

The problem

Every time we talk about girl's education, we hear a lot of emphases put on enrolling more girls to school. However, very little or no emphasis is put on small vital things such as access to menstrual sanitation that play a huge part in overall schooling experience. The problem this project is aiming to solve is to do with lack or poor menstrual sanitation for young girls in our community; Mombasa Kenya. In Kenya, about 65% of women and girls are unable to afford sanitary pads. Girls in rural areas in Kenya miss about 20% of their education because of this reason, making them more likely to drop out. Based on a needs assessment we conducted, we realized that the efforts of NGOs to provide access to education for girls was being frustrated by this small step. In Mombasa about only 32% of pupils going to school can afford sanitary pads hence this is a major cause of the girls' inconsistency in attending school. Out of frustrations girls use leaves and even mattress to manage their menstrual flow. This further became important to us when we learned about corrupt dealings in the county governments that embezzle the funds allocated for the provision of this basic need. With this background, together with two other friends, we started clubs in 3 girls' school where we introduced the concept of re-usable sanitary pads.



Accessible and Affordable Sanitation for Women – AASW

This is a student-run initiative that seeks to increase access to proper sanitation for young school girls in Mombasa Kenya. AASW empowers girls to self-produce their own menstrual materials sustainably and aims to break down the social stigma of menstruation. Our goal is to provide a safe, cost-effective, eco-friendly and long-lasting alternative packages for menstrual care. As such we seek to introduce the use of re-usable sanitary pads in our community. The packages contain the tools and instructions for stitching, using and washing their own menstrual pads that are reusable for up to 1 year. Our movement has so far reached 316 girls and counting! We are also teaching the girls entrepreneurship skills that can be useful for their own future startups.

Why is it well situated to improve the lives of my target community?

Mombasa is one of the major flannel producing cities in Kenya which is a perfect setting for our project. We collaborated with the major flannel industry; that provides us with surplus produce to use for our sanitation pads. The model of the project begins with us setting up the AASW club in a marginalized girl's school. We run workshops; on how to make reusable sanitary pads and menstrual hygiene education. We provide them with booklets in both the local language (Swahili) and English; that has information on menstrual health. Also, we have a stitching manual that has a step-by-step guide on how to stitch a sanitary pad. We then purchase a sewing machine that the girls use to make the pads during club time. Due to the high enrollment of girls in the club, we usually make a surplus and sell them back to the community at a cost-effective price. This money is then channeled back into the project to buy other materials such as needles and threads.

Ecosystem

In Kenya, there is one large non-profit organization called *Days for Girls* that work to improve the accessibility of menstrual sanitation. It was founded in 2008 and is the first organization to introduce the concept of reusable sanitation in Kenya. However, the organization is mainly concentrated in the capital city, hence its scope is not as wide to reach the coastal areas of Mombasa. AASW borrowed the menstrual

pad design; mainly the type of materials from Days for girls. This is because starting off we needed to use something that already works well. We have since then, been in the process of testing our prototype, so far having made around 5 changes to our materials. This is entirely based on the feedback given to us from the girls. For example, our very first pad lasted around 5 hours. We then switched to a thicker flannel made out of wool that gave more absorption. We also added a waterproof material on our prototype to prevent any leakages as one of the reports we got was some small leakages. We also seek to improve the overall schooling experience for the girls and not limit it to menstrual access. Other issues such as the provision of meals during school time and books are also on our radar as we grow. We are currently in the process of setting up a lunch program in our 3 schools currently working in. AASW also has a long-term mentorship program between our team and the girls, creating a community and not just a mere enterprise.

Our collaborators

The two members I work with are students from my former high school. They've been part of this program since its inception two years ago. Their experience working on this project over the years will be instrumental to the success of my program this summer. In the summer of 2016, I attended the *Global citizens' initiative youth summit* at Harvard University where I gained skills in running a project. I represented my team in a seed competition and won \$1,000 that saw the launching of AASW as an official venture. Ziyaan Virji also adopted AASW as his personal project for middle school and has been recently nominated for an award *Global Teen leader 2019*, a global award given to recognize young people making a change in their communities. Sarah Masika is currently writing a book for her personal project on how to survive life as an underprivileged woman in the coastal region. A book which we believe will be of immense value to our program as it is written based on her experiences living in the same conditions. We have a service group in my high, made up of old and younger students. We are divided into 4 groups; education, finance, marketing, and stitching group. The education group deals with running workshops and events on feminine hygiene awareness. Finance looks for funding and resource mobilization for the initiative. Marketing follows girls to share their period story and share our work to reach out to more girls. Stitching group deals with the actual production and distribution of our products. We also recently partnered with a women center Tunaweza women; that looks to improve living conditions for women in rural areas. They have helped us provide the girls with other necessities such as books and uniforms. We are currently on talks on how to run a lunch program for the schools.

Summer 2019 project timeline

Due to the high number of girls that have benefitted and shown interest in our initiative, this summer we would like to expand our scope and reach out to a larger part of the community.

- Schools visitation May 28th – 12th June
- Sewing and menstrual education workshop. 13th June – 1st July
- Pad production 2nd July – 29th July
- Selling and community promotion – 1st August – 20th August
- Evaluation 21st August – 24th August



Short term goals

- By the end of 2019 reach up to 600 girls within our community
- Open the 4th club in the eastern region of Mombasa
- Having a final prototype that we can replicate anywhere else

Long terms goals

- Producing and selling the re-usable pads at a large scale
- Making schooling experience as comfortable as possible for the girls through; A lunch program for the girls during their school year, providing them with textbooks and uniforms.

Budget

The seed grant will be helpful to launch our second stage growth.

Purpose	Amount (USD)
Air ticket & ground transport	2100
4 Sewing machines	800
Materials such as sewing thread and zippers	500
Food and electronic supply during the workshop	700
Website domain	500
Emergency	400
Total	5000