

**Honourable Speaker,
Honourable Members,**

I rise to share information with this August House and the public at large about what provisions, systems and process the Ministry has in place to provide sanitary materials to needy school girls in Namibia.

From the onset, Allow me to expound on this by informing the public of what is in place already to meet these needs. The Basic Education Act 2020, Act 3 of 2020, makes sufficient provision for the provision of sanitary materials to our girls.

Act 3 of 2020, Chapter 3, Section 32 (1) clearly states that the “***Minister must take all measures to ensure that necessities such as shelter, water, food, light, ventilation, sanitary facilities and access to emergency medical care are provided for in all schools in Namibia***”.

Furthermore, Section 33 (1) of the same Act states that the “***Minister, after consultation with the Minister responsible for health, and in accordance with Section 4 of the Basic Education Act, must develop an appropriate school health policy***”, that incorporates the programme known as the **Integrated School Health Policy**. This policy aims to focus on the achievement of health and educational outcomes. Furthermore, the said policy also outlines the details of the distribution of sanitary pads.

Honourable Speaker, Honourable Members,

The Ministry developed guidelines on the Administration of the Primary and Secondary Education Grants, which defines the Dignity Project as

supporting an integrated approach to health, hygiene and wellness for boys and girls through the provision of materials and activities, including, but not limited to sanitary products, as part of the Integrated School Health Programme and National Safe Schools Framework.

Additionally, as of 2016 until to date, schools have been directed to allocate N\$5.00, multiplied by the total learner enrolment, towards the Dignity Project, which must cater for items such as the provision of sanitary pads. For instance, if a school has a learner enrolment of five hundred (500) and you allocate $500 \times \text{N\$ } 5$, it will give you N\$ 2500 towards the Dignity Project. It should be understood here that the allocation per learner include all learners in a school, also those who do not need sanitary pads e.g boys and young learners, and those who are not categorised as vulnerable and can afford sanitary pads.

The guidelines for the school grant utilisation, additional to the allocation per learner, provide for the provision of health and hygiene products, in the sense that the school will provide a maximum start-up amount of N\$2000 for primary schools, and N\$3000 for secondary schools, for starting an income generating project for the purchasing of sanitary pads and other essential toiletries for **learners in need**. The start-up amount is separate from the allocation per learner. This is meant to be sustained through donations and fundraising activities, to ensure sustainability of the Dignity Project.

Honourable Speaker, Honourable Members,

The guidelines for the utilisation of school grant funding also come with a step-by-step instruction on book-keeping and reporting, using Microsoft

Excel workbook. Here, the spending towards Hygiene, Sanitation and the Dignity Project come in a clearly separate reporting line. This enables the respective Circuit Inspector of Education to monitor and report the effective implementation to the Programmes and Quality Assurance Chief Education Officer. This official then reports to the Regional Director on every circuit in the Region upon which then the Regional Director reports back to the Executive Director on the overall regional school grant utilisation in all schools.

Apart from this reporting structure, the schools are also instructed to have their book-keeping audited and such audit reports must be submitted through the Circuit Inspector of Education to the Regional Director of Education, Arts and Culture.

Honourable Speaker, Honourable Members,

The identification of qualifying learners is done by Life Skills teachers in all schools (who are vulnerable and in need of items such as sanitary materials).

The Ministry, in line with the School Grant Policy, as approved for formalisation by Cabinet at its 16th/20.09.22/003 meeting, has increased the funding for health and hygiene needs, including sanitary wear and toiletries to N\$ 15 per learner, on top of the Education Grant, for the 2024/25 financial year.

The total allocation towards health and hygiene will thus increase to Twelve Million, Two Hundred and Sixty One Thousand, Four Hundred and Twenty Namibia dollars (N\$ 12 261 420), annually, ^{based on} for the eight hundred

and nineteen thousand, seven hundred and forty-nine (819 749) learners enrolled in schools currently.

The School Grant Policy (2023), allows for equitable allocation of grants to schools on the basis of their socio-economic status, and also addresses the allocation of sanitary pads and other materials to our learners. The grant takes into consideration individual learners' needs, particularly, orphans and vulnerable learners, with a specific focus on Health and Hygiene provision.

Honourable Speaker, Honourable Members,

Within the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, we host an organization known as the Forum for African Women Educationalists in Namibia (FAWENA) which is partly funded by the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture. For this year alone, under what is referred to as Dignity packs (sanitary pads, toothpaste, roll-on, etc.), we budgeted four hundred thirty-nine thousand, three hundred and eighty-five Namibia dollars (N\$439 385) and reached out to about 1480 girls and boys in the Omusati and Oshana regions.

Furthermore, our Ministry, in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry, Ministry of Health and Social Services, as well as Ministry of Urban and Rural development, implements the Community Lead School Sanitation (CLSS) programme, with the aim of improving overall sanitation in our schools, which is driven by the communities where the schools are. The programme also has a component of Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM), of which we require implementing schools to have a Menstrual Hygiene Management Club which includes both boys

and girls. The club provides education, awareness and support with regards to Menstrual Hygiene. The CLSS programme is running in 4 regions, Ohangwena, Kavango East and West, and Zambezi since 2018, with many schools participating, and Omusati joined in 2023. As part of this programme, the issues around the provision of sanitary pads are also dealt with through the Sanitation Focal Persons at the respective schools. Schools that are implementing CLSS are making efforts to ensure that sanitation facilities are available for the learners, specifically for the girls, to be able to safely dispose of the sanitary products.

Honourable Speaker, Honourable Members,

The National Safe School Framework specifically provides guidance on how to construct menstrual health and hygiene safe facilities from basic materials and with limited resources available at the schools. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry also built sanitation facilities across the country to strengthen the existing infrastructure to improve sanitation and hygiene and continues to do so as part of its Development Budget, having constructed 70 more ablution facilities between June and September this year, 2023.

This is a clear testimony that we have legal frameworks in the Education Act, Act No. 3 of 2020, additional to the programmes within the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, and Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication, and Social Welfare, to provide for the sanitary materials to our learners. We also wish to emphasise that regardless of the efforts by the various line Ministries, parents share a responsibility in supporting their children in this regard also.

Hon. Speakers, Hon. Members,

We wish to state all Ministerial programmes take into consideration the health and hygiene needs of both boys and girls. We have seen the decline in the participation of boys because we are not also taking their needs into consideration.

In conclusion, I want to assure this August house and the nation at large that the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture has mechanisms in place to take care of the needs of our learners from poor socio-economic backgrounds, in terms of ensuring their dignity and comfort during the time of that need. This, we also do by reaching out to our 'Friends of Education', who so far have donated such products to many of our schools.

Having given the above clarification it is very important to emphasise that
~~And yes,~~ the implementation of whatever programme at schools effectively depends on the leadership at that institution. Thus, one cannot deny the possibility of lack of implementation and thus the Ministry commits to intensify the monitoring and evaluation aspect *to also determine whether the Dignity Project has is making the desired impact.*

I thank you.