

Youthful inventor lights up menstrual care in Africa

E theexchange.africa/industry-and-trade/health-industry-and-trade/youthful-inventor-lights-up-menstrual-care-in-africa/



Ziyaan Virji, 18, a student at the Aga Khan Academy in Mombasa, Kenya

Two years ago, a 16-year-old student at the Aga Khan Academy Mombasa, Ziyaan Virji, turned his project – Affordable and Accessible Sanitation for Women (AASW) -into an internationally-recognized organization. This project would go on to receive major international recognition including the Diana Award for going above and beyond his everyday life to create and sustain positive change. 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.

Ziyaan has since partnered with several organizations to improve the access to sanitary health. Through Operation Period, the organizations has helped over 1,000 girls to acquire access to menstrual hygiene across six different countries, including Kenya, Tanzania, Pakistan, India, Nigeria and the UAE.

Since 2014, May 28th has been recognized as Menstrual Hygiene Day, a day to bring awareness to menstrual inequity.

International Period Month

For International Period Month, AASW is working to give 2,500 girls access to sanitary packages in Kenya and Tanzania in partnership with Diamond Trust Bank Kenya (DTB Kenya), Heels4pads, and Wezesha Binti Foundation.

To supplement this, AASW and Operation Period, have set up a COVID-19 emergency fund where supporters can donate to help in the distribution of 28,000 menstrual packages to frontline healthcare workers, low-income earning individuals and the homeless in marginalized communities by the end of the month across additional countries, including Bangladesh, India, Malawi, and the USA.

“With the support of Diamond Trust Bank Kenya, and in collaboration with Heels4pads and Wezesha Binti Foundation, which both aim to provide menstrual health to young women, we are already working towards providing 1500 reusable sanitary packages to marginalized communities who are affected by this pandemic in Kenya and Tanzania, which will last for 3 years,” Ziyaan Virji says. “But that is not enough to address the adverse effects COVID-19 has had on those who menstruate around the globe, we want to do as much as we can.”

The aim of this launch is to work towards enhancing access to proper menstrual care and fighting the stigma that accompanies the topic of menstruation. AASW and its partner organisations have received overwhelming support from volunteers, donors, and well-wishers for this cause. The organisation hopes to expand its work through advocacy, liaising with governments, and creating global strategic partnerships with the ultimate goal of ensuring free and proper access to menstrual health for all women.

“Periods don’t stop for a pandemic, and neither does our work,” Manju Bangalore, Founder and Executive Director of Operation Period, said. “We want to use International Period Month as a way to show the world how we are addressing the inequities in our systems that have allowed for period poverty to exist.”

Africa sanitary pads market stood at \$ 528 million in 2016 and is projected to reach \$ 779 million by 2022. Various initiatives are taken by sanitary pad manufacturers, governments, and NGOs operating across various African countries, coupled with rising awareness about personal hygiene among females is expected to boost Africa sanitary pads market over the next five years. Moreover, rising demand for reusable pads, which are highly cost-efficient, is anticipated to further boost Africa’s sanitary pads market in the coming years.

Tags: [Affordable and Accessible Sanitation for Women \(AASW\)](#)[Aga Khan](#)[Aga Khan Academy Mombasa](#)[Menstrual health in Africa](#)[Menstrual Hygiene Day](#)