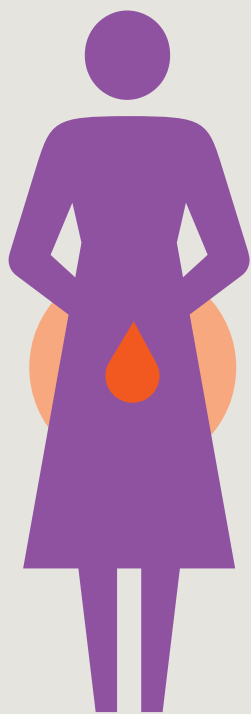


ACT WITH HER: Forging Panoramic Pathways with Girls from Adolescence to Adulthood

Menstruation Matters in Very Young Adolescence: Perspectives from the Frontline

Act With Her is a five-year program in Ethiopia that partners with girls to forge the health, education, economic, and social pathways they need to thrive during the transition to adulthood. We engage girls, boys, and their parents or caregivers in group sessions over 10 months, and in some areas also work over a longer period to catalyze shifts in social and gender norms and in the adolescent-friendliness

of key systems and services. Designed to separately serve very young adolescents (VYAs) and older adolescents, with a learning period built in between, we engaged the first cohort of VYAs from March 2019 through January 2020, with over 13,000 girls and boys participating in over 500 groups. Through perspectives shared by adolescents, mentors, and our frontline staff **WE LEARNED:**



Talking about menstruation is a good first entry point for sexual and reproductive health

Girls have the right to manage their periods in healthy and dignified ways. Moreover, learning what menstruation is during very early adolescence and how their own bodies work is the critical foundation for later understanding fertility, pregnancy, contraception, and sexual and reproductive health.

Menstruating students need more support and less stigma

Girls worldwide report difficulties with attending class while menstruating. Girls were happy after learning to make reusable pads and how to better manage their periods (including while at school), and also felt less ashamed. Many school leaders were very eager to improve and made positive changes quickly, at minimal cost.



Menstrual health and hygiene management is about far more than sanitary products

For adolescent girls, having their period directly influences family dynamics; child, early, or forced marriage; social norms and stigmatization; mental health; gender equality; financial expenditures; access to education; water, sanitation, and hygiene; and sexual and reproductive health and rights.

"Even I believed that if a girl starts to see menstruation, she is ready for marriage, she should not go to school. But now, I know that it is a natural gift and how to manage it. So, I started to attend my regular education and realized menstruation should not mean early marriage." —GIRL



"Parents and boys are showing an understanding of girls and supporting them during the menstruation period. As a result, girls currently are not ashamed of experiencing menses which previously the reverse is true."

—BOY

"Previously, I didn't eat food with or sleep with my mother and sisters during menstruation. After I learned that menstruation is a natural gift I started sleeping and eating food together with them." —BOY



Sustained change won't happen until boys are part of the conversation

As a topic addressed in girls', boys', and parents' group sessions and in broader community discussions, we were not surprised that girls welcomed learning about and improving their menstrual health. But even in culturally conservative areas we saw an unexpected appetite for open dialogue and calls for change among adolescent boys, fathers, school directors and teachers, health workers, and community and religious leaders.

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