

# A monthly challenge, a sustainable solution



Organisation: Stichting AFRIpads Foundation  
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# AFRIpads Foundation in 2024

## The Foundation

The main goal of AFRIpads Foundation is to raise funds to enable school attendance amongst girls in East Africa. The Foundation concretizes this goal by buying AFRIpads kits, consisting of a set of reusable pads that best meet the needs and preferences of young women and girls, from the AFRIpads Ltd., a local social enterprise based in Uganda. This company produces and provides low-cost, washable sanitary pads for young girls to curb the high rates of menstrual-related absenteeism. The Foundation donates AFRIpads kits to girls in vulnerable positions who can't afford to buy these pads themselves, in remote areas like former war zones and refugee camps. 500 million women and girls lack access to menstrual products globally. 66% of women and girls in Africa say they can't afford menstrual products. It would take 13% of their income. 3 days of school or work are missed on average per month in Uganda & Kenya due to this lack of access and stigma. By providing menstrual products and giving menstrual and feminine hygiene education to groups of girls; even the girls in the most vulnerable positions get the chance to stay in school and fulfil their academic potential.



AFRIpads Foundation works completely independently from, but in close collaboration with, the AFRIpads Ltd. Where the main focus of the Ltd., being a social enterprise, is to become financially independent and self-sufficient, the AFRIpads Foundation is an NGO with the ambition to keep all girls in school, even when they have their period! The Foundation uses 99% of its funds to support girls with AFRIpads kits.

## Board Transition Update

In 2024, the AFRIpads Foundation celebrated a significant milestone—its 15th anniversary. It also marked the beginning of a carefully planned leadership transition

within the board. Throughout the year, the board focused on shaping the future of its governance by drafting comprehensive function profiles for all board roles and initiating a structured recruitment process for the positions of **Chair**, **Secretary**, and **Treasurer**.

This transition process has resulted in the appointment of:

- **Esmée van der Ven** as incoming Chair
- **Laura Honders** as incoming Secretary
- **Lucas Gmeling** as incoming Treasurer

Esmée and Laura will formally assume their roles at the start of 2025, while Lucas will also take over his responsibilities as Treasurer in the new year.

As part of this transition, **Sanne Bolkenstein** and **Nicoline Evers** will step down from the board mid-2025, concluding their valued contributions. Meanwhile, **Sølvi Hart**, **Willeke Westra** and **Hans Spaan** will remain on the board into 2025 to ensure continuity and support the new leadership team.

The AFRIpads Foundation is grateful for the dedication and service of its outgoing board members and looks forward to this new chapter with confidence and optimism.

## Employee Fund

The Employee Fund is a fund employees of the AFRIpads Ltd. can apply to for help with extraordinary medical costs, which are not covered by the healthcare insurance, particularly when it comes to mental health. As AFRIpads Foundation, we realise that AFRIpads Ltd. employees are critical in reaching our mission, and we feel we need to step in when necessary. However, there were no requests for the Employee Fund in 2024.



## Foundation management

All practical facilities the Foundation needs are provided by Bert Bolkenstein and Carina Bolkenstein-Bast, free of cost. Bert Bolkenstein enabled both the start of the AFRIpads Ltd. in Uganda, and AFRIpads Foundation in the Netherlands. Bert and Carina offer the Foundation:

- Secretarial support
- Office facilities
- Administration

The board consisted in 2024 of:

- Sanne Bolkenstein (chair)
- Nicoline Evers (treasurer and secretary)
- Hans Spaan (board member)
- Lucas Gmeling (board member)
- Sølv Hart (board member, social media)
- Willeke Westra (board member, partnerships and donations expert)



# Donations

At the AFRIpads Foundation, we believe that access to menstrual products is only the beginning. That's why our donation program goes far beyond simply handing out reusable pads. Through close partnerships with AFRIpads Ltd., we implement impactful, community-based projects in remote regions of East Africa that create long term change. Each project is carefully planned and implemented with local partners, often schools and grassroots organisations, and includes:

- Introducing AFRIpads to local communities and institutions;
- Providing comprehensive menstrual health and hygiene MHH education to girls and young women;
- Demonstrating how to use and care for AFRIpads reusable pads;
- Distributing full AFRIpads kits, which includes a one-year supply of reusable sanitary pads, underwear and the 'Girl Talk' educational booklet.



By funding and supporting these projects, the AFRIpads Foundation achieves three core goals:

1. **Empowering Girls:** Girls and women in East Africa receive the resources and knowledge they need to manage their periods with dignity, stay in school, and participate fully in everyday life, including sports and social activities
2. **Expanding reach:** More girls and communities are introduced to the sustainable solution of reusable menstrual products, creating awareness and demand

**3. Strengthening local communities:** all kits are locally made by AFRIpads Ltd., helping to sustain a mission-driven social enterprise that creates employment and economic opportunity in Uganda.

What makes our approach unique is that we don't just donate pads, we invest in education, awareness and the tools for long-term change. Menstrual health becomes a gateway to better health outcomes, improved education and greater gender equality.

Thanks to the support of 10 donors, we partnered with 24 schools and organisations across Uganda, Kenya and Rwanda in 2024, including Paul Mercy Foundation, Sharing to Transform, Strengthening Hope and Resilience Empowerment (SHARE), Society with a Vision, Ministry of Education and Sports- Gender Equity Budgeting Unit, Girls to Lead Africa, Joy for Children Uganda, Just Like My Child, Christian Life Pre and Primary School, Teach for Uganda, Uplift Slum Africa, Future Light Football Academy, Masaka Rotary, A Smile from Kenya, Simavi, and Transformation Fountain International.

Together we reached 20,035 girls with reusable menstrual products, underwear and MHH education. The result? Increased school attendance, improved health and hygiene, and empowered girls ready to lead their communities.

## **Donation Change Stories**

The change stories in this report involve a few organizations that collaborated with AFRIpads Ltd. to reach women and girls with the greatest needs. This effort included providing them with reusable pads, educating them about menstrual health, and for some, even conducting research together.

## 1. AFRIpads Kits bring dignity to slum Girls in Kampala District, Uganda



*"I always felt ashamed during my menstruation,"* shared 18-year-old Aisha from Bukoto slum. *"Now I know it's normal."* Aisha's words shed light on a hidden struggle. Many young women in Bukoto and Bwaise slums faced this silence. Menstrual products were unaffordable and information about their bodies was missing.

Joy for Children Uganda stepped in through AFRIpads with support from John and Marine van Vlissingen Foundation. They distributed 800 School Girl Kits, booklets, and underwear to school girls. Aisha along with girls between 18 to 19 years, attended sessions on managing their menstruation and understood how to use and care for the reusable pads. They asked questions without fear. The sessions addressed their specific needs. These young women often navigate tough socio-economic realities.

Fatima, a leader in one of the local women's groups, saw the change. *"The menstrual kits have truly helped,"* she noted. *"Many girls here struggled during their periods. Now they have pads and understanding of their menstrual cycle."*

The participants further appreciated AFRIpads for the visual aids. They utilized them during the training sessions. Aisha now feels more confident. She knows how to care for herself. School days are less worrying.

## 2. From a Small Gift to a Big Change in Tooro Region, Uganda



*"This seemingly very small gift is very beneficial and needed by several girls like me."* These heartfelt words came from a pupil who received the AFRIpads Schoolgirl kit. For many young girls there, managing their periods was a silent struggle. Access to pads was limited, and talking openly about their bodies felt impossible.

In Bunyangabu district, Tooro Region Uganda, life began to shift after AFRIpads partnered with SHARE, an entirely not-for-profit, community-based healthcare organisation, working in the Kyotera District, with support from Vistra Foundation and Contribute Foundation, to help schoolgirls manage their periods with dignity. Before receiving these products, staying in school became harder due to a lack of proper resources. Shame often added to their burden.

Crucially, SHARE engaged sixteen most in-need schools and their teachers. A Padbank was established within one of the schools so that pupils and students in need can access the pads. *"I sometimes spend my funds to buy pads for the pupils without pads,"* commented a teacher from one of the schools. *"This pad bank will help many girls menstruate without shame since most of them have been using handkerchiefs and underwear to manage their menstruation."*

In total, 1655 reusable pads were distributed to the schools. Menstrual health education sessions and training trainer sessions were also provided to the teachers. These ensure long-term support and knowledge within the communities.

### **3. Rekindled partnerships and a promising pilot study with SIMAVI**



With support from AFRIpads Foundation, AFRIpads Ltd. renewed its collaboration with SIMAVI. Together, we supported 345 pupils across two schools: Kyamatanga Primary School in Bunyangabu district and Magunga Primary School in Kabarole district, Uganda. SIMAVI, through its partners Joint Effort to Save the Environment and Caritas Fort Portal-HEWASA, had already conducted comprehensive menstrual health education sessions. Following this, AFRIpads Ltd. organized a training focused on the use and care of AFRIpads. Pupils actively demonstrated their learnings and openly shared their experiences. Tuhaise Esther's words were particularly moving: *"I have been missing school for fear of staining my skirt, which brings so much shame. My mother can hardly afford disposable pads, so I have been using rags."*

Beyond this, we observed increased confidence among the students. A baseline study report conducted as part of this pilot study indicates a positive initial acceptance of the reusable pads. The upcoming endline study will provide more comprehensive findings and further findings into the long-term impact of this project on girls and schools.

#### **4. Dismantling Menstrual Taboos in Schoolgirls**

In collaboration with Raising Teenagers Uganda and with the support of Hofstee Stichting, we aimed to address the problem at its roots in schools throughout Namayumba sub-county, Uganda. Thanks to our support, AFRIpads Ltd. was able to distribute 250 reusable sanitary pads to students at Bugimba Primary School, Building Tomorrow Primary School, Kavumba Primary School, and Kyampisi Primary School.

The impact went beyond just giving out pads. Engaging in educational sessions helped these young girls understand their bodies better. *"I feel I can explain what I have learned to my friends who are not in our school,"* shared 13-year-old Grace from Building Tomorrow

Primary School. Mariam, 15 years old from Kyampisi Primary School, added, "*I like how the pictures make it easy to understand.*"



## 5. Ending Period Poverty in Korogocho Slums - Kenya

In Kenya's Korogocho slums, AFRIpads joined Blessed to Transform with the generous support of the Daniela Ryf Foundation. AFRIpads reached 1,225 girls, providing them with reusable menstrual pads.

Our support extended hand-in-hand with Blessed to Transform, a feeding centre in the slums. Following nourishing meals, the children participated in use and care sessions. These sessions thoughtfully introduced AFRIpads, explaining their use and benefits in a clear and accessible way.

The impact resonated deeply within the community. Shamim shared her relief, "*Since my mother died, I was wondering who would be buying me pads, but now I am happy AFRIpads*

*gave us the pads to use.*" Cecilia echoed this sentiment, stating, *"I am happy now I don't have the stress of thinking where I can get the pads from."*

It is quite evident that period poverty exists among different regions in East Africa and reusable pads offer hope to the affected girls and their families.



# With Gratitude: A Word of Thanks to Our Donors and Partners

We extend our deepest thanks to all our generous donors and partners who are part of a life-changing initiative that empowers vulnerable girls and young women. Your support ensures they have the resources they need to stay in school, manage their health with dignity, and build brighter, more hopeful futures. Your time, commitment, and generosity make a real difference—and we are truly grateful.

Among our valued partners, we would especially like to recognize:

Victrix Foundation, Ontwikkelingshulp D.A.S., Henriette Funds, Hofstee Stichting, Stichting Contribute, Daniela Ryf Foundation, Stichting Dirk Bos, and Stichting EER  
— thank you for your continued belief in our mission and for standing with us in empowering girls through menstrual health education and support.

We are also deeply thankful to Michelle Tjeenk Willink and her dedicated team at AFRIpads Uganda for their tireless work in delivering our menstrual health management programs on the ground. Your passion and professionalism ensure that our impact reaches the girls who need it most.

Together, we are creating lasting change. The contribution of each and every partner is crucial to achieving maximum impact—directly supporting girls in shaping their own futures with confidence and opportunity.

Thank you for walking this journey with us.

# Financial report AFRIpads Foundation 2024

## Euro account:

Income:		Expenses:	
Donations geef.nl	€2.137,35	17.004 AFRIpads kits	€117.975,-
Donation Paypal	€4.198,80	Organisational costs	€967,90
Donation large donor A	€150.000,-	Banking costs	€122,85
Donation large donor B	€18.303,-	Administration	€351,31
Donation large donor C	€10.000,-	Website	€223,85
		Partin	€84,-
Other donations	€27.321,15	Costs Farmtofeed	€10.828,-
<b>TOTAL IN</b>	<b>€207.761,50</b>	<b>TOTAL OUT</b>	<b>€130.201,60</b>

## USD account:

Income:		Expenses:	
Donations	\$30.000,-	6.756 kits	\$30.000,00
		Bank charges	\$156,85
<b>Total IN</b>	<b>\$30.000,-</b>	<b>Total OUT</b>	<b>\$30.156,85</b>

## Balance sheet per December 31st 2024

Assets in euro		Equity & Liabilities in euro	
ABN AMRO	€ 95.805,95	Equity	
Geef.nl	€ 65,-	Unrestricted Capital	€ 22.569,75
Paypal	€ 4.198,80	Continuity Reserve	€ 2.500
		Designated Fund: Victrix Donation	€ 75.000,-
<b>Total</b>	<b>€ 100.069,75</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>€ 100.069,75</b>
Assets in dollar		Liabilities in dollar	
Paypal	\$4.198,-	Own capital	\$7.614,02
ABN AMRO	\$3.416,02		
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$7.614,02</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>\$7.614 02</b>

More than 90% of our expenses have been used to purchase AFRIpads kits.

# Outlook 2025

Menstrual Health Management (MHM) remains a critical yet often overlooked component of public health and gender equity in Africa. The current global and regional geopolitical dynamics—ranging from conflict and economic instability to shifting donor priorities—are severely undermining progress in this area, with disproportionate effects on women and girls.

## Key Geopolitical Drivers and Their Impact on our work

- **Economic Instability and Inflation:** The global economic fallout from events such as the Ukraine war has led to price hikes and supply disruptions. In many African countries, menstrual products are either imported or reliant on foreign raw materials, making them increasingly unaffordable for low-income households.
- **Shifting Donor Priorities and Budget Cuts:** Development aid from traditional partners is being redirected toward crises in other regions. This deprioritization affects MHM initiatives, including awareness campaigns, education programs, and distribution efforts led by NGOs and community groups. The sudden interruption of USAID programmes in Africa will have significant consequences for the continent in all spheres of society including MHM health programs
- **Political Instability:** Coups and unstable governance in countries like Sudan weaken institutional capacity to implement and fund gender-sensitive health policies. Education systems, critical for MHM awareness and access, are often disrupted.
- **Climate Change and Resource Conflict:** Water scarcity driven by climate change and extractive industries exacerbates menstrual hygiene challenges, particularly in rural and displaced communities.

## Consequences

- Reduced access to affordable, safe menstrual products
- Increased absenteeism among school-aged girls
- Heightened stigma and mental health burdens
- Exposure to health risks due to unsafe hygiene alternatives

## **Your support is needed.....more than ever**

To mitigate these challenges, MHM must be integrated into emergency response plans, local production of menstrual products should be supported, and African governments and international donors must treat MHM as a public health and human rights priority.

Through our program, we aim to provide high-quality, reusable sanitary pads and essential menstrual health education to girls and young women aged 10-22. This initiative is not just about products—it's about dignity, empowerment, and breaking the cycle of poverty through education.

Our focus will be more than ever on maintaining our highly valued partnerships and engaging with new partners to enable us to reach more girls, ensuring they remain in school, gain confidence, and work toward a future filled with possibilities. Beyond the immediate impact, this investment will create ripples of change throughout their communities, fostering greater gender equality and economic development.

Together, we can transform lives.

