

Empowering
People through
Period Equality.



An update from our CEO on Irise's work in East Africa- *empowering young women and girls to realise their full potential, unlimited by their periods.*



Hello!

I'm getting in touch to update you on the impact your support is having on the lives of young women and girls in East Africa.

As the number of girls in school globally drops for the first time in a decade, we're extremely grateful to everyone who has chose to stand with and for Irise community as we fight to reverse this.

We work in East Africa with and via our amazing sister organisation, Irise Institute East Africa. Here's a short message from their Regional Director, Lillian Bagala;

"Girls lose the confidence to freely express themselves, speak up against any form of violence inflicted on them, or even participate in leadership processes at school or in the community...we give voice and power to girls and young women to be assertive, speak up, and actively engage in leadership processes at all levels.

That is what we are advocating for, the chance to give every girl the choice to be herself and be vocal about what she needs to thrive..."



The Period Equality Network

We worked together, with our longstanding funder, The Waterloo Foundation, to start The Period Equality Network, a community of grassroots groups and community-based organisations, many led by young women, working to tackle period poverty, shame and inequality in their own communities.

To date the network has over 100 members across the East Africa Community!



Members of the Period Equality Network, including Irise Institute East Africa, are formally recognised for their contributions to menstrual health in Uganda

www.irise.org.uk

Registered charity number: 1157722

The network have worked together to champion girls' leadership and spearhead efforts to end period poverty and shame, even in the face of significant cuts to funding for gender equality.

Key achievements include:

- Making grants to groups in Uganda providing vital support to their communities, including:
 - **Health for Youth with Parents Involved-** working in 6 schools and 1 refugee community, HEYPI set-up a Gender Based Violence help desk to deal with rising cases and carried out music, dance and drama-based workshop to break period stigma among young people. They then worked with schools to make “safe spaces” for girls to manage their periods in school and created stigma busting content for local radio which they promoted in collaboration with local social media influencers.
 - **Faraja Africa Foundation-** delivered a digital storytelling campaign across 3 regions of Uganda to tackle harmful social and cultural norms surrounding periods.



A community group hold a sign saying, “No girl and no woman should be held back because she menstruates.” (left) Children pose with a sign as part of a community-led campaign (right)

- Irise Institute East Africa hosting virtual Regional Workshops on the Menstrual Health Landscape in East Africa, funded by the African Women’s Development Fund, and leading to the production of “Menstrual Health Country Snapshots” to guide policy and programming in the region.
- Irise Institute East Africa also worked with Uganda’s Ministry of Education and Sports to develop Uganda’s first National Strategic Plan for Menstrual Health and Hygiene in Uganda.
- Other TPEN members also took action, including The Zamara Foundation, a Period Equality Network member based in Kenya leading a petition, with other East African partners and Period Equality Network Members, to the Legislative Assembly of the East African Community to include menstrual health into the East Africa Community Sexual and Reproductive Health Bill during the public hearings.
- Irise Institute East Africa also brought together TPEN members and other stakeholders including The Ministry of Education and Sports Uganda, UNFPA East and Southern Africa and African Coalition on Menstrual Health for the first ever Regional Symposium for Grassroots Organisations addressing menstrual health in the East Africa Community. Funded by the African Women’s Development Fund.



School girls take part in the first ever Regional Symposium for grassroots organisations addressing menstrual health in the East Africa Community (left), delegates take a photo for social media outside the venue (right)

- Regional Director, Lillian Bagala, was also a Keynote Speaker at the Global Period Poverty Forum in Australia- where she shared lessons and learning from TPEN.



Period Friendly and Period Positive Schools

Thanks to support from our amazing community we were able to continue our Period Friendly and Period Positive school programmes- designed to build the capacity of local government, communities and schools to keep girls in school during their periods.

The programme has already been delivered in 41 schools across Central and Eastern Uganda, reaching and estimated 12,000 girls.



Girls pose together after a Menstrual Health Education session

We commissioned an independent evaluation which found:

- Improvement in girls' confidence and ability to concentrate and participate in class during their period.
- Menstrual related absenteeism was halved
- An increase in the proportion of girls' achieving top grades in exams
- Girls with disability or from low socioeconomic status benefit the most- reducing inequality.
- Changes were sustained through significant disruption caused by covid-19

Here's what our independent evaluator's and technical reviewer at the UK's Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) said about our work:

"The Menstruation Friendly Schools (MFS) project achieved its intended outcomes and provides a convincing model for effective school-based interventions. Despite the unprecedented disruption of the pandemic, the project demonstrated significant achievements in overall impact." -Technical Reviewer from the UK's Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office

"More still, majority of the project schools have been influenced to mainstream menstruation management and education into their school programmes and plans, and importantly in budgets, to ensure that schools provide at least emergency products to the girls. This indeed as indicated in the results has greatly contributed to the girls' comfort, confidence and thriving in schools....Scaling up and replication of this project and approach would allow for consolidation of these gains and provide benefit to all Ugandan communities where menstruation is still treated with limited appreciation." - Elizabeth M. Asimwe

Rise-Up

Last year we launched the Rise-Up Initiative in partnership with Irise Institute East Africa and The Kulczyk Foundation to help female-led social enterprises already tackling period poverty and shame in their communities to recover from the pandemic and support girls struggling to access pads, underwear and toiletries.

Thirty entrepreneurs accessed peer mentorship and training and went on to mentor 40 school girls who received start-up capital to set-up their own small businesses.

Girls benefitting from the programme were more able to manage their periods and felt more confident in school as a result.

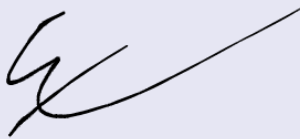
88% of entrepreneurs felt the programme had helped them to support girls in their own communities and grow their business.

School girl Leilah, thanked the Irise community for seeing and investing in her **“capability.”**



Entrepreneurs, school girls and a local Member of Parliament celebrate their successes

Thank you for everything you do to help make period equality a reality. We look forward to continuing the fight for a world where every girl can realise her potential, unlimited by her period in 2023.



Emily Wilson
CEO Irise International