**Ubumwe ‘Unity’ Project, Rwanda**

**Grant Application for Dignity Bags**

**Hands Around The World – Jersey Division**

**Project Name:** Breaking down barriers to girls’ education - provision of dignity bags

**Charity Criteria:** Women’s empowerment: education, enhancing life chances, improving access.

**Project Summary:** Distribution of dignity bags with sanitary products to all girls of menstrual age in our nine partner schools in Bugarama, Rwanda and the surrounding area to improve girls access to education and reduce teenage pregnancies.

**Project Budget:** £10,000. The total cost of the project over three years comes to £12,480, of which we have raised a total of £2,500 to date.

**Project Target:** There is a total of 6,331 girls enrolled in our partner schools (including nursery and pre-menstrual aged girls). Total girls of menstrual age: approx. 4,800. The cost of a bag comes to £2.60.

**Project Overview:**: Since 2010, HATW has aimed to promote good quality education and equitable opportunities for children and young people in and around Bugarama. One of the aims of our latest three-year Ubumwe (Unity) Strategy is that *Learners have access to safer water, sanitation and hygiene facilities, including menstrual health support and materials for girls.*

Although there are relatively equal numbers of boys and girls in classrooms, girls are more likely to drop out of school. A key contributing factor is period poverty resulting in gaps in attendance resulting in lower academic achievement by girls (Unicef, January 2024).

Government policy requires all schools to provide a girls’ room to support girls during menstruation, to avoid them missing school.

In our baseline study in September 2023, just 18% of schoolgirls in our partner schools reported that they had access to appropriate hygiene facilities and sanitary materials at school.

To address the need HATW is planning to build Girls Hygiene Rooms in each of our nine partner schools and to complement this we are raising funds for the provision of dignity bags which will contain pads, underwear, soap, wash cloth and Vaseline. We have identified a local supplier to make these bags.

We aim to provide all 4,800 girls of menstrual age at our nine partner schools with these bags by the end of our three-year Ubumwe project.

We are working in collaboration with school matrons who are responsible for the distribution of the dignity bags and will provide a counselling service for the girls. A pilot scheme with four schools in underway.

**Project Location:** Bugarama and surrounding area, Rusizi District, Western Province, Rwanda

**Project Outcomes:** The availability of clean hygiene facilities and menstrual health education, together with counselling support from school matrons, will motivate girls to attend school more regularly, thus enhancing their academic potential and life opportunities.

The provision of a Girls’ Hygiene Room and counselling support in one of our partner schools has already proven to result in significant reduction of teenage pregnancies.

**Project Timetable:**We conducted a fact-finding exercise in August 2023 and identified four school matrons to undertake a pilot exercise. Distribution began in November 2023. By the end of March 2024, 460 dignity bags had been distributed. A monitoring visit is being made in May 2024. We aim to complete the distribution of dignity bags to all nine schools by the end of the school year in July 2025.

**Project Monitoring and Evaluation**

A comprehensive Baseline Study for the Ubumwe Project was carried out for HATWJ by Lifetime Consulting & partners Ltd in September 2023. They will return in September 2025 to conduct an end of Project Impact assessment.

The project will collect baseline and endline data, comparing the two in final evaluation, in conjunction with regular mid-term data collected. Monitoring will include participatory collection of quantitative and qualitative data related to key aspects of the project, such as number of girls enrolled at each school at project outset, progress on construction / installation, attendance / absenteeism rates, experience of girls using the hygiene rooms and their attitudes towards school attendance, water usage and user experience, and more.

**Sustainability**

Our Dignity Bags project is running in conjunction with another programme to provide Girls Hygiene Rooms in each of our partner schools by the end of our three-year project. The success of the project will be measured in conjunction with this programme.

One of our partner schools already has a GHR, provided by World Vision. The facility is considered too small for the size of the school (with over 2,000 students). However, the impact has already been noted in significant reduction of teenage pregnancies. The support of the school matron is essential in counselling vulnerable students.

Our first Girls’ Room at Mihabura primary school has been recognised by the local education authority as a model for future development in Rusizi District.

HATWJ will continue to work with its local partners at the nine schools beyond our current three-year Ubumwe project assessing the changing needs of the schools. Challenges encountered and learnings will be recorded in the planned Impact Assessment and will inform our strategy in subsequent projects.