Menstrual health product standards: Why do we have to talk about this?

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WoMena Uganda
Menstrual health product standards: Why do we have to talk about this?

Nancy Muller, Senior Program Officer, PATH
March 28, 2019
Why do we have to talk about this?

- To end the culture of silence and shame around menstruation.

- Menstruation...
  - is normal
  - start of a girl’s sexual and reproductive health journey
  - offers an opportunity to reach girls with positive messages
The Menstrual Health Value Chain

Awareness and Gender Equitable Norms >> Access >> Use >> Menstrual Waste Management
When you think of menstrual health products, what products come to mind?
Health effects of menstrual practices and products - what is the evidence?

• Lack of access to WASH facilities and unhygienic WASH practices associated with higher RTI incidence in rural Indian girls and women.
• Culture of shame limits women’s ability to negotiate for WASH facilities.
• Reusable absorbents more likely to contribute to urogenital infections - linked to lack of education and access to private facilities with water.
• In Kenya, up to 10% of 15 year old girls reported engaging in transactional sex for menstrual products.
• Bacterial vaginosis less common (12.9%) among Kenyan girls using menstrual cups compared to those using disposable pads (20.3%).
• More evidence needed on health effects of menstrual practices and products.
Why standards for menstrual health products?

- Standards allow agreement on benchmarks for quality, performance, and safety.
- Inform governments, NGOs, donors purchasing decisions.
- Provide manufacturers with minimum quality standards, thereby raising the quality of all products.
- Allow new products to enter the market.
Nepal:
Radha Paudel - How can menstrual products ensure the dignity of girls and women?

India and Uganda:
Tanya Mahajan and Shamirah Nakalema - The long road to menstrual health product standards

Questions - Mentimeter
How can menstrual products ensure dignity during Menstruation in Nepal?

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Radha Paudel Foundation
www.radhapaudelfoundation.org
Hotel Yak and Yeti, Kathmandu, March 2019,
## Current Situation with Menstrual Health Products in Nepal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types</th>
<th>Availability</th>
<th>Commonly Used location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Simple used or new piece of cloth</td>
<td>• Commonly used and available</td>
<td>• Widely used throughout the country by lower income families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Traditional practice</td>
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| Non-Biodegradable disposal sanitary Pads | • An average 7 million units of Sanitary Pads sold every month in urban (PSI, 2018). | • Family with disposal income  
• Not used in rural areas due to lack of availability and knowledge |
# Current Situation with Menstrual Health Products in Nepal

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| Reusable Cloth pads (with holder and clip) | • In areas where small local enterprises developed / NGOs  
• School where training were conducted | • Widely used in urban areas  
• Used by women who have lower income earning families  
• Not available and use in rural areas except few exceptions |
# Current Situation with Menstrual Health Products in Nepal

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<tr>
<td>Tampons</td>
<td>• Selected supermarkets in touristic areas</td>
<td>• Returned Non-Resident Nepalese women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Women with disposal income</td>
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## Current Situation with Menstrual Health Products in Nepal

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<td>Menstrual panties</td>
<td>• Very rarely used and available</td>
<td>• Used in only trainings by few organizations</td>
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- **Menstrual panties**: Used in only trainings by few organizations.
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| Bio-Degradable disposal sanitary pads | • Recently introduced  
• Not widely distributed | • Chitwan (Central part of country)  
• Local initiatives with limited distribution |
## Current Situation with Menstrual Health Products in Nepal

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<td>Menstrual Cups</td>
<td>• Very recently introduced by few NGOs&lt;br&gt;• Not widely available</td>
<td>• Not commonly used among Nepalese women&lt;br&gt;• Few pilot projects are on progress</td>
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- Menstrual Cups: Very recently introduced by few NGOs, not widely available, not commonly used among Nepalese women, few pilot projects are in progress.
Impact on Girls and Women’s Health

Physical

Psychological
## Impact on Girls and Women’s Health

<table>
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<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Impact</th>
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<td>Physical Health</td>
<td>• Hygiene and care of MH products leads to many complications related with reproductive health e.g. vaginitis</td>
</tr>
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<td>• Physical discomfort due to not having an appropriate products</td>
</tr>
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<td>• Lack of availability of the products limit the physical activity/movement (e.g. school) of the girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Health</td>
<td>• Emotional distress during menstruation due to shame and lack of dignity regards to products including purchasing, using and waste management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>• Risk of depression and suicide ideation</td>
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</table>
DIGNIFIED MENSTRUATION

NEED TO MOVE BEYOND INFRASTRUCTURE OR HYGIENE

Health

Water & Sanitation

Education

Human Rights and Empowerment

ENVIRONMENT
Urgency of Standard and Quality of Menstrual Products

Practice:
1. Menstrual Blood consider ‘IMPURE’
2. 40+ types of rumours, misconceptions, associated with menstruation (RPF,2018)
3. Separate toilets for girls 67 % (UNICEF,2016)
4. Introduction of diverse production
5. Struggling by small enterprises-administrative process

Policy:
1. Right to Dignity (Constitution)
3. Increasing demand of productions
Thank you

Follow me:
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Twitter: @radhapaudel
www.radhapaudelfoundation.org
www.radhapaudel.org
The Long Road to Menstrual Health
Product Standards - *Experiences from India and East Africa*

Tanya Mahajan - Sr. Consultant, Development Solutions; Coordinator, Menstrual Health Alliance India

Shamirah Nakalema - Master Trainer and Project Officer WoMena Uganda
Menstrual Health Product Options

- Reusables and Disposables
- Absorbents and Collectors
- Vaginal insertion and External
- Long acting and Short acting
- Wearables

Image source: My and My Cup - Menstrual Cup Workshop - Ruby Life, 2019
Who makes a MH product standard?

- Government Departments and Ministries (Health, women rights, environment/waste management, education, consumer safety)
- Regulatory authority/ Standards Body
- Manufacturers
- Researchers and experts (Textile engineers, chemical engineers, microbiologists, environmentalists etc.)
- CSOs/UN agencies
- Consumers - role of media
What should be included in a MH product standard?

- Importance of definitions - cloth vs. reusable cloth pad
- Physical performance parameters - parameter for consumer identification
- Safety profile
- Hygiene parameters - Is pH enough?
- Biodegradability/Compostability
- Packaging and labelling - Use and maintenance, Disposal, Duration of use
How is a MH product standard enforced?

• Are they mandatory?
• Consumer awareness
• Advocacy with Government Departments/Ministries
• Procurement - Govt. programs, NGO/CSR programs
• Imports
• Taxation
Unanswered Questions

- Case of menstrual cups
- Lack of evidence for appropriate duration of use
- How stringent should hygiene parameters be for reusable cloth pads?
- Case of small scale manufacturing
- Call for zero tax - always appropriate?
THANK YOU
Question & Answer