



Period Poverty



WaterAid/James Kiyimba



In support of



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Girlguiding



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This resource is made up of two 45 minute core sessions. There are 3 activities in each. There are also 3 further activities available in the optional pack, should you wish to do more.

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Introduction

“It is time to break the stigma surrounding periods. From a young age we are told that periods are meant to be private, a secret to be dealt with quietly, leaving many people ashamed and often uninformed about periods. We need to bring periods into the open and give young people the opportunity to learn and ask questions. Everybody deserves to feel comfortable and confident in their body, and that is why the Advocate panel is excited to be taking action to destigmatise periods. We called on Girlguiding to take action to end period poverty and stigma. And, as a result these brilliant unit activities were created!

We'd love it if, as part of these activities, you could collect products, for girls in your unit to access and to donate to a local foodbank. That way, as Girlguiding members, we can be part of the solution to period poverty. There is also a pledge your unit can make to commit to ending stigma and shame about periods!

We hope that you'll enjoy the activities created by WaterAid, and please let us know how your unit is tackling period poverty!”

- Ellie Dibben, Lead Volunteer for Advocate



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Every day, 800 million women have their period, yet in most parts of the world it is still considered embarrassing and taboo. This secrecy makes it much more difficult for women and girls to get the help and support they need to manage their periods hygienically and with dignity – particularly for the one in three women who have no access to a decent toilet. And because 3 in 10 schools worldwide don't have clean water and 1 in 3 don't have toilets, when students are on their period, they often stay at home and miss out on an education altogether.

WaterAid is working to ensure that all girls have access to the decent toilets, clean water, information and support needed to manage their periods with dignity, so they can stay in school and achieve their dreams and aspirations. When a community gets clean water, decent toilets and good hygiene, it's girls and women whose lives can change the most.

“Periods shouldn't come in the way of us achieving our dreams. I don't think any girl should miss a school day because she is a girl.” – Melal, 15, Ethiopia

Young people are powerful agents of change and are vital in helping us break the taboo and stigma linked to periods. By giving young people a voice and empowering them to speak out on issues which traditionally are seen as taboo, they can be the change needed. But periods are not just a problem in the developing world. The taboo around periods is still very much alive in the UK which is why we're proud to be working with Girlguiding to help break the stigma and taboos linked to periods, by encouraging everyone, everywhere to get talking about periods.

We can help you bring your sessions to life. Request a free WaterAid speaker to help get the conversation about periods flowing and find out more about period poverty around the world by visiting:

www.wateraid.org/requestaspeaker



Notes to leaders

Why is Girlguiding campaigning on this?

Girlguiding listens to and is led by girls. After being approached by the Girlguiding Advocates, Girlguiding asked its Senior Section members if we should take action on period poverty, and 97% them voted to join the campaign to end period poverty.

Who does this affect?

While this may not be a problem for the girls in every unit at the moment, it is an issue that affects a significant number of girls in the UK. Plan UK have reported that period poverty in fact affects 1 in 10 girls*. Period poverty is also a hidden issue, which means that girls may hide the fact that this is an issue which affects them, so it best not to assume a girl's situation. Plan UK also report that almost half of girls aged 14-25 feel embarrassed about their period*. It is likely that some girls are too embarrassed to tell somebody when they are struggling to afford products. And, even when girls can afford products, many still feel shame & embarrassment around their periods.

Girlguiding wants to change this and support amazing work already happening.

<https://plan-uk.org/media-centre/almost-half-of-girls-aged-14-21-are-embarrassed-by-their-periods>

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Notes to leaders

Should we let parents/carers know?

We recommend that you check with parents/carers before running sessions on periods with girls, particularly if they are a Brownie or a Rainbow group. The unit resources are created with Guides and the Senior Section in mind, but unit leaders may be able to adapt them to suit a younger group's needs.

Do I need to be an expert on all things related to periods to deliver these sessions?

No! These sessions are about giving girls the space to explore periods and understand what they can do to challenge period poverty and stigma around periods. Ultimately, this is an optional unit activity and as the expert about your unit, you can adapt the resources to best meet the needs of the group.

Privacy vs Challenging Stigma

While you may wish to keep your experiences private, and we believe everyone has the right to, there shouldn't be shame or stigma attached to anyone who chooses to share their experiences. In fact, sharing experiences of periods can be a really useful way to learn tips for dealing with PMS or to hear about different products like menstrual cups!

Unit meetings should be a safe space for girls to share their experiences and talk freely without feeling judged or embarrassed.

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Notes to leaders

Why aren't you referring to girls – why people?

While experiencing periods is something which overwhelmingly affects girls and women, it is not only girls and women who experience periods, as trans boys and non-binary people experience them too. Girlguiding is committed to being inclusive. We believe that anyone who needs to access period products should be able to do so.

You can also buy the period poverty badge from Girlguiding for the girls in your unit to wear with pride. We hope you enjoy running these sessions with girls!

<https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/making-guiding-happen/running-your-unit/including-all/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/>

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Session one activities

Stigma and language

Let's get talking!

Time needed:
20 minutes

What you'll need:

2 large sheets of paper: one headed 'open' and the other with 'private'

Sticky notes

Blue tac

Shoe box or container labelled with 'Period Knowledge Box'. There should be an easy way for girls to post questions into it.

Aim of the activity

To get thinking about how we and other people feel about talking about periods.

What girls will get out of it:

You will consider reasons for why people feel uncomfortable talking about periods.

You will think about why it is a good idea to talk about periods openly.

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Let's get talking!

What to do

1. Write the following two headings onto each large sheet of paper: 'Open' and 'Private'. Stick these onto the wall in opposite ends of the space.
2. Explain that they will be doing an activity about things we are happy to talk openly about, such as the weather, and things that we might only talk about in private, such as our feelings about people. Emphasise that there are no right or wrong answers.
3. Split the group in two. One team will be trying to come up with open topics and the other team will think about private topics. Ask each group to stand in a line behind each other, facing either the paper marked 'open' or the paper marked 'private'.

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Let's get talking!

4. The girls will take part in a relay race. The person at the front approaches the paper and writes something she thinks is an open or private topic (depending which group she is in). The next girl in the line can only go to the paper once the first person has returned to the back of the line. The teams will have 2 minutes to write as many examples on the paper stuck to the wall as they can.
5. Bring the group back together, and looking at the sheet marked 'open', ask them to explain why this is so. They could think about how they feel talking about these topics and why. For example, comfortable, happy and so on.
6. Move on to look at the 'private' topics. How would they feel talking about these topics openly? For example, embarrassed, uncomfortable and so on. Ask them why they feel this way? For example, because no one talks about them usually, or they are embarrassing topics that they would only talk about with someone they trust.

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Let's get talking!

7. If the topic of periods hasn't already come up, write 'periods' onto a sticky note and hold it up for the group to see. Ask them to place the sticky note under the heading that matches how they feel about talking about periods. Ask for reasons.
8. Ask what they think these observations tell us about talking about periods? Explain that in general, periods are usually not talked about openly. People may find talking about periods difficult depending on where they are and who they are talking to. Girls may prefer to talk about periods to other girls or people who have periods privately, or they may find talking to boys about periods slightly awkward.
9. Can they think of any reasons for why it might be a good idea to talk about periods openly? Explain that if it is not talked about openly, the wrong information may be given which could affect your health or lead to girls not knowing what a period is, or what to do when they start. Periods should be talked about openly because it's nothing to be ashamed or embarrassed about. It's a natural change that happens.

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Let's get talking!

10. Period knowledge box - explain to the girls that throughout these sessions, they can post questions they may have about periods into the 'period box'. After each activity (or unit meeting) you can open the period knowledge box, read out the question and see if it can be answered by yourself or the group. If there is uncertainty on the answer, they could look it up between unit meetings . The girls can bring in questions from home if they wish.
11. You could bring the period knowledge box to the next few meetings following the weeks when you run your period activities to allow girls to post questions in and open the box at the end of the meetings to see if the group can answer the questions. If there are any questions which arise which you don't know the answer to, you don't need to have all the answers, and definitely not straight away!

You could suggest that girls look the information up on the NHS website: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/periods/>.

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Guess what it is

Time needed:

15 minutes

What you'll need:

Large sheet of paper stuck onto the wall

Pens – enough for the whole group to have one each

A printed or written out version of the Girlguiding pledge

Period Box

Aim of the activity

Discover how the language and words used when talking about periods makes it a taboo subject.

To pledge to tackle the stigma that surrounds periods

What girls will get out of it

You will think about the way in which people talk about periods and whether this is helpful in making it a topic that is easy to bring up in conversation.

You will pledge to break the stigma attached to periods.

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Guess what it is

What to do

1. Explain that periods are often seen as a 'taboo' subject (something people don't want to mention or talk about). When people consider something to be a taboo or private, they sometimes use different words to describe it and intentionally avoid mentioning the topic or word directly.
2. In small groups (of 4 or 5) ask the girls to spend 2 minutes thinking of different words or phrases they have heard of for periods or if they have any words or phrases of their own that they use. Examples could include Aunty Flo, red lights, menstruation, time of the month, rag week and so on.
3. Give out a pen to each group and ask someone from each group to write the words and phrases they've heard on the large piece of paper stuck at the front of the room.



Guess what it is

4. Ask the girls to read out some of the words. Ask the group if they seem serious? Funny? Do they make it clear what is being referred to?
5. Explain that Girlguiding Advocates think that by having different words for periods, it makes them seem like something that should be secret, hidden away and never mentioned. Girlguiding Advocate Emma has said,

“Because of the stigma around periods, shops selling products don’t even use the word ‘period! Instead they use sanitary or hygiene – as if periods are something that’s dirty!”

It can also be very confusing to know which word to use when you need to talk about periods.

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Guess what it is

6. Ask the group how might the words we use, such as 'sanitary or hygiene' make it difficult to find period products or talk about them? Can they think of different phrases that could be used to help them find the products they need and help them talk about periods?
7. Explain to your unit that because language around periods is important in making them less taboo, Girlguiding wants there to be a change in the way we talk about periods! Girlguiding is calling for the language to change from hygiene or sanitary products, to period or menstrual products. This will help stop girls and women feeling embarrassed or ashamed about their periods as the words are being used openly.
8. Tell the girls that they will be working to help make periods more of an open topic - to make them feel period proud and to tackle some of the issues that surround periods. To get started on this important challenge they will be making the pledge on the next page. Read out the pledge and ask the girls what they think of it.

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The WaterAid logo icon, which is a blue water drop shape.

Guess what it is

Girlguiding period pledge

“We pledge to tackle period stigma by talking openly about periods, so no one feels embarrassed talking about them”

9. Together they should raise their hands to show support for the pledge and call it out with pride or create a chant to say the pledge.
10. Ask girls to sign and decorate the printed version of the pledge.
11. If they want to take the pledge further, they could think of ways that they can make their pledge public. Who could they tell? How could they do it? You can tell Girlguiding you've made the pledge by going to:

www.girlguiding.org.uk/periodpoverty

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Is that a fact?

Time needed:

15 minutes

What you'll need:

The 'true or false' quiz

Aim of the activity

To introduce facts about periods that the group may not have thought of before.

What girls will get out of it

You can check your period knowledge to make sure that you are well informed without feeling embarrassed

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Is that a fact?

What to do

1. Explain to the girls that they are going to take part in a true or false quiz about periods. This will make sure that they have the right information they need to deal with their period. If they think a statement is true, they should move to one end of the room and if they think a statement is false, they move to the opposite end of the room. If they are not sure or neutral, they should stand in the middle.
2. Read out the statements below. After the girls have chosen what they think the answer is, give the correct answer and accompanying information.
3. When you complete the quiz, ask the girls if there were any facts that they found particularly surprising or shocking. Ask which ones and why. To end the activity, explain to the group that knowing about periods can help them prepare if they have periods, and help them understand that periods are normal, not something to be ashamed of.

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Is that a fact?

True or False quiz

Usually periods last for around two weeks. FALSE – A period usually lasts between 2-7 days.

Some people bleed more than others. TRUE – Everyone's body is different, which means that the amount of bleeding varies between people.

Periods occur every month, at around the same date. TRUE – Your menstrual cycle (the time between your periods) is usually around 21 – 35 days long. It varies between people. This means that your period is usually around the same time every month.



Is that a fact?

You can only buy period products from a chemist. FALSE –

Products such as period pads, cups and tampons are available from many places including newsagents, corner shops, chemists, supermarkets and even vending machines.

You could ask where else they think period products should be available from and who should be able to access these.

Every girl starts their first period at the age of 12. FALSE – People can start their periods from the age of 8 to around 16. Everyone is different and starts at different ages.

You should flush pads (or period towels) and tampons down the toilet. FALSE – Period products should never be flushed down the toilet as they can cause blockages in pipes leading to sewers flooding, and sewage spilling into rivers and streams polluting them. It can even cause sewage overflowing from blocked pipes up through your toilet! Products should be wrapped up and put in a bin or placed into a period bin where available.

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Is that a fact?

The flow (how much blood there is) of your period can change.

TRUE – The flow of your period will change. The first few days may be heavier than the last few days. You can adjust which products you use to help you deal with the flow.

Sometimes periods can give you tummy aches and cramps. TRUE –

Many people experience cramps and pain before and during their period. Medicine or tablets can be used to help with pain, or a hot water bottle can help.

You will have periods for the rest of your life. FALSE – You will get periods until you are around 40 – 60 years old.

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Is that a fact?

Some girls end up missing school because they cannot afford to buy period products or cannot access them. TRUE – Unfortunately some girls are unable to afford products such as pads, tampons, period pants or re-usable cups. This means that they have to use whatever they have available instead, such as tissue or even socks. Many end up not going to school when they are on their period as they are worried that their period may soak through their clothes. This happens here in the UK and in many communities all over the world where girls do not have access to what they need. This is called ‘period poverty’.

Ask the girls how they feel about this fact? What do they think could or should be done?

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Session two activities

Dealing with periods

What do we know about periods?

Time needed

15 minutes

What you'll need

Images of period products e.g. pads, tampons, cups (or the actual products if you can't print them).

Copies of the questions to help with presenting a period product

Blue tac

Pens and paper for small groups

Aim of the activity

To ensure that everyone in the group has a shared understanding of periods.

To build up knowledge about periods and how to manage them.

What girls will get out of it

The opportunity to share your knowledge about periods and period products and learn from others about things you may not already know.

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What do we know about periods?

What to do

1. Remind the girls that throughout this session, they can post questions into the 'period box'
2. Split the girls into small groups. Provide each group with one of the images of period products. Give the groups 5 minutes to create a short (1 minute) presentation to explain the period product they have to an alien from another planet who wouldn't know a thing about it. Stick a copy of the following questions on the wall for inspiration on what they'll need to cover:

What is the item in the picture?

Where can it be found?

What might it be used for?

How is it used?

Have they seen it before? Where?

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What do we know about periods?

3. Give the groups one minute each to present their presentation to the group.
4. Ask the girls if they have any questions they can ask them or put them in the period box.
5. Explain that by having as much knowledge as possible about period products, that girls can be prepared for their own periods, but also be able to help others who may have questions.

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Act it out: be prepared

Time needed:

15 minutes

What you'll need:

“What would you do if...?”
statements printed or
written onto separate
pieces of paper.

A letter to parents/carers
of girls asking them to
donate period products

Aim of the activity

To allow girls to discuss and consider how to deal with emergency period situations which may arise.

To help girls think about how they can always be prepared for their period.

To explain that not everyone has access to the products they need to deal with their period and what can be done to help.

What girls will get out of it

Be able to ensure that you are always ready for unexpected periods.

Ensure that everyone is prepared for their period in the unit, as well as have access to what is needed.

Find out what you can do to help those that don't have access to the products they need.

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Act it out: be prepared

What to do

1. Explain that they will be thinking about what they would do in certain period scenarios. Split the group into five groups (or less if you have a smaller unit).
2. Each group is given a problem from the statements. Give the groups 2 minutes to think of a solution to the problem. They should then devise a short sketch to act out their problem and solution.
3. Groups take it in turns to act out their solution to the rest of the group.
4. Explain to the girls that as a unit they could start a collection of period products. Anyone in the unit will be able access these if they need to. This means that if you start your period unexpectedly, or don't have the money to buy period products you can get them at the unit.

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Act it out: be prepared

5. Explain to the girls that you can also organise a collection to donate period products to your local foodbanks or groups taking action on period poverty locally. If girls would like to do this remind them to bring in products to the next meeting (this could include pads, tampons, menstrual cups or period pants).

You'd need to co-ordinate this with girls and their parents/carers. You may wish to send a letter home about this, asking for donations of products to be brought in.

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Act it out: be prepared

“What would you do if...?” statements

Your period leaks onto your underwear or clothes and you are not at home?

You start your period when you're at camp and don't have any period products?

You start your period when you are out?

One of your friends unexpectedly starts their period and does not have the money to buy period products?

You have questions about periods that you don't know the answer to?



Period poverty in the UK and across the world

Time needed:
15 minutes

What you'll need:
A printed copy of of the stories from the UK and the rest of the world

Aim of the activity

To help girls understand that period poverty is something that affects both the UK and abroad.

What girls will get out of it

Understand that people all over the UK and the whole world have periods in common.

Think about how period poverty prevents people living a fulfilled life.

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Period poverty in the UK and across the world

What to do

1. Ask girls to split into smaller groups (of 3 or 4) and give each group a story about period poverty abroad. Ask for one volunteer from each group to read the story out loud to their small group
2. Once the stories have been read, bring the whole group back together and ask the group how reading the stories made them feel.
3. Highlight the fact that all around the world people experience periods. They have the same questions and symptoms, and have to overcome taboos and bust myths. To do this, it is important to keep talking openly about periods and ensure that everyone has access to period products, decent toilets and understands how to stay clean and healthy during their period. This means that they are able to continue with their everyday life as normal, wherever they live in the world.

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Period poverty in the UK and across the world

4. Remind them that Girlguiding has members all around the world and by being part of Girlguiding you are part of a huge network of girls that can speak out for those experiencing period poverty and make a difference.
5. Ask the girls if they think that period poverty (not being able to afford period products when you need them) is a problem here in the UK? Ask for a show of hands.
6. Ask the girls to sit down with their eyes closed. Read out the statistics linked to the UK. After each fact, ask the girls to put their thumbs up if they think the statement is true, and thumbs down if they think it's false. Highlight to the girls if most people put their thumbs up, or thumbs down.
7. After reading all the statements , explain that they are all, in fact true.



Period poverty in the UK and across the world

8. Explain to the group that their voice matters and they can take action to improve the situation for people in the UK and abroad, we call this social action. Social action is taking practical action in the service of others.
9. Remind the girls that if they want to take social action to tackle period poverty in the UK, they can do a collection of period products for the unit or local foodbanks. They can also help tackle period stigma by living the period pledge the unit made. And remember to tell Girlguiding what the unit has done on this!

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Period poverty in the UK and across the world

Period poverty in the UK – the facts (from Plan International UK, 2017)

One in ten girls (10 per cent) have been unable to afford period products

One in seven girls (15 per cent) have struggled to afford period products

One in seven girls (14 per cent) have had to ask to borrow period products from a friend because they don't have the money to buy any

More than one in ten girls (12 per cent) has had to use alternatives to period products because they don't have money to buy regular products.

One in five (19 per cent) girls have changed to a less suitable period product due to the cost





Period poverty is not just about having the money to buy period products. For some girls across the world, they don't have some of the basic facilities such as clean water and toilets to enable them to manage their periods hygienically and take part in everyday activities.

Bina (far left) is 15 years old and lives in a village in Mozambique. Her school doesn't have access to clean water and decent toilets which makes it difficult for her to manage her period. Due to this, she ends up having to stay at home when she is on her period so she misses out on lessons every month. Can you imagine how difficult it would be to manage your period if you didn't have clean water or a toilet? Here she talks about how having a decent toilet at home (a latrine) has made life much easier when she has her period, but not having toilets at school means she has to miss out on her education which could affect her chances of achieving her ambition.

"I leave home at 6 and I arrive at school at around 7. Maths is my favourite subject - I like doing sums. I'd like to be a teacher when I'm older. I now have a latrine at home. Before we built the latrine I had to go to the toilet under a tree. I like my new latrine because it helps us to stay healthy and avoid diseases. When we used to go to the toilet under the tree, chickens would walk through all the waste and it would spread germs everywhere making us sick. I learnt about washing my hands at home - my mum taught me. They also teach us about hygiene at school. I have to go home when it is my period. I end up missing class. I have to stay home four days every month. I feel bad staying at home but I don't have a choice as there is no water at school, so I can't change my cloths or wash my hands. It is the same for my friends. I'll be so happy when there is a new school toilet block. The new block will have everything girls need to manage their period. I will no longer have to miss lessons. I am really looking forward to it."

Ritah

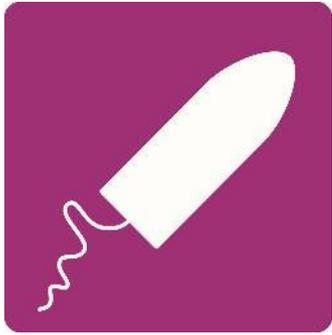


At this school in a village in Uganda, an inspiring group of students are working with the charity WaterAid to help transform people's lives. WaterAid helped to build a latrine block at the school and taught the students about good hygiene as well as how to make reusable period pads and how to manage their periods. The students formed a hygiene club, and shared the lessons with their families and community so that everyone could benefit from improvements in health, education and wellbeing. Ritah, pictured in the middle, is a hygiene leader and works at the school. She is also a former pupil of the school.

“When I went to this school, we didn't have a hygiene club and girls missing school due to their periods was a problem. There would be up to five girls absent from school each day. Before the new latrine block was built, we would have to go to the toilet outside in the open. This made it very to deal with our periods.

Now we have the hygiene club, things have changed. We talk about periods openly, and I have taught students how to make pads. Parents no longer have to worry about not being able to buy period towels, so this has really helped them. We teach boys and girls together, so they learn more. If you separate them, then boys don't have the chance to learn about periods.

Another change the hygiene club has brought to their community has been washing hands. The children have taught their parents how to wash their hands properly, and how to use and build latrines. As well as the toilet block, we also have taps to keep the children clean and healthy, and help girls who are on their period deal with it comfortably. The changes have been amazing. Parents really wish for their children to go and stay at school, instead of not being able to finish their education.”



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