

Re-thinking traditional feminine hygiene products for Africa's young women

Cuplings Foundation managing director and co-founder, Farah Abdulla has made it part of her life's purpose to effect positive change.



Source: Supplied.

This year the foundation aims to raise more than R7m to fund the distribution of 25,000 re-usable soft silicone menstrual cups by Christmas. “Each cup has a lifespan of 10 years and eliminates the dependency that younger women and girls have on feminine hygiene products.” Abdulla said.

This, she added, was of particular benefit to less fortunate individuals who are dependent on various ‘pad programmes’ that distribute disposable products to communities, sometimes inconsistently.

Abdulla added: “It’s washable, easily wearable and saves thousands of rands for users who presently purchase tampons or pads every month. The value to people who cannot afford to buy hygiene products, is immense.”

Abdulla said it is estimated that more than 2.5 million South African girls miss a week of school every month due to their period. “This could add up to two years of education lost, when adding up time lost over an average scholastic career.”

Accessibility a challenge

And lack off access to sanitary products is becoming a greater challenge as socio-economic conditions continue to add pressure.

“Most women who live in villages, impoverished areas and shelters cannot afford to buy sanitary products even when they are made available in their local stores. Instead they are forced to use clothes, tissues, leaves and other unsanitary methods to deal with their monthly period,” Abdulla said.

While lack of access to feminine hygiene products remains a major problem in developing nations, the impact of disposable sanitary products also holds significant environmental consequence.

Individuals use between five to 10,000 pads or tampons during their lifetimes, and worldwide around 17 billion pads and tampons are sold annually. Once used, they fill up waste sites around the world, and according to studies by Global Citizen, non-compostable period products can take up to 800 years to decompose.

“Cognisance of the damage that these products can do to the environment and the negative impact that not having access to feminine hygiene products can have on various life stages of a women, particularly young women, should make women’s period wellness at the top of socio-environmental agendas worldwide,” Abdulla added.

Silicone menstrual kits are biodegradable.

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