



ECO ETHICS
KENYA

Introduction of reusable sanitary towels as a means to manage menstruation

Location: Ozi village, Tana Delta District

Timeline: June 2010 to May 2011

Funding: Terres des Femmes

Objectives: Reduce school absenteeism among girls due to menstruation; see an improvement in girls' performance in school; demystify menstruation in the community; create a business for women in Ozi

About the project:

Girls not having access to sanitary towels may sound like a relatively trivial problem, but it is responsible for widespread absenteeism from school in Kenya. Particularly in slums and rural areas, Kenyan schoolgirls often find themselves staying at home for up to five days a month during their menstruation period, as sanitary towels are either unavailable or unaffordable. As a result of this girls perform worse in school than their male student counterparts and, in the higher classes, may drop out completely. While several programmes exist that supply schoolgirls with disposable sanitary pads for free or at subsidised rates, Eco-Ethics has taken a new approach to present a rural community with an environmentally-friendly and sustainable means to tackle the problem.

In a two-day workshop, reusable sanitary towels made out of cotton and towel were introduced to the girls of Ozi Primary School. Ozi is a fishing village of Ozi in Kenya's Tana Delta, north of Mombasa, where Eco-Ethics has built good links with the community. After the demonstration, the girls in Ozi were taught how to sew the pads themselves. They are relatively easy to sew by hand and when taken well care of can be washed and reused for several years. The reception of the pads was extremely positive, and each girl has now hand-sewn five pads for herself.

As well as aiming to help more girls in school, another objective of the project is to create a business opportunity for women in the community. Following the sensitization stage among the schoolgirls, selected women from Ozi will be trained to become professional tailors of the sanitary pads. The pads can then be sold throughout the village, as a lack of sanitary pads is also a burden to adult women. Once a market for the reusable sanitary towels has been established and Ozi's women are happy using them, an exchange visit will be held for women from neighbouring communities to visit Ozi, learn about the sanitary towels, speak to the schoolgirls and women using them, and eventually be taught to sew the pads themselves. These women will

then become tailors of the pads and introduce them to their communities. The absence of sanitary towels is a problem in the entire region around Ozi.

An evaluation of the pads among the girls in Ozi is scheduled for September 2010, after which the training for the women will begin. The reception of the project has been incredibly positive so far, with everyone being extremely responsive, motivated and thankful for the reusable sanitary pads introduced to them.