

Menstrual Hygiene Management: Developing an Affordable Sanitary Pad

Health need

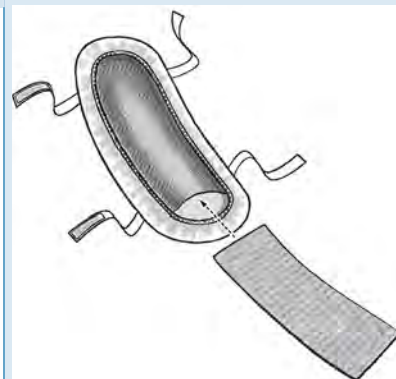
Girls and women in the developing world lack adequate solutions to manage menstruation. Imported pads are prohibitively expensive for low-income families. Research in Uganda indicates that 90% of the urban poor cannot afford off-the-shelf sanitary pads and instead improvise with materials with limited absorbency such as cloth, newspapers, and even dried grass, making it difficult for menstruating girls to participate in school. The United Nations Children's Fund estimates that 1 in 10 African girls either skips school during menstruation or drops out entirely because of lack of menstrual hygiene management (MHM) options. Studies have confirmed that educating girls is associated with development and health benefits to the girls, their families, and society. Benefits include protecting girls from HIV/AIDS, abuse, and exploitation; reducing child and maternal mortality; improving child nutrition and health; decreasing fertility rates; enhancing women's political participation; and improving economic productivity. As governments acknowledge these issues by subsidizing menstrual hygiene products, the impact of the products on sanitation and waste disposal systems must also be considered.

Technology solution

PATH's solution is to develop and advance appropriate, low-cost MHM options for low-resource settings. Our research indicates that girls and women are interested in disposable products that prevent leaking, are absorbent, and affordable. We have learned that women lack information on menstruation or appropriate disposal of waste. Reusable MHM options (cloth pads and menstrual cups) while important, require a higher up-front cost, access to clean water and soap, and thorough drying—resources that are not always available in poor communities. We are currently exploring a concept for a hybrid sanitary pad—a reusable, leak-resistant sleeve with options to use either a disposable or reusable absorbent material. This hybrid pad would dry quickly, prevent leaking, reduce plastic waste disposal, and offer the flexibility of using a variety of absorbent materials.

Current status and results

We developed a hybrid pad prototype based on our target product specifications and pad testing. In 2011, focus group discussions (FGD) conducted in Cambodia on various prototype designs of the hybrid pad provided valuable insights. While women did not use the prototypes, their feedback on design, materials, size, and shape helped to further define our product specifications. In late 2012, our FGD in Tamil Nadu, India on the perceived acceptability of hybrid pads showed that women who used cloth and those who used disposable sanitary pads were both interested in the hybrid pad concept. Perceived advantages are that the hybrid pad would stay in place, be comfortable, easy to use, and simple to wash and dry. They saw it as useful for school girls or women who work out of the house. Stakeholders in India and women's self-help groups who make sanitary pads, saw the benefit in terms of local production, income generation, and simplifying disposal. Our next step is to produce prototypes to test in actual use.



Prototype design of a reusable hybrid pad with a disposable liner.

The Kasiisi Project Girls Support Program in Uganda found a 30% decrease in absenteeism and an improvement in grades when sanitary pads and underwear were provided to primary school girls.

http://www.globalgiving.com/pfil/2700/Affordable_Sanitary_Pads.pdf

Availability

For more information regarding this project, contact Nancy Muller at nmuller@path.org.

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