AGM and considers strategies to reduce this risk. Irise International has a policy to keep twice the UK running costs of the organisations for one year in reserves in order to mitigate fluctuations in funding.

Liability of Members

Irise International is incorporated so the members and trustees are personally safeguarded from the financial liabilities the charity incurs. The charity has a legal personality of its own, enabling it to conduct business in its own name, rather than the name of the trustees.

Image: Schoolgirls listen to a local student teach about menstrual hygiene

Irise International

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