

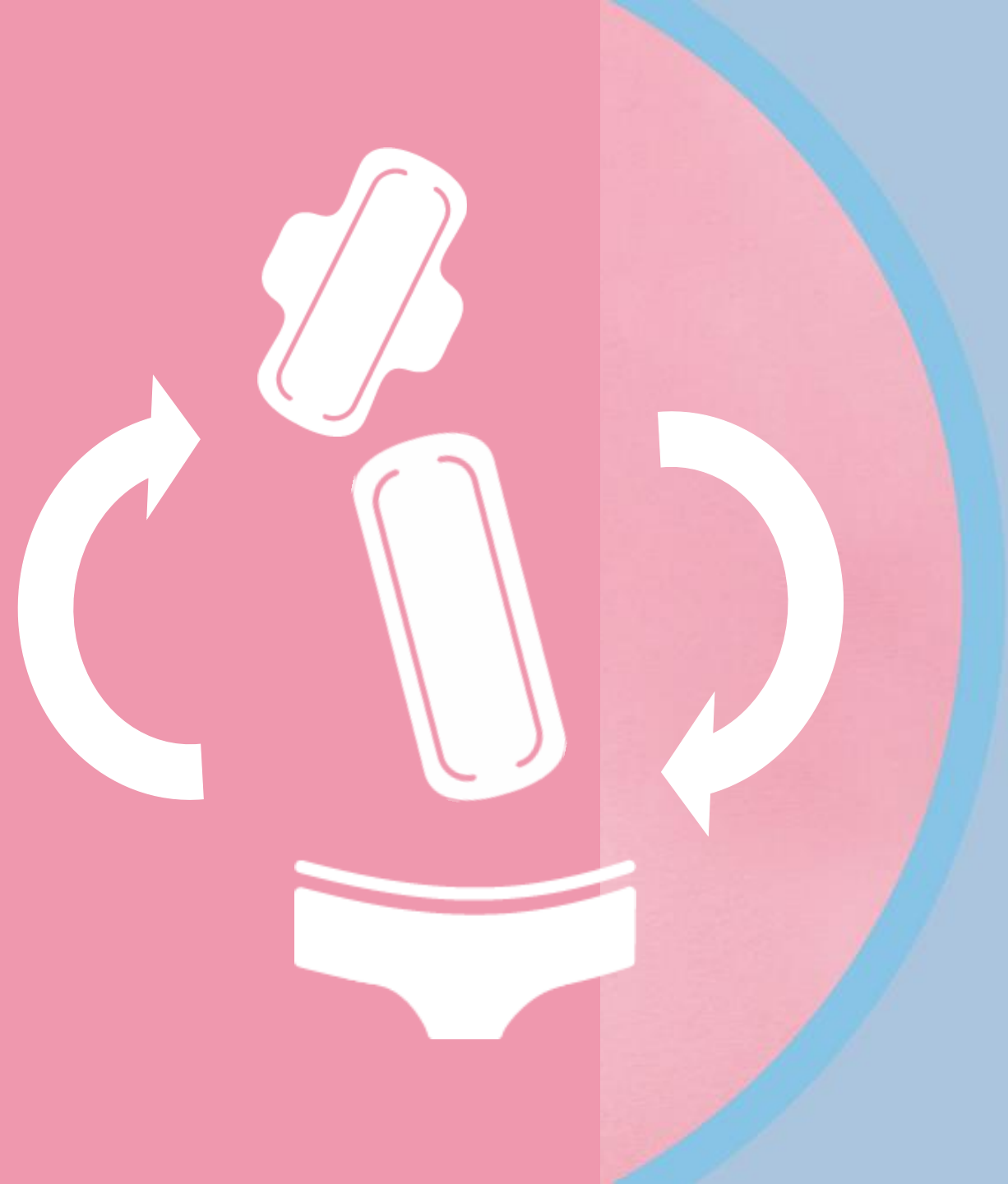
# WEBINAR SERIES

Standards for

Reusable

Menstrual Products

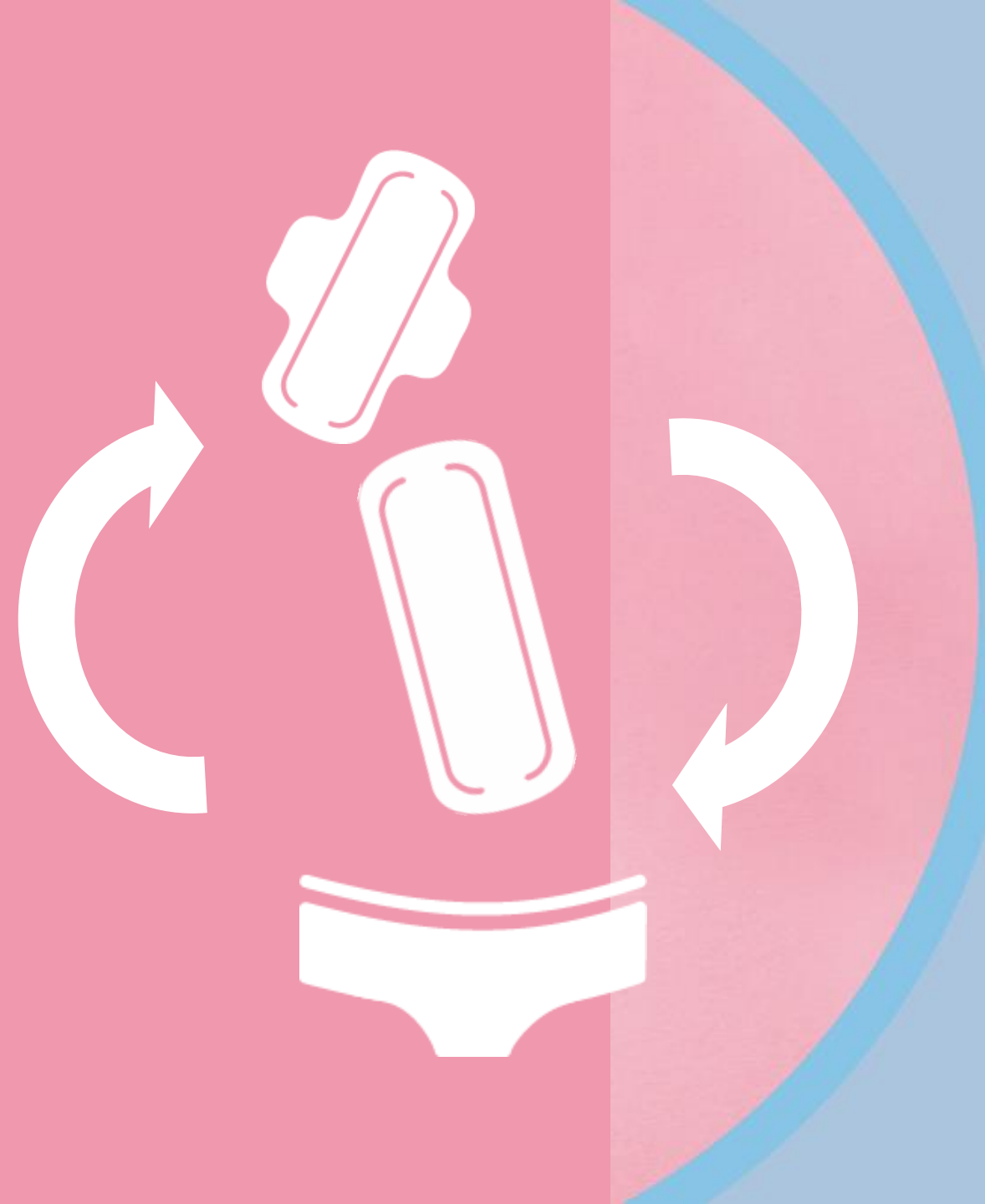




Topics that will be covered:

- Overview of reusables
- Standardization Parameters
- Existing Standards Landscape
- Gaps & Challenges

Please add your points and questions into the chat box !



SPEAKERS:

**Sophia Grinvalds**, AFRIpads (for the key note)

**Torben Holm Larsen**, Real ReliefWay

**Shivani Swamy**, Living Guard

**Audrey Anderson Duckett**, Be Girl

**(Mahesh Nagessar**, South African Bureau of Standard)

MODERATOR

**Ina Jurga**, International Coordinator MH Day/ WASH United



# Reusable Menstrual Products

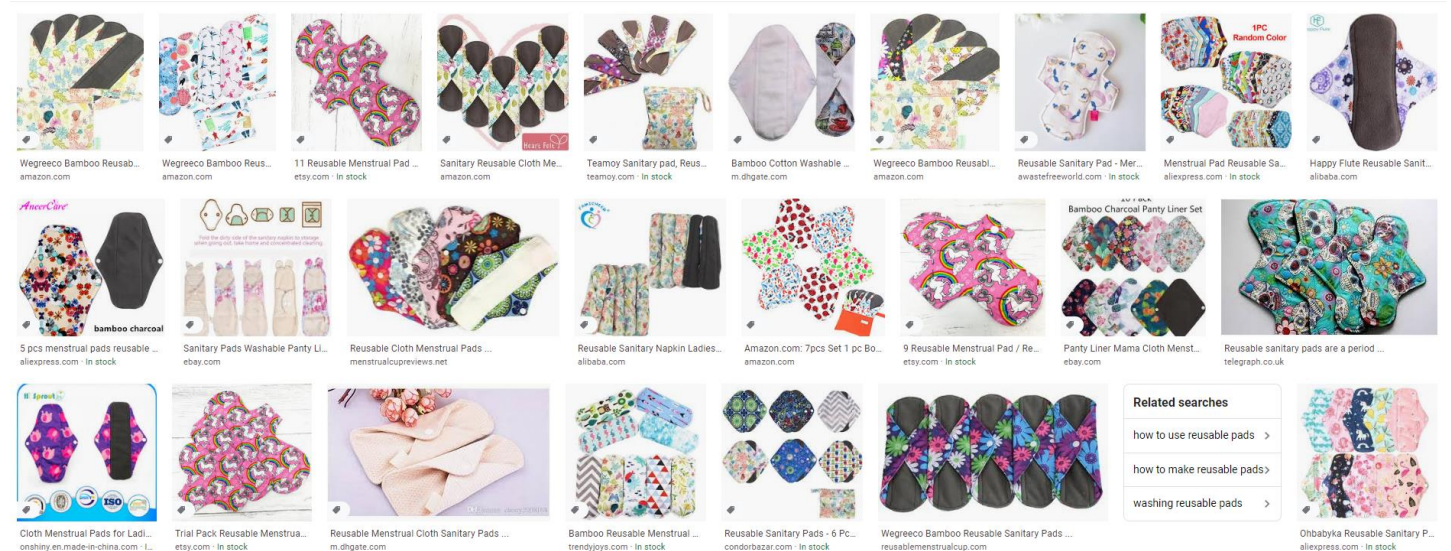
## Types of Reusable Pads

- Reusable / Cloth
  - + Sanitary Pad / Towel / Napkin
- Intra-labial Pads
- Period Panties / Underwear

## Benefits of Reusable MH Products in LMICs

- Cost-saving
- Environmentally-friendly
- Convenience (durability, reusability, single purchase)
- Humanitarian settings

Many brands and types of reusable pads are available on the market, increasingly in LMICs, **but what levels of standardization or conformity exist** across these products?



# Without product standards ...

The promotion of the **use of safe** and **effective** menstrual products is a shared aim of MHH sector stakeholders.

This requires consumers being able to **access** and **choose** from a **variety of quality and certified** products.

## Manufacturers

- Not held accountable for the quality or safety of the MH products they produce.

## Retailers / Distributors / NGOs

- Can sell or distribute MH products irrespective of quality, performance, durability, etc.

## Government / Regulatory bodies

- Have limited frameworks to regulate, inspect, certify and enforce the quality of MH products on the market.

## Consumers / Beneficiaries

- Have inadequate protections and assurances about the quality, safety and function of the MH products they buy.

# Standardization Parameters for Reusable Pads

The parameters, content and specifications typically present in a standard for reusable pads:

## General

- Terms and definitions
- Description / categorization
- Size (dimensions)
- Material components or qualities
- Construction

## Product & Performance

- Workmanship
- **Absorbency & Retention capacity**
- pH Level
- Total viable bacterial count (1,000 per gram of sanitary pad)
- Microbiology levels (Enterobacteriaceae, Staphylococcus aureus, and Pseudomonas aeruginosa)
- Durability (30-60 washes)
- Odor
- Drying time
- Color fastness

## Packaging & Marking

- Labeling
- Use and care instructions
- Disposal method

# Standardization Parameters for Reusable Pads

The parameters, content and specifications typically present in a standard for reusable pads:

## Sampling & Testing

- Frequency and scale of tests
- Random vs. mandatory testing
- Sampling methods

## Test Methods & Procedures

- Determination of pH of aqueous extract
- Determination of absorbency capacity and rate
- Determination of water soluble coloring matter

## Manufacturing Environment

- Factory requirements
- Facilities
- Employee requirements

# Questions

1. What standard are you using to date?
2. What testing criteria do you apply? What are the limitations especially in case of a reusable products
3. On what basis do you provide information for the users (materials, usage, handling, drying, ...)



## Parameters ideally covered by a standard for reusable sanitary pads

- **Durability**
  - Materials, composition
  - Tensile strength
  - Workmanship
- **Absorbancy**
  - TBS, UBS same basic test. Is it really an absorbency test or more a leakage test or a combination? TBS also test absorbency rate.
  - ISO 20158, tests time and quantity of water to saturation
  - ISO 9073 and others
- **Drying time**
  - ISO 13934
  - Simple self made test, wetting, drying and weighing.
- **Safety**
  - pH value
  - Bioburden (see next slide)
  - Other residues

## Parameters ideally covered by a standard for reusable sanitary pads

- **Bioburden**

Does it make sense to check bioburden on reusable sanitary pads? Can we avoid it?

What if the product claims to be antimicrobial? Should there be an optional test for this, that would allow the claim? Test AATCC 100, JIS L 1902

- **Other tests**

Size

Odour

Design of the pad

Colour fastness, rubbing, washing

Abrasion resistance

Water soluble matter

# Questions

4. For a product that is emerging in the market, if you do not have the information, where should a company look for/ access information?
5. Can you provide an example what you include in a Standard-Operation Procedure?

# Questions

6. What type of standard does menstrual underwear fall under - and/or which do you use? As a novelty product, does this create an advantage or disadvantage ?
7. Some concerns raised about finding PFA in certain brands (Not BeGirl) - what is your take on material usage and safety?

# MANAGING MENSTRUATION IS A GENDER EQUITY ISSUE.



72% ↑

MOBILITY



23% ↑

FEELINGS OF  
NORMALCY



44% ↑

PARTICIPATION  
IN ACTIVITIES

The above findings from Be Girl's 2019 study in 2 provinces in Mozambique were all statistically significant at  $p < 0.05$  when comparing the group that received an education workshop and 2 pairs of Be Girl menstrual underwear with the group that received the education workshop only.

# National Standards - Africa

| Country/Region      | Status          | Authority                               | Standard Name                  | Variations in Parameters  |
|---------------------|-----------------|---|--------------------------------|---|
| <b>Tanzania</b>     | Existing (2014) | Tanzania Bureau of Standards (TBS)      | TZS 1659:2014<br>First Edition | No durability requirement<br>No odour requirement   |
| <b>Uganda</b>       | Existing (2017) | Uganda National Bureau of Standards     | US 1782:2017<br>First Edition  |   |
| <b>Zimbabwe</b>     | Existing (2017) | Standards Association of Zimbabwe       | ZWS 2013:2017<br>First Edition | Sampling Scale not defined in standard<br>No use and care instructions<br>No drying time recommendation<br>Only standard that includes 'maternity pads'                       |
| <b>Malawi</b>       | Existing (2018) | Malawi Bureau of Standards (MBS)        | MS 1445:2018<br>First Edition  | No odour requirement  |
| <b>Ethiopia</b>     | Existing (2018) | Ethiopian Standards Agency (ESA)        | ES 6346:2018<br>First Edition  | Only standard to include disposal instructions.<br>No microbiology requirements<br>No use and care instructions<br>No durability requirement<br>No drying time recommendation |
| <b>South Africa</b> | Final Draft     | South Africa Bureau of Standards (SABS) | SANS 1812:20xx                 | Sampling Lot & Scale absent from final draft standard<br>No use and care instructions<br>No drying time recommendation  |

# Regional Standards - Africa

| Country/Region                | Status             | Authority                                       | Standard Name   | Membership   |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|---|-----------------|--|
| <b>East African Community</b> | Final Draft (2019) | East African Standards Committee (EASC)         | FDEAS 96-2:2019 | 6 member countries: Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda Burundi, South Sudan |
| <b>ARSO</b>                   | Final Draft (2019) | African Organization for Standardization (ARSO) | DARS 1575:2017  | 36 member countries  |



# National Standards - Other

| Country/Region       | Status      | Authority                               | Standard Name  | Comments  |
|----------------------|-------------|---|--|---|
| <b>India</b>         | Final Draft | Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS)        | IS 14922   | Only (draft) standard that references anti-bacterial properties   |
| <b>United States</b> | Existing    | U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) | Menstrual Tampons and Pads: Information for Premarket Notification Submissions (510(k)s)<br>Classified as non-significant risk (NSR) medical devices | Materials, performance, Hygiene (staph, TSST-1 for tampons, normal vaginal flora), Toxicology<br><br>Includes disposable pads, tampons, washable cloth pads and intra-labial pads |

# Questions

For many countries reusables are a new type of product and standards are just developing

8. What are the key differences in approaching a reusable product standards across countries?
9. What are the different development, compliance and enforcement protocols across LMICs and related gaps?
10. In South Africa further tests that have altered the finalization of the standards (what prompted it, and what is the value of such tests?)

- South Africa is almost in **the finalization stages of SANS 1812, *The manufacture of washable, reusable sanitary towels***. It is vital as it offers an option to girls and women especially in our tough economic climate. The standard if complied to, offers consumer a peace of mind that products are what it is intended to do.
- Sanitary dignity framework mentions sanitary towels (which can be disposable and reusable). **Women have a choice to use what is preferable, available and affordable**. This also has a great impact on the reduction of waste.
- It is recommended in the standard that **proper care instructions and warning statements are clearly marked**. Products are in the market already but the standard will only help to protect the consumer if she intends buying and using the product and can surely make the right decision.
- The standard covers the manufacturing process until packaging. Human element, use and care of the product is uncontrollable but recommendations must be clearly defined.
- ISO 13485, Medical devices – Quality management systems – Requirements for regulatory purposes.
- ISO 15223-1, Medical devices – Symbols to be used with medical device labels, labelling and information to be supplied – Part 1: General requirements.
- 
- We cover absorbency, pH, microbiological, loss of fibre (critical as fibre loss transferred to the human body that can sometimes cause medical complications)

# Questions

What about other quality criteria:

- Dimensional stability - washing
- Test method for the self-disinfecting or Antibacterial or antifungal finishes
- Product information: To ensure safety of product with multiple uses, the manufacturer should define the process and temperature for washing the reusable sanitary napkin. The manufacturer should also define the life cycle of the product for reuse in terms of number of washes.

# Some Gaps & Challenges

Effective development and enforcement of product standards requires public and private sector **interest, resources, capacity** and **commitment** ...

## To develop standards

Limited number of standards can be developed/reviewed annually  
Necessitates qualified and robust technical committees to ensure the standard is appropriate

## To test, inspect and certify products

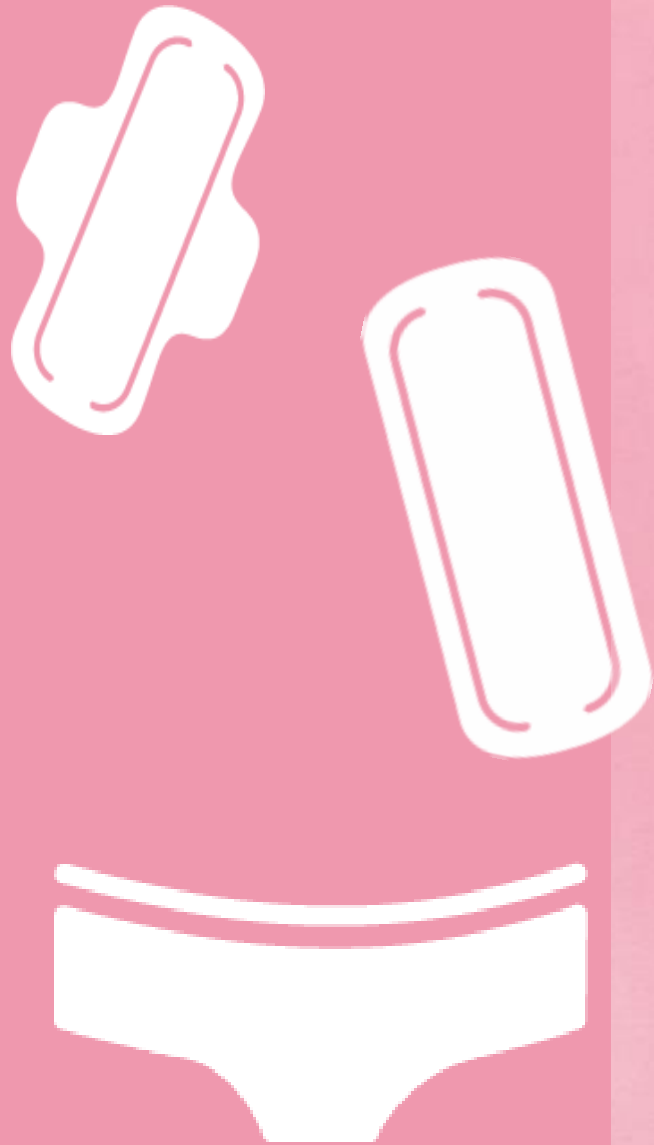
Labs that are certified and well- equipped (equipment + materials)  
Qualified lab technicians  
Timely lab results

## To monitor, enforce and support compliance

Manufacturers  
Retailers  
Distributors  
NGOs

Standards must  
leave room for  
**innovation!**

Progress  
depends on it.



WHAT ARE YOUR QUESTIONS TO THE EXPERTS?

WHAT ARE IMPORTANT POINTS THAT WERE NOT TOUCHED IN THE DISCUSSION?

WHAT ARE THE EXPERIENCES IN YOUR COUNTRY / SETTING?





# 3 PART WEBSERIES ON MENSTRUAL PRODUCT QUALITY & STANDARDS

DISPOSABLE MENSTRUAL PRODUCTS  
MARCH – REUSABLES  
APRIL - MENSTRUAL CUPS

[secretariat@rhsupplies.org](mailto:secretariat@rhsupplies.org)  
[info@menstrualhygieneday.org](mailto:info@menstrualhygieneday.org)



# Key Concerns

User habits & responsibilities = drying in the open?

Innovations in new products

Is there a minimum standard for self/ home made product (while not commercialized, they are still distributed)

