

ZanaAfrica: Empowering Women and Girls to Improve Reproductive Health

In Kenya, sanitary pads are too expensive for many women and girls. Pads are sold at high mark-up rates that, on average, represent the majority of a poor family's daily budget. At the same time, there is little relevant health education for girls as they reach reproductive age. Without information and affordable sanitary pads, girls skip school due to embarrassment, or turn to unhygienic alternatives like rags, which can cause serious infections and other health problems.

The lack of affordable sanitary pads causes approximately 1 million school girls to miss over 6 weeks of school per year. This high rate of absenteeism leads to drop-out rates of over 60 percent among Kenyan girls under 18. Girls who drop out of school typically earn less than their peers, have sex and marry earlier, and are four times more likely to contract HIV. ZanaAfrica was awarded a grant by the HANSHEP Health Enterprise Fund, implemented by the SHOPS project, to improve girls' health and address this root cause of absenteeism.

The Business Model

To meet the health and reproductive needs of women and girls in Kenya, ZanaAfrica has developed an affordable and environmentally friendly sanitary pad that helps break down barriers to sanitary pad access and good hygiene. Rather than import sanitary pads or product inputs, which increases costs, ZanaAfrica uses local agricultural resources. Pads are then sold in different sized packages, which allows women and girls to buy what they need every day or two, making the price a smaller share of their daily household income.

Instead of solely stocking its products at large vendors, ZanaAfrica leverages established NGO partnerships with groups like Marie Stopes International and Living Goods to deploy door-to-door saleswomen. Through these representatives, ZanaAfrica reaches women and girls in small towns and remote communities. Realizing that some girls cannot pay for sanitary pads, and that different customer segments have different preferences, ZanaAfrica has created two lines of sanitary pads. Each line is uniquely branded: *Safi* pads target women and girls that purchase pads, while *Nia* pads are distributed to girls for free through local organizations.

ZanaAfrica generates profits from pad sales by optimizing its value chain, while woman-to-woman sales help ensure the firm's sustainability. With a low-cost manufacturing process that uses agricultural by-products, and a distribution system



Kenyan schoolgirls read comic inserts from ZanaAfrica packages.

ZanaAfrica

Grantee at a Glance

- Vision: Empower Kenyan women and girls to make strong health and life choices through improved reproductive health
- Innovation type: Low-cost, locally produced sanitary pads with health education comic inserts
- Health focus: Family planning and reproductive health
- Target population: Low-income women and girls
- Country: Kenya

that minimizes intermediaries, ZanaAfrica is able to keep costs low. At capacity, ZanaAfrica's product is 30 percent cheaper to produce than the average pad in Kenya, and has a 24 percent profit margin. Pad profits will help pay for educational health inserts that will be placed in sanitary pad packages throughout the year.

Providing Essential Health Information

With support from the HANSHEP Health Enterprise Fund, ZanaAfrica is developing comic-style paper inserts that feature female "health heroes," and convey messages about reproductive health, menstrual hygiene, family planning, and sexually transmitted diseases, such as HIV. Each sanitary pad package will include a health comic insert, providing health information to women and girls in a fun, engaging manner. This method is a highly scalable way to deliver standardized and accurate health information, removing the social anxieties, taboos, and misinformation that sometimes come from teachers or family members.

To create the comics, ZanaAfrica conducted interviews and focus group discussions with over 270 women and girls across two counties in Kenya. Interviews solicited reproductive health and menstrual hygiene knowledge, perceptions, myths, and behaviors. From the findings, ZanaAfrica developed 28 topics and selected 12 for the first health comics. After the first round of 12 comics has been distributed, ZanaAfrica will conduct an evaluation of the first comics, looking at changes in girls' knowledge and behaviors, and the extent to which comics are shared with friends and family members. SHOPS is providing guidance on ZanaAfrica's evaluation design and the research ethics process.

Support from the Health Enterprise Fund strengthened ZanaAfrica's operation by facilitating partnerships with other fund grantees. ZanaAfrica is partnering with fellow fund grantee Afya Research Africa to sell their pads through their M-Afya health kiosks, which enables ZanaAfrica to reach remote communities and provides M-Afya kiosks with additional sources of revenue.

The Impact



We seek to not just deliver a sanitary pad. We seek to deliver a support network for women as they grow throughout their lives." – Anne Smith, Chief Knowledge and Innovation Officer, ZanaAfrica

With support from the fund, ZanaAfrica has entered into 13 public and private partnerships, which are increasing distribution channels, raising visibility, and enhancing research capabilities to make more effective health comics. Each quarter, ZanaAfrica sells approximately 8,000 two-packs of Safi sanitary pads. Starting in 2015, health comics will be included in the product packaging. By 2020, ZanaAfrica aims to serve 2.5 million women and girls with sanitary pads, and 7.5 million with health information. This reach translates to a projected impact of 4.7 million girls' school days reclaimed, and 40,000 reproductive tract infections prevented due to improved hygiene and knowledge.

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



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