Title of Project: Re-Cycle  
Country: Puerto Rico, United States  
The George Washington University  
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Re-Cycle is a project that aims to reduce period poverty in Puerto Rico. “Period poverty is the lack of sufficient resources needed to manage menses, such as toilet, bathing, and laundering facilities; general menstrual education and information; and...menstrual management supplies” (Casola et al., 2022). In order to reduce period poverty in Puerto Rico, Re-Cycle has a three-pronged approach called “PIE”. This implementation plan will be executed over the summer of 2023.

The P in PIE refers to peacebuilding. Our research, which at the moment consists mainly of a literature review on period poverty in other nations, has shed light on the different ways that period poverty can look and into how period poverty is manifested in Puerto Rico. Seeing that period poverty in Puerto Rico is a social, economic, political, and environmental issue, the essential step to ensure that our efforts can be long-term is to provide a platform and a medium for peacebuilding and gender equality. A woman in Puerto Rico has to suffer due to the island’s culture of gender discrimination and gender inequality, which then results in women being unable to speak up for themselves in matters pertaining to their health, their needs, and their struggles. Re-Cycle would like to create a peaceful environment for women, meaning that Re-Cycle wants to create an environment where women will feel safe, respected, and considered equals to their male fellow citizens and where women’s voices will be heard, valued, and respected. On the other hand, the pads section of our PIE approach will consist of Re-Cycle creating and distributing reusable fabric menstrual pads for women and girls living in low-income communities. The goal of these pads is to provide women and girls in these communities with a sustainable and sanitary alternative to their current methods of menstrual management, which in many cases consist of unsanitary and unsafe methods of menstrual management.

The I in PIE refers to investigation and implementation. At the moment, there is no quantitative data regarding period poverty and its effects in Puerto Rico. Instead, there are anecdotal research and accounts (Rozas Rivera, 2021). Seeing that this issue is prevalent on the island and that there is a lack of action, Re-Cycle aims to be a pioneer in the menstrual equality movement in Puerto Rico and to conduct a research investigation to determine what period poverty looks like in Puerto Rico, who struggles with period poverty, and what can be done to ameliorate the issue. We aim to use the data collected from research to implement real, sustainable, and long-term solutions to period poverty that include but are not limited to making reusable products more accessible to struggling communities, expanding awareness on the issue of period poverty, providing education on menstruation and menstrual equality to individuals throughout the island, and working to minimize the stigma associated with menstruation.

The E in PIE refers to education and environmentalism. Education is key to reducing period poverty in Puerto Rico. Through our literature reviews, we have determined that period poverty is not necessarily limited to poverty but that a lack of access to menstrual education is a cause for period poverty. With this in mind, practically every woman or girl who menstruates in Puerto Rico is a victim of period poverty. Women in Puerto Rico are discriminated against due to their sex; they are not seen as equals and therefore silenced when trying to speak out about their needs, and the island’s Catholic culture has seemingly declared that menstruation is a taboo topic that should not be discussed in places outside the home. Evidently, if a nation views a natural, biological process as taboo and inappropriate, education is needed. Education is needed to normalize this issue among different communities, and education is needed to teach women and girls about menstruation as a whole. Menstruation sheds light on a woman’s health. Menstruation is essentially the best indicator of whether the body is healthy. Without proper education about menstruation, women are at risk for developing health issues and then silenced when they try to speak out about their needs and struggles. In terms of environmentalism, we have observed that one of the reasons that Puerto Rico struggles with widespread poverty is due to events such as hurricanes and earthquakes. These issues are caused by climate change and result in a climate crisis. Following these events, many people are displaced, they lack sanitary water, and they live in unsanitary conditions. For example, many people had to leave their homes due to flooding. Waste found in these floods contributes to the island’s health crisis. Keeping this in mind, by making menstrual products more accessible to different communities, we do not want to increase the amount of waste...
created by these communities, especially waste that can be a biohazard. Therefore, we want to distribute reusable fabric pads because these will last a long time and create little to no waste. In addition, this option is more sustainable because we can provide pads to these communities with one trip every few months or even years, which can reduce the amount of carbon emissions from having to drive back and forth to these communities every month or every other month to ensure they do not run out of disposable menstrual products.

In order to make this project possible, communication is essential. We need good communication to find communities, bond with these communities and keep our relationship strong to make sure we continue to hear about their needs and are able to respond accordingly. With communication as our top priority and consideration when looking for a community partner, we decided to reach out to a student organization at the University of Puerto Rico Rio Piedras campus called the American Medical Women’s Association (AMWA). AMWA is an organization that seeks to promote the health and well-being of women as well as to provide opportunities for women who are interested in working in the medical field. While we initially created a partnership with AMWA in Rio Piedras (which is located in the capital of Puerto Rico), AMWA has numerous chapters spread throughout different areas of the island. With AMWA, we have a strong network of young women who want to help their communities and access contacts in communities throughout Puerto Rico. In addition, having an organization like AMWA, which seeks to empower women and encourage women to work in the medical field, we have an organization that is practically investing in the well-being of future women because with more women in the medical field, more awareness about women’s issues can be brought to the table and the stigma associated with issues like menstruation and reproductive health can be minimized.

Our project began in January 2021 as part of the Clinton Global Initiative University’s Class of 2021. That same year, we received a Clinton Global Initiative University grant from George Washington University’s Honey W. Nashman Center for Civil Engagement and Public Service. Those funds were used to purchase materials to make prototypes for reusable fabric pads, and trials were conducted to receive feedback regarding the pads’ effectiveness, comfort, and durability. In addition, those funds were also used to purchase menstrual products to distribute throughout different communities to begin forming relationships with communities throughout the island and to begin learning about their struggles. In 2021, we also reached out to different prospective principal investigators with our research proposal and received our CITI certificates. In 2022, we launched our social media platform that seeks to educate and spread awareness about period poverty in Puerto Rico to people living on the island. We have also spent the past year doing deep dives of research into period poverty, period poverty in Puerto Rico, and the current social, economic, political, and climate issues being dealt with in Puerto Rico. We have also modified and adapted our research proposal and received feedback from professors at George Washington University.

Future plans regarding our funding are divided into funding for education, implementation, accreditation, and investigation. In terms of education, we seek to use the funding to expand our social media outreach, create and print brochures about period poverty and menstrual health to provide to communities, hold seminars at local schools, and hire interns to teach them about these issues and to have been gain work experience and take that knowledge with them to their communities. In terms of implementation, we plan to use the funds to develop a final prototype for our reusable pad, to hire workers to produce these pads and to use these funds to facilitate transportation to and from these communities. In terms of accreditation, we seek to formally establish Re-Cycle as a nonprofit organization with the intention of having this accreditation serve as a way to make our organization seem more credible to the people in Puerto Rico and to future prospective grant providers. Lastly, in terms of investigation, we seek to use funds to conduct a research investigation, promote our research, and provide incentives such as prizes to people who participate in our investigation with the goal can encourage more people to participate. We would carry all of these things out during the summer.

Our ultimate goal on a short-term basis is to provide menstrual relief to women through our donations, which consist of donating disposable menstrual products. We do not expect to resolve the issue of period poverty for women immediately after helping them once, but we want to make small changes as we go. By giving women free products that will last them at least three months, we are helping them save money, reducing their likelihood of developing reproductive or urinary issues, and providing them with a small sense of relief for the time being. In the long term, we hope to have these continuous donations to serve as a way for our relationships with the communities to grow and become stronger. We also hope to spread awareness on the issue of period poverty and to educate people
throughout the island on the causes and effects of period poverty. We aim to monitor our progress primarily through community feedback. Our project is for the community, so we would want the community to provide feedback in order for us to shape our project to fit their needs. So far, we have observed satisfaction from communities we have worked with by seeing how they have invited us back and connected us with other communities. We hope to continue this way and to also form stronger connections that will allow them to feel more comfortable with sharing their needs and struggles with us so that we can do everything in our power to better their current situations and ultimately accomplish our main goal: reduce period poverty in Puerto Rico.