

MENSTRUAL POVERTY

Instead of period products, millions of women around the world use ...

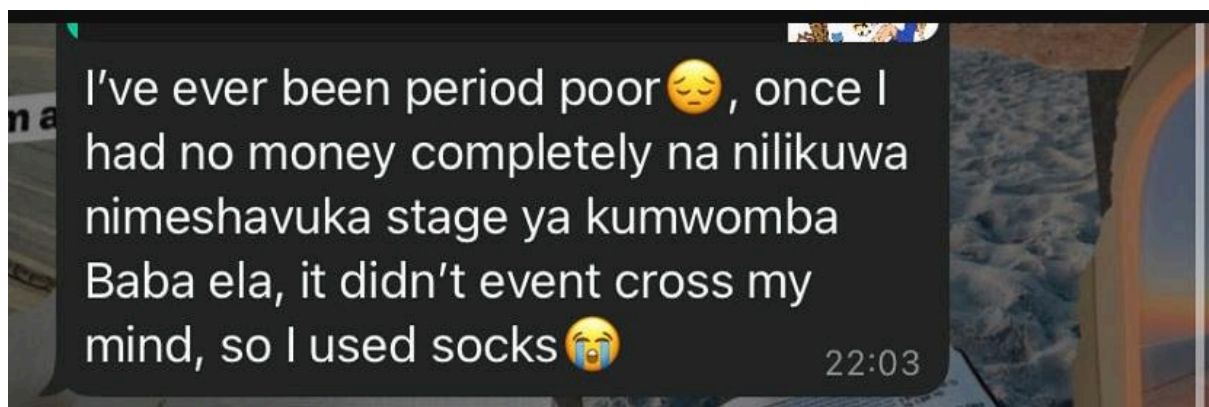


Illustration from Care Organization showing what women around the world use instead of period products.

As I sit here with my eyes closed, I'm taken back to eleven years ago the day I got my first period. I was a teenager. I'd learned about menstruation in school, but as the first daughter, I had no older sister to turn to. And I was too afraid to talk to my mother. That Monday morning, I woke up and realized I'd started my period. I had no money for sanitary pads. I searched my room, found a khanga, tore off a piece, folded it, and used it as a pad. I didn't know how to do it properly. It was bulky, uncomfortable, and painful. By the end of the day, I was sore, chafed, and emotionally drained.

That experience shaped how I viewed periods for years. Now, working in girls' empowerment, I've heard many stories far worse than mine. Girls using leaves, newspapers, rags, even cow dung because they can't afford pads. I've seen it in rural communities, but it doesn't stop there. Period poverty exists in cities, classrooms, offices everywhere. It's silent, but it's real.

One woman messaged me after I posted about this issue:



"I've ever experienced this. I was in my period, I had no money, and I was past the stage of asking my dad for help. It didn't even cross my mind. So I used socks and I felt so uncomfortable 😞. I would really never wish myself to be in that situation"

She shared it with me. That hit me hard. This is not a rare experience, it's just rarely spoken about.

Let's Start with the Truth

- In Tanzania, menstrual products are still taxed as luxury items.

Let that sink in.

- Pads are treated like non-essential goods, yet they are a basic need for half the population.
- This Value Added Tax (kodi ya pad) inflates prices, making pads unaffordable for many. For countless girls, this means skipping school, using unsafe alternatives, or suffering in silence.

This tax must go.

- Removing it would be a powerful step toward equity, dignity, and opportunity for girls and women across Tanzania.

What Are We Teaching at Home?

- Period poverty isn't just a policy issue it's a mindset issue. It begins with what we believe, what we teach, and what we stay silent about.

We need to ask ourselves:

- Do our daughters feel safe talking about their periods?
- Do our sons understand that menstruation is normal?
- What are we saying directly or indirectly about periods in our homes?

Every shift begins at the family level. When we raise boys to respect, not shame, menstruation, we raise men who can support and not judge girls in school, women in the workplace, and their partners in daily life.

But here's the reality: most boys aren't raised that way. They grow up being told, directly or subtly, that periods are not their business.

They learn that menstruation is something "disgusting," "feminine," and "off-limits."

They're taught that real men don't talk about pads. Don't ask questions. Don't get involved.

As these boys grow into young men, they enter schools, communities, and friend groups that reinforce the same toxic message.

And if any man dares to speak up about menstruation or support it in any way he's ridiculed, labeled as weak, or dismissed as "not a real man."

This mindset creates generations of men who stay distant, silent, and sometimes harmful men who look away instead of stepping up.

But this cycle can be broken.

When we bring men into the conversation early and intentionally we give them permission to care, to learn, to lead with empathy. We raise boys who will one day help their daughters buy pads without shame, advocate for policy change, and build workplaces where women don't have to hide when they're in pain.

Menstruation affects everyone because girls and women are everywhere at home, in class, at work, in leadership.

We need men who understand that being part of the solution doesn't make them any less of a man. It makes them human.

To Funders and Changemakers

Menstruation may seem small to you but it's not small for the girls living it. Shame, discomfort, and missed opportunities are a daily reality for many.

Fund the work that matters!

Support movements providing pads, reproductive health education, and spaces where girls can understand their bodies and gain confidence.

At WOYOMO (Women and Youth Movement), we work closely with girls and young people through different programs, and one of our most recent projects, Health Spark, focuses on students and conversations around Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) including menstruation. We believe deeply in the power of just one sentence, one moment of guidance, to change the course of a girl's life.

And these conversations are not just for girls. We intentionally include boys and young men in these dialogues because menstruation is not just a "women's issue." Men are part of our daily lives as fathers, brothers, classmates, partners, colleagues, and leaders. They interact with our menstrual journeys at every stage at home, in workplaces, in schools, in relationships, even on the street.

By involving men and boys, we help break down the stigma and shame surrounding periods. We teach them how they can support, not judge. How they can advocate for menstrual rights, how to create safe spaces for women to rest when they need to, and how to shift their mindsets away from ignorance or embarrassment toward understanding and empathy.

We're ready to partner with those who want to see real change.

If you want to be part of this movement, email us at: info@woyomo.or.tz

Let's build a better world for every girl in Tanzania together.

And I leave you with this:

"If a pad can change a girl's day, what's stopping us from changing her world?"

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