

# **Period. End of Sentence.**

## **Documentary Resource Guide**

### **About the Film:**

As students at Oakwood High School, located in Los Angeles, we participated in a club called Girls Learn International (GLI), which was spearheaded by our English teacher, Melissa Berton. We fell in love with the club not only because we were discussing issues of gender inequity but because we had the opportunity to connect and work with women and girls worldwide. Another unique aspect of the club is that the Feminist Majority Foundation (FMF) selects student delegates from GLI chapters across the country to attend a two week conference called the Commission on the Status of Women at the United Nations. During our trip to the UN, we discovered that many countries were discussing the issue of girls missing school due to their periods. When we returned to Oakwood, we were motivated to get involved with this important issue, one which we had never even had to consider.

In our research, we learned about an Indian man named Arunachalam Muruganantham who was dismayed by the lack of access women in his country had to sanitary pads, and despite his own wife leaving him and being shunned by his community in the process, he invented a low-cost sanitary pad-making machine. Inspired by Muruganantham's work, we decided to raise the funds to purchase a pad-making machine for a community. First, with the help of Action India, an NGO based in Delhi, we connected with a small village called Kathikhera, located in the Hapur District. Because of their periods, many of the girls in Kathikhera had missed class time or dropped out of school entirely. The young women in Kathikhera were eager to collaborate with us on this initiative.

After getting to know the women of Kathikhera, we knew that we wanted to work together to make a change in the lives of menstruators all around the world. After much thought, we came to the conclusion that by documenting our partnership, we would be able to spread awareness on a much larger scale, shifting the conversation of menstruation from private to public. In October of 2016, we launched our first Kickstarter campaign, which raised \$45,076 and allowed us to purchase the pad machine, gather the first year's supplies, and document the project.

### **Discussion Points:**

Each group watching the film will have a conversation unique to their setting, depending upon age, location, and organization. Here is a list of suggested questions to spark your very own discussion!

- How did you learn about periods?
- Talk about the first time you got your period. What was that like? If you told someone after, who did you tell?

- How many people were aware that access to sanitary products is an issue all over the world?
- Has access to menstrual hygiene products ever been an issue for you?
- If you are in the United States, are you aware of the Tampon Tax? If so, does your state have a Tampon Tax?
- How can you be an advocate for menstrual equity?

## **Questions & Answers:**

### **Q: Why was it so important to make the film? Why not just buy a machine?**

**A:** After much thought, we decided that making the documentary would leave a bigger impact on a larger audience. By creating a documentary, we wanted to show the world that this is an issue that needs to be brought to its attention. We came from a privileged background in Los Angeles and considered ourselves well-informed, yet we had never considered the inherent risks of period poverty in our own backyard, as well as around the world. We wanted to shatter the harmful silence that prevented these discussions. We also wanted to develop a strong relationship with Action India and the women in Kathikhera, and since the making of the film, we have continued to implement programs with Action India.

### **Q: What is the value of having the machine in the village?**

**A:** Having the machines located in rural communities fulfills multiple purposes. First, the machine creates pads that can then be sold to the immediate community, as well as any larger distributors, creating an influx of pads in areas where they might have been scarce. Additionally, the machines associated with The Pad Project are staffed and managed by local women, creating jobs and boosting the local economy. For many of these women, the difficult work of raising a family and making a home is overlooked, and certainly not compensated, therefore, their work on the machines would be their first paying job, as well as the first job that their husbands or fathers would consider to be true employment.

### **Q: What are the long term goals of the project?**

**A:** The Pad Project aims to innovate, educate, and advocate. While our goal is to place pad machines in communities all over the world, we ultimately aim to promote menstrual equity, but we know that cannot be achieved through one machine, or even many. Our organization takes a multi-pronged approach to achieving menstrual equity, combining pad machines with community partnerships, sexual and reproductive health education, and domestic advocacy work. We work to educate communities on menstrual hygiene management, as well as period poverty and the barrier to gender equity it presents. We also work to advocate for policy targeted at menstrual equity, whether that be the removal of the Tampon Tax or working with local school

boards to mandate free period products in public school bathrooms, or even just to provide the framework for barrier-breaking conversations about menstruation.

The core components of our international work are our pad machines and our reusable cloth pad-making programs. Each partner community has different needs, and we work with local partners and NGOs to implement programs that work best for that specific community. Each manual pad machine employs 5-6 women and enables them to produce pads for their communities for approximately \$.05 each. Workers can decide how and where they would like to sell their pads in order to create more economic opportunities, but communities must partner with local NGOs on the ground to help monitor and ensure the success of their particular program.

At The Pad Project, we aim to promote gender equity around the world through various projects. We refuse to accept a world where menstruators have to choose between buying a box of pads or buying their next meal. That's why we are committed to highlighting existing laws and regulations around periods in the United States and advocating for change. On a global scale, the pad machines we fund both expand access to pads and serve as a catalyst for gender equity. Their implementation helps grant menstruators the personal, economic, and educational tools to spark conversations around menstruation and drive societal change. Access to pads allows menstruators to feel comfortable and confident in a learning environment, but it is critical to pair pads with comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) education. Whenever we install a machine, we do so by partnering with established local organizations who can host community led workshops and start dialogue around menstruation and related SRHR education. For instance, our film, *Period. End of Sentence.*, can serve as an entry point for these conversations. Ultimately, we believe that our efforts to install pad machines and increase community understanding of menstrual health will promote global gender equity and ensure that a period ends a sentence, not an education.

**Q: Have the founders of The Pad Project visited India?**

**A:** As we began working with Action India in Kathikhera, we were cognizant of respecting boundaries and did not want to insert ourselves into cultural systems we did not understand. As such, we kept the documentary crew as small as possible, and after filming for a few weeks, it became clear to our production team that having too many outsiders in the village would draw negative attention to the project. We are lucky to have a large team of students and adults working on The Pad Project, and in the years since filming the documentary, we have been able to send more of our LA based team to the village, both to screen the documentary and to foster the relationships that are vital to the success of the project. Although not everyone has been able to visit the village yet, we hope to send more of our team there in the future!

**Q: What were difficulties that arose while filming?**

**A:** One of the main difficulties that arose while filming was the language barrier. Our documentary team did not speak Hindi and had to experience their time in the village through an interpreter. Additionally, there were challenges to working in a community that had never worked with film equipment or foreigners before. We did as much as possible to establish trust with the community before filming, and our partnership with Action India was vital in that regard.

**Q: Were women from Fly at the Oscars?**

**A:** We were so fortunate to have six women from Kathikhera in the audience with us at the Oscars. Having a majority of our team together for the first time in three years was absolutely amazing and really solidified our partnership. We are so thankful that we got to celebrate our victory together!

**Q: What is The Pad Project doing now?**

**A:** The Pad Project is focused on growth in all respects. Since the Oscars, we have received support from generous donors, which has given us the resources to look beyond anything we ever hoped and allowed us to expand our operations. That has come with some growing pains as well, and we have spent much of our time building our team and organizational capacities. We are so proud that this project began with a group of high school students and their English teacher, and now we have assembled an incredible team to continue to foster relationships with communities around the world. We have had inquiries from over 95 countries and are working diligently so we can reach everyone! We are excited to announce we have placed six pad machines in different regions in India and implemented a reusable cloth pad-making program in Sierra Leone. We are working to install a semi-automated pad machine in Afghanistan and to launch a reusable cloth pad-making program in Guatemala. With our partner, This is L., we hope to place additional machines in India, Kenya, Nepal, and Sri Lanka in 2020. The Pad Project is combating period poverty in the U.S. by hosting menstrual hygiene donation drives in the greater Los Angeles area and providing grassroots organizations across the country with microgrants to purchase bulk menstrual supplies.

*The Pad Project is a 501 (c) (3) not-for-profit organization. Contributions are tax – deductible to the extent permitted by law. TAX ID # 82-2441730.*

*Mailing Address- 10573 West Pico Blvd Suite 73 Los Angeles, CA 90064*

*<https://www.thepadproject.org/>*