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WomenStrong International Launches Menstrual Education Campaign to Reduce Obstacles Preventing Impoverished Girls from Finishing School

#WomenStrongWarrior Supports Teenage Girls in Ghana, Kenya, Haiti and India who want an education but are stopped at puberty by stigma and poverty

Washington, D.C. (May 22, 2017) – WomenStrong International, a consortium of non-profit organizations in five nations supporting women-driven solutions to extreme urban poverty, today launched a campaign to increase menstruation education and reduce obstacles preventing girls from getting the education they need to create better, more prosperous lives.

WomenStrong invited those who care about women and girls to join #WomenStrongWarrior on Menstrual Hygiene Day, May 28, and support the fight for access to menstrual and reproductive health education, sanitary pads and basic facilities, such as school toilets.

“Our experience working with adolescent girls in sub-Saharan Africa and India demonstrates the importance of education, which is everything to a girl hoping for a better life,” said Dr. Susan M. Blaustein, WomenStrong Founder and Executive Director. “We call on schools, local governments, multilateral institutions, policymakers and international development organizations to help create a world where menstrual health is a human right and girls can grow up with dignity and joy in their womanhood.”

Studies show that most girls don’t receive the information they need on changes that occur at puberty and don’t have money to buy sanitary products. These gaps become insurmountable barriers to school attendance. Yet, education is known to be the most critical factor in a woman’s ability to delay marriage, survive childbirth, raise healthier and better-educated children, and emerge from poverty. When a girl misses a week of school each month because of her period, or drops out, she is condemned to a life without resources or dignity. The impact of losing this girl resonates in the national economy since educating girls is now known to be one of the highest yielding investments in the economic growth of developing countries.

WomenStrong’s Consortium members working at the community level in the slums of Kisumu,

Kenya; Kumasi, Ghana; and Madurai, India, have established Girls' Clubs, providing thousands of adolescent girls with a safe place to make friends, build confidence, learn about sexual and reproductive health and rights, and exchange information with peers and mentors. The Clubs have seen the substantial positive impact of training girls and boys on puberty and menstrual and reproductive health and hygiene. Including boys, men, mothers, teachers, health workers and others in trainings helps break the silence around menstruation, destroys negative myths and misinformation, and removes the stigma from this natural biological process.

But trainings alone aren't enough. Girls also need school toilets with doors and locks for privacy, and basic menstrual supplies. So, as often as possible, trainings are followed up with the provision of personal hygiene packs containing sanitary pads, soap and panties, all of which increase a girl's chances of staying in school.

Research funded by The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation found that 65% of Kenyan women and girls were unable to afford sanitary pads and often resorted to using rags or even leaves, the source of a variety of health risks. Families living on less than \$2 per day are faced with choosing between buying sanitary pads for their daughters or food for the family.

"To a young girl, the obstacles seem huge, simply overwhelming. Confusion, embarrassment, no money to buy the supplies so many of us take for granted. But it really takes so little to change a girl's life," Dr. Blaustein said. "Even a small contribution makes a big difference to a girl, now and for years to come."

- \$12 can buy a girl a year's worth of sanitary pads
- \$25 pays for two packets of sanitary pads, a monthly recording chart and pencil
- \$50 buys a menstruation kit, with a year's worth of pads, panties and soap
- \$100 buys a girl a menstruation kit for two years
- \$200 provides menstruation kits for four girls in a WomenStrong location of the donor's choosing

#WomenStrongWarrior is a part of a growing global movement calling for menstrual hygiene education that informs and empowers girls and women to make decisions on managing their own bodies. Organizations and governments are calling for menstruation education to be part of national school curricula, as well as policies and programs for teen boys and girls.

For more information on WomenStrong International, and to stay updated on program news, innovations and stories that inspire from around the world, please visit www.womenstrong.org or follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) or [Instagram](#).

ABOUT WOMENSTRONG INTERNATIONAL

WomenStrong International is a consortium of non-profit organizations in five nations supporting women-driven solutions to extreme urban poverty. WSI emerged from a decade of work at Columbia University's Millennium Cities Initiative where we found the most successful programs were local and led by women. Through our Consortium members in Ghana, Kenya, Haiti, India and Washington, D.C., we help thousands of women and girls meet their 6 Essential needs for health, shelter, safety, education, economic empowerment and a functioning urban environment. These women, in turn, improve the lives of their children, families, communities and nations. WomenStrong International believes the path out of poverty and toward a more just and prosperous world can be found by making women strong. For more information, visit www.womenstrong.org.

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