

MENSTRUAL HYGIENE WEBINAR 3 SYNOPSIS

Date: June 14th Thursday at 7:00 AM PDT

Topic: Creating access to menstrual products

Guest speakers: Thematic presenter- Nancy Muller (PATH)

Topical presenter- Wonder Mafuta (World Vision Somalia)

Topical presenter- Charu Agarwal (Dharma Life)

Webinar host: WASH United and World Vision

Organised by: WASH United, Simavi, World Vision, GIZ, an activity of the MH Alliance

Link to the recording: <https://vimeo.com/275146525>

Thematic Presenter- Nancy Muller (PATH)

• Background on Menstrual Products

- Are a basic human right, and are important regarding health, education, employment, and gender equity
- Absorb blood and prevent leaks, thereby supporting girls/women to live in dignity and confidence
- Include disposable sanitary pads/tampons, reusable cloth/period panties, and menstrual cups
- Influenced by cultural beliefs, and preference influence the type of menstrual products girls/women use
- Disposable sanitary pads are commonly preferred by girls/women
- Reusable cloth/period panties, and menstrual cups are used less often by women and girls due to lack of awareness, distribution channels, standards, cultural beliefs, misinformation, and cost.

• Research on Menstrual Products

- Rigorous research on menstrual products and access is limited and of uneven quality
- Increased incidence of reproductive tract infection (RTI) from improvised cloth use
- Higher perceived reliability of reusable sanitary pads to improvised cloth
- In one study, bacterial vaginosis less prevalent among menstrual cup users than among users of disposable pads
- Increased self-efficacy and reduced stigma among users of period panties
- Increased level of education is associated with use of commercial products
- Safe hygiene facilities reduce risk of bacterial vaginosis
- No evidence on the association of cervical cancer with poor menstrual hygiene

• Menstrual Product access

- Access to improved menstrual products is limited in many settings
- Countries including India, Kenya, Zambia, and South Africa are subsidizing products to help keep girls in school. However, this support faces challenges which include:
 - Single product focus
 - Limited monitoring and evaluation of the programme
 - No performance or quality standards of products for comparison
 - Luxury taxes and lack of systems and policies for products' disposal
- Various models exist to increase access to menstrual products for high, middle and low income populations -- for example: Shops, social enterprise sales models, and subsidies, respectively

• Key Takeaways

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- “Menstrual products are part of the solution and not the solution”
- All types of menstrual products are needed
- There is no one right product
- Keep women and girls in the centre of product design
- Product choice is important
- There is need of research, evidence, quality of products and setting up supportive systems.
- Consideration for menstrual products choice include performance, acceptability, context of use, and supply

Topical presenter- Wonder Mafuta (World Vision Somalia)

• **Be Girl Pilot**

- A partnership between WV Somalia and Be Girl
- Conducted in the northern part of Somalia to examine how access to high-quality durable menstrual products improve girls’ quality of life
- Xi-month pilot process evaluation on school girls
- Intervention included the provision of two Be Girl period panties per girl delivered in an MHM workshop

• **Lessons Learnt**

- Menstruating girls are resilient despite country’s fragility
- More school attendance but access does not necessarily influence school performance
- Holistic approach (i.e. other influences of absenteeism in menstruators) should be considered when deciding what menstrual products to provide to menstruators
- Access to menstrual products can positively change attitudes and influence perceptions of menstruation

Topical presenter- Charu Agarwal (Dharma Life)

• **Making Periods Normal Programme**

- A collaborative initiative based in Bihar aimed at promoting healthy hygiene practices among adolescent girls and women in the community through innovative behaviour change tools
- Promote adoption of sanitary pads and improve access to pads in the community.
- Key aspects of the programme include awareness, accessibility, use, and affordability
- Mobilise women as change agents and sensitise men and boys about menstruation

• **Lessons Learned**

- The successes of the programme include
 - Unique distribution channel of menstrual products
 - Generates income for women entrepreneurs
 - Access to products i.e. sanitary pads helps to improve quality of menstrual health
- The challenge of the programme includes:
 - Weather conditions such as serious rainy periods may disrupt distribution channels.

Key question addressed in the webinar

• **Dharma Life**

- What process did you go through to choose the sanitary napkin provider for the project?
 - Ans: Quality control criteria, nature of production and supply chain, and price point.

- Why are you not offering more than one product?
 - Ans: It is the feasible solution for social impact
- **WV Somalia**
 - How have you involved community groups in access to products?
 - Ans: Imams, teachers, and expectant mothers in the community and the Ministry of Health are involved
 - How do you address pain management for menstrual hygiene?
 - Ans: health team provide drugs such as paracetamol for pain, which are provided with distributed MHM products
- **PATH**
 - What are your thoughts on providing of pain medication or seeking local remedies for menstrual pain management?
 - Ans: Information about how to access pain management product and manage the pain is important, provision of paracetamols is a reasonable approach, and linking to health services is helpful to women and girls
 - What are the economic importance of MHM?
 - Ans: There is a market for MHM products
 - If those local solutions (e.g. banana leaves) work fine, what is meant by "their quality needs to be improved"?
 - Ans: There are issues around quality control for disposable products. There is need for more evidence and data.