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The Global Health Network

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Menstruating girls and women are often held back by their low self-confidence, negative patriarchal societal attitudes, and limited capacities or platforms that hinder active participation in structural and mainstream political leadership. Historically, men have held positions of power, and there have been few women in leadership positions, which may be one of the contributing factors why Menstrual Health has not effectively been advocated for at national and local levels.

This baseline study was conducted by Irise Institute East Africa under the “Tomorrow is Different” project that is funded by the African Women’s Development Fund. The goal of the study was to ascertain baseline information on how menstruation and menstrual-related symptoms hinder girls’ participation in school leadership structures including prefectorial bodies. The research targeted 100 participants in five districts in Uganda including Jinja, Kabale, Kumi, Soroti, and Rukiga, including schoolgirls, teachers, local government leaders, Ministry of Education and Sports officials, and Period Equality Network members. The qualitative study employed open-ended questionnaires for Period Equality Network members, structured interviews for local government leaders and teachers, and online surveys (google forms) for Ministry of Education and Sports officials.

Findings revealed that period poverty affects the confidence of girls especially when they stain commonly known as stamping, and the stigma often comes from their fellow learners especially boys, as well as teachers which prompt such girls to drop out of school. Additionally, girls are worried about their commitment to school since they miss some days due to inadequate access to products. The study also established that girls are often left out in decision-making processes that limit them to share their experiences.

The outcomes from the study will guide the integration of leadership development in menstrual health education sessions for schools. Recommendations from the study included capacity building for boys and teachers, equipping schools with emergency menstrual products, and construction of gender-responsive WASH facilities in schools for example incinerators to help in the proper disposal of disposable sanitary pads, safe spaces and changing rooms for the girls.