



January 2013

## Meeting the needs of adolescents: introducing the CycleSmart Kit

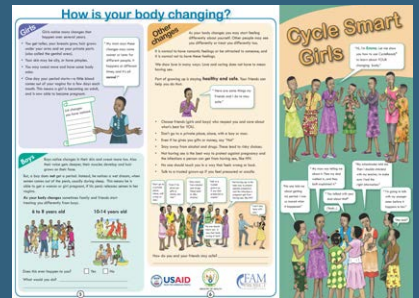
2012 has been a thrilling year for the family planning community. In July, at the London Summit organized by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and UK Department for International Development, over \$2.5 billion in financial commitments toward family planning were made by donors and developing country governments. As we embark on the new year and see new commitments made toward expanding access to family planning, let's ensure this approach is comprehensive and holistic, honoring the needs of women, men and young people alike.

### Why Adolescents?

Addressing the needs of adolescents presents a window of opportunity to intervene before most youth become sexually active and before gender roles and norms with negative sexual and reproductive health consequences become solidified. The knowledge, attitudes and skills acquired during the ages of 10 to 14 set the stage for future relationships and communication with sexual partners about rights and responsibilities and for developing self-care practices and behaviors to prevent unwanted sexual relationships, unintended pregnancy, and disease.

## YOUTH RESOURCES

CycleSmart Brochure  
ENGLISH | KINYARWANDA | SPANISH



Uses young protagonists, games and storytelling to convey information related to tracking, understanding, and preparing for the menstrual cycle and puberty; and tips on staying safe

CycleSmart Programmatic  
Guidelines

## How to Use the CycleSmart Kit with Young People: Programmatic Guidelines



### Simple Steps for Including the CycleSmart Kit in Your Program



**Read the CycleSmart brochure completely, and understand how to use CycleBeads, before discussing them with youth.**

- Practice how you will teach this to young people.
- If you have questions, talk with a partner who can provide content context and more information.



**Talk with girls about the brochure and the beads.**

- Talk to girls individually or in a group. Discuss the changes both girls and boys notice.
- Show girls how to use CycleBeads to keep track of their periods, and to give parents the changes they notice between one period and the next.
- Give each girl a CycleSmart Kit with her own brochure and CycleBeads to use. The program can still be voluntary, a diary, and a sample sanitary pads to the kit, as well as information about how to protect local health providers.



**Talk with boys also.**

- Meet in a small group of boys and girls, or talk to boys by themselves.
- Show boys how to use CycleBeads to track their menstrual cycle and the changes girls notice. Also talk about the changes to their bodies.
- Give boys the CycleSmart brochure.



**Discuss how girls and boys may be treated differently at puberty.**

- Find out what young people have noticed about what society expects from girls and boys now that they are growing up.
- Ask what fits, what does not, and how they feel about girls and boys being treated differently.
- Explain together how young people can stay healthy and safe in their community.



**Include parents.**

- Where possible, show parents and other caring adults how to use the CycleSmart Kit to educate their children about puberty and fertility awareness.

**What is the CycleSmart Kit?**

The CycleSmart Kit includes CycleBeads to track of color-coded beads that help a girl keep track of her menstrual cycle and learn about her fertility and a simple, factual brochure about puberty. The CycleSmart Kit is designed to be used by young people ages 10 to 14, develop an awareness of their personal health, be able to help parents, teachers, health providers, laws, education and other health care providers understand the changes girls and boys are going through and how to stay healthy and safe.

**Why are the CycleSmart Kit and puberty education so important?**

Many girls and boys enter puberty with very little information about their changing bodies. Often, parents and other important adults in their lives feel unprepared or uncomfortable talking about the topic. Yet, when young people understand the changes of puberty and signs of fertility, including physical and emotional changes of both girls and boys, this helps prepare them to make healthy decisions about themselves and their bodies as they grow up. It also helps them to understand the changes girls and boys notice right away, very signs that their bodies are starting to change. The CycleSmart Kit is an easy, concise and meaningful tool for puberty education, and has been tested and used in Rwanda and other countries in the world.

**Who might explain and give this kit to youth?**

Parents, teachers, health providers, educators, religious leaders, and others are among those well-positioned to offer and discuss the CycleSmart Kit with young people. Programs for parents and peer educators both in school and at older ages (16+ years) will also provide great opportunities to discuss. The CycleSmart Kit can be shared to young people through clubs or other youth groups, after-school programs, information, awareness and healthy schools, girls' groups, and health care. Girls and boys can also get the CycleSmart Kit directly from health providers. It is important to ensure that it is most helpful for them to have access to a person who can respond to questions they may have.

It is very easy to include the CycleSmart Kit in your program.

## Why CycleSmart?

Research findings from IRH's work in Rwanda and Guatemala suggest adolescent girls are receiving insufficient guidance on puberty, fertility awareness and menstrual onset.

As a result, IRH developed the CycleSmart Kit, a package tailored to girls ages 12-14 which includes CycleBeads®, the color-coded beads used to keep track of the fertile days of a woman's menstrual cycle, and an **age-appropriate brochure** which includes topics like the menstrual cycle, puberty-related changes, risk of pregnancy, gender norms, and safety tips. It may also include sanitary pads, a calendar, and a weekly diary (see Kit image below).



The CycleSmart Kit was developed and tested in collaboration with youth-serving organizations in Rwanda and is based on research conducted with adolescents, their parents, and their communities. This tool can be used to teach young girls and boys about important topics around puberty in a visual, tactile and very concrete way.

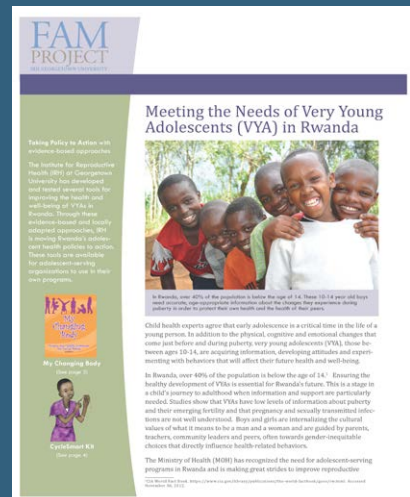
## What's next?

IRH is working on adapting the CycleSmart Brochure for US-based audiences. Stay tuned for more information!

## What are people saying about the

Guidelines provide user-friendly tips and resources to parents, educators, health providers, etc. on how to use the CycleSmart Kit to teach boys and girls about puberty and fertility

## Brief: Meeting the Needs of Very Young Adolescents (VYA) in Rwanda



Learn more about IRH's work designing and evaluating programs for VYAs in Rwanda

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# CycleSmart Kit?

*"This is an excellent project, it will help girls to prepare for their menstrual periods in advance, so they won't be surprised or be absent from school because of periods anymore."*

Female parent from Rwamagana, Rwanda

*"My mum used to ask me every day if I had moved the ring or if I had filled the diary, so I enjoyed it because she was closer to me and more concerned."*

Adolescent girl from Kicukiro, Rwanda

*"Using [the CycleSmart Brochure] to discuss puberty changes with parents or teachers will make us confident to discuss such things with any person."*

Adolescent boy from Rwamagana, Rwanda

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