



Menstrual Hygiene Products in Kenyan Markets

SUMMARY

This fact sheet focuses on menstrual hygiene products available in Kenya. The purpose is to provide an overview of the types of menstrual hygiene products, their advantages and disadvantages, storage requirements, and price ranges in the Kenyan market. This will guide users and sector stakeholders to make appropriate choices as they work with adolescent girls and women in schools and communities. Menstrual hygiene materials available for women and girls in Kenya are disposable sanitary pads, reusable pads, tampons, menstrual cups and menstrual cloths.

Introduction

Management of menstruation with safety and dignity is important for all adolescent girls and women. Good menstrual hygiene management (MHM) should ensure that women and adolescent girls are using clean menstrual management materials to absorb or collect menstrual blood, that can be changed in privacy as often as necessary for the duration of the menstruation period, that soap and water are used for washing the body as required, and there is access to facilities to dispose of used menstrual management materials (WHO/UNICEF, 2012).

In Kenya, MHM in schools and at home is frequently inadequate, especially in rural areas. Contributing factors include unavailability water, toilets and soap, especially in schools; low levels of knowledge on MHM; cultural and religious restrictions and misconceptions about menstruation; unaffordability of sanitary products and limited familiarity with the product in the Kenyan markets; and low knowledge on appropriate use of sanitary pads (Alexander, et al., 2014; Phillips-Howard et al., 2015; Maseno University, 2016).

This fact sheet is intended to provide information on the available range of menstrual management materials in the Kenyan market and provides programme partners with improved knowledge of alternatives. The ultimate aim is to improve MHM and contribute to improved menstrual health.

WHY DOES MENSTRUAL HYGIENE MATTER?

- Menstruation is a normal and healthy part of life for most women and transgender men.
- Many girls do not have complete and accurate understanding of menstruation as a normal biological process. Educating girls and boys on puberty and menstruation builds their confidence, contributes to social solidarity and encourages healthy habits.
- Menstruation can be a barrier to girls' school attendance due to pain, embarrassment, restrictions, and a lack of information and WASH services at school.
- Menstrual hygiene matters to health: many girls and women are not able to afford sanitary pads and rely on unsafe materials that can cause infection.
- Menstruation is not a sickness, illness, disease, infection; neither is it harmful, a curse, dirty, shameful, or unclean
- Girls and women with disabilities face additional stigma and barriers to adequate MHM.


Menstrual Hygiene Products in Kenyan Markets


Small scale studies in Kenya show that users prefer disposable sanitary pads to reusable sanitary pads and homemade alternatives such as pieces of cloth, cotton, pieces of mattress, natural materials (FSG 2016). The same studies showed that 65% of Kenyan girls across the country use home made alternatives (FSG 2016). High cost and poverty level emerged as the biggest challenges to accessing menstrual products in Kenya.


1. Disposable Sanitary pads




Disposable pads are made of absorbent material that absorbs the menstrual flow during menstruation. They are disposed of after every 4 to 6 hours or more frequently, depending on how heavy the flow is and what type of pad one is using. Pads come in various sizes, shapes, absorbencies and materials and consist of a layered design made of blends of plastics, rayon and cotton. Pads should include wings to prevent leakage and keep the pad more securely in place. Each user can experiment with different kinds of sanitary pads to know which one best suits her needs.

 Easy to use; widely accepted; high absorbency if the pad is of good quality

 Not easily available in rural areas; relatively costly; generates environmental waste; not reusable; some contain perfume and chemicals which may cause rashes and irritation.


 Should remain in the package or an improvised package; should be stored in an accessible, dry and well-ventilated place.


 Costs kshs 50 per packet of 8 pads (US\$ 0.50) and users can use on average up to 2 packets per month.


2. Reusable pads



Reusable pads are worn externally in the underwear to absorb menstrual flow and held in place usually by snaps. They are mostly made from a variety of natural or synthetic materials that can be washed, dried and reused for approximately one to two years. They should be thoroughly washed with water and soap and dried in sunshine before reuse. The pad should be changed every 2 to 6 hours or more frequently if the flow is heavy.

 Widely available; affordable; reusable; high absorbency if the pad is of good quality

 Requires access to water for washing the pad; more time consuming because of washing and drying; some girls and women are not comfortable washing blood due to stigma; need for somewhere private to wash and dry; inconvenience in storage and carrying used pad

 Should remain in the package or an improvised package; should be stored in an accessible, dry and well-ventilated place.


 Each pad costs Ksh 500 (US\$ 5), and can be used up to 2 years


3. Tampons





These are absorbent materials that are inserted into the vagina to absorb menstrual flow. They expand with moisture and thereby avoid leakage. They can be worn for up to 6 hours, after which they are removed and disposed of. They come in a variety of sizes, materials and with different absorbent capacities. They should not be used for too long to

avoid toxic shock syndrome (TSS) - a rare, life threatening complication of certain types of bacterial infections.

 Very compatible with physical activities like swimming, dancing and sports; does not cause friction and irritation; high absorbency

 Some cultures and religions do not accept usage of tampons; not widely available; not reusable; generates environmental waste; requires instruction before use; requires frequent changing to avoid TSS


 Should remain in their package; should be stored in an accessible, dry and well-ventilated place


 Each tampon costs *Ksh* 20 - 30 (US\$ 0.20-0.40)


4. Menstrual cups




This is a non-absorbent bell-shaped device made of silicone that is inserted into the vagina to collect menstrual flow. It creates a seal and is held in place by the walls of the vagina. It needs to be changed after every 12 hours, after which it is rinsed and re-inserted. After each menstrual cycle the cup needs to be boiled to make sure that it is clean. Most manufacturers offer two sizes: small for lighter flow and medium for a heavier flow.


 Very compatible with physical activities like swimming, dancing and sports; provides more comfort, less worries as the flexible cup is not felt inside and can provide up to 12 hours of worry-free protection; cost effective as one cup can be used for up to 10 years; healthy for the body as medical grade silicone is hypoallergenic and is free from bleaches and toxins; environmentally friendly; durable and reusable.


 High upfront cost; requires instructions before use; not widely available; not acceptable in some cultures and religions; fear of spillage


 Clean and store it after use as per the manufacturer's instructions; do not to share usage


 Each cup costs *Ksh* 1,000- 4,000 (US\$ 10-14)


5. Menstrual Clothes

 Clothes are reusable pieces of fabric worn externally to the body, in underwear or tied to the waist to absorb menstrual flow. They are made from either newly purchased pieces of fabric (mostly cotton) or old fabric repurposed from clothing or another use. They can be washed, dried and reused. However, there is no guidance on how long cloths can be reused, but it is generally agreed that this should be no longer than one year

 Easily available at home; reusable

 Requires water and a private place to wash and dry; it may be cumbersome to wash and requires drying; low absorbency

 Should be stored in an accessible, dry and well-ventilated place; should be discarded when damaged or shabby

 Low-cost, if any

Conclusion

This fact sheet has provided key information on the menstrual hygiene products available for use by women and adolescent girls in Kenya. More efforts are required to broaden the product range, make them more accessible and affordable, and to quality assure the products.

References

Alexander, K.T, Oduor C, Odhiambo F.O, et al (2014). *Water, sanitation and hygiene conditions in Kenyan rural schools: are schools meeting the needs of menstruating girls?* *Water*, 6: 1453-1466.

Maseno University (2016). *Menstrual Hygiene Management Situation Analysis Report*. Maseno University, Kenya.

Phillips-Howard PA, Otieno G, Burmen B, et al (2015). *Menstrual needs and associations with sexual and reproductive risks in rural Kenyan females: A cross-sectional behavioral survey linked with HIV prevalence*. *J Women's Health*. 24(10):801-11.

WHO/UNICEF (2012): *Joint Monitoring Programme. Meeting Report of the JMP Post-2015 Working Group on Hygiene*. WHO/UNICEF.

FSG (2016): *Menstrual Health in Kenya/ CountryLandscape Analysis*. Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

McMahon SA, et al. (2011): "The girl with her period is the one to hang her head" Reflections on Menstrual management among school girls in rural Kenya. *BMC Int Health Human Rights* 2011. 11:17.

About the Authors

This Fact Sheet was written by Agnes Makanyi, WASH Specialist, UNICEF Kenya and Andrew Trevett, Chief of WASH, UNICEF Kenya. Technical reviews were provided by Bernard Keraita (Regional WASH Knowledge Management Specialist – UNICEF ESARO), Brooke Yamakoshi, WASH Specialist (WASH PD, NYHQ) and Guy Hutton, Senior WASH Advisor (WASH PD, NYHQ).

About the Series

UNICEF's water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) country teams work inclusively with governments, civil society partners and donors, to improve WASH services for children and adolescents, and the families and caregivers who support them. UNICEF works in over 100 countries worldwide to improve water and sanitation services, as well as basic hygiene practices. This publication is part of the UNICEF WASH Learning Series, designed to contribute to knowledge of best practice across the UNICEF's WASH programming. The documents in this series include:

Field Notes share innovations in UNICEF's WASH programming, detailing its experiences implementing these innovations in the field.

Technical Papers present the result of more in-depth research and evaluations, advancing WASH knowledge in a key topic.

Guidelines describe a specific methodology to WASH programming, research or evaluation - drawing on substantive evidence, and based on UNICEF's and other partners experiences in the field.

Fact Sheets summarize the most important knowledge on a topic in less than four pages in the form of graphics, tables and bullet points.

WASH Diaries explores the personal dimensions of WASH, and remind us why a good standard of water, sanitation and hygiene is important for all to enjoy.

Readers are encouraged to quote from this publication but UNICEF request due acknowledgement. You can learn more about UNICEF's work on WASH here: <https://www.unicef.org/wash/>

www.unicef.org/wash

© United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

The statements in this publication are the views of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the policies or the views of UNICEF.

United Nations Children's Fund
3 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017, USA

For more information, please contact: WASH@unicef.org