Development and compliance of quality standards for disposable and reusable menstrual products in LMICs

July 2021
Objective

Develop policy guidance for harmonization of technical benchmarks for disposable and reusable sanitary pads in South Asia and Africa – focus countries India, Nepal, Kenya and Uganda
Partners

Our Partner Consultants

Sophia Grinvalds
Diana Nelson
Neville Okwaro
Mariana de la Roche
Sumati Joshi
Methodology

20 manufacturers

15 Advocacy Groups

10 Technical experts

4 Regulators

UN bodies, WASH United, GirlUp, GIZ Nepal, WoMENA, Irise UK, AMREF Health Africa, MHH coalitions

Microbiologists, material scientists, medical doctor, laboratories

UNBS, SIS, KeBS and BIS

Secondary review of standards in East and Southern Africa, West and Central Africa, South and South-East Asia and key reference standards from developed countries
Agenda

- Overview of the Standards Landscape
- Presentation and Panel Discussion
  - Process Lessons
  - Technical Specifications for Menstrual Product Standards
- Audience Q&A
Overview of Standards Landscape
Why are standards needed?

- Consumer Trust and Empowerment
- Enhance access by creating market entry pathways for new product categories
- Establish a common definition of QUALITY
- Reduce cost of giving

- Product Quality
- Product Choice
- Product Access
Overview of Standards Landscape

• Database of 27 standards for disposable sanitary pads and 14 for reusable sanitary pads compiled, including reference standards

• Key Insights – Current landscape
  • Most standards exist in the East and Southern African region, for both disposable and reusable sanitary pads
  • Regional African standards hold potential for faster adoption amongst other countries – especially in WCA, where joint advocacy is starting
  • Few countries in South and South-East Asia have disposable sanitary pad standards, only India reusable pads standards (in 2021) - scope for strengthening joint advocacy in both regions
  • Data could not be retrieved for LAC, interactions showed limited advocacy focus on product quality and scope for strengthening the same
Overview of Standards Landscape

• Key Insights - Reference Standards
  • Developed country norms used as references usually e.g., US FDA and EU as well as standards from the same region e.g., EAC for Africa and India for South Asia
  • Other technical industry references also exist e.g., INDA and EDANA, can also be used
  • Japanese and Chinese standards have very strong QC and should also be used as references given high trade volumes to LMICs (Africa, South Asia and LAC)
  • Language has posed a barrier till now
  • Technical exchange with manufacturing and QC experts from the region is also limited to LMICs and can be encouraged, especially during standards creation
Panel Discussion

Experiences of Standards Development and Enforcement from LMICs
Our Panelists

Mr. Sipiwo Matshoba, Department of Women, Youth, and People with Disabilities, South Africa

Dr. Michael Moscherosch, Director R&D, Fellow, Social Innovation, Johnson & Johnson

Danielle Jurman, RTSU, Humanitarian Office, UNFPA

Shivani Swamy, VP - Sales, Middle East and Africa, Livinguard Technologies

Sophia Grinvalds, Co-founder and Director, AFRIPads

Neville Okwaro, MHH Champion, Kenya
Process Lessons

1. Making the case
2. Standards Creation
3. Dissemination and Enforcement
4. Harmonization
1. Making the Case for Standards

**Government stakeholders as champions**

- How do standards support the goals of specific Ministries of Departments?
- Formal request for standards
- Leverage standards for inclusion of product choice in policy
- Standards as a means of market development and restricting poor quality products
- To support large scale procurement
“Standards are the distilled wisdom of people with expertise in their subject matter and who know the needs of the organizations they represent – including manufacturers, sellers, buyers, customers, trade associations, users, regulators and others…”

- International Standards Organization
## 2. Standards Development

### Diverse stakeholders for standards creation

- Neutral and diverse stakeholders needed on the table
- SMEs and advocacy groups
- Researchers and technical experts (material sciences, microbiology, reproductive health and hygiene)
- Fibre and other R/M suppliers
- Institutional and individual users

### Donor support and TA critical

- Stakeholder identification and engagement
- Secondary evidence incl. access to reference standards
- Primary evidence generation and engagement with research bodies
- Independent testing during standards formulation
Standards for menstrual products are not unique and they exist for many sectors, hence it is not reinventing anything. It shouldn't stand in the way of a serious company conducting business.

- Standardization advocate, procurement stakeholder
## 3. Dissemination and Enforcement

### Going beyond standards creation

- Need for awareness of standards among manufacturers and large scale procurement agencies
- Democratization of access needed
- Operational guidance & capacity building for adoption
- Improved access to labs
- Situating standards within MHH policies

### Enhancing compliance to for SMEs

- Evaluate product lifecycle to prescribe minimum burden of testing and enhance compliance
- SMEs can be supported for better compliance through subsidies, TA and pooled resources like testing facilities
- Support can also be provided under MHH policies to local/women-led businesses
4. Harmonization

**Countries**
- Regional leaders taking an active role in country level standards development
- Contribute to regional and global standards development e.g. through ISO Copolco

**Multilateral Organisations and Advocacy Groups**
- Syndicated fund for
  - Joint advocacy at country, regional and global levels
  - Evidence generation on menstrual product safety in LMICs
  - Technical support and knowledge sharing
- Represent unbiased user and industry interests
- Standards for multi-country/global product procurement

**Manufacturer and trade groups**
- Provide platforms for SME concerns
- Facilitate
  - assistance for subsidies, upskilling and TA
  - knowledge sharing among SMEs
- Support global knowledge sharing and advocacy efforts
### Technical Specifications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Material and Design</th>
<th>Fitness of Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>• Included in almost all LMIC country standards but not in US FDA or INDA/EDANA guidelines</td>
<td>• Absorbency and retention included in all standards to determine fitness of purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td><strong>Hygiene and bio-burden safety</strong> &lt;br&gt; • pH and bio-burden testing of final product included in most standards</td>
<td><strong>Material Safety</strong> &lt;br&gt; • Biocompatibility testing advised in most standards as per ISO 10993 &lt;br&gt; • More nuanced treatment needed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Increasing concern around compostability
Validity of tests still questionable without suitable infrastructure for composting in LMICs
Thank You

For more information, contact:

- Tanya Mahajan: tanya@devsolutions.org
- Sumati Joshi: joshisumati33@gmail.com
- Madison Schoeben: mschoeben@rhsupplies.org