

PERIODS DO NOT PAUSE FOR PANDEMICS

**International Menstrual
Hygiene Day 2021**



PATHWAYS

MEANINGFULLY ENGAGING COMMUNITIES



Menstrual Hygiene Day also known as MH Day is an international and annual awareness day held every year to highlight the importance of proper Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM). The theme of Menstrual Hygiene Day 2021 was “**Action and Investment in Menstrual Hygiene and Health.**” MH Day is observed on 28th of May because menstrual cycles average **28** days in length and people menstruate for an average of five days every month. (May is the **fifth** month of the year). This year, Pathways Policy Institute in conjunction with Drawing Dreams Initiative held two events to mark #MHD2021.



The discussions during the events were organized to focus on the following thematic areas: Menstrual Health, Reproductive Health and Life Skills and Career Choices. The objectives of these activities were to educate participants on Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM), to disseminate Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) information to the girls and boys and to distribute sanitary towels. This is cognizant to the fact that most of the pupils/students in the two institutions come from the informal settlements close by and they face various challenges such as inadequate access to sanitation facilities, broken families, child marriage, sexual violence, violations of bodily autonomy and period poverty.



In commemoration of Menstrual Hygiene Day 2021, Pathways Policy Institute in conjunction with Drawing Dreams Initiative held two pad drives in **St. Louis Primary school** on 26th May 2021 and at **Liki Secondary School** on 28th May 2021, in Laikipia County. These two pad drives were not only held because it is normal to do so on the 28th of May every year but took place strategically to break the taboos surrounding the inclusion of the boy child in the menstruation conversations in schools. In addition, to share accurate information on the importance of good Menstrual Hygiene Management from the most formative stage of young people's lives, which is while they are still in school.



As a result, **150** girls were reached directly at Liiki Secondary School, **5** teenage mothers received **2** kilograms of 'Unga wa Uji' each and **100** boys were mentored. At St Louis Primary School, **50** girls received pads and **100** boys were mentored. The engagements which involved students from different grades/classes and schools had one thing in common, inclusion of boys in the menstrual health and hygiene matters, which is still very low and, in some cases, nonexistent. It was very quickly noted that social norms imposed on boys and young men, are what make them shy from this conversation, those that were present for the talks in both schools after noticing how comfortable the male facilitators were with talking about menstrual hygiene, also very quickly got involved and were eager to learn and ask questions that they would normally shy away from asking. They too by the end of the talks shouted proudly that indeed periods do not pause for pandemics.



The dancing and laughter that took place after as the students, teachers and facilitators interacted, expressed a shift in the perception of menstruation by the boys and a relief to the girls that a matter previously perceived as shameful could be so warmly accepted among all of them and be a reason to celebrate and be proud. As the girls proudly held up their sanitary kits which were tokens from Pathways Policy Institute and Drawing Dreams Initiative, the boys and young men smiled proudly beside them signaling an understanding that menstruation is natural and nothing to make the girls feel embarrassed about.

