



Localisation of Oky Period Tracker App in Tanzania: Digital Innovations in Menstrual Health and Hygiene - For Girls, by Girls, Period!

SUMMARY

This case study explores the localisation and scaling up of the Oky Period Tracker App in Tanzania, focusing on its digital innovations in Menstrual Health and Hygiene (MHH) for girls. The Oky App, developed in collaboration with UNICEF and partners, revolutionises menstrual health education by providing personalised cycle tracking, calendars, and informative content through a gamified, culturally sensitive design. The initiative addresses the MHH challenges faced by Tanzanian girls and aims to empower them by dispelling myths and providing accessible information.

The background outlines the MHH challenges in Tanzania, emphasizing the multi-sectoral efforts and studies conducted to improve menstrual hygiene practices. Key findings from a national study highlight issues such as limited access to sanitary pads, reduced school attendance, and societal taboos affecting girls' well-being.

The Oky App's localisation in Tanzania involved collaboration with over 322 girls, incorporating Maasai culture elements and ensuring inclusivity. Launched in May 2023, the app garnered over 1600 downloads and maintained a high rating. UNICEF's unique social franchising model ensures the app's sustainability, with franchise partners committed to maintaining it for at least five years.

Testimonials reflect positive user experiences, emphasizing the app's role in providing accurate information and supporting girls in managing their periods. Lessons learned include the importance of consulting girls in comfortable spaces and collaborating with "gatekeepers" to enable broader access.

The case study concludes by highlighting the app's success in addressing MHH challenges, its positive impact on users, and UNICEF's plans for continued collaboration to promote Oky's accessibility and reach among girls in Tanzania and beyond.

Introduction

This case study explores the scale-up and localization of the Oky App in Tanzania and its digital innovations in the field of Menstrual Health and Hygiene (MHH). It delves into the background of the MHH challenges in Tanzania, highlighting the need for effective solutions. The case study focuses on the Oky period tracker App, examining its concept, features, and how it addresses the specific needs of girls in Tanzania. The study also explores the strategies employed for scaling up the app and its sustainability.

UNICEF and MHH

UNICEF ensures that its work on systems-strengthening within the WASH sector promotes gender-transformative approaches and that WASH policies, strategies and plans contribute to broader efforts to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. The WASH strategy emphasises the importance of MHH within the [hygiene framework](#) and WASH in schools programmes ensure that sanitation and hygiene facilities are private, safe and gender-segregated, as do WASH in health-care facilities programmes. All service delivery programmes work to incorporate menstrual hygiene and health requirements into designs.

Many UNICEF country programmes have stand-alone MHH programmes that complement and reinforce direct support for services and systems-strengthening work. In 2022, a total of 17.5 million women and girls were directly reached through these programmes (Goal area 4, Global Annual results 2022, UNICEF)

One of the ways UNICEF country offices have supported MHH programmes is through digital platforms that have the potential to raise awareness, facilitate advocacy and engagement, and support digital delivery of key programmes and services. One such platform is called Oky -

the first period tracker app specifically designed for girls.

What is the Oky App?

Oky¹ revolutionises the way girls receive information about their periods by delivering it in a fun, creative, and positive manner directly to their mobile phones. This Android and iOS app offers a range of features, including personalized cycle trackers, calendars, helpful tips, and comprehensive menstruation information. Through its gamified design, girls can customise the app, unlock unique avatars, and participate in menstrual health quizzes. Unlike other period trackers primarily designed for Western adult women, Oky stands out in the following ways:

- Age and culturally appropriate, localised in local languages.
- Digitally inclusive, catering to those with low connectivity and limited mobile literacy.
- Accessible both online and offline.
- Open source, prioritizing high data privacy and security.
- Promotes responsible cycle prediction and employs period and body-positive language.
- Emphasises fun, girl-centered, and gamified experiences to foster user engagement and encourage learning.

Central to Oky's development is the active involvement of girls themselves. Through extensive user-centered design, co-creation sessions, and remote and in-person testing, UNICEF collaborated with girls in Indonesia and Mongolia—two highly diverse countries in the Southeast Asia region—to gain deep insights into the needs and preferences of adolescent girls in both their online and offline lives. This inclusive process, which incorporated user feedback and input at every stage, influenced everything from technical specifications and features to the app's visual aesthetics.

¹ <https://www.unicef.org/innovation/stories/oky-co-created-girls-girls>

Oky is now expanding its reach and launching in several other countries, including Tanzania, Philippines, India, Mexico, Burundi, and Kenya. By late 2022, The OKY Period tracking application went live in Tanzania. Developed by Tai Tanzania in partnership with UNICEF Tanzania, Mingati and R-Labs, Oky Tanzania has been designed to provide an intuitive and user-friendly platform that is tailored to meet the needs of young girls across the country: View the promotional video [here](#).

BOX 1: UNICEF LAUNCHES Oky KENYA

“One of the main reasons girls are in search of information about menstruation is to dispel myths and misconceptions that often lead to anxiety, fear and shame,” Shaheen Nilofer, UNICEF Representative to Kenya said. “I would like to congratulate Oky Kenya for developing an innovative app for Kenyan girls, by Kenyan girls. This will help to break barriers and empower girls to take control of their own health and ultimately life.”

[UNICEF launches Oky Kenya, the first period tracker app specifically designed for girls in Kenya](#)

Tanzania Context and Oky

What are the challenges and barriers women and girls face in relation to MHH in Tanzania?

In Tanzania, women make up approximately 51 percent of the total population, and nearly a quarter of them are adolescent girls (Menstrual Hygiene Day snapshot). These girls and women face the task of adopting safe and hygienic MHH practices. Over the past decade, the Tanzanian government, along with local and international organisations, has introduced various MHH programmes for women and girls.

In 2021, to respond to these challenges and improve MHH in Tanzania, a multi-sectoral collaboration of the National Institute for Medical Research (NIMR), Public Health Laboratory Ivo de Carneri (PHL-IdC) Zanzibar, and the President’s Office – Regional Administration and Local Government (PO-RALG) and in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST), UNICEF, MHH Coalition of Tanzania, and other partners put together a national study to provide a representative survey about the MHH situation among school girls in Tanzania, Mainland and Zanzibar. The report shows the challenges they face and offers appropriate sectoral recommendations on how these hurdles contribute to improving overall health and education outcomes in the country. Access the full report [here](#).

Key findings from the 2021 national study on MHH in Tanzania included:

- **Generally, knowledge, attitude and practice scores on MHH were low** across the study areas with most of the girls from Tanzania Mainland demonstrating higher knowledge scores and adopting better practices than girls from Zanzibar. Overall, the rural dwellers registered higher knowledge and practice scores than girls from urban areas.
- **Quantitative results reveal that around half of the girls (52 per cent) reported regular use of commercial disposable sanitary pads.** The rest used reusable cloths (29.2 per cent) and pieces of cloths such as khang/kitenge, which they used once and disposed of (16 per cent).
- **Sanitary pads were reported not to be readily.** As a result, the girls resorted to using home- made substitutes as they were easily accessible and were mostly self-made. Others use pads because their parents buy for them or give them money to buy them. There were three reported sources of pads: shops, friends and peers, and free supply.

- **Girls with disability came up with a particular need.** This is because of practical management limitations for students who were visually challenged. It is more difficult for these girls to clean reusable menstrual materials once they are soiled because of their physical limitations.
- **About 16.8 per cent of the students reported to have missed school due to menstruation in the past three months.** Pain and discomfort (74 per cent), lack of menstrual materials (42 per cent), fear of embarrassment in case of visible stains on clothes (34 per cent), lack of changing room (34 per cent) and absence of clean and suitable toilet facilities (26 per cent) were some of the reasons given for missing school during menstruation.
- **There was a broader consensus among participants that menstruation reduces the girls' academic performance due to reduced school attendance, class disruption to handle menstruation, reduced attentiveness and psychological impacts.** Poor financial access to sanitary pads, severity of menstrual symptoms, encouragement from some parents and teachers, girls' fear pertaining to the durability and effectiveness of MHH materials used and fear of shame and stigmatisation at school during menstruation were the main reasons cited to having an impact on class attendance, consequently reducing the academic performance among girls.
- **Schools, female family members, female friends and peers were the dominant sources of MHH information.** Female teachers and matrons within schools and mothers within families are the common sources of information and support before and during menstruation. The mass media – Internet, social media, TV and radio– did not emerge strongly in qualitative interviews as sources of information on menstruation.
- **Norms, myths and beliefs on menstruation included religious and socially constructed taboos** around menstruation in the study settings. Religiously constructed restrictions around menstruation related to worshipping and touching of holy books.
- **Many of the girls in the study reported being prohibited from visiting friends, relatives and from social gatherings during menstruation.** Related to this aspect is a dominant theme across the participants' groups related to promoting secrecy around menstruation. Most of the participants affirmed that girls are prohibited from strenuous exercises or performing heavy duties during menstruation.
- There was a broad consensus among all the participating groups that **touching something during menstruation brings about negative consequences.**
- **Looking at the data across participant groups, there appears to be a broad consensus that menstruation is 'a woman thing' and therefore, it should be handled by women and not men.** The male gender– boys, fathers and male teachers– emerged strongly as largely unsupportive.
- Inadequate political commitment at the village, ward, district and region levels was also observed.

Tax on menstrual materials was removed in 2018 and was re-introduced in 2019 as the cost for menstrual products did not reduce for consumers at retail level as expected. Instead, the government placed some financial incentives for companies interested to invest in building production sites in Tanzania (www.periodtax.org).

Today, Menstrual Health and Hygiene (MHH) is clearly a priority amongst government, stakeholders and institutions in Tanzania, as demonstrated by playing a significant component of the School Water, Sanitation and Hygiene and School Curricular. Access the brief [here](#).

How the Oky App was localised in Tanzania?

In a collaborative effort involving Tai Tanzania, UNICEF, Mingati, and Rlabs, the Oky Tanzania mobile app was co-designed and localised. The process engaged over 350 girls across six different regions in Tanzania, including participants from Zanzibar. This collaborative approach, rooted in extensive research and development, focused on addressing the MHH information needs of girls in both rural and urban settings. The result is a user-friendly app, available for download on iOS and Android devices, poised to empower girls in efficiently managing their menstrual cycles.

During the design phase, input from girls in diverse settings, both rural and urban, was actively sought. Motion drawings were employed, incorporating elements of Maasai and Tanzanian culture to ensure the app resonates with its users. Avatars were thoughtfully created, representing a spectrum of backgrounds, including girls with disabilities and albinism, underscoring the app's commitment to inclusivity. Oky is also accessible in Kiswahili, further ensuring its reach to all girls in Tanzania. To find out more, visit the Localising the app video created by Oky [here](#).

Oky Tanzania made its debut in March 2023, marked by a multimedia and social media

campaign, complemented by targeted promotions in schools and communities. This strategic launch aimed to maximize visibility and engagement, amplifying the app's potential impact on the menstrual health and well-being of Tanzanian girls.

BOX 2:

TANZANIA MENSTRUAL HEALTH AND HYGIENE COALITION STRATEGIC PLAN 2020 -2025

Menstrual Health and Hygiene (MHH) Coalition formed during the commemoration of International Menstrual Health Day (2018) in Dodoma - Tanzania. MHH Coalition intends to strengthen the coordination of MHH stakeholders in the Tanzanian Government and its allies. Members of the coalition's meet regularly. The coalition was involved in advocating for the removal of the period tax in 2018. Institutions for Inclusive Development helped grow the coalition's membership and the coalition is currently Co-Chaired by the government (Ministry of Health) and Non-governmental stakeholder (World Vision). Today, the coalition comprises over 140 members.

Figure 1: Oky Global Scaling Overview 2023



Note: Local versions of Oky are now live in: Burundi, Indonesia, India-WestBengal, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Mexico, Mongolia, Nepal, Philippines, Tanzania, Ukraine + global Oky app (English, French, Portuguese)

Oky launch in 2023: South Africa, Papua New Guinea, Cote D'Ivoire

Oky prospects 2023-25: Brazil, Bulgaria, Bangladesh, Botswana, Colombia, Egypt, Ecuador, Ghana, Madagascar, Morocco, Mozambique, Peru, Thailand, Uganda, Vietnam, Zambia.

Scaling a digital innovation through social franchising

The model used is unique. UNICEF engaged a franchise partner to work with in the development and deployment of the app. As part of the franchise agreement, the franchise partner commits to maintain the application for a minimum of 5 years. This means that even after UNICEF stops investing directly in the app the franchise partner maintains the app ensuring that it is sustained beyond UNICEF's initial engagement. In addition to this the app is non branded to UNICEF and can be utilized and promoted by partners and organizations beyond UNICEF. New content is developed and added by the global

team as it is designed. As new content is added then improvements will be made. Should there be app updates these will also be pushed out to the respective application stores.

Oky links

Oky links: [Oky website](#); [Oky 1min intro](#); [Oky co-creation with girls](#); [Oky as a digital public good](#); [Oky data protection and privacy by design](#); [Oky vision and mission](#); [Oky points of difference](#); [Oky accessibility and disability inclusion](#); [Oky for and by girls](#); [Oky Scaling Model](#); [Oky for unconnected girls](#)

Oky Youtube channel: [Oky Youtube](#)

Oky on Social

Media: [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Instagram](#)

Oky in the Media: [FAZ](#), [Financial](#)

[Times](#), [Forbes](#), [Fast Company World Changing Ideas](#), [Nikkei](#)

Results

Overall, the Oky app has been successful in achieving its goal of providing girls in Tanzania with access to accurate information and support on a range of topics, including sexual and reproductive health, education, and personal development. The App has been well-received by users, who appreciate its user-friendly design and informative content.

Through community engagement events and social media surveys, we have been able to gather valuable feedback and insights from users, which will inform future development efforts.

In the 3 months since the app has been launched in Tanzania there have been 1600+ downloads so far. The App has maintained a rating of 4.33 stars, with many users citing the App's intuitive interface and useful features as major strengths. Additionally, the App has been downloaded by users across the globe, with the majority of downloads coming from Tanzania.

BOX 3:

TESTIMONIAL

"Mimi ni moja ya binti ambae nimenufaika sana na hii app..inanisaidia kupata taarifa sahihi n pia naweza kujua mzunguko wa hedhi zangu. #oky app kwel ni ya binti kutoka kwa binti."

[I am one of the girls who really benefits from this app...It helps me get accurate information and I am able to know my menstrual cycle. #oky app is truly an app for girls, by girls.]

- Irene_Makwambe on Instagram

Moving forward, UNICEF Tanzania plan to continue working with government agencies and other partners to promote the App and ensure its availability to as many girls as possible. We believe that the "Oky" app has the potential to make a real difference in the lives of girls in Tanzania and beyond, and we are excited to see its continued impact in the years to come.

Lessons Learned

In Tanzania, digital innovation continues to be a key mechanism in raising awareness, engaging girls, promoting menstrual products, and normalising the traditionally taboo topic of periods. Several partners, including UNICEF, utilise digital platforms such as the U-report and social media platforms to engage in MHH. Furthermore, other partners like TAI-Tanzania have continued to employ innovation, particularly through the use of 3D animation programme, raising awareness about MHH in an edutainment manner.

Figure 2: Oky App featured on the front page of Smart World



A key lesson learnt was to speak to girls in a space where they feel comfortable. Throughout the process girls were consulted in schools,

learning centres and other places where girls felt they could share their views. In addition, it was important to work with 'gate keepers', be it, would support/enable girls who do not have access to devices to use the app. To scale up the application, UNICEF will continue to collaborate with partners through the MHH coalition and ensure that innovations, such as the Oky app, are not only prioritised by UNICEF but are also promoted by all other partners in their respective working areas so that more girls can be reached and benefit in such innovation across the country.

The app was officially launched by the Ministry of Health in May 2023. The focus for next steps will be on user acquisition, marketing and ensuring as many girls in Tanzania as possible download and use the app.

Conclusion

The Oky App, a digital innovation in MHH, has contributed towards addressing the challenges faced by girls in Tanzania. By providing access to accurate information, personalized cycle tracking, and engaging content, the app has empowered girls to take control of their menstrual health and well-being.

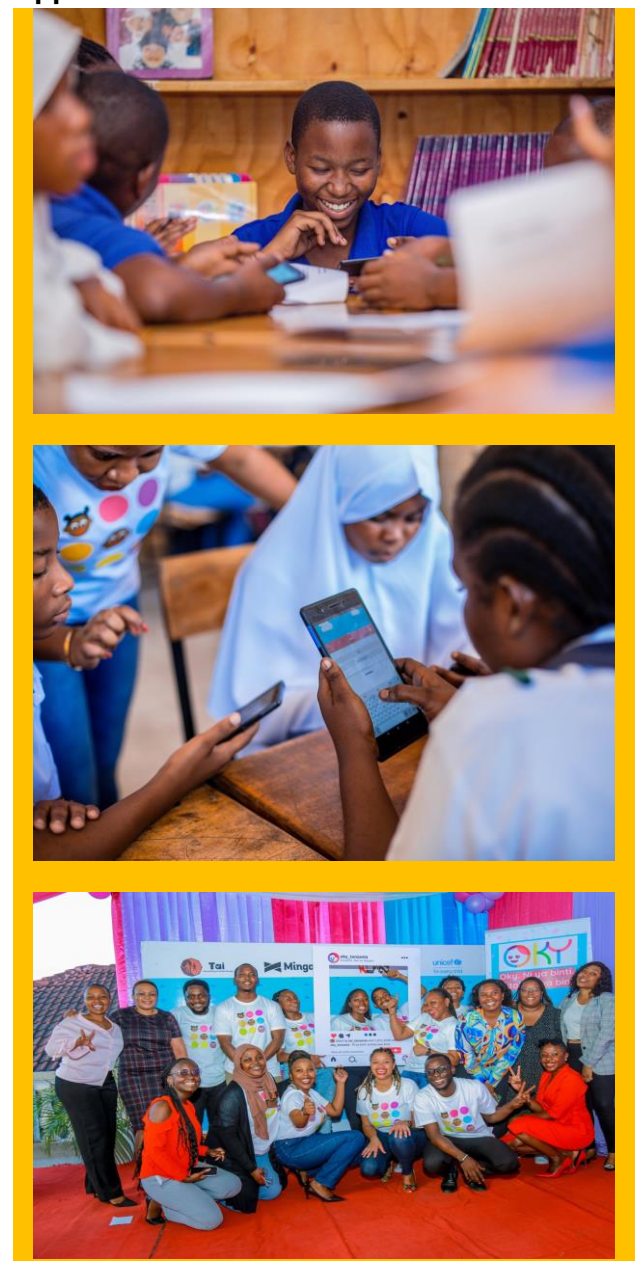
Through an inclusive and user-centred design process, involving extensive collaboration with girls in Tanzania, the app has been tailored to meet their specific needs and preferences. This approach has ensured that the app is accessible, inclusive, and relevant to girls in Tanzania. Users appreciate its intuitive interface, useful features, and informative content. The app has also gained positive ratings and reviews, showcasing its impact and effectiveness.

To ensure sustainability and wider reach, UNICEF has employed a unique social franchising model, engaging franchise partners who commit to maintaining the app for a minimum of five years. This approach ensures that the app continues to benefit girls even after UNICEF's direct

parents, teachers, health workers and other family members who have access to digital devices who involvement and allows for scalability beyond UNICEF's initial engagement.

UNICEF Tanzania plans to collaborate with government agencies and partners to promote the Oky App and make it available to as many girls as possible. The app has the potential to make a real difference in the lives of girls in Tanzania and

Figure 3: Youths being trained on the Oky App



beyond, and its impact is expected to grow in the coming years.

References

UNICEF's Guide to Menstrual Hygiene Materials
<https://www.unicef.org/media/91346/file/UNICEF-Guide-menstrual-hygiene-materials-2019.pdf>

Guidance on menstrual health and hygiene
<https://www.unicef.org/media/91341/file/UNICEF-Guidance-menstrual-health-hygiene-2019.pdf>

Oky App <https://okyapp.info/features/>

Menstrual Health and Hygiene among school girls in Tanzania: A 2021 research report about Menstrual Health and Hygiene among school girls in Tanzania, 2021

Menstrual Hygiene day snapshot of Tanzania
https://menstrualhygieneday.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/MHH_Tanzania-Snapshot-v3_2022.pdf

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