

Regional Project Sport for Development in Africa: Teaming Up for Gender Equality!

## Empowered to Play, Period.

### 1. Promoting gender equality (40% of marks)

Sport for development (S4D) has the potential to change mindsets and behaviour patterns regarding the discrimination of women and girls and foster mutual respect and understanding. The Regional Project *Sport for Development in Africa (S4DA)* uses sport and physical activity as an engaging tool to promote gender equality. Through value-based exercises, children and youth can develop their personal and social competences and are sensitised on gender equality and inclusion. Accompanying discussion sessions enable participants to further explore the conveyed competence or topic and connect it to their daily lives. S4DA follows a gender-transformative and rights-based approach which promotes equal opportunities for all. Safeguarding principles ensure that sport and physical activities are conducted in an environment which is free of harm and abuse while creating safe spaces for all.



In Senegal many girls and women suffer from a lack of information about their menstrual cycles; in a study by *Speak-up Africa*, 84% of the young girls indicated that they do not feel well prepared for their first period. This limited awareness harms their health, education, sports participation, and consequently, their overall professional and social lives. Access to reliable and comfortable sanitary protection is also still a challenge and disposable menstrual products are often of poor quality. Thus, young women are often held back by their menstrual cycle, especially in their school life. More than 45% of young women miss school at least once a month during their period.<sup>1</sup>

To address all these challenges, we work together with *ApiAfrique*, a Senegalese social enterprise established in 2017 with a mission to reduce waste, preserve health, and promote female empowerment – goals perfectly aligned with the objectives of the S4DA project and with Germany's feminist development policy. *ApiAfrique* locally produce sustainable and reusable female hygiene and baby care products. Along with production, they lead sensitisation trainings on menstrual hygiene management (MHM) with the goal of shifting the period culture in Senegal.

That is why *ApiAfrique's* work is so important: Through their trainings, they engage with (young) women, their families, and (young) men. **They address MHM as a societal issue and not 'only' as a women's issue.** They support young women from when they first start menstruating, so they can better understand their bodies, feel good about their bodies, and provide them with the information and equipment they need to better manage their periods.

**Our partnership with *ApiAfrique* focuses on** raising awareness on (1) menstrual hygiene management (2) the different hygiene products (young) women can use and how to use them, (3) the meaning of toxic femininity and positive masculinity, (4) the importance of male allyship and family support. Most importantly, together, we empower (young) women in and through sport.

*ApiAfrique* and S4DA promote gender transformative change through the following initiatives:

- **Shifting the menstruation culture and destigmatising talking about menstrual hygiene** through the facilitation of sensitisation trainings on MHM that address both women and men. A safe space is created, where topics like positive masculinity and toxic femininity can be addressed. The attractiveness

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.speakupafrika.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/MHM-Report-Pikine-et-Guediawaye-July-2017.pdf>

of sport is used to engage with participants creating a safe space for open reflection. On International Menstrual Hygiene Day, *ApiAfrique*, the football club Dakar Sacré Coeur, and S4DA organised a festival to break down taboos related to menstruation. About 150 young people (80% female) from communities across Dakar participated in awareness-raising workshops on the usage of washable and reusable sanitary kits through football, athletics, and dance activities. Girls and boys were able to ask professionals like athlete Gnima Faye, footballer Aissatou Seck and the *Badiénou Gokh*<sup>2</sup> about how to participate in sport while menstruating, the types of sanitary products available, and the free *Weerwi* app that allows you to understand and track your menstrual cycle.

- **Empowering women to embrace their periods** through [Weerwi](#), the pioneering African menstrual cycle tracking app uniquely crafted for the diverse social and cultural landscape of Africa. Developed collaboratively in Senegal with insights from girls, (young) women, doctors, and specialists, it provides personalised features including cycle tracking, period prediction, fertility awareness, body signals diary, and an infotainment series (more information in the next point). Users can access informative articles and videos on menstruation, body changes, and health. The app also anonymously connects (young) women with midwives for support via phone or WhatsApp. S4DA has integrated sport-related content into the app to inform and support girls and (young) women in managing their menstrual cycle and hygiene. Sport-related content includes the impact of sport on physical and mental well-being. The app has been downloaded more than 21.000 times so far.
- **Jointly producing innovative digital solutions to raise awareness.** The infotainment series *Weerwi* is produced in Wolof, the most common local language, with French subtitles, directed by Kalista Production. The *Weerwi* series is aimed at teenage girls and their families. It traces the life of Mina and her friends in their daily lives, at home, at school, and in their social life. Strong themes, including MHM, adolescence, girls' participation in sports, personal development, positive masculinity, and the importance of female role models (in sport) are addressed to inform and raise awareness through captivating fiction and endearing characters. The series consisting of three seasons (6 episodes per season) was released on YouTube and on social networks (TikTok etc.), with an average of 100.000 views per episode. The series has surpassed 1 million cumulated views thus far. A fourth season will be released in early 2024.
- **Providing young women with the products they need** by manufacturing and distributing reusable and washable textile hygiene products like sanitary pads and period panties. Period panties make the girls feel more comfortable playing sports while being on their period. (Young) women participating in S4DA activities receive *ApiAfrique's* period products and have reported feeling "safer" and more confident doing sports, while they are menstruating thanks to period panties. Basketball player Syra Sylla shares that *"When you run, when you jump, when you move, when you lift your leg, nothing moves, nothing changes place when you have panties. Whereas when you have a pad, you tend to spend time putting it back on (trying to be discreet) [...] with menstrual panties, you don't feel like you have a pad, so you almost forget that you are menstruating. We feel "normal", on a "normal" day."* So far, at least 10.000 (young) women have been directly reached through awareness-raising activities. This year, *ApiAfrique* was featured on the German television channel RTL.



### What's next?

**In the short term**, our primary goal is to reach more (young) women, break down menstrual taboos, and to continue providing essential information to empower (young) women to embrace their bodies and their periods. Along with sensitising (young) men about MHM and turning them into gender equality champions. We anticipate an immediate positive impact on participation rates, fostering a supportive environment for girls in

<sup>2</sup> Refers to women in charge of supporting women and children with health-related topics in local communities.

sports activities. Through regular participation in S4D activities, (young) women learn life skills, communication skills, and improve their overall health and well-being. **In the medium term**, our focus extends to sustained destigmatisation, informed decision-making, and a noticeable increase in girls' regular participation in sport. We aim to contribute to a cultural shift that promotes inclusion and breaks down barriers. **In the long term**, our overarching vision is to witness a substantial reduction in the percentage of girls missing school due to their periods. By addressing menstrual challenges head-on, we aspire to create a future where every girl has equal access to education and sports, fostering a more inclusive and empowered society.

## 2. Gender as a quality feature of our work (20% of marks)

The cooperation between *ApiAfrique* and S4DA started in 2021 and has been developing since. A partnership that is defined by mutual learning, both *ApiAfrique* and S4DA have integrated parts of their respective programming into their existing approaches. Together, we are guided by two main tools, the reach/benefit/empower scale and the four quadrants of change. We seek to influence transformational, long-term, societal change through this lens. The entire S4DA team has undergone GTA training at the beginning of the phase to ensure that the capacities of the team can match the expectations and objectives we have set for ourselves.

During S4D training workshops, MHM sensitisation trainings are led by *ApiAfrique* providing them a platform to grow their base and giving participants a chance to learn from local experts and community leaders. S4DA partner organisations like *Special Olympics Senegal (SO Senegal)*, *OlympAfrica Foundation*, *Don Bosco*, and *SOS Children's Villages* have all received sensitisation training by *ApiAfrique*. The target group is (young) women aged 14-19 years old. After learning about menstruation and the different period products available, participants receive *ApiAfrique* sanitary kits at the end of the training. We learned that SO Senegal athletes with intellectual disabilities experience difficulties using reusable pads. Therefore, we provide them with period panties, which speaks to the intersectional lens of the programming. Please refer to the table for an example agenda of a 5-day S4D workshop.

Days 1-3: S4D	Day 4: Gender Equality	Day 5: MHM Sensitisation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>S4D principles (incl. gender equality &amp; inclusion)</li> <li>coach roles and responsibilities</li> <li>safeguarding principles and mechanisms</li> <li>S4D methodology</li> <li>Preparing S4D sessions</li> <li>Conducting S4D sessions (practical exercises in groups using S4D handbooks)</li> <li>Discussion and reflexion rounds</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Concepts and terminology</li> <li>Exercise on gender stereotypes</li> <li>Group work on GBV</li> <li>GE/GBV in sports</li> <li>Group work on positive femininity/masculinity (support systems)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Menstrual cycle</li> <li>Hygienic products</li> <li>Viewing and discussing Weerwi episodes</li> <li>Weerwi tools (app, booklet, hotlines)</li> <li>Knowledge quizzes</li> </ul>

Example of an S4D workshop agenda attended by a mixed group of participants.

Together with S4DA, *ApiAfrique* has developed S4D concepts and integrated them into their MHM sensitisation trainings. The S4D approach is also now included in their ongoing infotainment series *Weerwi* as an innovative approach that creates safe spaces for participants to discuss sensitive topics like MHM, gender-based violence, and positive masculinity. The entire *ApiAfrique* team has undergone S4D trainings to strengthen team building, communication, and life skills of their employees.

S4DA has received an extra 2 million Euros (iPA 2023) from our commissioning party BMZ to contribute to Germany's feminist development policy. A clear signal to the value and effectiveness of the S4D approach in contributing to gender equality and empowering women and girls.

## 3. Implementing feminist core principles (20% of marks)

We recognise the importance of contextualising feminist core principles, originally from a German perspective, to align seamlessly with the Senegalese context. This principle is integral to S4DA, shaping our activities and initiatives. Our approach is organic, emphasising collaboration and support for the ideas already established by our partner. We complement these ideas with S4D concepts, adapting them with cultural sensitivity and aligning them with the gender dynamics in Senegal, guided by ongoing feedback and collaboration with our partners.

### Role of Feminist Core Principles in Our Work:

#### 1. Human Rights-Based Approaches:

Access to affordable and quality MHM products and facilities is a human rights issue. MHM programs advocate for improved access to these resources, addressing economic inequalities and ensuring that all individuals can manage their menstruation with dignity. We contribute to social and gender equality by challenging discriminatory practices related to menstruation and by promoting female participation in sport. Through the integration of MHM sessions in S4D trainings through *ApiAfrique*, we raise awareness, reduce stigma, and promote women's health.

### **2. Dismantling Structural Causes of Inequality:**

*ApiAfrique* is a female-led organisation with almost all staff being female, actively dismantling structural gender inequalities. Efforts to destigmatise menstrual hygiene and sexual and reproductive health empower women. MHM awareness fosters open dialogues around menstruation, creating a space to discuss and challenge stereotypes and promote gender-inclusive perspectives. During S4D sessions, (young) women are empowered through MHM education by learning about their bodies, fostering self-confidence, and challenging societal taboos. This empowerment contributes to breaking down structural barriers that limit women's education and participation in various spheres including sport.

### **3. Gender-Transformative Approaches:**

Through women-led ToT, (young) women have role models they can look up to. Our motto is *If you can see it, you can be it*. Our work has shown that having female role models is essential to creating pathways for female leadership and empowerment. Our trainers are community leaders not only serving as role models for participants but also for the wider community. This increases female participation in sport and challenges societal norms of female employment in sport. (Young) men also see that women can also be leaders and play active parts outside the household.

### **4. Post-Colonial and Power-Critical Approaches:**

We support *ApiAfrique* in strengthening local structures and promoting sustainable development, avoiding redundancy by building and empowering existing initiatives. Our partnership with *ApiAfrique* is critical and participatory, steering clear of imposition. We collaborate effectively, ensuring that S4D integrates seamlessly with *ApiAfrique's* ongoing endeavors. With *ApiAfrique* in the lead, we seek to dismantle power imbalances and respect local autonomy.

## **4. Cooperation (20% of marks)**

Our cooperation was a product of a meeting at a farmer's market in Dakar, where we quickly realised that our objective to empower women and girls was aligned. When we reflected on our approaches, we realised that there would be power in combining the attractiveness of sport to create safe spaces and generate role models and the expertise of *ApiAfrique* in delivering MHM sensitisation trainings.

S4DA invited *ApiAfrique* to lead sensitisation trainings with coaches and participants. And *ApiAfrique* started integrating sport as an empowering element in their ongoing programming e.g. the *Weerwi* series. For example, we learned the power of supportive fathers through our all-female trainings, a learning we shared with *ApiAfrique*. As a result, women's participation in sport supported by male role models is highlighted in the series. It is important to show examples of positive masculinity in the Senegalese context challenging societal norms of fathers being emotionally more distant and stricter than mothers.

**Strength in overcoming adversity.** Senegal is a conservative context making it difficult to address sexual reproductive health and rights (SRHR) topics such as family planning. Last year, following an SRHR training, we were accused of promoting homosexuality. A difficult situation that has only strengthened this partnership. Under the framing of MHM, we can answer curious questions going beyond MHM during S4DA trainings and through *ApiAfrique's* anonymous hotlines. Essentially, **our approaches complement each other.**

**Our power lies in co-creation.** We co-created the *Weerwi* seasons 2 and 3, as well as several training and sensitisation activities. The key success factors of our partnership are (1) a trust-based relationship, (2) mutual respect for each other's expertise and approaches, (3) a lot of open and honest exchange (including about failures or challenges and successes, which brings about ideas), and (4) the wish to be creative and jointly develop new tools and approaches.