

Background

In Ethiopia, studies have shown that many girls face serious barriers to managing their periods safely and comfortably. To address this, an international NGO –Plan International (Plan)– and a menstrual hygiene management (MHM) social enterprise –BeGirl–partnered to test the performance of BeGirl menstrual hygiene products in reducing barriers to MHM faced by girls in urban, peri-urban and rural Ethiopia.

Objectives

1. Understand:

- Current MHM practices of school age girls at Plan Ethiopia schools;
- Major challenges girls face with MHM at school and opportunity areas of intervention;
- Cultural beliefs, taboos and barriers that affect MHM interventions.

2. Create Awareness:

- Create awareness of menstruation and MHM;
- Strengthen teachers' knowledge, skills and ability to support healthy MHM;
- Develop positive change in attitudes towards menstruation.

3. Test Technologies:

- Introduce BeGirl reusable menstrual products as an alternative solution to MHM in urban, peri-urban and rural school settings;
- Gather girls' feedback and insights to understand design preferences and variables that inform product selection.

4. Evaluate:

- Evaluate the effectiveness of Be Girl products as part of a holistic solution to increase girls' school attendance while menstruating and support recommendations for better MHM practices and strategies at the school level;
- Evaluate the effectiveness of Be Girl products in mitigating feelings of shame and embarrassment.

Methods and Materials

Sample Selection:

- 3 schools were selected using purposive sampling, based on their urban, peri-urban or rural locations and presence of existing WASH initiatives and girl empowerment programs.
- Participants were 205 girls ranging from 11-17 years of age.
- Each site was given the FlexiPad and/or BeGirlPanty to test product performance over a period of 6 months.

Baseline/Endline Survey:

- Girls were encouraged to talk about current MHM practices and challenges in guided group discussions.
- Girls took an individual survey at baseline and endline to record MHM practices and challenges.

Test:

- All 205 girls received a FlexiPad and/or BeGirlPanty, and instructions for proper use and care of the product.
- To understand girls' preference between the BeGirl products, 114 girls received both the FlexiPad and the BeGirlPanty to compare. The remaining 91 girls received only one of the products.
- After using the product(s) for 6 months, each girl was given an endline survey to track impact.

Data Analysis:

- The results of the endline and baseline were compared using quantitative and qualitative indicators to analyze the impact of the intervention.

BeGirl Products

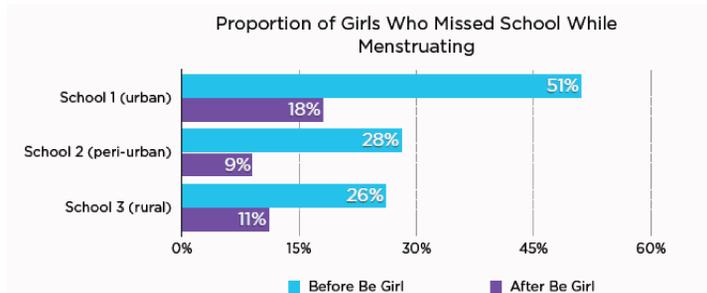
The pilot introduced two BeGirl products: the BeGirl Flexipad (reusable sanitary pad), and the BeGirlPanty (menstrual underwear).

Both products are adaptable, quick dry, and are designed to be leak-proof. 1 Flexipad or BeGirlPanty can replace about 125 disposables and lasts for about 1 year.

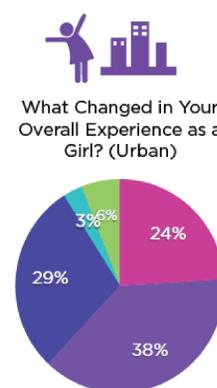
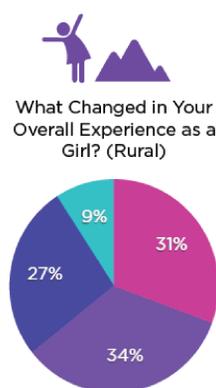


Intervention Results

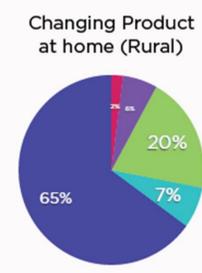
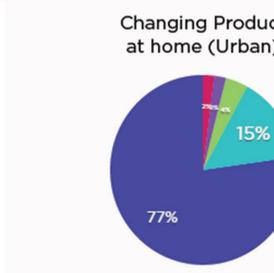
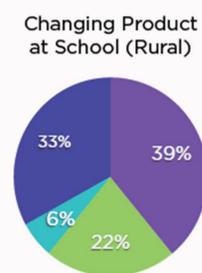
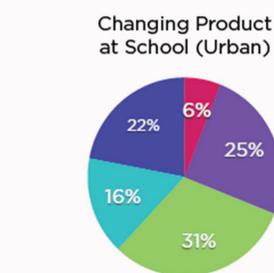
After receiving their BeGirl product, fewer girls in urban, peri-urban and rural settings reported missing school during menstruation.



After using the BeGirl products, across both rural and urban settings, most girls reported improved participation in school activities, increased confidence, and an improved perception of menstruation.



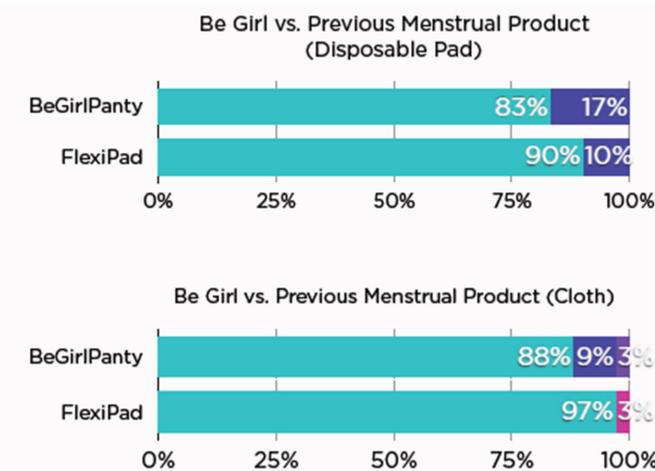
Even with the introduction of Be Girl products, girls still face challenges in managing menstruation both at school and at home, particularly around changing their product; common factors include limited access to handwashing and cleaning materials, and shame.



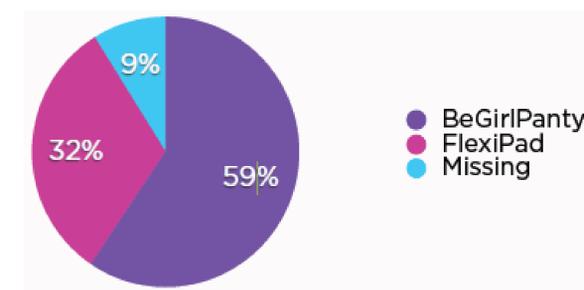
Product Results

Overall, girls reported very positive results from the BeGirl product. Girls in all settings reported a significant reduction in the number of leaks after using the BeGirl menstrual product.

In general, the girls surveyed preferred the BeGirl product to their previous product.



33% of girls preferred the BeGirlPanty because of its 2-in-1 functionality as underwear and a MHM product, its comfort, and discreetness.



Conclusions

The results of this study provide insights into the MHM preferences, wants, and needs of a selection of girls in various representative settings in Ethiopia.

- **Balanced investments** are required to ensure that girls have access to the products they like, and also to facilities, education and a supportive environment in which change can occur.
- **Rural vs. urban:** girls in these settings have different challenges and opportunities which must be understood and accounted for.
- **Male engagement** is critical, as the attitudes and behaviors of males—teachers and fellow students in particular—play a crucial role in girls' level of comfort or discomfort regarding menstruation.

Next Steps

Building on the results of this study, Plan International and BeGirl are continuing their partnership to bring the BeGirlPanty to 5,000 more girls in Ethiopia as part of a comprehensive education program that will engage girls, boys, and teachers in MHM-related conversations and activities.

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