

Afri-Can Trust: Empowering Women and Girls through Affordable Sanitary Pads

Approximately 65 percent of women and girls in Kenya cannot afford sanitary pads. One package of sanitary napkins costs the equivalent of the daily wage of an unskilled worker, and most women need two packets per cycle. Some girls use cloth or other makeshift solutions, but find that they have an increased risk of leakage—a major embarrassment when attending school. Evidence shows that menstruation increases absence from school, causing Kenyan girls to miss approximately 3.5 million learning days per month. In addition, low-income women who cannot afford sanitary pads are forced to miss work, further diminishing their income. The HANSHEP Health Enterprise Fund, implemented by the SHOPS project, selected Afri-Can Trust to receive a grant to provide an affordable sanitary pad option that enables girls and women to stay in school and at work.

The Business Model

Afri-Can Trust, in collaboration with the Kenya Industrial Research and Development Institute, has developed a low-cost, reusable sanitary pad product, known as I-Care pads. These pads are locally manufactured in Kisumu, Kenya, providing employment for vulnerable women in an area of Kenya with high unemployment rates. One I-Care pads kit has 4 pads that can be used for up to one year. The pads are 45 percent cheaper than the least expensive disposable napkins available on the market, making them more accessible for women and girls living below the poverty line.

Afri-Can Trust partners with schools to reach their primary target market of girls, ages 10—18. Afri-Can Trust trains teachers as both sales agents and health resources for young girls. The teachers are a single point of contact, providing health information and managing a stock of sanitary materials. Through teachers, Afri-Can Trust provides essential training in menstrual hygiene, dispelling myths and raising awareness about the importance of proactively managing one's reproductive health in order to stay in school and improve options for the future. In the first year of SHOPS support, Afri-Can Trust distributed free samples of the pads to each school girl and generated demand through school health club meetings with the girls and their teachers. Afri-Can Trust also has a secondary market of low-income working women, whom they reach through small corner stores called kiosks.



Kenyan schoolgirls hold up their I-Care pads kits.

Afri-Can Trust

Grantee at a Glance

- Vision: Build confidence of women and girls to take charge of their own lives
- Innovation type: Reusable sanitary napkins sold at 45% lower price than the cheapest disposable napkins available
- Health focus: Family Planning and Reproductive Health
- Target population: Poor, rural women and girls
- Country: Kenya

Expanding Access to Reusable Sanitary Pads

Through the HANSHEP Health Enterprise Fund, SHOPS supported Afri-Can Trust to take their prototype I-Care pads to market. SHOPS provided initial seed funding to Afri-Can Trust to scale-up production of their hygienically-approved, high quality, and reusable product and to distribute sample products. Afri-Can Trust's workshop increased its production from 5,900 in a year to nearly 30,000 environmentally-friendly pads in the first year working with the fund. With this support, Afri-Can Trust piloted and scaled-up their school-based distribution model, including training teachers, establishing health and savings clubs, and producing and distributing a trial packet of I-Care pads alongside an educational booklet. SHOPS provided technical assistance to streamline the manufacturing model, resulting in a 40 percent increase in productivity. SHOPS also assisted with the identification and purchase of a client relationship management system, which will support Afri-Can Trust's sales and stock management as they expand.

The Health Enterprise Fund grant will support Afri-Can Trust's testing of additional financial models to make the pads more affordable. Afri-Can Trust is piloting school-based savings schemes, which will assist girls in saving small amounts of money monthly in order to prepare for the upcoming year's I-Care pads purchase. The savings

clubs provide the secondary benefit of teaching financial management principles, and further building a supportive community around the girls.

The Impact

“ I have never missed school since I got I-Care pads unless I am sick. I also do not shy from participating in sports activities because I feel much freedom and can play freely.”
– Bonyaiguba primary school student, Nyamira district, Kenya

Over the first year of Health Enterprise Fund support, Afri-Can Trust distributed reusable sanitary pad kits to over 20,000 poor and low-income women and girls. Afri-Can Trust partnered with over 150 schools to educate over 16,000 girls in menstrual hygiene and reproductive health. In addition, over 130 teachers were trained to serve as resources on menstruation and reproductive health, as well as I-Care pads sales agents, for their students. Women and girls have started to purchase packets of sanitary pads without subsidies, with 670 purchasing their I-Care pads kits during the first year of support from the fund. By 2018, Afri-Can Trust plans to reach 180,000 women and girls in East Africa, ensuring they are confident and in charge of their own lives through the I-Care program and use of I-Care pads.

For more information about the HANSHEP Health Enterprise Fund, contact:

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For more information about the SHOPS project, visit: www.shopsproject.org



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