

## **Celebrating Maine Mura on World Menstrual Hygiene Day**

For some women, menstruation is an inconvenience they don't give much thought to. But for many, it can be a dreaded week with stigma attached. It can also be expensive and sometimes uncomfortable, resulting in missed school or work.

World Menstrual Hygiene Day was celebrated yesterday. It aims to create awareness about the challenges and hardships girls and women face during menstruation. The day is observed on 28 May because menstrual cycles average 28 days in length and people menstruate an average of five days each month. May is the fifth month of the year.

This year's theme is 'Action and Investment in Menstrual Hygiene and Health' and Te Ipukarea Society's Maine Mura program is doing exactly that. Taking action in this area to offer an opportunity for Cook Island girls and women to discuss all of these issues openly.

We believe that women should be encouraged to share their experiences with one another so we can all benefit from new learnings. Then what is sometimes a dreaded week of getting your period can become a bit easier.

The 'Maine Mura' program has a waste management focus as it raises awareness on reusable feminine hygiene products including moon cups and reusable sanitary pads. These sustainable alternatives also save money in the longer term. All women who attend our presentations can try either of the reusable products for free thanks to funding by UN Women.

Last week, Mitiaro was the last of the southern group outer islands to receive our Maine Mura program, having already visited Atiu, Aitutaki, Mauke & Mangaia. The Maine Mura campaign will shortly be making its way to the northern group islands and afterwards will be run in Rarotonga.

Students at Apii Mitiaro and women from the wider community attended sessions and had some great questions on the products. It was a great opportunity to talk more about women's health and there was strong interest from women wanting to trial the reusable feminine hygiene products.

Some are surprised to learn that there is a high plastic content in disposable menstruation products. On average, women use up to 12,000 disposable menstrual products over their life, with some disposable products taking up to 500 years to decompose.

Moon cups may be a new concept to our Cook Islands women but have actually been around for 20 years. Moon cups with proper care can last up to 10 years long. They save women lots of money, eco-friendly, safer to use, and holds more menstrual fluid than disposable pads or tampons. Depending on your flow, you can wear a cup for up to 8 hours without having to change it out.

Our TIS team also took the opportunity to run our environmental photography program with senior students from Apii Mitiaro as well as conduct a community presentation and discussion on current waste management issues.

One thing that stood out for us was how well the Mitiaro students knew their environment and history, teaching us the names of birds, plants as they helped guide us across the makatea safely in a most humble and respectful manner. They made the best tour guides, singers, entertainers and Te Reo maori teachers. The strong values of these students was so evident and something to be admired.

The future of the Cook Islands is looking bright!