

IMPROVING MENSTRUAL HEALTH AND REDUCING PERIOD POVERTY WITH MENSTRUAL CUPS



After a successful trial in 2024 with 250 schoolgirls receiving a menstrual cup each, we have been able to expand and run Phase 2 of our trial and distribute 2,500 menstrual cups to schoolgirls and women in various districts in Malawi.

This year we trained a second member of our team, Matilda Mwale, to work alongside Rebecca Manda. They are our Menstrual Cup Coordinators and between them they have trained 1,435 schoolgirls and 868 women including 79 of the Ripple Africa team. In addition, they carried out three-month follow-ups and some six-month follow-ups based on distribution dates. To ensure beneficiaries received proper training and to gather meaningful feedback, the cups were distributed in batches, with the final distributions taking place in early 2026.

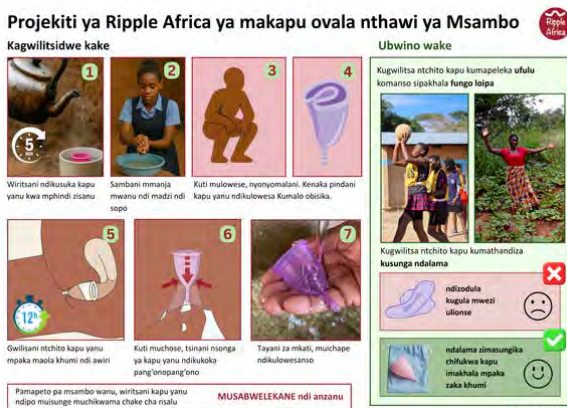


MATILDA

Ahead of distributing the menstrual cups we designed our own 'How To Use' guide in English and in the local language. We also devised a simple demonstration to show exactly how the cup is inserted, how it holds the blood, and how to remove the cup. This has been really successful, especially for the schoolgirls.



REBECCA



We distributed 278 menstrual cups to girls in Standard 6 and 7 in six primary schools, and to 1,157 girls in Forms 1 - 4 at eight secondary schools. We are happy to share some feedback from the schoolgirls benefiting.

Rhoda and Edwish are best friends. They are both 17 years old and are in Standard 7. Rhoda previously used disposable pads. She said, "My mother used to buy one pack but if she could afford it, she would buy two as one was never enough. I was excited for the change and I went home and told my mother that she can save money as I no longer need pads."

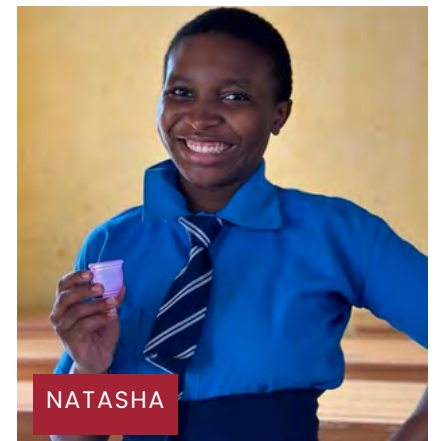
Since receiving her menstrual cup in June, Rhoda has used it every month. "My favourite things about the cup are no leaking, saving money, and freedom at school."

Attending the menstrual cup training was not the first time Edwish had heard about the product. She said, "My sister was part of the initial trial and when she brought it home, she said to me that one day, I would have one. When I told her I had received one, she was thrilled as she understands how great it is, and it means that our mother can save money. I hope my younger sister will receive one too."

Edwish's top three things about the cup are saving money, no leaking and being easy to clean.

Another schoolgirl who received a menstrual cup was Regina. She is 14 and also in Standard 7 at another primary school. She said, "This is going to help me so much. I can't wait for my period to come so I can try it."

Regina explained that she previously used cloth during her periods but disliked it because it was not discreet, and she felt like everyone knew she was on her period.



Natasha is 17 years old and attends Kapanda Secondary School. Her friend received a menstrual cup during the initial trial so when Natasha found out it was her turn to receive one she said she was thrilled. Learning that the cup could be reused meant she would not have to spend money on pads each month.

Natasha said, "I no longer have to pay for pads each month so I want to buy necklaces for all of my best friends as an end-of-year goodbye gift. I am excited to show my mum and tell her she can now keep the money for herself instead of giving it to me to buy pads."

Grace, Lennah, and Grace are three other girls who were delighted to receive a menstrual cup each. Attending Chifira Community Day Secondary School, the girls explained that their mothers give them money to buy disposable pads, and for Lennah, her boyfriend would sometimes buy an extra pack when she needed it.

Lennah said, “After learning about the menstrual cup I am like, wow this is amazing. I am happy to tell my mother and my boyfriend that they can save money as I do not need disposable pads anymore.”

Grace continued, “I am also happy to have this as I hate disposable pads. They are uncomfortable and because I can only afford one pack per period, I have to use the same pad for more hours than recommended, and I worry that I smell or might bleed through to my uniform.”

At the three-month follow-up the girls said, “It saves us money, there is no leaking, the menstrual cup is comfortable to use, and there is no odour.”



An unexpected challenge that a few girls experienced was having their cup stolen when they were sleeping at school during exam revision times.

Esther, Nyless, and Dorica were part of the initial trial of 250 schoolgirls. They were all sleeping at Mwaya Primary School while attending revision classes ahead of their final end of school exams.

Esther explained, “When students write their exams during primary school, they stay at the school for a couple of weeks to study. During this time, the cup that I had been using for almost a year was stolen. I woke up one morning realising I had my period but when I went to my bag, the cup was missing. This happened to Nyless and Dorica too.”

The schoolgirls were upset as they knew they would have to buy pads again. However, we have now been able to replace their cups, and during trainings, Rebecca and Matilda have reiterated that not only is it unacceptable to steal, that it is also unhygienic too.

During the training sessions at schools we also provided menstrual cups to any female teacher or mother on the school's Parent Teacher Association who wished to have one.

This included Violet. She is 36 years old and is a member of the Mother's Group at Kapanda Community Day Secondary School. She is married and has three daughters. Violet had never heard of a menstrual cup before the training. She says that what she learned from Rebecca is amazing. Violet believes that menstrual cups can significantly change the experience of managing periods for both girls and women. "Girls can stay in school, and mothers can do more," she says.

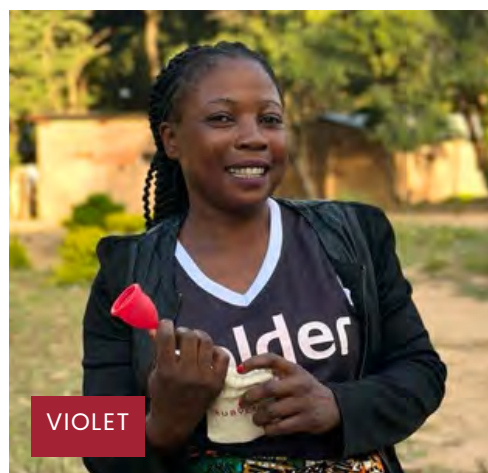
Violet emphasizes the importance of open communication between daughters and their mothers. She has always encouraged her daughters to talk to her, just as she spoke with her own mother. When her eldest daughter started menstruating she felt comfortable coming to Violet without any hesitation. She feels that having menstrual cups available for both women and girls will strengthen the bond between young girls and their mothers.

Veronica is a member of the Mother's Group at Chiomba Primary School. She cares for her niece, Grace, who also received a cup. Veronica said, "I have been caring for my niece since her parents died. Grace only started her period this year so I will support her with using the menstrual cup. We will learn together."

Since receiving the cup Grace said her favourite things about it are that it is convenient, there is no leaking, and it is comfortable. Veronica also said that it is convenient, and easy to use and clean.

Memory is a primary school teacher. She is 30 years old and a mother of two. Every month she was spending at least 3,000MK, approx. £1.50, on disposable pads.

She said, "I found the training interesting especially as I could save a bit of money to spend on my two young children. We also know that disposable pads are not good for the environment."



Student Data Summary

The average age of schoolgirls we trained was 16 and 87% were using disposable pads before receiving a menstrual cup. Of these girls, 80% said they were happy with the product they were using, and 12% of girls said they missed school during their period.

Due to distributions taking place at various times across the year, we currently have three-month follow-up data from only half of the schoolgirls. The remaining feedback, along with the six-month follow-up for all schoolgirls will be collected in 2026.

Of the 760 students ready for their three-month follow-up, we were able to meet with 80% (605) of the students. The other students were unavailable for the following reasons:

- 116 had transferred to other schools / Districts
- 27 had dropped out of school due to failing their exams
- 12 had dropped out of school due to pregnancy or marriage

Of the 605 students that we successfully followed up with, 90% (547) have used the cup and 10% (58) have not used it. The reasons for not using the cup were:

- 39 girls were scared that the cup was too big to use
- 9 found it difficult to insert
- 17 girls' families were unhappy for them to use the cups – additional feedback is that parents want the girls to be a few years older before trying the cup
- 1 found it difficult to remove
- 1 had it stolen

Three of the schoolgirls who are not yet using their menstrual cups are Shalom, Terah, and Alinafe.

Terah said, “My sister attends college in Blantyre and has heard of menstrual cups. She is happy I have one, but I need more time to practice.”

For Shalom and Alinafe, their parents have asked that they wait a few years. The girls said, “We know this cup will help us in future.”

These students are in a year group of 150 girls, the largest cohort of female students in one school that we worked with. The training was split into smaller groups but our experience shows that where there are fewer girls boarding, the majority use the cup. In this school, the girls are already receiving money for pads from their parents, and there is less peer encouragement to try something new. We ran additional training sessions for those girls requiring extra support.



However, of the 547 students that used their menstrual cup, it is positive to hear that 96% of the girls are still using it. The 24 schoolgirls not using theirs went back to using disposable pads and one went back to using reusable pads.

The schoolgirls were asked if they would recommend the menstrual cup to others and 99% said they would. Those who said they would not recommend it stated that this was because of fear that their cup would be stolen or because they don't feel comfortable discussing periods.

We asked the schoolgirls to rank, in order of importance, the top three things that they liked most about their menstrual cup. The results are shown in the pie chart.

Six-Month Follow Up Summary

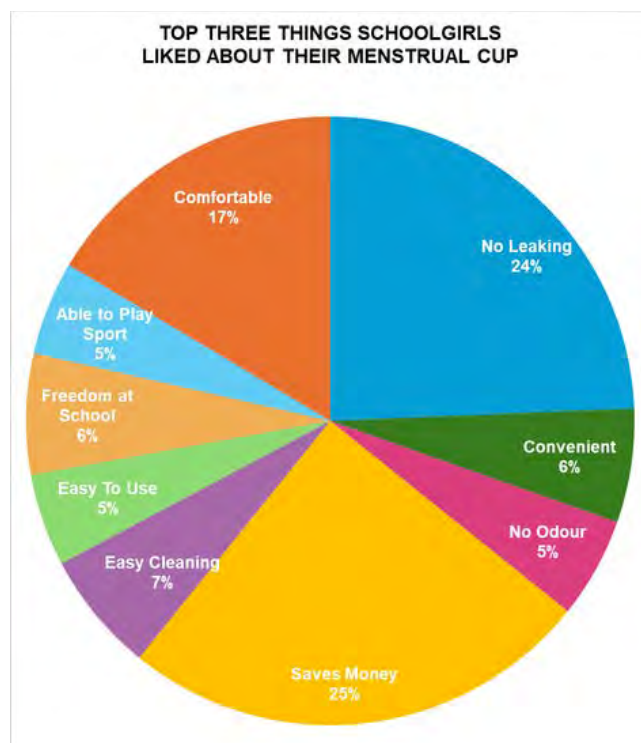
Since our last report in 2024 we have collected six-month feedback data from the Phase 1 trial of 250 schoolgirls.

We met with 202 schoolgirls and we were happy to record that 186 of them are still using the menstrual cup six months later. Sadly, the girls not using them were not doing so mainly because they were pregnant.

The schoolgirls who we were unable to meet with had transferred to other schools outside of the District.

The 186 girls still using their menstrual cup said they would not go back to other methods, and 8% said they would not recommend the cup because they were worried it would get stolen or for fear of judgement.

Discussing how much they would pay for a menstrual cup, the average price was 15,000MK, approx. £7.

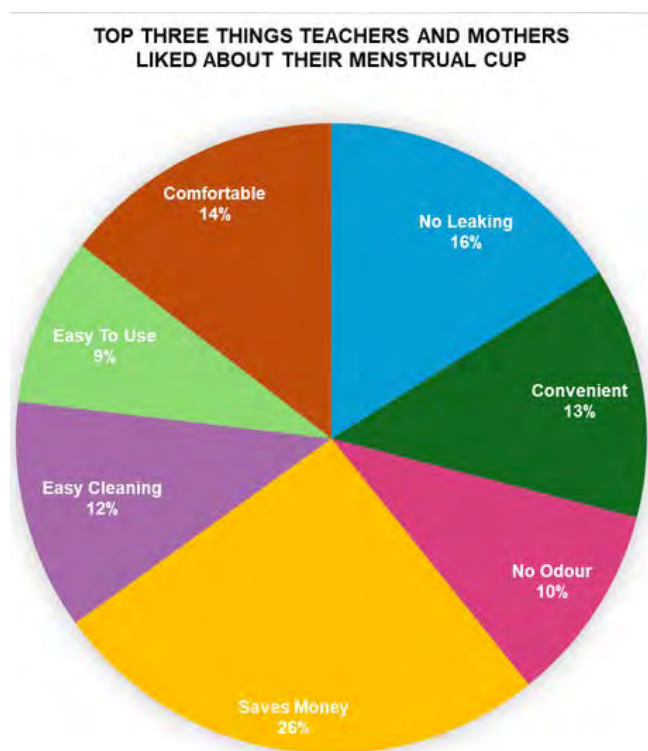


Teacher and Parent Groups Data Summary

We distributed 78 menstrual cups to teachers and members of the school Parent Groups. The average age of the teachers and mothers receiving a cup was 34 years old with an average of two children. In terms of period products, 78% said they were using disposable pads, 19% were using reusable pads, and 3% said cloth or other. Overall, 42% said they were happy with the product they used, and only 8% stayed at home during their period.

Again, these cups were distributed in two groups so the three-month follow-up data is for 62 women who we are delighted to say are all continuing to use their menstrual cups.

All of the teachers and mothers said they would recommend the menstrual cup to others, and also said that it has been positive that they were included because the girls have a female teacher at school who they can come to with any questions. Their top reasons for liking the menstrual cup are shown in the pie chart.



Maria is part of the Mother's Group at Chiomba Primary School.

She attended the training and said, "When I first saw the menstrual cup I thought it was terrible because I did not understand what it was or what it did. However, after learning from Rebecca, I like that it is easy to clean, and that the girls can come to school without a worry. I am excited for the girls to have this."



This Phase 2 pilot project also saw us meet with women from urban and rural communities, of different faiths and tribes, mothers and non-mothers, and of varying ages. We hope that this will provide us with the knowledge and understanding to expand the project and help even more women in the future.

To achieve this, Matilda spent several weeks on the road distributing almost 800 menstrual cups, including to our female staff. Meetings took place in churches and community buildings – and when it was too hot to be inside, under the shade of a tree!

The excitement and positive reception of each group was wonderful and on one occasion when our team members were in the area to monitor another project, they were approached and asked if we had more menstrual cups as the women who had them already loved them and the rest of the ladies in the village each wanted one!

During the training session, which includes explaining about the menstrual cycle, using diagrams to discuss and explain how the female body works, and how to use the menstrual cup, women are invited to ask questions. Questions we have been asked include:

- Will the menstrual cup get stuck?
- Will I still be able to pee?
- Does it matter if I have a light or heavy flow?
- Can I still ride on a motorbike taxi?
- Is it a family planning method?
- How do I know when the cup is full?





One of the wonderful things about working with communities in Malawi is the singing and dancing. It is such a part of everyday Malawian culture and it was so joyous to hear these ladies singing about the menstrual cup.

These women have already benefited from having our fuel-efficient cookstoves so were excited to be introduced to another life-changing product. One of the women was Elinata and during our follow-up visit she said, "The menstrual cup is great. There is no leakage and it is saving me time as I no longer have to wash cloths like before."

We are particularly proud that this project is inclusive for all. Elinata is deaf but, with the support of her aunt who signed the menstrual cup training to her, she is able to have and use one successfully. We are so pleased that she loves it and would recommend it to her friends.

Lennie and Teleza are also happy with their menstrual cup. Both women used to use cloth rags which would leave them with open sores as they would still have to carry out day-to-day activities such as collecting firewood and water. Lennie said, "The menstrual cup is so comfortable and there is no odour. I can walk freely now."

Teleza continued, "It is wonderful. I can carry on with farming and household chores now that I have a menstrual cup."



ELINATA



LENNIE



TELEZA

We are grateful to have been able to provide our female staff with a menstrual cup to help alleviate any challenges that they might face each month.

Victory is a coordinator in Nkhotakota District. She said, “Menstrual cups are a total win for me as they're easy to use, super comfortable, and can be reused for years. Plus, they're perfect for our active lifestyles. There are no leaks so no worries. And let's be real, they're a great way to reduce waste and save some cash. I've been using mine for a while now, and I'm never going back to pads.”

Mercy, Senior Project Manager for our Fuel-efficient Cookstove project, loves her menstrual cup. She said, “I wasn't sure about the cup when I first heard about it but after using it for the first time, I felt really comfortable, and I was able to work the whole day. I like that it is reusable as it is saving me money and it is environmentally friendly as I just wash it and use it again.”



VICTORY



MERCY



CHARITY



BRENDA



RHODA

Charity is a coordinator in Mzimba District. She said, “There is no more chafing or discomfort since using the menstrual cup. It is comfortable and easy to use. I am reducing my environmental footprint as I have reduced waste, and I am able to save money.”

Brenda, another coordinator from Mzimba District, said, “I like the cup because it has reduced my spending on sanitary pads every month and it has improved my menstrual hygiene practices. I am now better able to track my menstrual flow, and the cup is very convenient especially when I'm at work.”

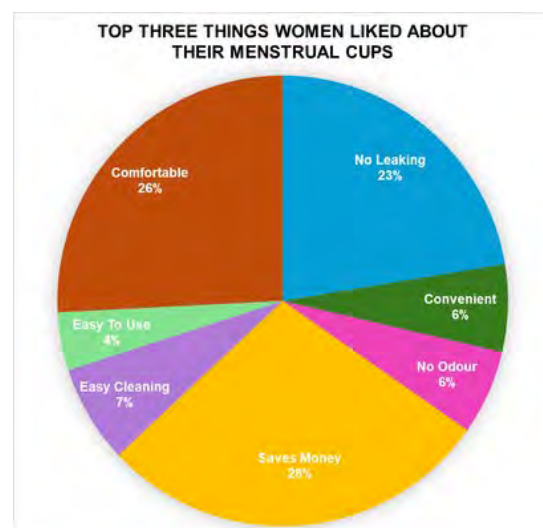
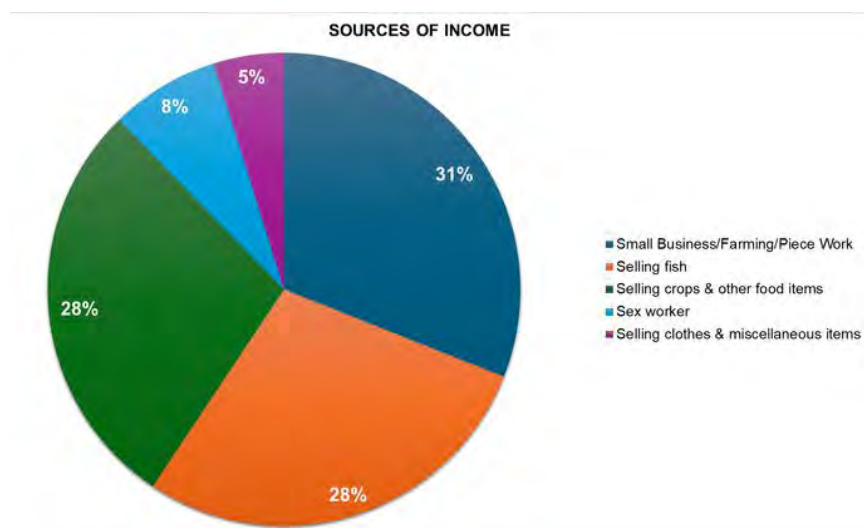
Rhoda is also a coordinator in Mzimba District. She said, “I was sceptical at first, but it's been a game-changer. I love how it reduces waste from disposable pads or tampons, and it is cost-effective. It can be uncomfortable to remove but overall, I am glad to have one as I have the freedom to move around and I have less anxiety about leaks or stains. I think it has reduced the stigma around menstruation, and I am able to participate more in daily activities.”

Community Women and Ripple Africa Staff Data Summary

In 2025 we distributed 763 menstrual cups to women in the community, and 79 menstrual cups to Ripple Africa staff. We have followed up with 85% of the women, and the remaining three-month and six-month follow-ups will take place in 2026. We have a few menstrual cups remaining which will be distributed this year too.

The average age of a Ripple Africa staff member receiving a menstrual cup was 31 years old and on average they had one child. Before receiving the cup, 92% used disposable pads but only 53% were happy with the product they used. The remaining ladies were using cloth, or a combination of cloth and pads with 5% saying that they missed work during their period.

In comparison, the average age of women in the community that we trained was 28 years old with an average of two children. Only 38% used disposable pads with the majority using cloth. Not surprisingly, 52% were not happy with the period product they used, and 31% of women reported staying home during their period. We also recorded additional information, including the level of education the women had received – only 34% had reached secondary school education, – and whether they had a form of income.



Of the 722 women ready for the three-month follow-up, we met with 92% of them as the remaining ladies in the community had moved to other Districts. Of the 664 women we met, 87% had tried their menstrual cup. Those who had not tried it were either pregnant or breastfeeding (but had attended training and have the product for future use), had trouble inserting it or were worried about the size. One lady had lost her menstrual cup, and two women reported that their husband/family did not approve of the product. These women have gone back to using disposable pads or cloth.

However, we are pleased to record that 92% of the women that had tried it are still using it. Several of the women who tried it but are not currently using it have started contraceptives that affect their menstrual cycle, or they are pregnant.

As with the schoolgirls, we asked the women using the menstrual cup to choose three reasons that they like about it in order of importance. The results are in the pie chart above.

2025 Summary:

- 1,435 schoolgirls, 868 community women, and 79 Ripple Africa staff trained and received a menstrual cup
- 96% of schoolgirls continue to use their cup
- 93% of women, including our staff, are still using their cup

Comparing costs, the menstrual cup saves users a huge amount. We have displayed the saving vs one pack and two packs of disposable pads as during distribution, it was common that schoolgirls could only afford one pack, but some women earning an income would buy two packs per month.

	Disposable pads		Menstrual cup
	One pack	Two packs	
Per cycle	£1.30	£2.60	£0.22
Per year	£15.60	£31.20	£2.60
Per decade	£156	£312	£26*

*Based on the RRP (£26) of a Ruby Cup in the UK. However, our beneficiaries received their menstrual cups for free so the saving is greater still.

Overall, the findings show strong acceptance and sustained use of menstrual cups among both schoolgirls and women. Despite difficulties in following up due to transfers, exam failures, pregnancy, or marriage, most participants were reached, and uptake was high.

Continued support, education, and gradual introduction for younger users – alongside community engagement to address parental concerns – may further strengthen adoption and long-term impact.

The results of this project show that these menstrual cups are providing women and schoolgirls with comfort, cleanliness and more financial freedom. We would like to thank our donors for supporting this vitally important project, and we hope to be able to provide more menstrual cups in the future.

