

These Girls Mean Business, Period. Sanitary pad school business in India spurs local hygiene movement and wins top international award.

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19 FEBRUARY 2018 - For the six young female students at GGUPS Sallada in Rajasthan, India, setting up their handmade sanitary pad business was personal. The girls had experienced being perceived as “unclean” whilst on their periods and, like many women in their community, they resorted to using dirty cloth scraps instead of proper sanitary pads. “It was high time the community took responsibility for ensuring good health and hygiene of women,” they said.

Stepping up to the plate themselves, the students joined the School Enterprise Challenge, an international business programme for schools, and set up a sanitary pad business called “My Right”. In addition to producing and selling almost 500 reusable pads, they led a campaign to raise local awareness about the science behind menstruation and, through their outreach, they challenged traditional ideas of menstruation and hygiene.

With over 20% of girls in India dropping out of school because of menstruation, “My Right” is a life changing business, especially for the 75 female students at GGUPS Sallada. The students behind this business impressed the School Enterprise Challenge judges with their detailed business report and positive impact on girls in school and women in their community. On Friday 16th February, they were announced as the Top Global Annual Report Winners: the highest award in the School Enterprise Challenge, with a prize of \$5,000 USD.

The School Enterprise Challenge, a programme run by UK charity Teach A Man To Fish, guides students and teachers around the world to plan, set up and run school businesses. Through the process, students develop 21st-century skills such as teamwork, leadership and communication, while gaining the hands-on business experience to become the employees and job creators of tomorrow. “We are on a mission to tackle youth unemployment and the ‘learning crisis’. The impact shown by these winners reminds us why it is so important to give young people the skills to improve their lives and their communities,” says Nik Kafka, CEO of Teach A Man To Fish.

In 2017, almost 6,000 schools from over 110 countries took part in the School Enterprise Challenge. School teams generated an impressive average profit of \$390 USD with businesses ranging from a community gym in Belize to a vegetable farm in Uganda. Students used these funds to support their schools and important local causes, as well as re-invest in their businesses’ future.

While the programme gives students a strong entrepreneurial foundation for their future, the benefits are also immediate. Teachers use the businesses as a practical context for school lessons and the money earned by the businesses can help cover tuition costs and much-needed school resources. As a participating teacher at Doha Complex School in Rwanda reported, “my students in this programme have discovered that they are the authors of their lives. Now I see numerous positive changes in their way of behaving at school that gives hope of expecting a good future of them.”

The 2018 School Enterprise Challenge Programme opens for new registrations in late February. Visit schoolenterprisechallenge.org for more information.

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