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## 17-year-old student from Mombasa nominated for this year's Diana Awards

By [Diana Mutheu](#)  
August 12th, 2019 • 2 min read

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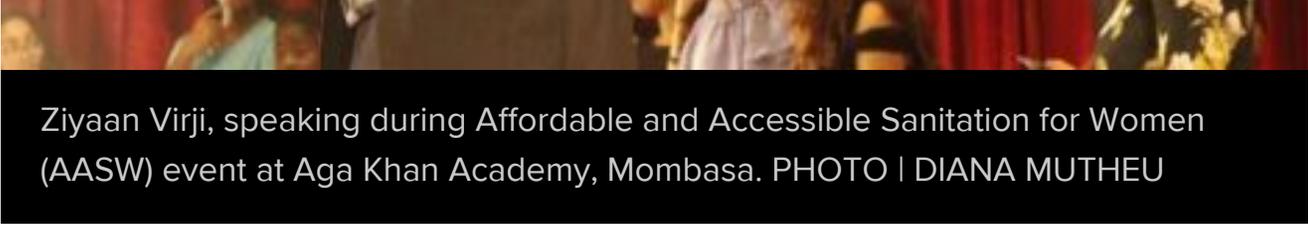
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Ziyaan Virji, speaking during Affordable and Accessible Sanitation for Women (AASW) event at Aga Khan Academy, Mombasa. PHOTO | DIANA MUTHEU



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A Mombasa student is among hundreds of youth globally who have been nominated for this year's Diana Awards, one of the highest accolades for

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social action or humanitarian efforts a young person can receive.

Ziyaan Virji, a 17-year-old student at the Aga Khan Academy in Mombasa, was awarded for his project of distributing reusable sanitary towels and creating awareness to end menstrual poverty in different parts of the world.



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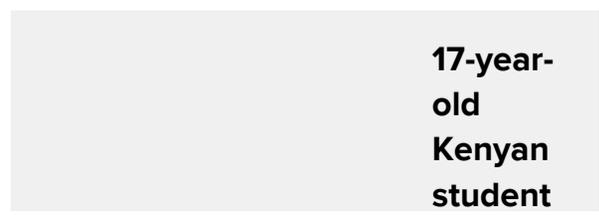
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Speaking during an interview in Mombasa office, Ziyaan said he was honored to be a recipient of this prestigious international award and attributed his success to his family, close friends, mentors and the school.

“It is such an honor for my work to be recognized in the legacy of Princess Diana. I would like to thank everyone who was involved for their continuous support. It shows credibility of my work,” Ziyaan said.

## **EMPOWER GIRLS**

He added that it will give him more exposure and also help him build more network.

The Diana Awards will be celebrating its 20th anniversary this year.

Through an initiative called Affordable and Accessible Sanitation for Women (AASW), Ziyaan aims to create entrepreneurial opportunities to empower girls to access menstrual hygiene.

“In 2017 when I was working on my school personal project I was taken aback to learn that over 500 million girls across the world do not have access to the necessary menstrual health resources they require. Through AASW, I want to change the narrative,” Ziyaan

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said.

Working with his fellow students aged 13 to 18, Ziyaan has also closely collaborated with a group of women with disabilities called Tunaweza to produce and distribute sanitary packages that are reusable, cost effective and environmentally friendly.

## **MENSTRUAL HYGIENE**

“We produce and distribute reusable sanitary packages and equip girls with the necessary skills to give themselves and their communities access to menstrual hygiene. These packages last for up to three years. They are 100 percent biodegradable and cost between three to five dollars,” Ziyaan added.

The reusable sanitary towels are made from Kitenge (African fabric). A full package comprises of two wings/covers, eight cotton liners, two pairs of underwear, antiseptic soap, hand towel, waterproof bag, a booklet that talks about menstrual health and a calendar. All these come in a small bag.

“So far, we have helped more than 300 girls to acquire access to menstrual hygiene in Kenya, Tanzania, Pakistan, India, Nigeria and the UAE. My aim is to reach out to many girls as possible because periods are a natural phenomenon and the stigma surrounding it should be stopped,” Ziyaan said.

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Ziyaan has also taken time to start a conversation with boys about menstrual hygiene which has borne positive results in his school.

“More boys are volunteering in this project. We should be part of the conversation because we have sisters. Also, later in life we will be fathers and our daughters will need us,” he added.

Diana Awards

Ziyaan Virji

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LIFE, MUST READ

# 17-year-old Kenyan student wins global award for sanitary towels innovation

By [Diana Mutheu](#)

August 14th, 2019





Ziyaan Virji, speaking during Affordable and Accessible Sanitation for Women (AASW) event at Aga Khan Academy, Mombasa. PHOTO | DIANA MUTHEU

A 17-year-old Mombasa student has received The Diana Award for going above and beyond his everyday life to create and sustain positive change.

The youth, who was selected for the Princess Diana Award was on Monday feted during the international youth day.

Ziyaan Virji, a student of Aga Khan Academy in Mombasa won the prestigious award for his project for providing reusable sanitary towels to girls who cannot afford them and creating awareness to end menstrual poverty and stigma in different parts of the world.

The Diana Award, which celebrates its 20th anniversary this year, is considered one of the highest accolades for social action or humanitarian efforts that a young person can receive.

The 17-year-old student could not hide his joy when he received the award on Monday.

“I am honoured to be a recipient of this prestigious international award and I thank everyone who contributed to the success,” Ziyaan said.

It is through an initiative called Affordable and Accessible Sanitation for Women (AASW), that Ziyaan was recognized and awarded.

## **EMPOWER GIRLS**

AASW aims to create and innovative opportunities to empower girls to access menstrual hygiene.

“In 2017, I researched about menstrual hygiene while working on my school personal project and I was shocked to find out that over 500 million girls across the world do not have access to the necessary menstrual health resources they require. After completing the school project, I decided to continue pursuing the project,” Ziyaan said.

The final year student of the International Baccalaureate Diploma programme said the Academy has taught him a lot about the whole process of service.

“Especially the idea of the service cycle and thinking sustainably when reaching out to communities. This knowledge guided me in creating my unique model of approach”. Pluralism, Ethics and Civil Society are some of the unique elements woven into the Academies’

curriculum, which is designed to develop the skills and dispositions necessary for students to become the leaders of tomorrow,” he added.

Working together with fellow students and a group of women with disabilities called Tunaweza they produce and distribute sanitary packages that are reusable, cost effective and environmentally friendly.

“We produce and distribute reusable sanitary packages and equip girls with the necessary skills to give themselves and their communities access to menstrual hygiene. These packages last for up to three years. They are 100 percent biodegradable and cost between three to five dollars,” Ziyaan added.

## **FULL PACKAGE**

A full package comprises of two wings/covers made from kitenge (African Fabric), eight cotton liners, two pairs of underwear, antiseptic soap, hand towel, waterproof bag, a booklet that talks about menstrual health and a calendar.

More than 300 girls in Kenya, Tanzania, Pakistan, India, Nigeria and the UAE have benefited from the project.

“We are going to create more networks in our social media platforms such as our Instagram and Facebook

pages,” Ziyaan said.

Also AASW hold various interaction sessions with various schools. They have relationship and needs assessment workshops, education workshop, stitching workshop and celebration and review sessions.

The Diana Award was established 20 years ago and is given to inspirational young people from across the United Kingdom and around the world.

The award was founded in memory of Diana, Princess of Wales and inspired by her belief that young people can change the world. The award is supported by her sons, The Duke of Cambridge and The Duke of Sussex.

Nominees of the award must be aged between 9-25 and have been carrying out their activities for at least 12 months. They are judged on four criteria, namely vision, social impact, youth led, service journey and inspiring others.

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