

## **The Issue – Menstrual Hygiene Management to Keep Girls in School**

In Northern Ghana, school enrollment, youth and adult literacy rates, and the gender gap in scholastic achievement are much worse than the country average. It's hard for children to access and complete their educations for a variety of reasons, many of which stem from poverty.

As girls go through puberty, they experience additional, gender-specific obstacles to completing their educations. Many lack access to menstrual pads. These girls may use unhygienic, improvised supplies that open them to risk of infection and disease. According to a study conducted by the Alliance for African Women Initiatives, items used include toilet paper, used cloth, cotton, and wool. The frequency with which improvised supplies are used shows that poverty prevents these girls from accessing more sanitary methods of managing their menstrual flow.

On some occasions girls even engage in transactional sex to earn money for pads, leaving them at grave risk of contracting STI/STDs and an unwanted pregnancy, or becoming victims to sexual violence. Other girls simply stay home from school, missing 3-5 days each month. Even when girls have access to menstrual pads, their schools may not have safe, private, hygienic bathroom facilities for girls. This further discourages girls from attending school during menstruation.

Days missed in school add up quickly and these children, especially girls, quickly fall behind in their studies, making graduation unlikely.



## About EPF Educational Empowerment Initiative



Founded in 2010, EPF Educational Empowerment Initiative works to reduce children's barriers to education in Ghana, particularly in the impoverished Northern region of the country. EPF focuses specifically on three points of intervention with their Happy Feet Initiative, Menstrual Pads for Dignity Program, and Girls' Scholarship Program.

**Menstrual Pads for Dignity Program:** This initiative provides free disposable menstrual products for needy girls in the most deprived districts in Ghana. In addition, the initiative provides hygiene, reproductive, and financial education for the girls it serves. The result has been a drastic reduction in the high rates of menstruation-related absenteeism among school-aged girls. The Foundation's long-term goal is to produce sanitary pads domestically. The creation of a factory in Ghana would not only make the pads less expensive, it would also provide jobs in local communities.

**Girls' Scholarship Initiative:** Working in partnership with private universities in Ghana, EPF provides a limited number of scholarships each year to brilliant but needy high school girls who would ordinarily not be able to afford the cost of a college education. Each participating university offers a tuition free scholarship to one girl each year, and the Foundation raises funds to support the student's books, accommodations, and associated costs to attend the college.

An additional program, the Happy Feet Initiative, serves children of both genders and all ages. It complements the government of Ghana free school feeding and free uniforms program by providing new shoes and other educational supplies such as bags, books, and calculators to needy school children in deprived communities.





## **Joint Program for Menstrual Pads for Dignity Program Expansion**

The EPF Menstrual Pads for Dignity Program currently provides free disposable menstrual products for needy girls in the most deprived districts in Ghana. In addition, the initiative provides hygiene, reproductive, and financial education for the girls it serves. The result has been a drastic reduction in the high rates of menstruation-related absenteeism among school-aged girls.

The EPF program is currently serving 978 girls in seven schools and has a waiting list of schools in three additional districts. The joint program expansion program with Procter & Gamble's Always Keeping Girls in School and World of Children Award is helping EPF expand the program to an additional 1,000 girls in 10 new schools.



The 1,000 girls will enroll in the program at the beginning of their Junior High curriculum. The program, to be extended to two full years if the six month pilot proves our hypothesis of this being a high-impact intervention model, will aim to support this cohort of girls from their enrollment in junior high school through their graduation.

In addition to continuing support for this initial cohort of girls, we propose expanding the reach of the program by a sustained rollout over the 18 months following the initial pilot phase. If we choose to renew the partnership past the two year mark, we will propose continued support for the same cohort of girls through three years of senior high school, as well as support for new cohorts of junior high school girls.

EPF organizes distribution of menstrual pads and health education through a network of female science teachers connected to the schools we partner with. Before the organization begins a project at a new school, they organize training for these teachers to learn about menstrual health and equip them to answer questions their students may have. They also host a seminar for girls to introduce them to menstrual health management. The trainings are currently conducted by resource personnel from the Ministry of Health with assistance from EPF volunteers.

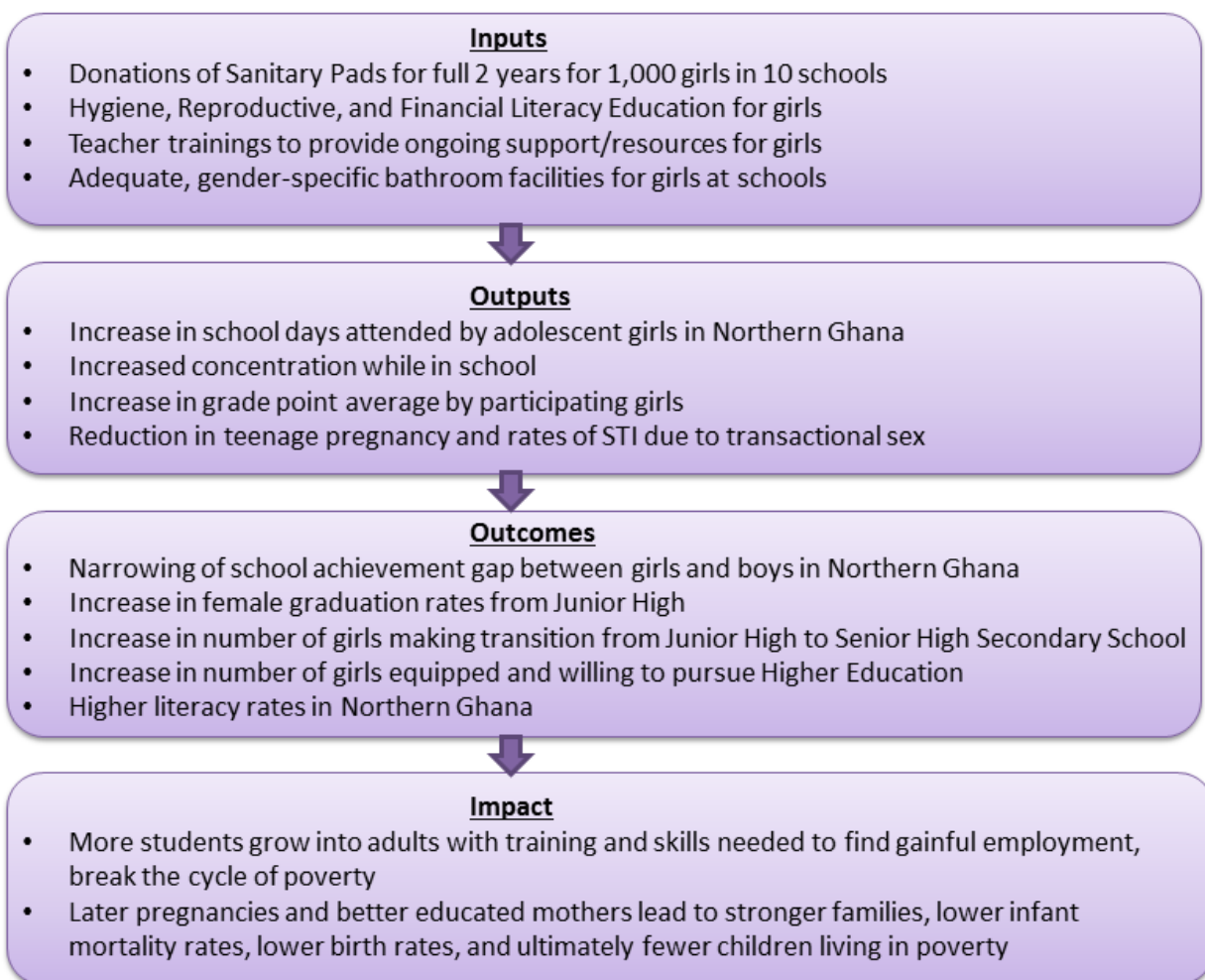
After the trainings, EPF distributes four months' worth of supplies to each student. The pads are redistributed at the beginning of each school term (three terms per year).

In addition to directly empowering girls to take ownership over their own sexual and reproductive health, the program also uses workshops and distribution days as an entry point

for engaging with girls, their families, schools, and communities on wider issues related to girls' health and access to education. As we build relationships with all stakeholders in these communities, we aim to shape the conversation around girls' health and education and promote changes that will reduce barriers to education for all children.

To complement the distribution and community engagement program, we believe it is important to ensure access to adequate bathroom facilities at each school to ensure girls have the privacy and safety they deserve while taking care of their personal hygiene at school. We have identified 3 partner schools without adequate facilities at which to pilot a related project in the same time-frame – the installation of biofil microflush toilets. This type of toilet is environmentally friendly and more cost-effective than traditional toilets. It also drastically reduces the presence of wet waste, which causes odors and attracts flies. The toilets use less than two thirds a cup of water to flush and recycle hand washing water for flushing.

### Menstrual Pads for Dignity Project Theory of Change





## **ABOUT WORLD OF CHILDREN AWARD**

World of Children® Award improves the lives of vulnerable children by funding and elevating the most effective change makers for children worldwide.

Since 1998, World of Children Award has granted more than \$7 million in cash grants and program support to more than 100 humanitarian leaders who are the driving force behind programs serving children worldwide. The organization's exhaustive research and vetting of individuals has been lauded by leading philanthropic organizations.

### **About Procter & Gamble**

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### **About EPF Educational Empowerment Initiative**

EPF Educational Empowerment Initiative has three main projects, which focus on decreasing menstruation-related absentee days for secondary school girls by providing them with feminine hygiene products; providing shoes for students who must walk long distances over rough terrain to reach their schools; and connecting young Ghanaian women to scholarships that enable them to continue their education.

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