



WEBINAR - Making the Case for Menstrual Health: Lessons from the Field

May 26, 2020

Q&A Follow Up

Q1. By fully integrating MH programming with ASRHR, do we risk having access to MH completely neglected in contexts that are still not open to addressing topics related to sexuality?

A1. MH needs to be incorporated between all relevant sectors - it's not about just one. Also we take quite gradual approaches to open up the space for talking openly about menstrual health and beyond.

Q2.1 Audrey, did you include boys & girls in the same class? How was the dynamic? Were the separated groups reunited at a certain point during your program?

A2.1 Thanks for the question! Boys' and girls' workshops were held separately in same-sex groups. We found this to be important, especially as this workshop was the first exposure to menstrual health education for many young people, and it's important to have a safe space.

Q2.2. For us we include both boys and girls, at first they were uncomfortable but as the discussions continued they became more responsive and they were eager to know how they can support the girls during their periods

A2.2. I like that you include and engage the boys because it is of immense importance for them to be well educated on matters of menstrual health because it affects them as well.

Q3. Audrey- Love your educational program! Just a product question. Do you produce locally and to what degree do you partner with the local community? In the production facility in or near Mozambique?

A3. Be Girl produces our products through partnerships with manufacturing facilities globally - our focus is to produce the highest-quality sustainable products at affordable costs and create access through both direct distribution to girls in need and through market mechanisms. Within Mozambique, we work with local entrepreneurs and resellers to sell products at affordable costs and generate income, as well as partnering with nonprofits for distribution free of cost. There are better local livelihood





opportunities available in selling quality products vs. producing them at small scale.

Q4. I would love to know if anyone tried to work with mothers and understand what has been the role of mothers to support daughters towards transforming any social/family/gender norms which have been restrictive in nature for the girls?

A4. Hello Susmita - great question. In our participatory photography element, girls documented their menstrual experiences including restrictions and challenges faced at home and in the community. They shared their photos and stories in exhibitions at school with parents, peers, teachers and community. This was really powerful in changing attitudes at home and in the community but we still found that it was harder to change attitudes of older people.

Q5. In Zimbabwe specifically Masvingo the price of sanitary wear is rising rapidly and we all know that this is affecting mostly adolescents girls and young women. Is menstrual management still a priority in the COVID 19 period (Lockdown)?

A5: We must make it a priority! Certainly, saving lives is at the top of government and nonprofit priority lists - as it should be. However, with varying levels of lockdown and reduced access to basic needs, it is more critical than ever to ensure menstrual management.

Q6. Many thanks for an interesting set of learnings! Also interested to know how panelists balance scale and sustainability with the need to tailor approaches to community/region/country.

A6: First of all, we need an approach that works, and we must never sacrifice effectiveness in the name of scale. However, if something *is* working, we absolutely must position for scale and sustainability. Be Girl has tackled this question by developing a core MH intervention package that has been validated across 30 countries, and we partner with local organizations to adapt it for diverse contexts. We offer sustainable products validated by girls and women in multiple contexts, and we produce these high-performance, long-lasting products via partnerships with global manufacturers to scale quickly. The question of sustainability must also be considered within the parameters of available budgets and timeframes. Real, effective, market-systems development requires a time- and resource-intensive investment. If this is not available, distribution of sustainable, quality products through dignity kits, for example, may in fact be the most effective use of funds.



Q7. Just a question - why are we only talking about adolescent girls? Is there not a benefit to supporting the wider community of women on MH and would this further increase acceptability and support? In many rural areas where we work, no one has access to quality products and particularly when it comes to integrating with SRH this is especially important (for contraceptive-induced bleeding, for example). I am interested as we are having this debate internally and notice that MH discussions are primarily focused on adolescents as an audience.

A7: This is a great point, and we need an intersectional approach to support menstruating people of all ages and identities. This is not a matter of “either/or” but rather “both/all.” These programs discussed happened to focus on adolescent girls; indeed, the onset of menarche (a girl’s first period) is a pivotal point in her life, presenting a strong case for investment to set girls on a path of positive development throughout their lives. However, managing menstruation is a gender equity issue, regardless of age, with far-reaching effects for a woman’s health, economic participation, individual and household resilience, and more.

Q8. Audrey - have you found any particular advantages to using menstrual underwear as opposed to reusable pads?

A8. Yes! First, the menstrual underwear is a full intervention - with pads, girls still need underwear to attach the pads, and the girls who are most in need often don’t have their own underwear. With menstrual underwear, they have a full solution. We’ve also found that the underwear faces a bit less stigma as well, because pads are easily recognized as menstrual products. Stigma is a separate issue that of course must be addressed, but in the meantime the combined underwear product can make it easier for girls to wash and dry products.

Q9. Audrey - I’m also interested in hearing more about your experiences on menstrual underwear, reusable pads and cups for scale-up in terms of costs, preferences, durability and other considerations

A9. Our goal is to provide girls and women with *choice* in managing menstruation. Menstrual underwear is by far our most popular product, testing the best across different contexts, and facing the fewest cultural barriers. Menstrual cups are a great sustainable option, lasting 5-10 years. Washable pads are sometimes preferred by women who already have underwear that they like to use, or want to take advantage of the larger size pad option for very heavy flows or postpartum use. The pads and panties last 2 years or longer with proper care. We partner with global manufacturers to offer quick scale-up and keep costs down.





Q10. How do you reach the girls who are not in school?

A10. In Zimbabwe you can get them through mixing with stakeholders in the communities to mobilize girls and they attend the programs

Q11. Audrey - I am interested to understand how many pairs of panties you gave to each girl and what the absorbency of the panties is. Could the girls use one pair for the whole day? How did they manage with changing panties at school? Thank you

A11. Thanks! When we do direct distribution, we recommend giving girls two pairs of panties each. Our products are designed with built-in menstrual protection through a pocket that holds absorbent material for menstrual flow, and for an average flow 1 pair will last a girl all day long. However, the pocket was designed to allow them to easily change the inserts and add more absorbent material, either disposable (like toilet tissue) or reusable (any cloths, etc.). Then at home they can wash one panty while they wear the other. The products use high-performance materials to be able to wash and dry very quickly so they are ready to go in the morning with a fresh pair.

