



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

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

Nancy Muller, Senior Program Officer, PATH  
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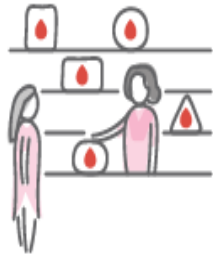


## Why do we have to talk about this?

- 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



Disposal



Treatment

**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?

**Radha Paudel**

Author, Activist.

Radha Paudel Foundation

[www.radhapaudelfoundation.org](http://www.radhapaudelfoundation.org)

Hotel Yak and Yeti, Kathmandu, March 2019,



**Nepal Times**

*Radha Poudel is a  
public health worker,  
writer, and activist*

## Current Situation with Menstrual Health Products in Nepal

Types	Availability	Commonly Used location
Simple used or new piece of cloth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Commonly used and available</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Widely used throughout the country by lower income families</li> <li>Traditional practice</li> </ul>



## Current Situation with Menstrual Health Products in Nepal

Types	Availability	Commonly Used location
Non-Biodegradable disposal sanitary Pads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An average 7 million units of Sanitary Pads sold every month in urban (PSI,2018).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Family with disposal income</li> <li>Not used in rural areas due to lack of availability and knowledge</li> </ul>



## Current Situation with Menstrual Health Products in Nepal

Types	Availability	Commonly Used location
Reusable Cloth pads (with holder and clip)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In areas where small local enterprises developed / NGOs</li> <li>School where training were conducted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Widely used in urban areas</li> <li>Used by women who have lower income earning families</li> <li>Not available and use in rural areas except few exceptions</li> </ul>



## Current Situation with Menstrual Health Products in Nepal

Types	Availability	Commonly Used location
Tampons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Selected supermarkets in touristic areas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Returned Non-Resident Nepalese women</li> <li>Women with disposal income</li> </ul>



## Current Situation with Menstrual Health Products in Nepal

Types	Availability	Commonly Used location
Menstrual panties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very rarely used and available</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used in only trainings by few organizations</li> </ul>



# Current Situation with Menstrual Health Products in Nepal

Types	Availability	Commonly Used location
Bio-Degradable disposal sanitary pads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recently introduced</li> <li>• Not widely distributed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chitwan (Central part of country)</li> <li>• Local initiatives with limited distribution</li> </ul>





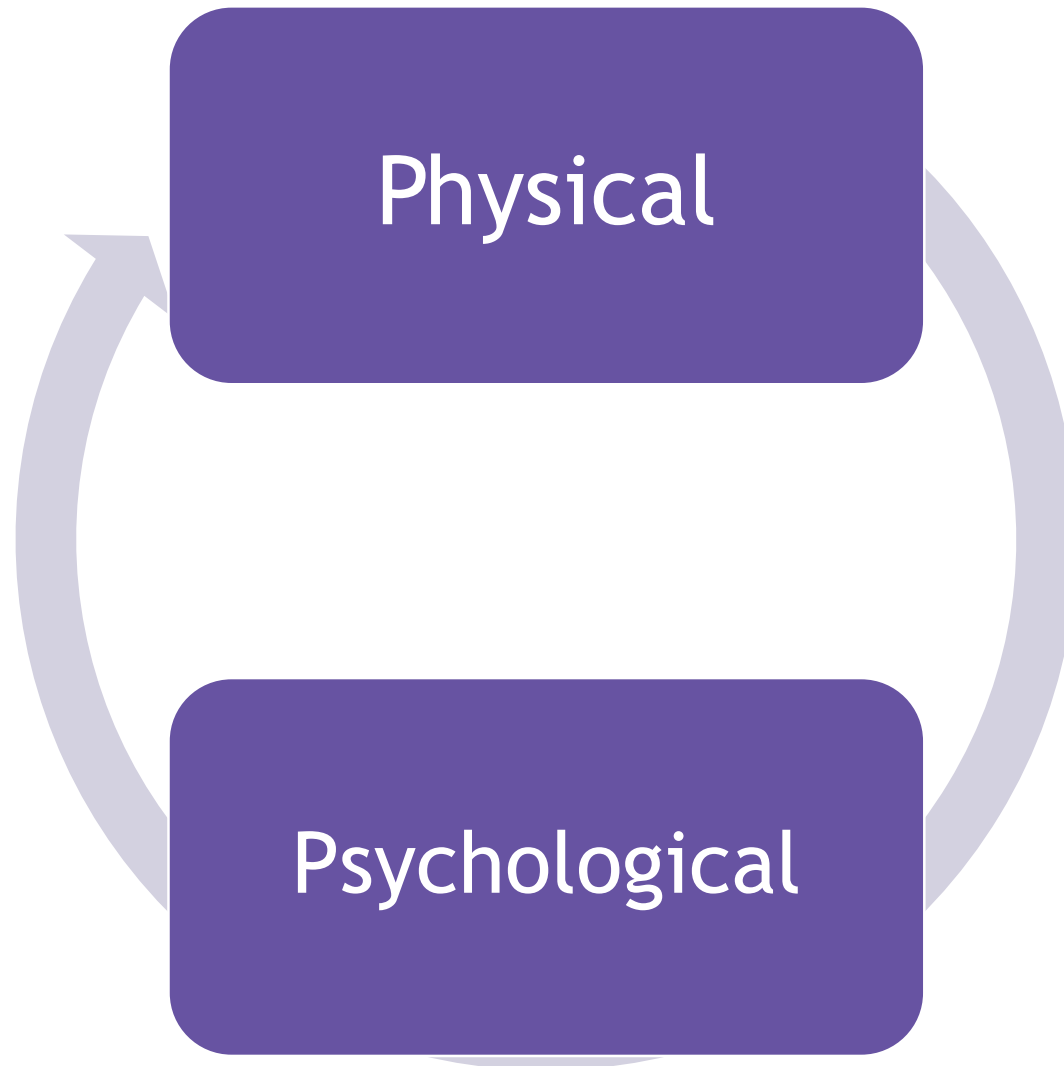
## Current Situation with Menstrual Health Products in Nepal

Types	Availability	Commonly Used location
Menstrual Cups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very recently introduced by few NGOs</li> <li>• Not widely available</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not commonly used among Nepalese women</li> <li>• Few pilot projects are on progress</li> </ul>



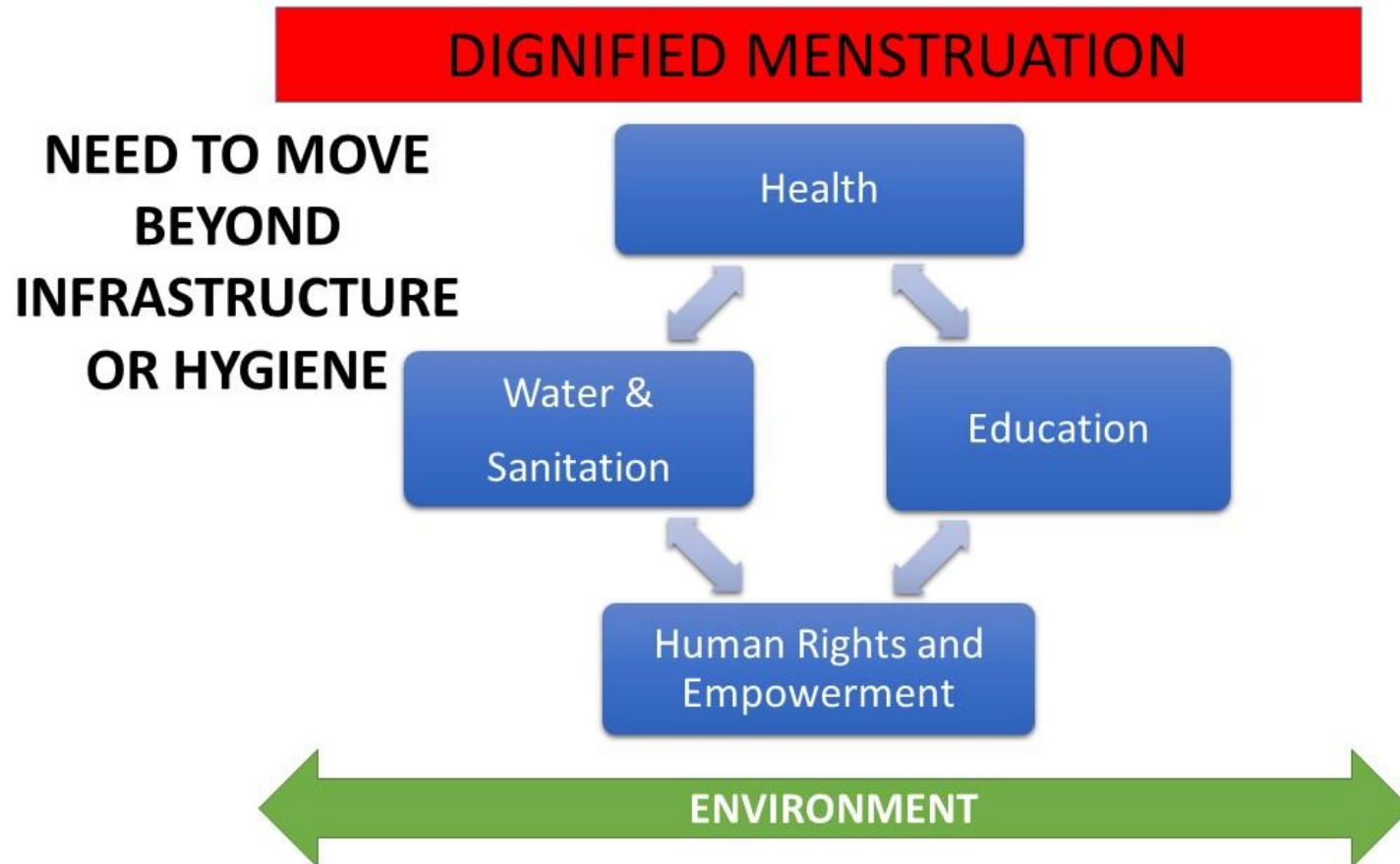


# Impact on Girls and Women's Health



## Impact on Girls and Women's Health

Dimensions	Impact
Physical Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hygiene and care of MH products leads to many complications related with reproductive health e.g. vaginitis</li> <li>• Physical discomfort due to not having an appropriate products</li> <li>• Lack of availability of the products limit the physical activity/movement (e. g. school) of the girls</li> </ul>
Psychological Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotional distress during menstruation due to shame and lack of dignity regards to products including purchasing, using and waste management</li> <li>• Risk of depression and suicide ideation</li> </ul>



Call for ACTION

### Urgency of Standard and Quality of Menstrual Products

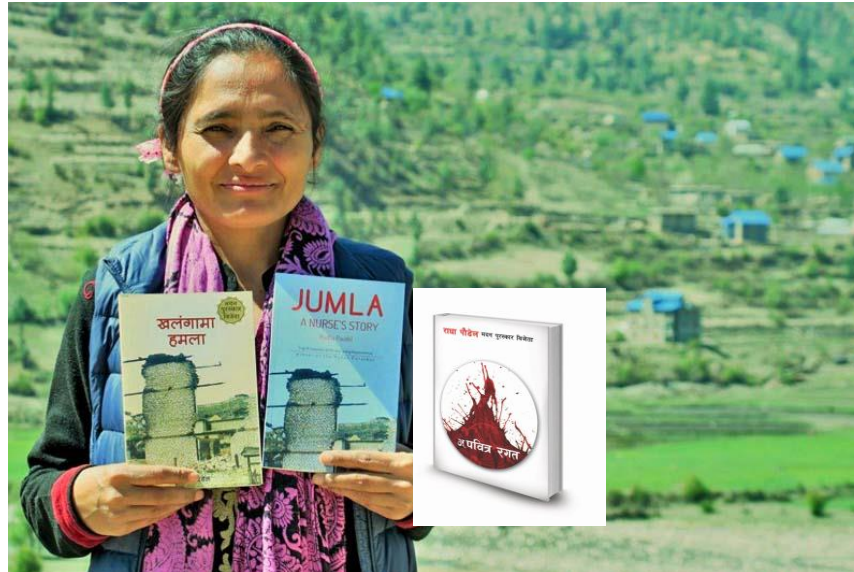
#### Practice:

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)
2. Mandatory Provision of pad in school (2019)
3. Increasing demand of productions

# Thank you



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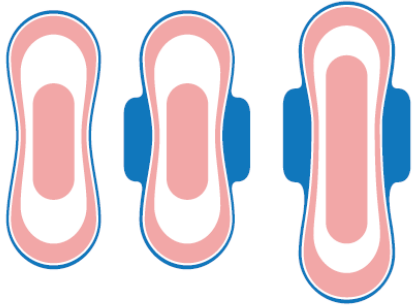


# The Long Road to Menstrual Health Product Standards - *Experiences from India and East Africa*

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

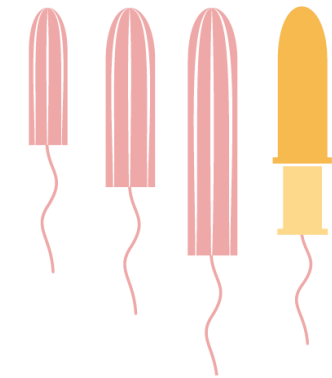


Image source: My and My Cup - Menstrual Cup Workshop - Ruby Life, 2019





## 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