

Dignity! Period. Update

Summer 2009

Action for Southern Africa (ACTSA) has distributed over six million sanitary pads to the women of Zimbabwe since our Dignity! Period. campaign was established four years ago. This Spring, ACTSA visited Zimbabwe to meet with our partners and the women and girls who benefit from the campaign. In the UK, supporters have continued to give generously, organising events and raising awareness about this critical campaign. The 2009 Summer Dignity! update covers the latest developments in the campaign and explains why we need you to keep up all your efforts to improve the lives of Zimbabwean women. **Your support is needed now more than ever!**

Campaign to date

The economic crisis in Zimbabwe makes it one of the harshest places to live in the world, with millions living on less than 50p a day. There is a severe shortage of goods, including sanitary towels, as many manufacturers have fled the country.

Since launching Dignity! Period. in 2005, ACTSA, with the ZCTU, has distributed **more than six million sanitary products** free to the women and girls of Zimbabwe.



However, the need for these supplies is greater than ever. Many women and girls across Zimbabwe still face unnecessary suffering because they cannot access sanitary protection. ACTSA continues to campaign internationally to generate awareness and raise funds.

ACTSA visit to Zimbabwe

Earlier this year, ACTSA sent out a representative to meet with the partners in Zimbabwe and the women and girls who benefit from the campaign. We had a chance to travel around the country to see the benefits and **impact that the campaign is having on women and girls' lives as they are now able to carry out their daily lives with dignity and confidence.**



The political climate in Zimbabwe is changing with an agreement between Robert Mugabe and Morgan Tsvangirai to govern the country together. However, in spite of the political developments, the economic crisis remains very real and acute. The message that was given to ACTSA was loud and clear- **the campaign must go on, because basic sanitary protection is still completely unaffordable to the vast majority of women and girls in the country.**

ACTSA visited the manufacturing plant in Zimbabwe where the products are produced and delivered from. We were pleased to see good working conditions and a happy staff force. However, we were informed that the campaign is the only source of business for them at present because most shops are still not stocking sanitary ware. Therefore, should the campaign lose momentum it may mean that the plant would have to close and more workers become unemployed to add



who had used cloth, tissue, blankets, t-shirts, newspapers and leaves to protect themselves during their period before the campaign had assisted them.

to the current 90% of Zimbabweans without jobs.

We visited many women's groups and saw how the products were distributed with every woman having to sign that she has received her share and then the personnel responsible for distribution filing reports to the ZCTU, our partners ACTSA works with in Zimbabwe, so they can monitor and evaluate that the campaign is effective and successful.

We heard many stories of **women**

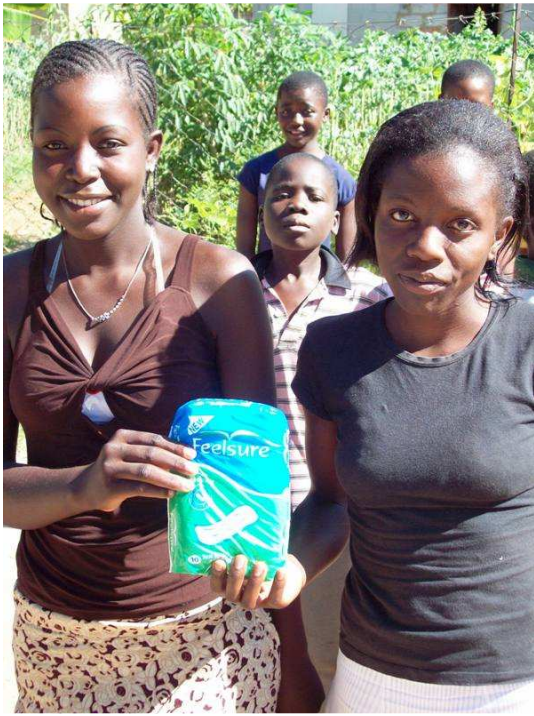
Beauty Mujulama

Beauty is 19 years old and lives with her father and her three sisters in a small village called Kwanga.

"When my period started my mother got me sanitary products from the shop in the city of Gweru. It was normal and I didn't think anything of using this method. Then things started to get very expensive and my mother got very sick. She died two years ago from AIDS and my father was left to care for me and my younger sisters. He couldn't afford to buy us sanitary pads and didn't think we needed them.

When my mother died I started to use the bark of trees. We put the bark in an organ to grind, and then used that instead of pads. There is very soft grass called Magudya and I also used that instead of pads as well. The bark or grass burns inside of the thighs so that it can be very hard for a person to walk. The two thighs will have some wounds every month when you receive your menstruation. It was very hard to maintain good cleanliness. When it got very bad I told my father that I thought I was infected and he presumed that I had had sex with one of my school friends who is a boy. He said that it was an STI and that I should be ashamed because my religion says that I cannot have sex with someone before I am married. My father hit me and he told me I was not allowed to see my friends.

I was very upset and I wanted my father to understand. Now I can access the products again things are ok and my father said sorry since he now believes me that it wasn't an STI because another girl in the village was suffering from the same infections. I hope that we will be able to get products for ourselves soon. It is great that people are supporting us abroad and having these pads has really changed my life."



We heard first hand accounts of women who had been too ashamed to go out or go to work because of their period. Some women explained how their husbands had beaten them as they thought their partners had been promiscuous because the women had contracted infections as a result of unhygienic alternative methods.

The women ACTSA met told us that they have become more confident to go to work and school; they now talk about women's issues and are will also confront men to talk about their periods. **They are so grateful for the support that is being provided to them and asked ACTSA to pass their deepest gratitude to every single person supporting the campaign!**

Campaign News: Bodyform Sponsorship ends



Female hygiene and sanitary products manufacturer, Bodyform, have regrettably ceased their sponsorship for the Dignity! Period. campaign in 2009.

Unfortunately, this will have a serious impact on the amount of products being supplied to women in Zimbabwe and the awareness of the situation their being raised in the UK. Bodyform supported the campaign in 2007 and 2008, assisting ACTSA to produce and supply over 3 million products to women in Zimbabwe through a local manufacturer, for which we would like to thank Bodyform.

While ACTSA will be seeking support from other businesses to back the campaign, it is more critical than ever to have public support for the campaign and keep raising awareness and, of course, those invaluable funds so that we can keep up our support and solidarity with the women of Zimbabwe. See the back page for ways to donate, fundraise or promote the campaign.

Celebrity Support

Rakie Ayola is a Welsh actress, best known for her role as Kyla Tyson in the popular BBC medical drama Holby City. Rakie has supported the campaign by giving press interviews, offering her services as a voice over artist for the Dignity! video appeal and even hosting ACTSA's Annual Fundraising Dinner. We are very grateful for all the work she has done so far.



Tv.com

"A few times in my life I've had to line my pants with toilet paper because I didn't have a spare sanitary towel or tampon to hand, so I understand just a fraction of the embarrassment and indignity that the women of Zimbabwe are experiencing. What I hope to never know is the resulting disease and abuse that can come from their having no access to affordable sanitary products. These products are necessities not luxuries. This is why I whole heartedly support the Dignity! Period. Campaign."

Get or stay involved!

The campaign's success depends on its supporters to promote the campaign by raising valuable funds and awareness of the issues facing women in Zimbabwe. Thank you for your support!

Donate

You can donate to Dignity! Period. in a number of ways. You can set up a monthly direct debit online or you can make a one-off donation online or by sending a cheque to ACTSA (details below). **Just £5 per month will provide sanitary protection for 5 women in Zimbabwe.**



Promote the campaign

We rely on our supporters to promote and publicise the campaign so it gets the most exposure possible. You can hand out flyers, put up a poster at work or even write to your local newspaper. We also have a variety of online resources, including a Dignity! Period. video with footage from ACTSA's recent visit to Zimbabwe.

**To order campaign flyers please contact us on campaigns@actsa.org*

Fundraise

There are many different ways to raise funds for Dignity! Period. People all round the country have been holding events and getting sponsorship to raise money for the campaign.

We have the *Dignity! Period. Toolkit* full of useful resources to help you promote the campaign, including presentations, posters and leaflets online at www.actsa.org/dignity.

Buy and sell our Dignity! goodies

We are selling Dignity! pin badges for £2 each and our Dignity! wristbands at £2.50 each. If you're feeling ambitious, you can also support the campaign by ordering some on a sale or return basis and then sell them to your friends, family and colleagues.



What other supporters have done

"Leeds University recently hosted a Dignity! Period Pub Quiz. We showed the video appeal as well as giving out leaflets and we even had special quiz round on Zimbabwe. We raised £160 which I know doesn't seem like a lot but the event was very well-received and now the campaign has lots more supporters in Leeds. We're going to do something similar (but bigger) next year!"

Laura Conrad from Leeds



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