



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

July 2021



Reproductive Health  
**SUPPLIES COALITION**



# 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



AFRICAN COALITION  
FOR MENSTRUAL  
HEALTH MANAGEMENT



**M**  
MHMPA  
PRACTITIONERS' ALLIANCE NEPAL

**MHAI**  
Menstrual Health Alliance India



DAYS FOR  
GIRLS

**Madami**  
by MH Hub

## Our Partner Consultants

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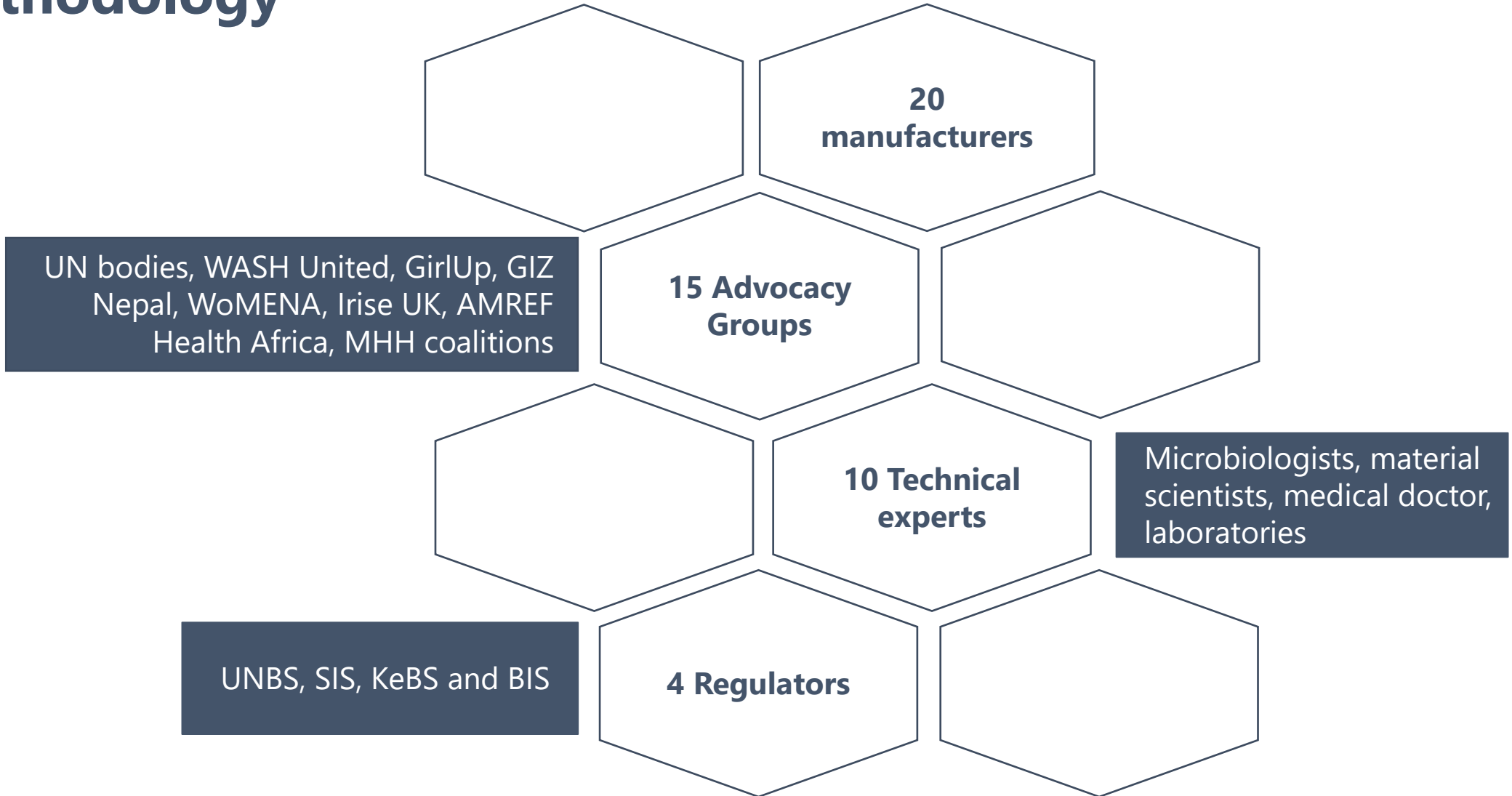
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# Methodology



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



Reusable  
cloth  
pads



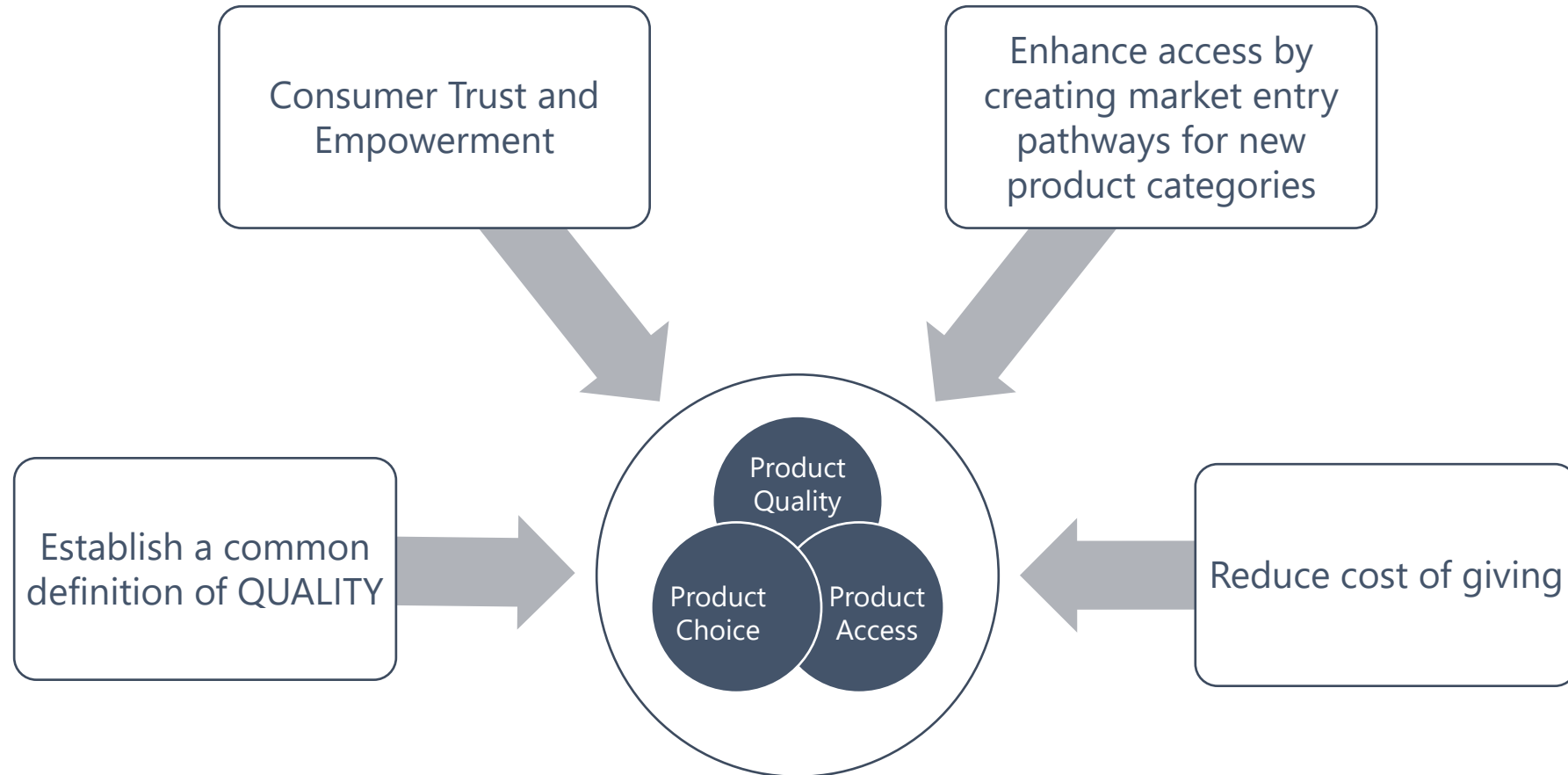
# Overview of Standards Landscape

Menstrual

Compostable  
pads



# Why are standards needed?





# 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



Reusable  
cloth  
pads

Panel Discussion

# Experiences of Standards Development and Enforcement from LMICs

Menstrual

Compostable  
pads



# Our Panelists

Mr. Sipiwo Matshoba, Deptment 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

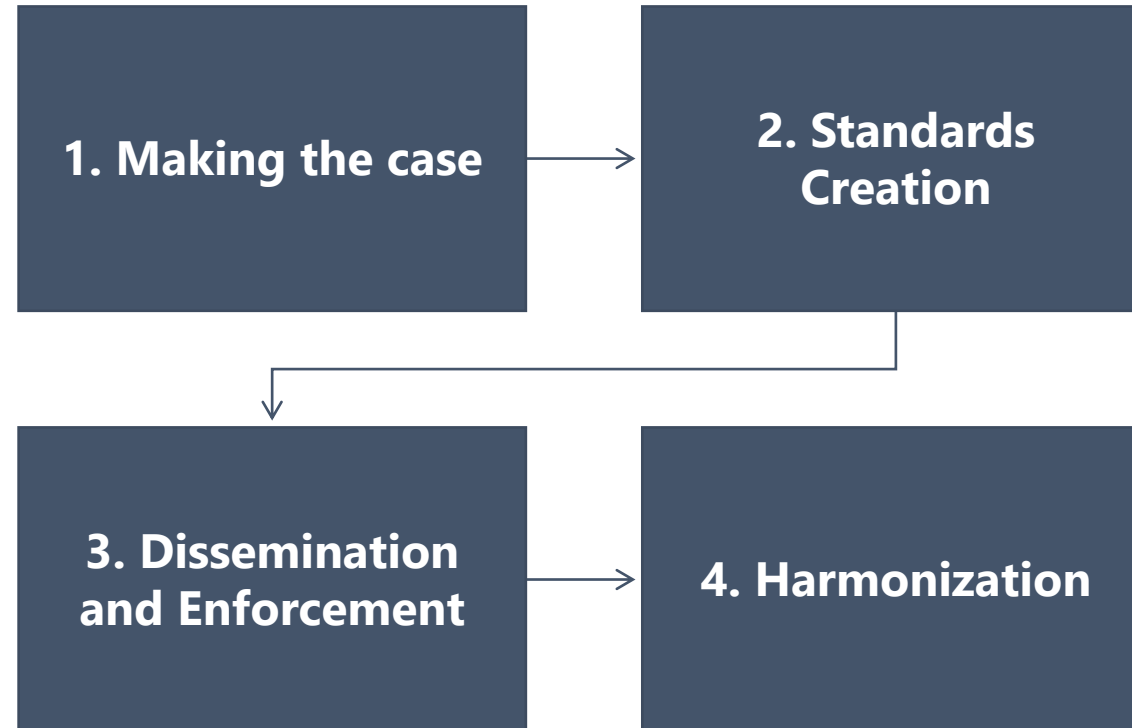
Shivani Swamy, VP - Sales, Middle East and Africa, Livinguard Technologies

Sophia Grinvalds, Co-founder and Director, AFRIpads

Neville Okwaro, MHH Champion, Kenya



# Process Lessons





# 1. Making the Case 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

1.

## Material and Design

- Included in almost all LMIC country standards but not in US FDA or INDA/EDANA guidelines

2.

## Fitness of Purpose

- Absorbency and retention included in all standards to determine fitness of purpose

3.

## Hygiene and bio-burden safety

- pH and bio-burden testing of final product included in most standards

4.

## Material Safety

- Biocompatibility testing advised in most standards as per ISO 10993
- More nuanced treatment needed

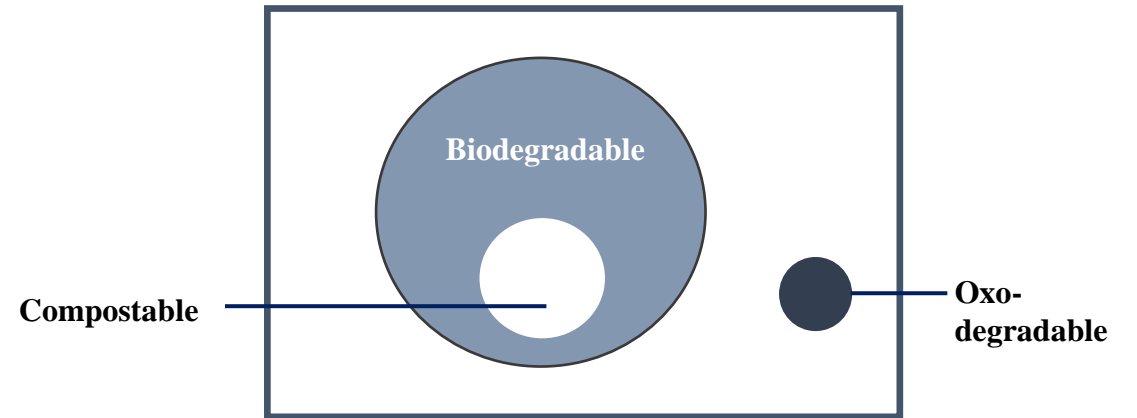


# Technical Specifications

5.

## Environmental Safety

- Increasing concern around compostability
- Validity of tests still questionable without suitable infrastructure for composting in LMICs





# Thank You

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