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Watch



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Newsletter

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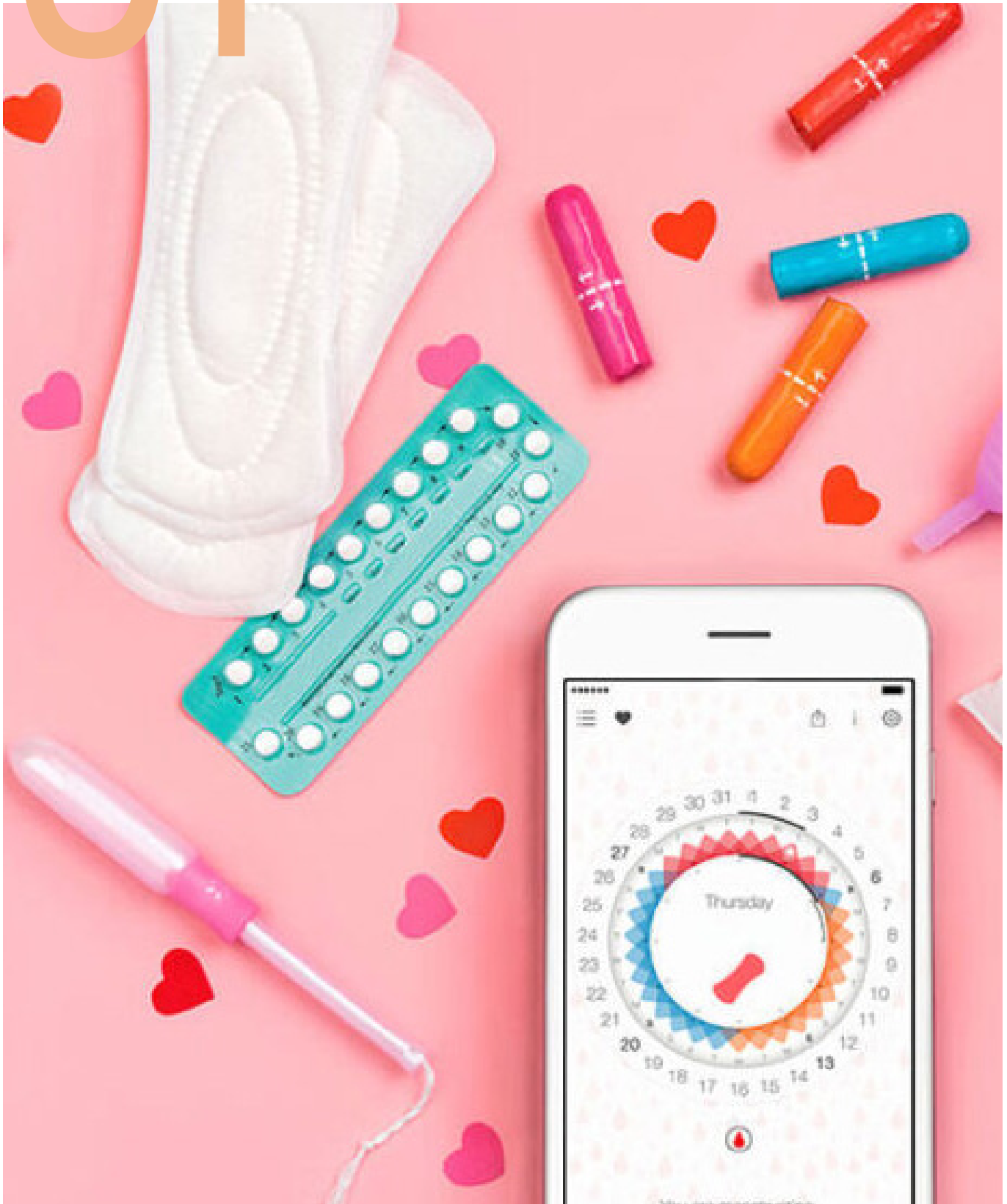
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01



BEYOND THE CLASSROOM: A CALL FOR INCLUSIVE MENSTRUAL EQUITY IN GHANA

As a young lady who is passionate about Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), the news from the government that it was going to provide free sanitary pads to girls from upper primary to senior high schools came as good news. The joy of many parents, guardians, advocacy groups, civil society, and youth-led organizations pushing the fight against menstrual poverty further heightened when the government made a budget allocation of GHC 292.4 million Ghana cedis in the 2025 annual budget for the distribution of sanitary pads. To me, this

initiative marks a significant stride in the government's efforts and commitment to ensuring that young adolescent girls experience dignified menstrual periods, menstrual poverty is drastically reduced, and educational outcomes and self-confidence are improved, especially for girls in rural communities.

While the government's introduction of the free sanitary pad initiative is highly commendable, the policy presents several concerning gaps that must be addressed. Closing these gaps is just as critical as the policy's implementation.



First, it does not cover a particularly vulnerable group of girls who need sanitary pads the most. These include young teenage mothers who have dropped out of school, head potters, girls who hawk on the streets and traffic lights, girls who are in vocational schools and girls under apprenticeship training. Considering the saying that “all hands are not equal”, it is not entirely the fault of these young girls to find themselves not being able to afford menstrual products—life happens.

Many of these girls come from low-income households where buying sanitary pads is not a priority. As a result, they may be vulnerable to sexual exploitation or forced to use unhygienic alternatives like tissue paper, cloths, or socks. Research on menstrual poverty conducted by SEND GHANA in 2024 revealed that 80% of respondents earn an average monthly salary ranging from 50-1500 cedis. The high cost of living and the increasing surge in prices of goods and services often impose a burden on these young girls and their families to choose between

two necessities—affording a two-square meal or buying a sanitary pad.

Again, for the sake of inclusion and avoidance of discrimination, the government must also pay attention to the affordability and accessibility of sanitary pads across the country. The high imposition of taxes on sanitary pads and the classification of sanitary pads as luxury items remain a major barrier to combating menstrual poverty and ensuring dignified menstruation. While the government can be commended for removing taxes on locally manufactured pads to boost the sector, it is also crucial for the government to understand that local manufacturers may not have the capacity to adequately serve the large population of adolescent girls and women hence the dependence on foreign ones. VAT and levies which form taxes on imported sanitary pads and products make it expensive and unaffordable ---again, affecting a section of vulnerable group of girls who the free sanitary pad intervention does not cover undermining the very fight against menstrual poverty.





In addition, the long-term sustainability of distributing free sanitary pads to primary and secondary schools may eventually face setbacks. In a country where a change in government often leads to shifts in policies and the discontinuation of previous projects and socio-economic programs, it is crucial to explore how this policy can be safeguarded and maintained regardless of which government is in power. Social interventions like this one are also often underfunded or stalled due to financial constraints. To address this, civil society and the media must intensify advocacy efforts, urging the government

to draft and pass this policy into law. To foster inclusion, avoid discrimination, ensure dignified menstruation for all adolescent girls and women of menstrual age, the government should listen to the several calls made by civil society and youth-led organisations to remove taxes on sanitary pads, and ensure sustainability of the free sanitary pad initiative. This is because the latter are the people who work closely with these young girls and women, know their plights, and have a true reflection of how such decisions affect citizens on the ground.

02



FAIR4ALL STRENGTHENS GENDER-RESPONSIVE PLANNING IN DISTRICTS

By Joseph Otchere Osei, SEND GHANA

SEND GHANA, through its Fair4All project, is working to close the gender gaps in district-level budgets. For years, budget decisions have often not considered the specific needs of women, girls, and other marginalised groups in planning and disbursement of funds. To help fix this, the F4A project is promoting Gender-Responsive Budgeting (GRB) as a way to make sure public funds are planned and spent in a way that is fair and meets the needs of everyone.

Gender-Responsive Budgeting (GRB) is an approach that ensures government budgets reflect the diverse needs of all citizens, particularly women and vulnerable populations. It goes beyond

allocating funds for women-focused initiatives; GRB requires analysing how budget policies and expenditures affect individuals differently based on gender and addressing disparities. When implemented effectively, GRB seeks to promote equitable access to public services, reduce gender-based inequalities, and ensure that national and local development plans benefit all segments of society.

The benefits of gender-responsive budgeting to communities are far-reaching. When budgets are responsive to the distinct needs of women, men, girls, and boys, local development becomes more inclusive and effective. GRB



Key sub-national stakeholders in a group picture from one of the GRB trainings

ensures that resources are allocated to address critical issues such as maternal health, girls' education, child abuse, economic empowerment of women, young people and protection from gender-based violence. It also leads to improved service delivery, stronger community participation, and increased transparency in governance.

As part of our efforts to ensure that District Assembly budgets continue to align with GRB principles, the F4A project organised a meeting on 12th February 2025. The meeting convened key sub-national stakeholders involved in the budgeting process, including Budget Officers, Planning Officers, Social Welfare

Officers, and Gender Desk Officers from various districts. The objective was to promote collaboration and support the integration of transformative gender perspectives into district-level budgeting frameworks.

The engagement empowered participants to develop actionable plans tailored to their specific district contexts, laying a foundation for sustained advocacy and effective implementation of GRB. It also improved stakeholders' knowledge and capacity to mainstream gender concerns into district planning and budgeting processes. Additionally, the meeting served as a platform to identify existing gaps in GRB implementation at the district level and to document key challenges, which will inform future engagements with national-level stakeholders.

It is expected that participants will return to their respective districts with renewed commitment and practical strategies to champion the integration of gender priorities into local development planning. By applying the knowledge and tools acquired, they are better positioned to advocate for inclusive policies, influence budgetary decisions, and foster accountability mechanisms that reflect the needs of all community members, especially women, girls, and other marginalised groups.



Interactive session with participants

03



OPINION: LOCALLY LED CLIMATE ACTION MUST BE THE FUTURE PRACTICES OF COCOA FARMING IN GHANA

By Joseph Otchere Osei, SEND GHANA

Ghana's rich biodiversity and fertile landscapes have long been the backbone of agricultural productivity, particularly in cocoa-growing regions. However, environmental degradation is becoming an urgent concern, threatening not only ecosystems but also the sustainability of key livelihoods. Deforestation, soil depletion, and the pollution of water bodies—driven largely by unsustainable farming practices and encroachment into forest reserves—are eroding the very foundations of Ghana's green heritage and, by extension, the future of agriculture. Climate change further compounds these challenges, leading to unpredictable rainfall patterns, increased pests, and declining soil

health, all of which directly impact crop yields and food security.

These environmental challenges are particularly evident in the cocoa sector. Cocoa is not just a crop in Ghana. It is a source of livelihood for millions, a major contributor to our economy, and a symbol of our identity. Yet, the future of cocoa farming is under threat. Over the years, many cocoa farmers have turned to practices aimed at increasing yields quickly using weedicides, pesticides, and clearing large areas of land without proper care. While these methods may have offered short-term benefits, they have also caused lasting damage. Soils are becoming less fertile, water bodies are contaminated, and the natural



Key stakeholders including Cocoa Health and Extension Division, Cocoa Farmer Cooperatives, Licensed Cocoa Buying Companies and Environmental Protection Agency at F4A Alternative Business Practices Forum

balance of our ecosystems is breaking down.

This damage has left cocoa farms highly vulnerable to climate change. Farmers are already experiencing the impact: erratic rainfall, prolonged droughts, and frequent pest infestations are making it harder and more expensive to produce cocoa. Many have lost income, while others are watching their farms lose productivity year after year. It is clear that the unsustainable approach to producing cocoa must change.

At SEND GHANA, through the Fair4All project, we believe that the solution lies in the hands of the very people most affected—our farmers. That is why we are supporting a new way of doing things: one that places the farmer at the centre of climate action and supports them to lead the change from the ground up. This is what we call locally led adaptation.

Across several cocoa-growing communities, we are working with cocoa farmer cooperatives to introduce alternative, environmentally friendly ways of farming. With support from the Cocoa Health and Extension Division and Licensed Cocoa Buying Companies, farmers are learning to adopt practices that protect the environment while securing their livelihoods. Rather than using harmful chemicals, they are returning to methods that nourish the land. Some are now using slashers for weeding instead of spraying dangerous herbicides. Others are allowing cocoa pods to decompose naturally on their farms to enrich the soil and attract helpful insects that boost pollination. In some areas, farmers are even using red ants as a natural method to control pests

like capsids, which have destroyed many farms over the years.

These changes may seem small, but they are already making a big difference. Farmers are beginning to see improvements in soil quality, water conservation, and even crop yields. More importantly, they are regaining confidence that they can adapt to the changing climate without harming their land or their health.

What makes this approach useful is that it gives farmers control over their future. Instead of relying solely on external experts or distant policies, farmers are building knowledge within their communities and taking the lead in protecting their environment.

Of course, challenges remain. Locally led adaptation needs stronger support from both the government and the cocoa sector at large. There is a need for more training, better access to tools, and follow-up research to measure the long-term impact of these practices on the environment, productivity, and income. But what is clear is that when farmers are empowered to lead, they can build resilience that benefits not just themselves, but entire communities.

The future of Ghana's cocoa sector must be green, fair, and resilient. If we want to protect the environment, sustain our economy, and secure the livelihoods of thousands of cocoa farmers, we must support locally led adaptation efforts like these.



Participants at one of the Alternative Business Practices Forum in the Eastern region



Implementation of spreading cocoa pods on a farmer's cocoa farm showing commitment to the adoption of alternative practices that protect the soil

04



IF YOU KNEW YOUR FAVOURITE SNACK WAS PACKED WITH SUGAR, SALT, AND FAT, WOULD YOU STILL EAT IT?"

Joana Ankomaa Addey

Imagine picking up your favorite snack on a sunny day—something that looks tasty, quick, and satisfying. But what if you were told that what you just ate contains sugar, salt, or fat far beyond the recommended daily limit? Would that change your mind? Would you think twice before offering it to your child? In Ghana today, this is not a hypothetical scenario. It is a daily reality.

Many of the most popular beverages and snacks on our shelves — from fizzy drinks to boxed juices and processed foods — contain sugar and salt levels far beyond what is considered healthy. Most consumers are unaware. This lack of

awareness is not by choice but by design. Our current food labelling system does not make it easy to understand just how unhealthy some of these products are.

The Ghanaian food environment has changed dramatically over the last decade. Traditional, wholesome meals made from fresh, locally sourced ingredients are increasingly being replaced by ultra-processed foods that are high in sugar, salt, and unhealthy fats, especially among children and young people.

Ultra-processed foods are industrially manufactured products that go through multiple processing steps and contain



ingredients not commonly used in home cooking, such as artificial flavours, preservatives, sweeteners, and colourings. These include items like sugary cereals, packaged snacks, instant noodles, fast food, soft drinks, and sweetened juices. Often marketed as convenient, affordable, and tasty, these products are aggressively promoted to young people through advertising, branding, and placement in schools and communities. However, their regular consumption has been linked to rising rates of childhood obesity, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and other diet-related Non-Communicable Diseases

(NCDs). As these unhealthy options become more accessible and normalized, the risk of poor dietary habits becoming lifelong patterns increases—threatening the health and wellbeing of an entire generation

According to the Ghana Health Service, NCDs such as hypertension, stroke, diabetes, and certain cancers are on the rise — now accounting for over 40% of all deaths in the country. One of the major culprits? Unhealthy diets fueled by excessive sugar consumption.



The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that adults and children reduce their daily intake of free sugars to less than 10% of their total energy intake, with further health benefits when reduced to below 5%. This recommendation varies slightly based on age, sex, and energy needs:

- Adult men typically require about 2,500 kcal per day, so 10% of energy from free sugars equals 62.5 grams, and 5% equals 31.25 grams.
- Adult women need around 2,000 kcal daily, meaning 10% equals 50 grams, and 5% equals 25 grams.
- Children's energy needs vary by age, but on average, a child requiring 1,800 kcal should consume no more than 45 grams of free sugar (10%)—with 22.5 grams (5%) being the ideal target for better health.

Yet, many popular beverages and ultra-processed snacks available in Ghana far exceed these limits. A single 500ml bottle of some fizzy drinks can contain over 60 grams of sugar, surpassing the daily recommended limit even for adult men in one serving.

A 2021 report by the Ghana NCD Alliance found that over 60% of foods sold in retail stores and kiosks in Accra were classified as ultra-processed, many of which contained high levels of sugar, salt, or fat. Even worse, these products often use flashy packaging, cartoon characters, and misleading health claims to attract children.

Countries around the world are already showing us the way. Several have taken bold evidence-based steps to combat this growing public health crisis — and the results are promising. Notably, these countries have implemented mandatory front-of-pack warning food labeling on unhealthy foods. In some cases, this has not only empowered consumers to

make healthier choices but also pushed food manufacturers to reformulate their products to reduce harmful ingredients like sugar, salt, and unhealthy fats.

In 2016, Chile introduced a ground breaking Front-of-Pack Warning Label (FOPWL) policy, requiring clear, black stop-sign-style warnings on foods and beverages high in sugar, saturated fat, salt, or calories. Within just a year, purchases of sugary drinks dropped by 24%, and more than 1,500 products were reformulated to meet healthier standards. Chile's policy has since become a global benchmark in the fight against unhealthy diets.

Mexico followed Chile's lead in 2020 with a similar FOPWL policy, and the impact has been equally impressive — more consumers now say the labels help them make better choices, and nearly half have changed what they buy as a result. Other countries across Latin America, including Peru, Uruguay, and Argentina, have adopted similar strategies and are seeing encouraging changes in consumption patterns, especially among school-aged children.

Introducing a mandatory Front-of-Pack Warning Food Labeling (FOPWL) system in Ghana would be a transformative step toward improving public health. It would empower consumers with simple, accessible information to make healthier food choices and avoid products high in sugar, salt, and unhealthy fats—key contributors to NCDs like diabetes, hypertension, and obesity. This could lead to a decline in the consumption of unhealthy foods and ease the strain on Ghana's already burdened healthcare system.

In addition, FOPWL would help protect children from predatory marketing tactics. With the rise of unhealthy food advertisements targeting young audiences, especially through schools

and social media, clear warning labels would serve as a barrier to deceptive marketing strategies that encourage poor eating habits from an early age. In a country like Ghana, where children are particularly vulnerable to advertising, this is a critical safeguard.

For low-income families, who often rely on affordable but unhealthy processed foods, FOPWL would be a game-changer. By making nutritional information more accessible, it would help these families make healthier, more informed choices without the need for higher-cost, healthier alternatives. This would promote long-term health equity by ensuring that all segments of the population, regardless of income, have the knowledge and resources to make health-conscious decisions.

Overall, FOPWL represents a bold policy step toward creating a healthier food environment and a more resilient healthcare system, especially as Ghana continues to urbanise and rely more on processed foods.

It will also promote product reformulation by encouraging food manufacturers to reduce the levels of harmful ingredients such as sugar, salt, and unhealthy fats. This reformulation would lead to healthier products on the market, benefiting consumers and encouraging the food industry to prioritise public health in their product development processes.

The truth is simple: what we eat and drink is silently fueling a public health crisis. If people knew their favourite beverage contained sugar equivalent of 10 cubes,

many would pause – but they don't. Ghana cannot afford to ignore the health implications of unchecked sugar, salt, and fat consumption in ultra-processed foods.

This isn't about banning your snack or drink. It's about choice—*informed* choice. It's about empowering Ghanaians to take control of their health, one sip or bite at a time.

Because let's face it – if you wouldn't sit at home and mix 10 spoonfuls of sugar, salt, or fat, into your meal, then food companies shouldn't do it without your knowledge. You deserve to know what's inside your food and drinks before they end up inside you. So, the next time you reach for that bottle, ask yourself: "Would I eat this much sugar, fat, salt?" If the answer is no, then it's time to demand the truth, front and centre.

Let's call on the Ghanaian government to implement Front-of-Pack Warning Labels so we can all shop smarter, live healthier, and stop sugar, salt, and fat from hiding in plain sight.

Informed choices don't start at the back of the label – they start right on the front.

REDUCING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE THROUGH EMPOWERMENT IN WESTERN GHANA

In the districts of Savelugu, Mion, West Gonja, Garu, Sissala West, Amenfi West, Aowin, Suaman, and Sefwi-Wiawso, Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is no longer as common as it once was. Women feel safer in their homes. Men are now more involved in housework and childcare. Couples communicate better and handle disagreements without violence. Survivors of abuse are speaking up and seeking justice. In many families, there is now more cooperation, mutual respect, and support for women's involvement in economic activities.

But this wasn't always the case. Before the Women's Economic Advancement for Collective Transformation (WEACT) Project began work in these communities, GBV was widespread. Many women were suffering silently. They didn't know their rights or where to seek help. Men, facing poverty and financial stress, often took out their frustrations on their families. Arguments over food or household needs sometimes ended in physical violence. Household chores were left entirely to women, causing tension and deepening inequality in homes.



Project staff interacting with community members

To address these issues, the WEACT Project introduced several strategies that are now helping families live more peacefully. One of the key strategies was the introduction of Gender Model Families, or GMFs. Selected families were trained to understand the importance of gender equality, how to share responsibilities, and how to resolve conflict through dialogue. GMF mentors worked closely

with households, supporting them to apply what they learned in daily life. Activities such as cooking and cleaning together helped men appreciate the effort women put into managing the home. These changes encouraged teamwork and reduced the pressure that often led to conflict.



Men's cooking competition in Kwasuo

Legal education was another important part of the project. Local Legal Volunteers were trained to raise awareness about the laws that protect women and girls. They held community sessions to explain people's rights and supported women who had experienced violence. Many women, who once thought they had no choice but to endure abuse, are now reporting cases and receiving help. Men also learned that violence is not only harmful but also against the law.

The project also used awareness-raising activities such as community meetings and radio discussions to change the way people think about gender roles and violence. These platforms helped people understand that GBV is not a private family matter—it's a serious issue that affects the whole community.

The combined effect of these efforts is clear. In Amenfi West, a woman shared how her husband, who used to make all

financial decisions alone, now includes her in budgeting and supports her small trading business. In Nyankaman, Helen Nkwa explained how her marriage changed after she and her husband received support from a GMF mentor. They were able to resolve a serious conflict through open conversation—something that would have likely ended in violence in the past.

Today, more women are running small businesses, participating in farming, and contributing to household income. They are supported by partners who value their work and respect their rights. Violence has gone down. Trust has gone up. And families are building better lives together. The WEACT Project continues to promote these changes, with the hope that more families will adopt practices that lead to safer homes and stronger communities.

05



POWER TO CHOOSE YOUTH ADVOCATES CHAMPION PAD BANKS TO KEEP GIRLS IN SCHOOL

Abigail Boye (Youth Advocate)

Menstruation remains a major barrier to girls' education and self-confidence, especially in low-income and rural communities in Ghana. Many girls miss school during their periods because they lack access to sanitary products or fear embarrassment. To help address this, young advocates under SEND GHANA's Power to Choose (P2C) project are advocating for the establishment of pad banks in schools to make available menstrual hygiene products for girls when they are on their period while they are in schools.

These pad banks are dedicated spaces

within schools where sanitary pads are stored and made available to girls who may need them during school hours. The goal is to ensure that menstruation does not disrupt their learning or well-being. So far, 12 pad banks have been established across three municipal assemblies—Cape Coast, Sagnarigu, and West Mamprusi. The sanitary pads are provided at no cost, with support often coming from donations by parents or from girls who can contribute a pad each term to the bank in support of their classmates.



Before the intervention, many girls missed school during menstruation or resorted to unsafe alternatives like cloth rags or toilet paper, which negatively affected their health and self-esteem. With pad banks in place, girls can now manage their menstruation hygienically and with dignity, reducing absenteeism related to menstruation.

The pad banks are expected to bring meaningful improvements to the lives of schoolgirls. Having sanitary pads readily available enables girls to remain in school throughout their menstrual periods, which can lead to better academic performance and a more consistent

learning experience.

Beyond the practical benefits, pad banks also help to reduce the discomfort that often surrounds menstruation. This contributes to a sense of dignity and reassurance, encouraging girls to stay focused on their education without distraction.

In addition, the presence of pad banks fosters a more inclusive and supportive school environment. It promotes awareness, empathy, and mutual respect among students, helping to break down stigma and create a space where all learners—especially girls—feel valued.



Through the Power to Choose project, young advocates continue to push for more pad banks and greater community involvement. Their efforts ensure that

menstrual health remains a priority, helping girls stay in school, feel confident, and reach their full potential.



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