



Creating a world where no girl is held back by her period; Impact Report 2014-2019



Irise International

Our vision is a world where no one is held back by their period.

We are a learning and research focused organisation working in the UK and East Africa to support young people and their communities to overcome menstruation related barriers- working on issues girls tell us are ways their periods hold them back.

We champion innovative approaches working with a wide range of partners and help others replicate our work. We also use our learning and research to advocate for policy and practice change.

Some recent achievements...

Secured £170,000 from the UK government to develop a menstruation friendly intervention for schools in Uganda.

Co-convening the Research stream of the UK government's Period Poverty task force.

Secured funding from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport via the Let's Talk Period Grant Scheme to pilot an approach to dismantling menstrual stigma in the UK.



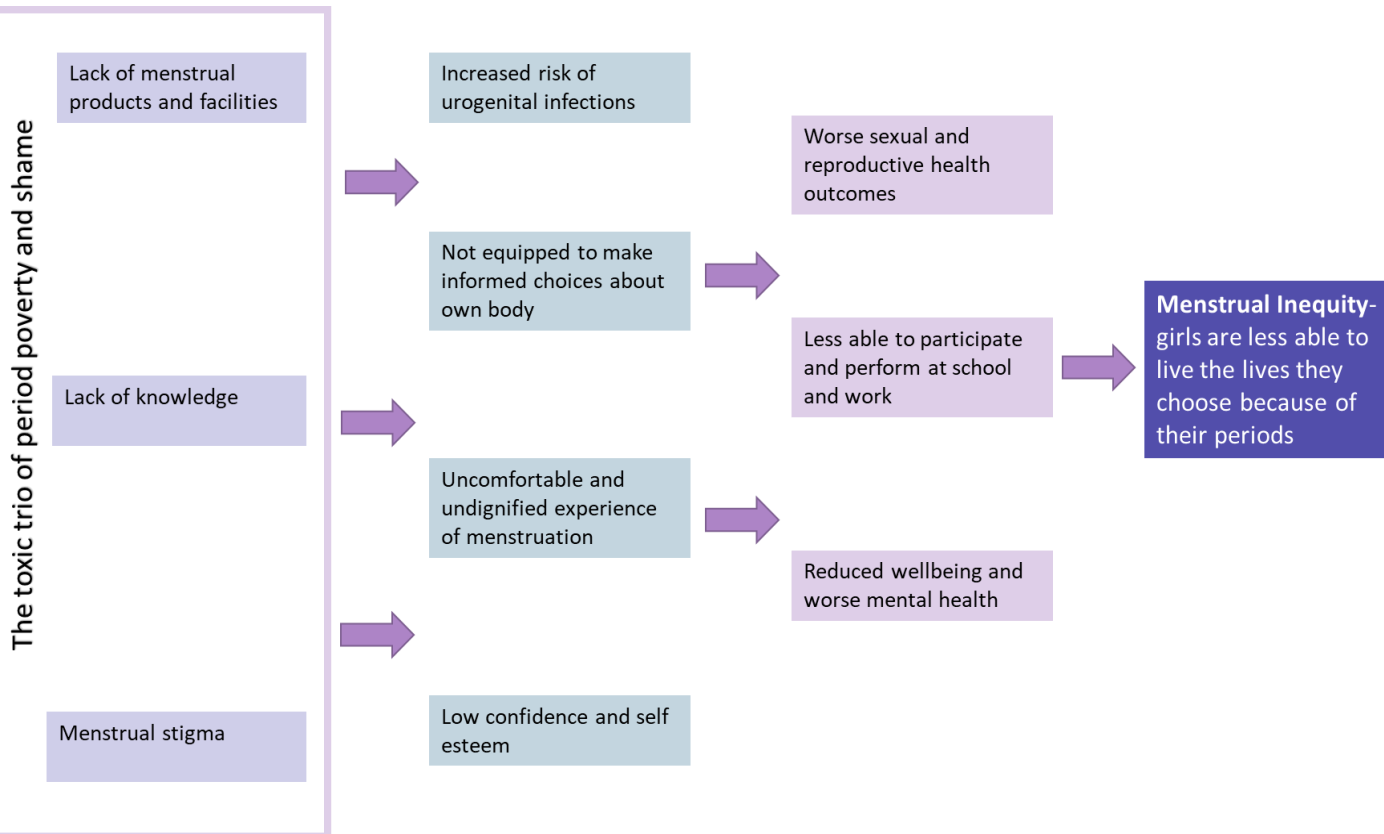
Our Story

- We were founded in 2014 in response to the challenges girls' reported experiencing during their period in east Africa.
- In 2017 we expanded our work to the UK context in recognition that girls in the UK were facing similar challenges.
- Over the last five years we have grown rapidly and are proud to be leading the way towards a world free of period poverty and shame by 2030.



The Need

Girls who can access a choice of reliable menstrual products, have knowledge about their own bodies, and are free from shame are more able to pursue the lives they choose. However, girls in the UK and east Africa are affected by the 'toxic trio' of period poverty; they lack access to a choice of affordable menstrual products, gender sensitive facilities and information about their bodies compounded by stigma, a problematic set of societal beliefs and values surrounding menstruation that lead girls to experience shame.



In the UK:

- 1 in 7 girls don't know what's happening when they start their period
- Half of girls feel embarrassed about their period
- 70% of girls aren't allowed to go to the toilet during school lessons

In Uganda:

- 70% of girls are embarrassed and fearful of menstrual related accidents during their periods
- Over half are missing some school
- 78% of girls lack basic information about their own body and what a period

What we do

Developing solutions



Creating evidence



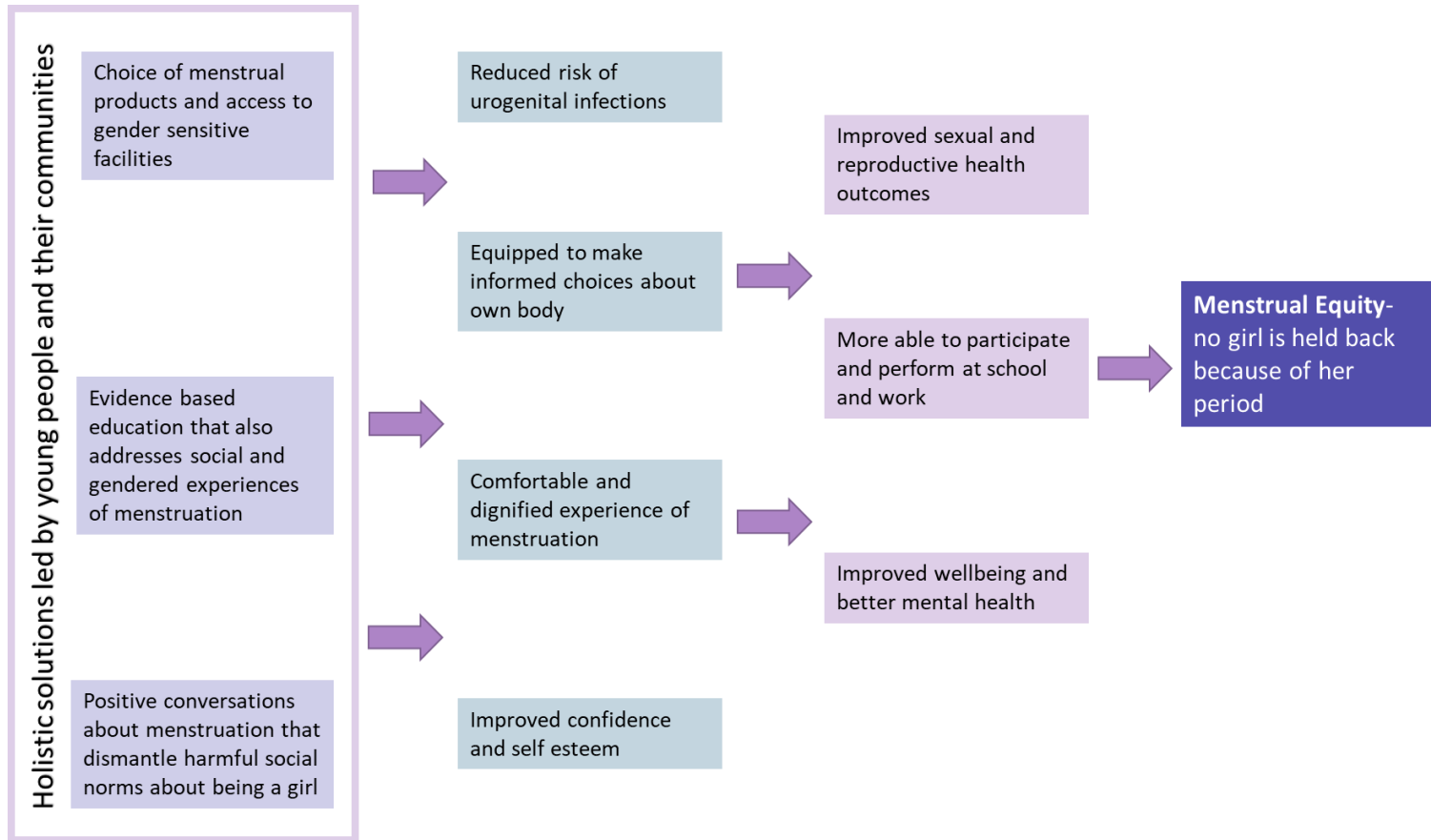
Sharing learning



Advocating for change

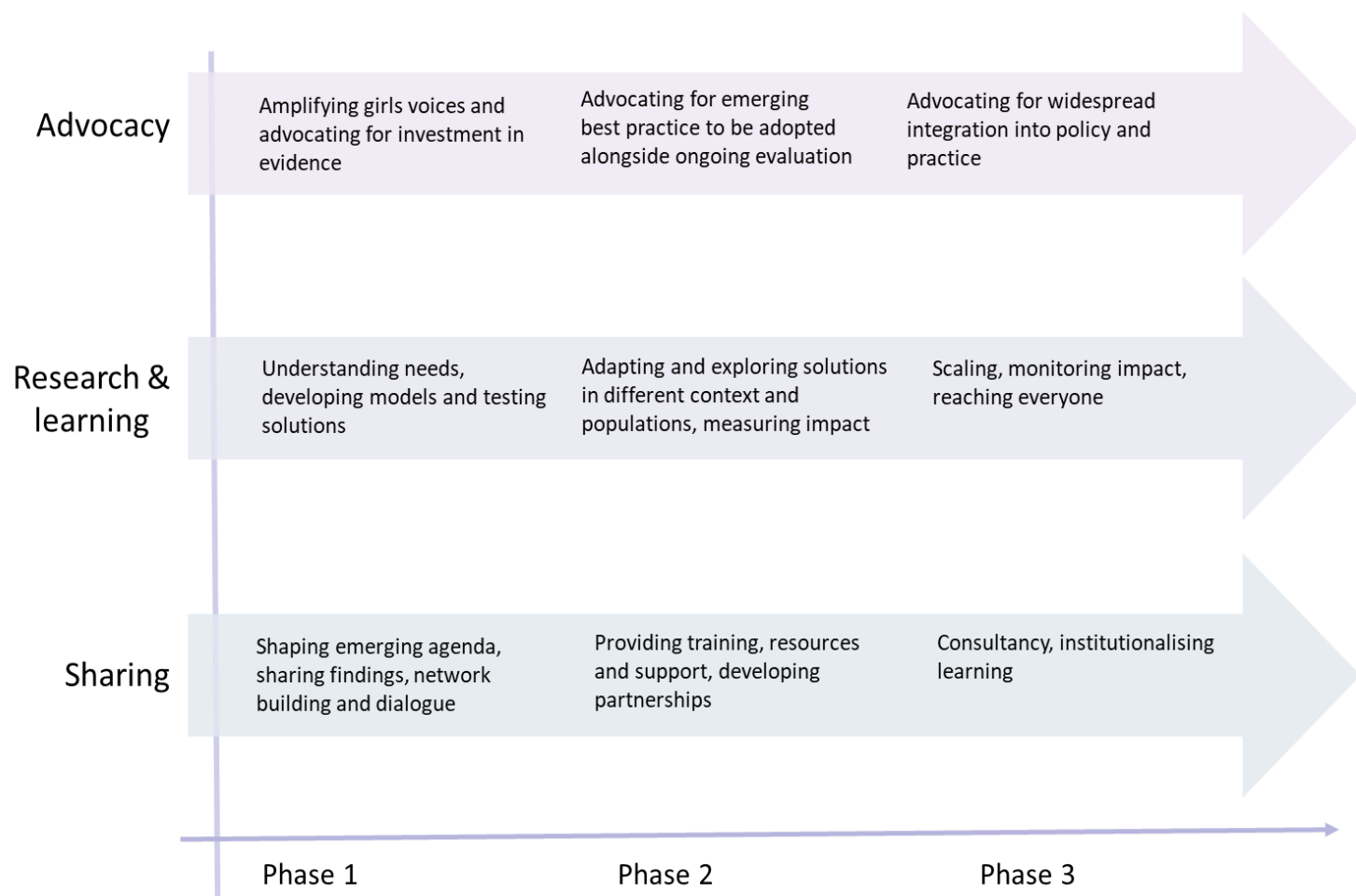


How we create change



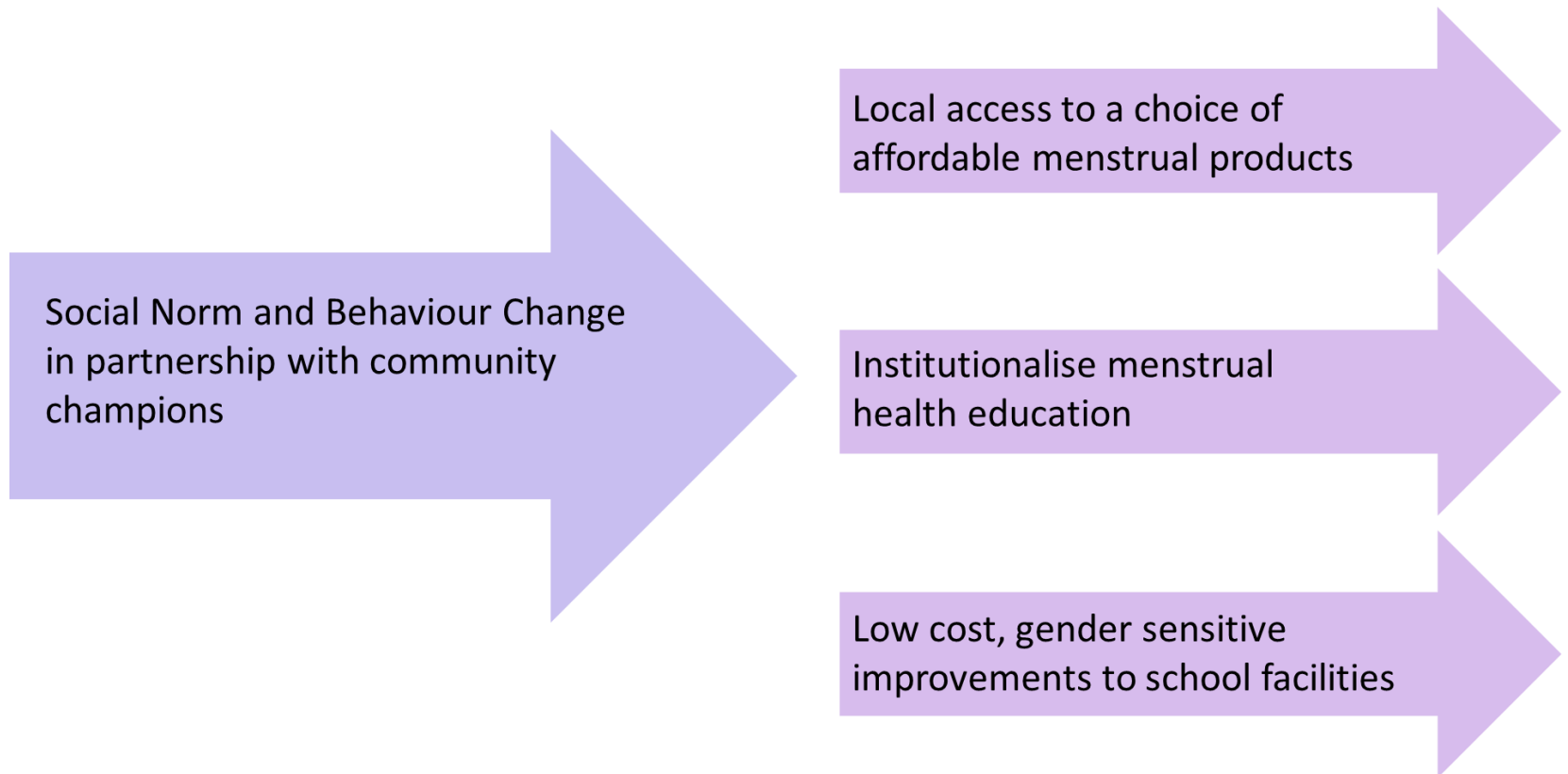
Our Approach

Irise believes that a phased approach to intervention development and scale-up produces impactful, cost effective initiatives and avoids inadvertent harm.



Developing Solutions- Uganda

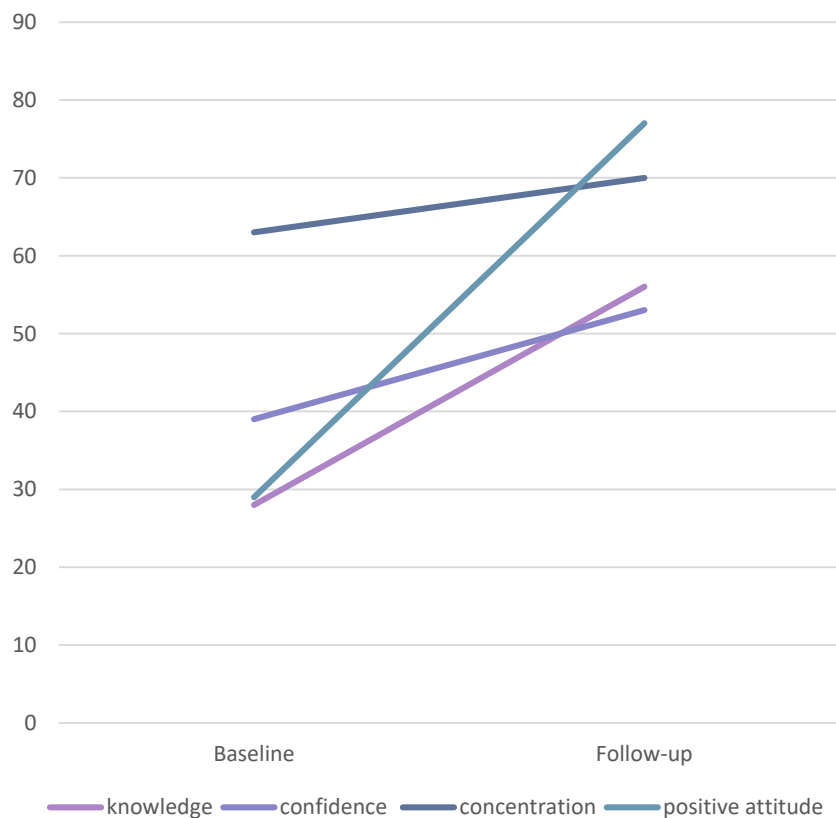
We work in partnership with community champions to dismantle menstrual stigma and create sustainable menstruation friendly schools and communities. We set-up access to a choice of affordable menstrual products through establishing local entrepreneurs, work with teachers and the District Education office to institutionalise menstrual health education and partner with parents and the wide community to make and sustain low cost, gender sensitive improvements to school facilities.



The Results

Girls

% of girls with “adequate” knowledge, confidence, concentration in class and attitudes towards menstruation



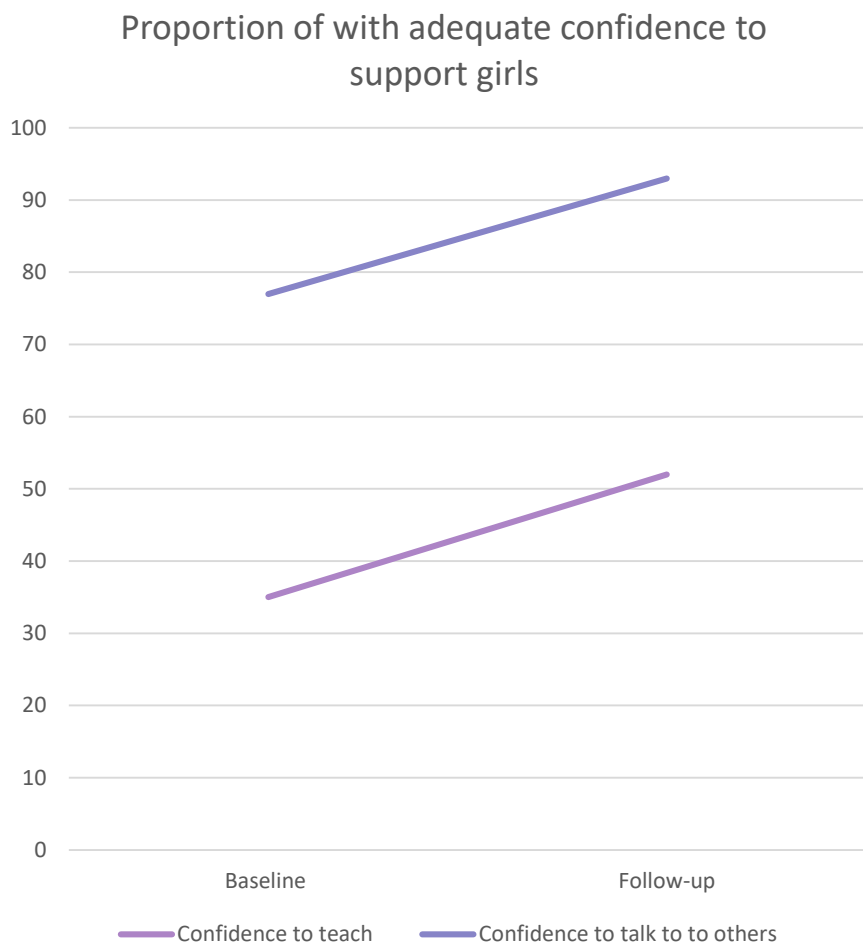
Boys

Proportion with “adequate” knowledge and attitudes towards menstruation



The Results

Teachers and Parents



Entrepreneurs

52% increase in household income
spent on:

Growing their business
Sending their children to school
Feeding their Family

The Results

“I was fearful I could not stay in friendship, I was fearful even coming to school, nowadays I am free, I go to school, I jump”



“At first I had fear, I would feel ashamed about menstruation but I learnt that menstruation is normal, so nowadays if I have a problem I can talk about it”

“The children have been exposed to the issue through the socialisation of Irise. They now discuss it [menstruation] freely...The girls lived in fear but now they are confident. It is becoming easy and they can perform well because they are comfortable.”



Tabitha, Deputy Head Teacher

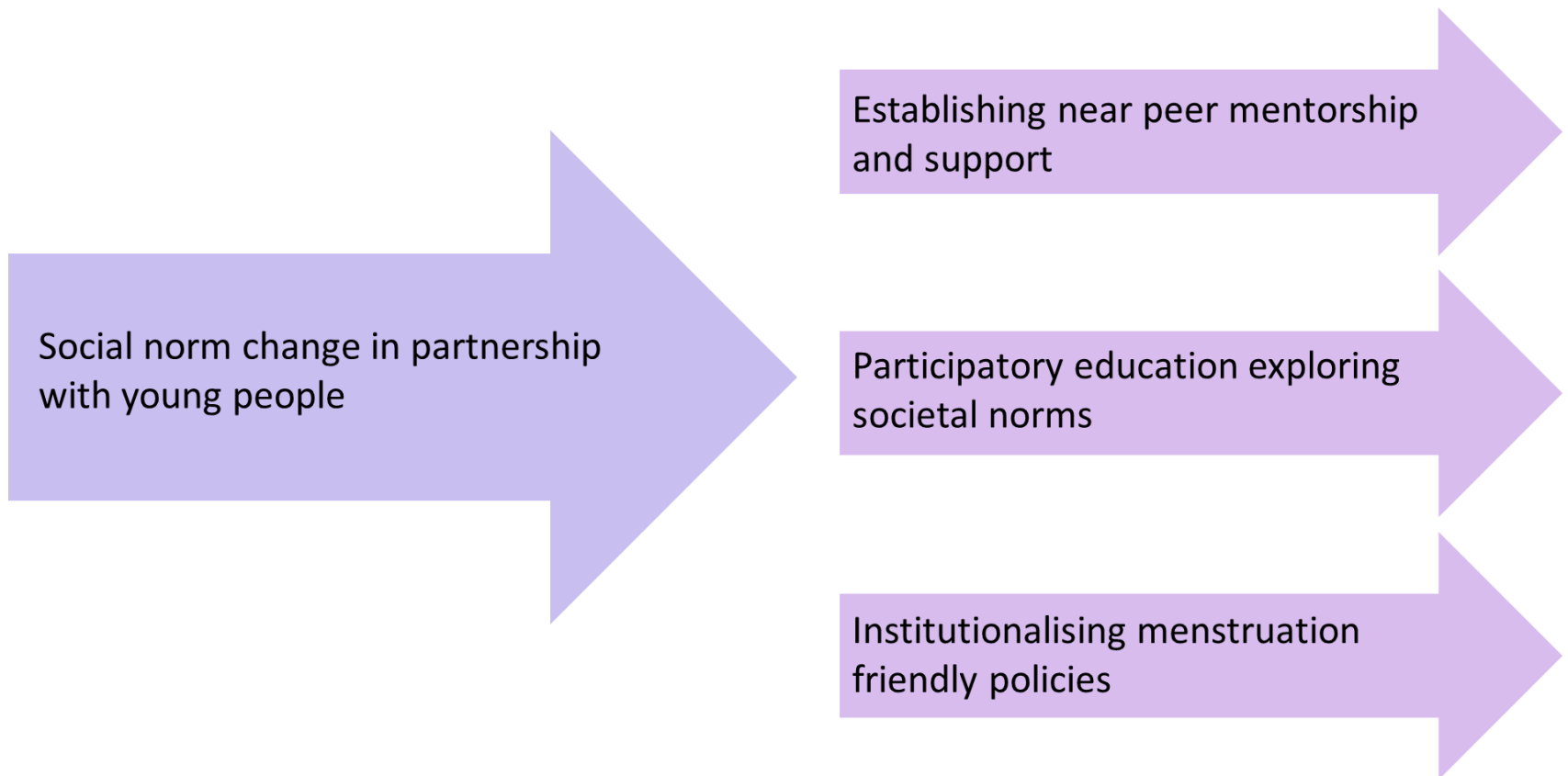


“I can now afford immediate needs like food and clothes without burdening my parents. I also gained confidence to address community...I have made constructive friends in the communities where I operate from....people can now use both reusable and disposable pads unlike in the past where girls and women could use clothes. The myth that young girls may not be able to bear children when they use these pads no longer exists.”

Joan, Irise entrepreneur, single mother

Developing Solutions- UK

We're piloting approaches working in partnership with young people to create social norm change through establishing near peer mentorship and support, access to participatory education exploring societal norms around menstruation and institutionalising menstruation friendly policies and practice.



The Results

School aged children

Knowledge

Over 90% of young people demonstrated significant improvements in knowledge

Confidence

Over 50% of girls demonstrated significant improvements in confidence

Young People

Creating Change

87% of young people feel their involvement with Irise has helped create real change for women and girls.

Skills Development

100% of young people feel their involvement with Irise has helped them develop their skills

Career Development

90% of young people feel their involvement with Irise has helped them pursue their career of choice

Part of a Community

93% of young people feel part of a community of likeminded people

The Results

“I went on the internet to learn more about my period when I was 9 because I didn’t know what it was, I used a help line to find out and they were rubbish...we could say anything [in the Irise session] and we wouldn’t get in trouble for talking about it and we could share our opinions.”



School girl

“It has changed my attitudes towards my body...and in particular periods, massively. I have a totally new found confidence with it and I think I have learnt how to communicate with others to help produce this effect in them...inspiring a new generation and empowering people to speak about their bodies in a different way.”



Bianca



“The supportive culture has provided me with an important safe space to break down my own internalised menstrual stigma. It has also given me the chance to meet other people...who also care strongly about women and girls.”

Romany



“The stigma surrounding menstruation meant I was too embarrassed to ask to go to the toilet at school, or even to ask my mum for more absorbent pads, meaning I used menstrual materials for longer than was healthy... As I’ve got older and particularly through my involvement with Irise, I have been able to dismantle this internalised stigma.”

Sophie

Creating Evidence

- We're creating high quality evidence to understand the impact of menstrual health interventions and how to measure them, in partnership with academics.
- Impact of notable publications:
 - Irise's pilot study, published in a peer reviewed journal, has been cited in 8 peer reviewed papers and is scoring in the top 25% of all research outputs scored by Altmetric which tracks a range of sources to capture the attention surrounding a piece of research.
 - The associated report has been downloaded 6,430 times since it was published (1,363 times in the last year) and cited 9 times.
 - In 2016 it was combined with a study from the University of Oxford as part of an analysis to combine existing data on the effect of menstrual health interventions on school attendance. This paper has been read by over 22,000 people and cited 24 times.



Sharing learning

- Founding member and on the Steering Committee for the East and Southern Africa Menstrual Health Research Network-building collaborations and share priorities for menstrual health research.
- Part of the UNFPA's African Coalition for Menstrual Health Management Monitoring and Evaluation working group- creating consensus about measuring impact.
- Over 100 organisations have accessed our Menstrual Health Resources- over half intended to use them to plan a project or deliver training.



Advocating for Change

- We're part of the Ugandan government's Menstrual Hygiene Management Steering Committee and have worked with them to create national menstrual health policy, curricula and campaigns.
- We're co-convening the Research work stream of the UK government's Period Poverty task force, working to end period poverty in the UK by 2025.
- We're proud partners on Global Menstrual Hygiene Day- supporting the campaign since it started.

