

Project Title

Feminist Humanitarian Network Member Covid-19 response

Activity Title

Training for vulnerable women and adolescent girls from the most vulnerable community groups in Garowe, Somalia on how to make their own washable, reusable sanitary pads

Funding

Centre for Disaster Philanthropy

Facilitated By: ActionAid International on behalf of Feminist Humanitarian Network (FHN)

Implemented / Organized

Hawa Feminist Coalition

Date

April 20, 2023

Introduction

The closure of stores and public transport, rising costs, and increasing economic uncertainty due to COVID-19 measures are all putting menstrual hygiene supplies out of reach for those in poverty in Somalia. The vulnerable and marginalized communities in Somalia, including refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced people (IDPs) living in poverty and in cramped and poor-condition camps, have limited access to basic services. COVID-19 directly impacted the lives of a population already living under the strain of widespread poverty and decades of armed conflict and insecurity. In addition to the COVID-19 impacts, the burden of devastating humanitarian consequences as a result of the prolonged and severe drought conditions in Somalia further accentuated the lack of access to menstrual hygiene products and left young women from marginalized communities without access to period products like sanitary pads.

Sanitary pads are expensive and often inaccessible, and some girls resort to managing their periods with pieces of rags or paper, which are often unhygienic and uncomfortable, causing chafing, urinary tract infections, reproductive tract infections, and other reproductive health problems.

With the support of the Centre for Disaster Philanthropy through ActionAid International on behalf of Feminist Humanitarian Network (FHN), Hawa Feminist Coalition conducted training for 50 vulnerable women and adolescent girls from the most vulnerable community groups, such as internally displaced people (IDPs), refugees, and people with disabilities in Garowe, Puntland State of Somalia, on how to make their own washable, reusable sanitary pads using commonly-found materials. The training was held in Garowe, Puntland Somalia from March 12 to 20, 2023.

Objectives

The main purpose of the project is to train 50 vulnerable women and adolescent girls from the most vulnerable community groups, such as internally displaced people (IDPs), refugees, and people with disabilities in Garowe, Puntland State of Somalia, on how to make their own washable, reusable sanitary pads using commonly found

materials, so they can have access to sustainable sanitary protection and good menstrual hygiene at their fingertips during COVID-19.

Participants / Target Populations

Training targeted 50 vulnerable women and adolescent girls from the most vulnerable community groups in Garowe, Somalia, and divided the number among the following groups:

- 25 vulnerable women and adolescent girls from the internally displaced people (IDPs) in Garowe
- 15 vulnerable women and adolescent girls from the refugees, particularly Yemeni refugees in Garowe,
- 10 vulnerable women and adolescent girls from people with disabilities and host communities in Garowe

The selection of the trainees was coordinated with the local authorities of Garowe, the community leaders, women's groups, girls' clubs, and health workers of IDPs, refugees, and people with disabilities in Garowe, Puntland State, Somalia. The selection was carried out in consideration of the following groups among the target vulnerable communities:

- a. Minority group
- b. Poorer groups
- c. Survivors of gender-based violence

This was done to select the most vulnerable among the vulnerable women and adolescent girls to ensure that the most appropriate and right people are selected for the training opportunity. The selection was carried out in fairly and according to the criteria.

Methodology

The methodology used in this six-day training was built on the principles of an adult learning approach. In order to achieve the agreed objectives within the given timeframe,

a highly participatory and interactive approach was designed, encouraged, and used during the training.

The essence of this approach was to involve all trainees in the discussion centered on fully selected thematic issues and to guide the participants on the training progress. Methods including trainer-led sessions, brainstorming, discussions, roleplay, coaching and mentoring, and practical sessions have been the key methods employed during the training to make it fun and interactive for the trainees.

Preparation of Tools and Materials

A guidebook showing how to design and produce your own reusable menstrual pads was developed. The book was written in a simplified approach with pictures and drawings and few texts, and it was translated into Somali so the trainees and other women could understand and use it easily to make their own sanitary pads using the instructions and drawings provided by the book. The book was printed in 100 copies and distributed to the trainees.

A female trainer was hired who is a professional and expert in sewing and also in the design and production of the reusable sanitary pads to train the trainees on how to make and produce their own reusable menstrual pads using commonly-found materials as well as how to maintain these pads hygienically.

The below materials and tools, which are necessary for sewing sanitary pads in the practical exercise of the training, were purchased to use for the practical sessions:

- a. Note books
- b. Ink pens
- c. Flip charts
- d. Marker pens
- e. A4 papers
- f. Rulers
- g. Thin clothes
- h. Buttons
- i. Cotton fabric

- j. Needle
- k. Scissors
- l. Pins
- m. Thread

Activities and Deliberations

The training duration was six days held between March 12 and 20, 2023. The topics and sessions covered during the six-day training are detailed below:

Day 1 - Introduction to the Menstrual Cycle and Hygiene Management

The first day of the training was an introductory day that introduced the 50 trainees to the menstrual cycle, normal and abnormal periods, and the risks associated with poor menstrual hygiene management. Trainees also learned how to identify the different types of menstrual products available on the market.

The topics covered in the first part of the training included brainstorming and discussions around the environmental impact of disposable menstrual products, the advantages and disadvantages of reusable sanitary pads, and why sanitary pads made by hand are cheaper than those made by sewing machines. Why is the hand-made method preferred over the sewing machine? This made trainees more open about the issues they face surrounding menstruation, and basically, it all came down to menstruation being seen as taboo.

Day 2 - Understanding Reusable Sanitary Pads

On the second day of the training, the trainees were taught about the different types of reusable sanitary pads available and their different materials. The many ways to create these reusable menstrual products include the method and the materials that can be used, such as leftover quilting cotton, linen, hemp, flannel, fleece, and thicker, more stable knits. The other materials, like using water-proof or water-resistant materials for the bottom of the outer layer of the pad, are perfect for this.

There has been brainstorming and discussion around the benefits of using reusable sanitary pads, which include affordability, comfort, and their eco-friendliness. The

discussion was focused on the cost-effectiveness of reusable sanitary pads as a way of saving money in the long run and also on the easiest way women and adolescent girls from poor communities can access menstrual pads.

Day 3 – Maintenance and keeping hygienic standards of the pads and awareness on GBV

On the third day of the training, trainees were taught about how to maintain and clean the reusable sanitary pads, including cleaning techniques such as rinsing in cold water, storing in a wetbag or bucket, soaking heavily stained pads in water with salt or stain remover, washing on a decent length wash cycle at no more than 30 °C, and also air drying. The trainer explained the importance of quality control and how to maintain specific standards when producing reusable sanitary pads.

The session was followed by brainstorming and discussions around the consequences of poor hygiene and how this can affect the reproductive health of women and adolescent girls.

There have been two-hour sessions led by the GBV team of the organization that provided the trainees with information about gender-based violence, such as understanding what GBV is, identifying the underlying causes and risk factors contributing to GBV, understanding the different forms of GBV, understanding how to prevent GBV, and also how to respond to GBV.

The session was followed by a short discussion on how the trainees can take a role in the prevention of GBV and raise awareness among their communities.

Day 4 and 5 – Trainer’s-led Practical Demonstrations

On the fourth and fifth days of the training, more trainer-led demonstrations were taught, such as practical lessons on how to use needles and threads for the production of reusable sanitary pads. Trainees were taught practically how to thread the needle, and how to control the sewing. The trainer demonstrated how to meet specific guidelines and produce high-quality, reusable sanitary pads. Trainees also watched a video

showing the step-by-step process of how to make the reusable sanitary pads, including the materials, sizes, linings, and sewing.

The trainer performed a live demonstration where she sewed a pad in front of the trainees, and the trainees had a chance to see the process practically and ask the trainer about whatever they had in mind.

Day 6 – Trainees'-led Practical Sessions

On the last day of the training, trainees were put on a practical exercise where they were tasked with making the pad by themselves, and each trainee was given materials consisting of a printed guidebook, a pen, A4 papers, a ruler, thin cloth, several buttons, cotton fabric (towel), a needle, a scissor, pins, and one thread to use for making the pad by hand. Patterns for various sizes of pads are also provided to produce different sizes. Each trainee was required to produce one pad successfully in 5 hours with the coaching of the trainer. The trainer has been present during the practical exercise and has helped the trainees with pad design, sewing techniques, and the necessary measurements to achieve the right pad sizes.

Achievements and Challenges

The six-day training provided for 50 trainees, of which five days were teaching and tutoring and the last day was practical exercise, where trainees were required to practice what they had learned from the training and make their own sanitary pads using the knowledge they acquired during the training, was delivered successfully.

All the trainees gained the necessary knowledge to make pads, fully understood the process and steps taken and the kind of materials used in making the pads. Trainees demonstrated their level of understanding on the last day of the training, when each of them made a pad using the materials provided. The finishing of each trainee was checked carefully to ensure she followed the process taught in the training and the product was usable and perfect. The result shows 41 out of 50 trainees made the pad perfectly, while the remaining 9 made small errors. This shows that 82% of the trainees proved their excellence in making their own menstrual pads using commonly found

materials for themselves and their families. A brief survey conducted after the training also shows the below positive result, which is another success indicator.

- 95% of the trainees said the training methodology was relevant and perfect, and the topics and materials were simple and understandable.
- 96% of the trainees said they had fully understood and are confident they can make the reusable sanitary pads from now on.
- 89% of the trainees said they would use their acquired skills to make sanitary pads for themselves and their families.

While the materials used for sewing the reusable sanitary pads are found around the houses, some, like threads and other similar materials, are to be bought from the market, which is a challenge for some of the trainees who are struggling with their daily lives and getting food for their families, and it is hard for them to spend a penny on buying some necessary materials for sewing the reusable pads with their own hands. In this situation, the distribution of these necessary materials to the trainees could have helped them.

Another challenge is the devastating drought that hit Somalia, affecting nearly half of its entire population, or approximately 7.8 million people. Across Somalia, approximately 2 million women of reproductive age have been affected, including more than 380,000 who are currently pregnant and in need of life-saving sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services and information. This became another challenge that worsened the situation further and increased the inaccessibility of women and adolescent girls to menstrual pads and health services.

Conclusion

The project ended with success, achieved its objective, and trained 50 vulnerable women and adolescent girls from the most vulnerable community groups, such as internally displaced people (IDPs), refugees, and people with disabilities in Garowe, Puntland State of Somalia, on how to make their own washable, reusable sanitary pads using commonly-found materials.

These vulnerable women and adolescent girls gained invaluable skills, and every one of them successfully produced a pad with their hand, which is proof that they can have access to sustainable sanitary protection and good menstrual hygiene at their fingertips from now on. These vulnerable women and adolescent girls are also capable of helping their communities since they know how to sew and probably have a bunch of fabric scraps hanging around. Each of the training participants received a book translated into Somali, which is a do-it-yourself book or step-by-step guide in the local language, so other women and adolescent girls can learn from it how to design and produce their own reusable menstrual pads using commonly found materials, as well as how to maintain these pads hygienically to maintain their period in a healthy and dignified manner.

This is expected to positively promote accessibility to menstrual hygiene products for vulnerable women and adolescent girls among internally displaced people (IDPs), refugees, and people with disabilities in Garowe, Somalia, who have been affected by the COVID-19 prevention measures.

The GBV awareness-raising sessions included in the training are also another positive contribution to the prevention of gender-based violence, which has been on the rise among vulnerable communities and doubled during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Trainees and their community thanked the Feminist Humanitarian Network (FHN), the Centre for Disaster Philanthropy, and ActionAid International for their support of this useful project. And also commended Hawa Feminist Coalition for this beneficial skill and consideration of menstrual hygiene gap among the vulnerable communities, which is a gap largely ignored in the humanitarian crisis in Somalia. Trainees requested the continuation of this worthwhile project and similar trainings, and they have also requested assistance with sewing equipment. So that they can produce a significant number of reusable pads to meet their demands and help Somalia's vulnerable women and girls better manage their reproductive health.

Program Schedule / Participants List

Photos



Some of the trainees in a group photo hold the guidebook and the reusable sanitary pads they made during the training.





Trainees engaged in a practical session on sewing a sanitary pad during the last day of training.





Some of the trainees showing their happiness after their successful completion of making their own reusable sanitary pads on the last day of the training.

