LOVE THE OCEANS
Empowering Communities,
Conserving Oceans

# SEXUAL HEALTH QUESTIONNAIRE REPORT



LTO's Women's Swimming Lessons. Photo credit: Mario Guilamba

# INTRODUCTION

Love The Oceans (LTO) is a non-profit marine conservation organisation whose purpose is to support the protection and research of marine life diversity in Jangamo. Its main objective is to preserve the marine environment by strengthening local communities and conducting scientific research with the aim of establishing a Marine Protected Area in Jangamo.

According to local research, it is estimated that in Jangamo, approximately 90% of women cannot swim, and as a result, no women are included in the marine environment in Jangamo, neither in fishing, ecotourism, nor swimming. Limited access to menstrual products compatible with swimming, combined with a patriarchal society that prioritises men, means that no women are learning to swim and are therefore less likely to be involved in the marine environment.

The lack of sex education at an appropriate age means that the link between sexual contact and pregnancy is often not established, and although having sex outside marriage is not taboo in Jangamo, becoming pregnant outside marriage is. Children have sex at 14 or 15 and become pregnant, which means that the average age of marriage is 14 locally. Once married and pregnant, children drop out of school and become full-time mothers, taking care of the home and the farm. This, combined with Portuguese colonial rule that excluded women from education, has led to an estimated illiteracy rate of 75% among women, with only a small proportion of them having careers and formal jobs. These complex social issues have led to women being heavily dependent on their partners, most households being supported by a single income, and women having little control over family size due to a lack of economic independence, education and access.




Helena and Luisa, part of Love The Oceans Sea Her projects complete their PADI Open Water. Photo credit: Mario Guilamba



LTO's long established children's swimming program. Photo credit: Mario Guilamba

These factors combined have historically limited opportunities for women in our community, and Love The Oceans is helping local women change this situation.

Love The Oceans realised that women were not attending swimming lessons and, as a result, were not learning how to stay safe in the water and access the ocean. As a result, women excluded themselves from ocean-related activities and, consequently, were not included in decision-making to protect the ocean.

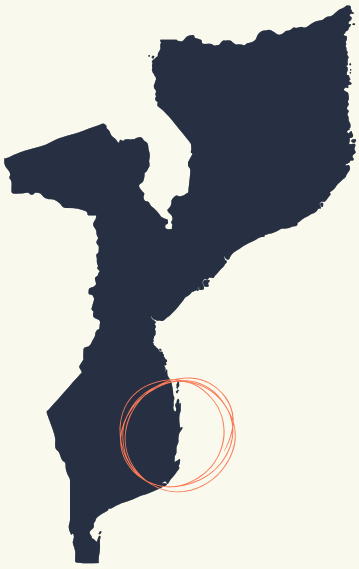
Most research in the field of marine conservation shows that inclusive ocean governance is an essential component of successful conservation projects. When different environmental issues are discussed in the community, it is important that all members, including women, have a say, since in Jangamo, women represent 50% of stakeholders. To successfully manage the marine habitat and life in the Jangamo area in order to ensure stable food security for the region, it is essential that women participate in these conversations. This report examines the barriers women face in entering the marine space and achieving economic independence, including menstrual management and sexual health.

This report explores how social, economic, and educational inequalities have limited women's access to sea-related activities to inform Love the Oceans' marine conservation projects.

# METHODOLOGY

Data collection took place between August 2022 and May 2023, covering a total of 121 women residing in the communities of Guinjata, Paindane, and Baía dos Cocos. To ensure diversity, women of different age groups, educational levels, and socioeconomic backgrounds were included.

Questionnaires with closed and open questions were used to collect data on reproductive health, access to menstrual products, education, and participation in community and marine activities. The questionnaires were conducted in Bitonga, the local language, and in Portuguese, according to the participants' preference, ensuring clarity and accessibility.



The surveys were confidential and conducted privately. A large proportion of the participants completed the questionnaire at school, so that the age distribution covered young women, adults and adolescents.



Jangamo Bay, where Love The Oceans works. Photo credit: Kaushik Subramaniam

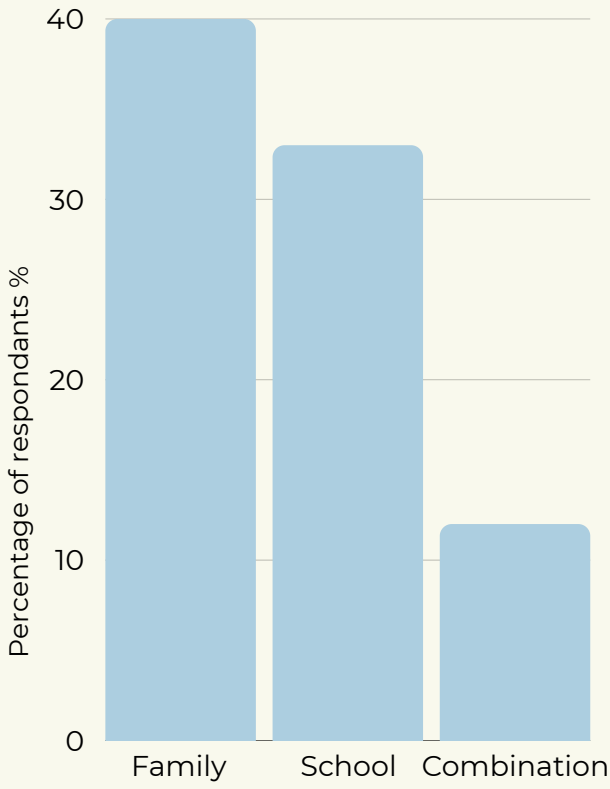
# RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

## Education

Sexual education is foundational to gender equity, health, and long-term sustainable development but it remains severely lacking in many coastal communities. For women and girls, understanding their bodies and rights is not just a personal matter, it's key to exercising bodily autonomy, making informed decisions, and participating fully in community life. When women can choose *if and when* to have children, they are more likely to finish their education, enter the workforce, and take part in decision-making, including in conservation. This is especially important in areas like Jangamo, where environmental degradation and poverty are deeply interconnected.

Women with access to sexual education are more likely to delay childbirth, finish education, have fewer children, and achieve economic independence - all of which reduce pressure on limited natural resources like fish stocks. They are also more likely to take leadership roles in community projects, including those that protect the ocean and promote sustainable practices. In short, sexual education is a conservation issue, a gender equity issue, and a poverty alleviation tool.

However, our recent surveys show that this education is not reaching those who need it most. While 40% of respondents said they get most of their knowledge from family, only 33% said school was their main source, and 12% said they relied on a combination of both. 7% of respondents said they didn't know what a period was, and 66% did not understand the connection between menstruation and sexual reproduction. These findings highlight an urgent need to close the information gap and ensure every individual, but especially women and girls, has access to the knowledge they need to thrive.



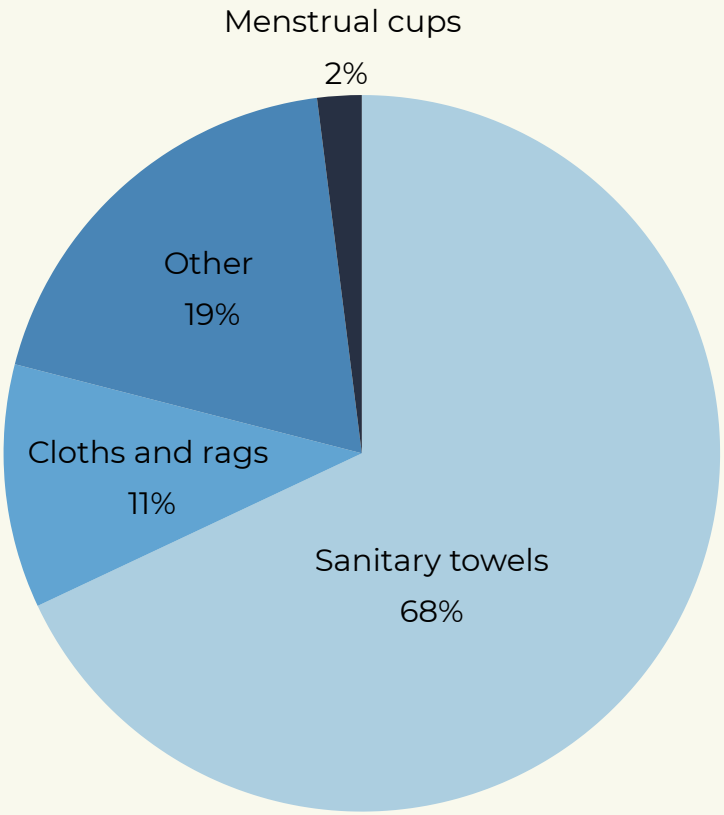

Where respondents obtained most of their information about sexual health

# Menstrual Products

Access to safe, effective, and affordable menstrual products is a human rights issue. Without adequate menstrual management, girls and women face significant barriers in daily life, including education, employment, and community involvement. 79% of respondents say they avoid certain activities during their period. This can lead to social, economic and academic disadvantages. In conservation contexts such as ours, it also means fewer women participate in training programmes, community leadership and decision-making on environmental protection, which deepens existing gender disparities in ocean governance.

Cultural stigma, lack of access to menstrual products, and limited education about menstruation contribute to this cycle of exclusion. By ensuring that menstruating people have access to adequate products and the knowledge to use them safely, we can empower more women and girls to thrive in some areas of their lives, including conservation. Reusable products, such as menstrual cups, offer a sustainable alternative, but their adoption remains low due to a lack of knowledge, availability, and habit in their use.

The results of our survey reflect this gap in access and awareness. Ninety-three per cent of respondents had never used tampons. More than half (55 per cent) had never heard of menstrual cups, although 42 per cent expressed interest in trying one. In terms of current use, 68% reported using disposable sanitary pads, 11% rely on cloths or improvised bandages, and only 2% use menstrual cups. When participants were asked which menstrual products would be most useful to have greater access to, 52% said it would be useful to have a menstrual cup, 13% said sanitary pads, and 5% said tampons. These figures highlight an urgent need to increase education about menstrual health and access to sustainable menstrual management options.



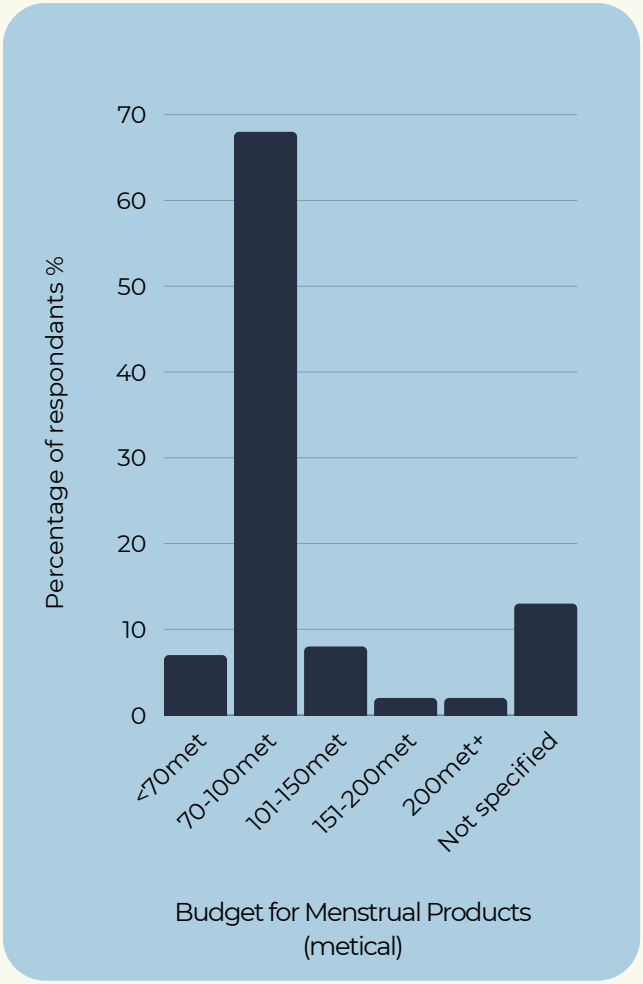

Use of menstrual products

# Finances

When women have control over their finances, they are better able to make informed decisions about their health, including whether or not to access contraception or menstrual management products. Without economic empowerment, these essential choices are often out of reach, reinforcing cycles of poverty, limiting participation in education and training, and ultimately reducing women's ability to contribute to and lead conservation efforts.

Countless studies show that conservation projects are more successful and sustainable when women are included and empowered. But without the ability to purchase basic products such as tampons or sanitary pads, women are often excluded from these opportunities. Our research highlights the financial difficulties many women face. Monthly spending on menstrual products ranged from 20 to 350 meticais, with the majority (68%) spending between 70 and 100 meticais per month. 38% of respondents said they had no monthly budget dedicated to menstrual products.

To put this into context, a single pack of tampons costs around 185 meticais, while the minimum wage in Mozambique is 9,800 meticais per month, and most women in our region do not have formal employment. These economic barriers have real consequences, making it more difficult for women to access healthcare, education and, consequently, conservation training.

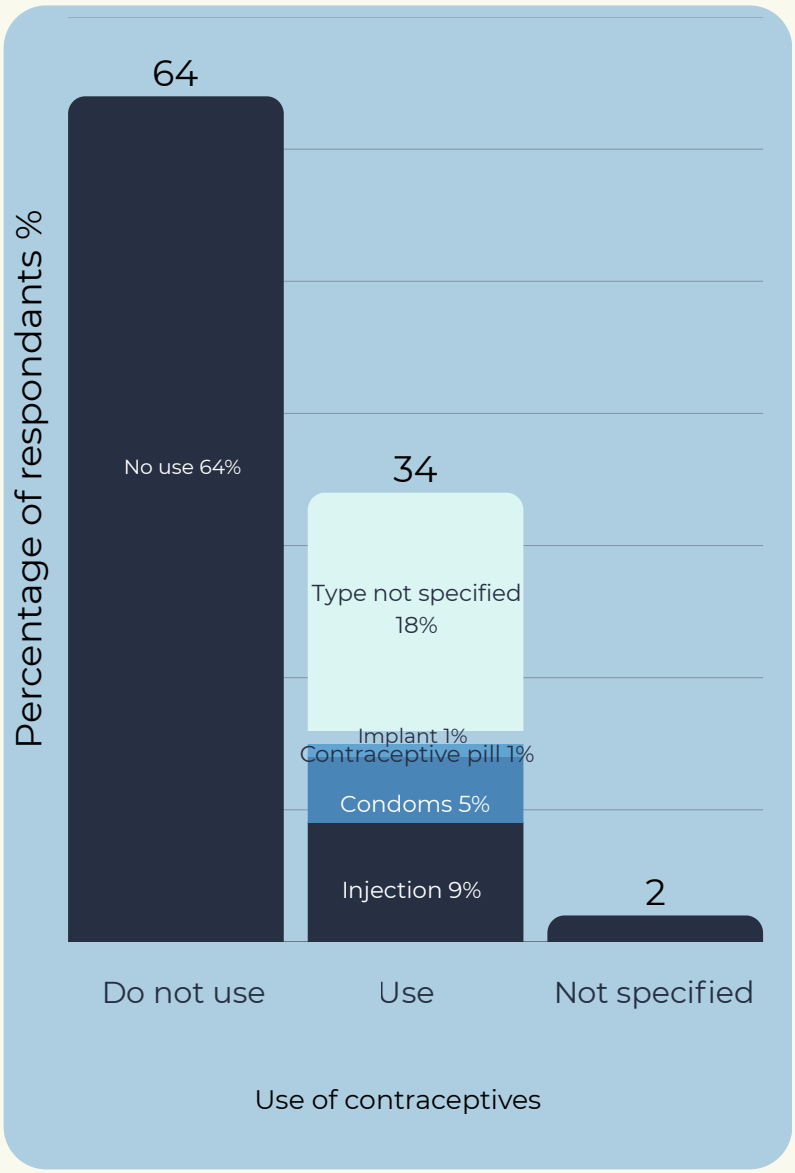



Addressing financial inequality is essential to ensuring that all women can take care of their sexual health with dignity, have access to the opportunities they deserve, and lead the protection of Mozambique's marine ecosystems.

# Contraceptives

Access to contraceptive methods is an essential component of empowering women to make informed decisions about their sexual health, their future, and their participation in conservation. When they have control over whether and when to have children, women are better able to pursue education, take advantage of economic opportunities, and assume leadership roles, including in environmental management. This autonomy is particularly important in coastal communities, where women's involvement in marine conservation can be limited by early pregnancy, family responsibilities, and social expectations. By being able to choose the right time for motherhood, women gain more space to contribute actively and sustainably to the management of marine resources.

However, our survey results show significant gaps in access to contraceptives: 64% of women reported not using any type of contraceptive. Among the 34% who do use contraception, the most common method is the Depo-Provera injection, followed by male condoms. Follow-up questions with a focus group of women suggested that making contraceptive pills available would be more effective, as this method of contraception allows women to decide whether or not they want to become pregnant. These figures point to an urgent need for broader education and better access to a variety of family planning options to ensure that women can make informed choices that support both personal well-being and conservation outcomes across the community.



# Barriers women face in the marine environment

## SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC BARRIERS



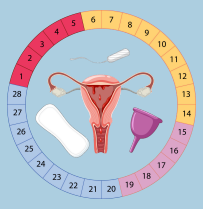
- Gender norms exclude women from ocean-related activities.
- The lack of menstrual products leads to school absenteeism and dropouts.
- Limited sex education and restricted access to contraception contribute to early pregnancy and early marriage.

## INEQUALITIES IN EDUCATION



- Early pregnancy results in school dropouts and fewer opportunities in life.
- Many girls do not understand how menstruation is linked to reproduction.
- Sex education is largely absent in schools.

## MENSTRUAL AND SEXUAL HEALTH



- Limited access to menstrual products restricts women's participation in maritime work.
- Few women have used tampons or menstrual cups due to cost and availability.
- Contraceptive use is low, reducing bodily autonomy and increasing vulnerability.



Women involved in Love The Oceans Sea Her projects learning to swim.
Photo credit: Mario Gutierrez

# CONCLUSION

This report shows how the barriers women face in the Jangamo region are complex and interconnected. Addressing menstrual health and improving reproductive education is not only a matter of basic rights, it is fundamental to enabling women to actively participate in marine conservation.

By creating inclusive pathways for women to engage in ocean-related activities, the organisation Love The Oceans (LTO) aims to promote more equitable and sustainable environmental management in Mozambique's coastal areas.

For marine conservation to be truly inclusive and effective, it is essential to invest in education, ensure access to menstrual products, and engage local communities.


## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Government visit Love The Oceans site to officially open the Jangamo Cleaning lessons in 2025. Photo credit: Mario Guilamba