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Young IB student receives the Diana Award

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The Diana Award recognized **IB Diploma Programme (DP)** student, Ziyaan Virji for his efforts to provide girls with the necessary sanitation they need to end period poverty.



Ziyaan Virji presenting his sanitary pads that are washable (therefore re-usable).

Around 500 million girls around the world do not have access to the necessary menstrual health resources they need. An [IB Diploma Programme \(DP\)](#) student in Kenya is working hard to make a positive change, by raising awareness and educating communities about this critical problem. By doing this, he received The Diana Award for his continued efforts to end period poverty.



Around 500 million girls experience period poverty.



Cost of purchasing sanitary products are high.



Reproductive health is not taught in many school curriculums.

Ziyaan Virji, a student at the [Aga Khan Academy Mombasa](#), launched [Affordable and Accessible Sanitation for Women \(AASW\)](#). The international voluntary youth initiative works with [Tunaweza Women with Disabilities](#), a community partner, to produce and distribute sanitary packages that are washable (therefore re-usable), cost effective and environmentally friendly.

How did he establish this project?

What started as a [Middle Years Programme \(MYP\)](#) personal project for Ziyaan, has since grown to help over 500 girls across Kenya, Tanzania, Pakistan, India, Nigeria and the UAE.

Ziyaan was awarded with [The Diana Award](#) for going above and beyond his everyday life to create and sustain positive change. The award, which was founded in memory of Princess Diana of Wales, was inspired by her belief that young people can change the world.

It is considered one of the highest accolades for social action or humanitarian efforts that a young person can receive.

He says: “I have found my purpose in life – to make a difference and create impact in the lives of others. I empathize and I’m compassionate to solve the issue of eradicating period poverty and the stigma surrounding it.

Ziyaan Virji addressing youth at TechFest 2.0 on his mission to empower women through his organization.

How did he raise awareness about the project?

AASW uses social media, various events and educational sessions to spread awareness and educate people. The sessions are open to teachers, boys, girls, parents and village leaders, and they are held at the Academy and Unity School in Bombolulu – the main partner school for the Mombasa team at The Aga Khan Academy.

“Reproductive health is not taught in a lot of school curriculums,” explains Ziyaan. “Even if it is part of the curriculum, there is very minimal knowledge passed on. There are a lot of misconceptions about menstrual health because of the religious and cultural contexts of our target groups. Additionally, in schools where reproductive and menstrual health is taught, girls and boys tend to shy away from asking questions or talking in depth about the topic.”

During two to six sessions, a scientific explanation about the menstrual cycle and how it works is provided. The sessions involve informal discussions on topics such as how to deal with period cramps and different types of menstrual products. In addition, attendees get an AASW designed menstrual booklet in English and/or their local language for future use.

AASW also hosts sessions for women at Tunaweza and the girls at Unity School, teaching them how to stitch their own re-usable pads. “This empowers them to support other young women and girls in the community, while also providing an entrepreneurial avenue,” he says.

Ziyaan has demonstrated multiple IB Learner Profile attributes, such as caring, open minded, communicators and reflective. The Head of the Aga Khan Academy Mombasa, Alison Hampshire, says: “We are all immensely proud of the work Ziyaan has done with his team. Ziyaan is setting an example for many other students on what it means to be a leader, open minded and to strive for gender equality. It is always great to see the values we’re teaching at the Aga Khan Academy Mombasa being put into action, and these are definitely the values we want to continue to instill in our students here.”

What’s next for AASW?

Ziyaan aims to continue expanding AASW to provide over 1,000 girls with access to sanitation in the next 12 months. He plans to become a social entrepreneur after university.

“I would love to continue my work with AASW and potentially make it a career, as well as take on other issues and create impact,” he says. “Additionally, I would love to continue public speaking and using social media effectively because I believe those platforms are extremely effective to inspire many people around the world to be change-makers and create impact.”