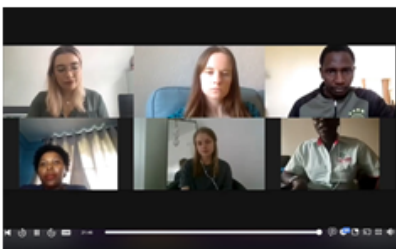


# POWER NOT JUST PADS

Irise's response to the global pandemic

March 2020-2021



**"It brought back life for us because I was stuck and stranded"**

Beatrice, single mother Uganda

**"I could never have imagined the impact of such kindness to my mental wellbeing."**

Helen, Asylum seeker, UK

# A hidden crisis

**The coronavirus crisis rapidly evolved into a girls' rights crisis as their fundamental dignity and right to safety was and continues to be jeopardised in a multitude of ways.**

Around the world women and girls are experiencing escalating physical, sexual and emotional violence at a time when help is harder to access than ever before. They face a disproportionate burden of care and exposure to infection as they struggle to fulfil their care giving responsibilities in their family and community. Across the contexts where we work many are struggling to feed their children, control their fertility and meet their basic gender specific needs. They feel hopeless and unheard by those in power.



**Globally: Over 10 Million girls at risk of dropping out of school.<sup>1</sup>**



**In Uganda: Estimated 20% of girls did not return to school after the first lockdown.<sup>2</sup>**



**In the UK: 1.5 million young women lost income since the start of the crisis.<sup>3</sup>**

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[1] Malala Fund

[2] African Revival-based on research in AR schools in Northern Uganda

[3] Young Women's Trust

**“Many girls’ [futures] are getting spoilt because of the situation at hand, and if things were good, many would study...many have been forced into early marriages, pregnancies. If we get help, many of us would go back to school, and we can achieve our dreams and become future leaders. ”**

**17 year old Ugandan school girl**

**“It seems those in power don't really care about us, especially [us] women. ”**

**Young woman in the UK**

The need to take drastic measures to fight coronavirus is not a choice, but we can choose to protect vulnerable women and girls’ basic rights as we do so-early on in the crisis Irise made a decision to fight for girls.

# Fighting back

**Irise took action across 3 strands:**

## ENSURING PROVISION

**Immediate support for overlooked gender specific needs.**

- Worked in partnership with local government in Jinja, Uganda to provide emergency support packages to the most vulnerable young people including menstrual products, soap and health information and Back to School kits to support girls back into school. Recipients included child headed households, girls with disabilities and young, single mothers.
- Provided empowerment packs to marginalised women and girls in South Yorkshire containing menstrual products, toiletries, health & wellbeing information and signposting to other services. Recipients include young carers, victims of rape and domestic abuse, asylum seekers and women from ethnic minority backgrounds and low-income households.

## PROVIDING PROTECTION

**Safeguard vulnerable young people.**

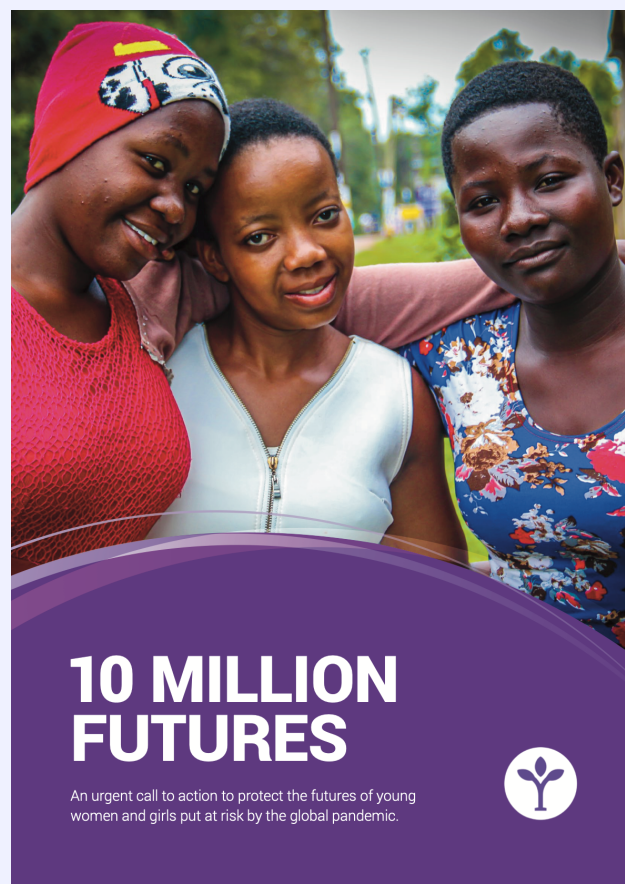
- Launched an interim safeguarding strategy in partnership with local government and community in Uganda including training for community leaders and champions, local radio shows, counselling for young women and girls and a push to get vulnerable girls back into school at the end of lockdown.
- Brought together over 100 diverse, young advocates in the UK to support each other and campaign for a response that leaves no one behind, including a Helping Hand campaign to raise awareness around domestic violence and how to get help.



## RESTORING POWER

### Amplify the experiences and priorities of those we support.

- Completed Needs Assessments and consultations in both contexts, culminating in the launch of reports and advocacy campaigns to put the priorities of marginalised young women and girls on the agenda.
- 10 Million Futures Report for East Africa called for urgent action to protect the futures of girls at risk of school drop out because of the pandemic-jeopardising a decade of progress.
- Young and Female; the Double Disadvantage for the UK called for urgent action to unlock the potential of young women to enable a rapid and resilient recovery.

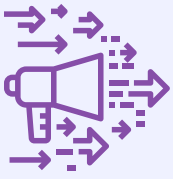


# Our impact



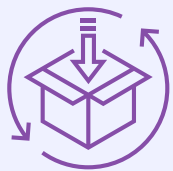
**6,800**

marginalised women and girls in the UK receiving empowerment packs.



**100**

young people in the UK engaged in advocacy.



**1,376**

emergency support packages supplied to Ugandan households with vulnerable children.



**718**

Back to School Kits distributed to Ugandan girls at risk of drop out.



**512**

vulnerable households received safeguarding support and counselling.

# Boosting mental health and wellbeing

We stood with people and let them know they were not alone.

"It made quite a few people emotional when they came to pick them up because it was like 'someone remembered me, this is going to help me';"

UK emergency response partner  
distributing empowerment packs



"It brought back life for us because I was stuck and stranded, we experienced improved health from the counselling provided, children are at least happy, pads provided gave comfort to my daughter and that saved me from extra costs."

Beatrice, single mother

# Protecting the most vulnerable

We made sure no one was forgotten

"My siblings stopped going to the neighbours to beg for food like they used to. I stopped asking for sanitary pads from my dad and the little money given to him by well-wishers could be used for buying food and not pads."

Kauma, 13 year old girl, Uganda



"Being an asylum seeker on less than £40 pound a week with fibroids has not been easy [...] The stress I go through every month whenever my period is approaching disappeared immediately [when I received your menstrual products]. I guess we don't sometimes appreciate the gravity of a little kindness. I could never have imagined the impact of such kindness to my mental wellbeing."

Helen, asylum seeker, UK

# Empowering Young People

We prioritised their futures

**"The pads helped me because I stopped using clothes and [...] started using the reusable pads [...] which helped me even to return to school. I didn't have enough books and pens but since Irise gave us [books] I became more comfortable with my studies until I finished my final exams."**

Nakakande, 15 year old school girl,  
Uganda



**"I can contribute to positive change and be vocal about women's issues."**

Nky, young woman, UK



# It's not over

The futures of young women and girls still hang in the balance. They are bearing the brunt of the social and economic impacts of the pandemic but are also the catalyst for a rapid and resilient recovery.

- In East Africa we're focusing on getting girls safely back to school and providing ongoing safeguarding and support as they recover from the traumas they have experienced, alongside initiatives to support young women to recover economically from the pandemic, increasing their agency and leadership.
- In the UK we're bringing young, diverse female leaders together to advocate government to listen to their priorities and build back a society where a female body is not a disadvantage.

**This work was funded with UK Aid from the UK government. Thanks to our funders and supporters:**





# POWER NOT JUST PADS REPORT

June 2021

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Creating period friendly communities

