



Menstrual Cups as a Menstrual Hygiene Management Method in Uganda

RHSC webinar
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Schoolgirls receiving WoMena training on **hygiene and menstrual cup use** in Gulu, Uganda (WoMena, 2013)

Menstrual Hygiene Management – the Issue & Menstrual Cups as a Potential Solution



Issue: Menstrual Hygiene Management



WoMena study participant/schoolgirl in Gulu demonstrating how to fold cloth for menstrual protection (Tom Saater, 2014)

- 25% of the world's population menstruates
- Many disadvantaged women and girls in rural Uganda and around the world lack access to appropriate menstrual hygiene management (MHM) methods* References at end of this document.
- Many resort to using other poor-quality methods, e.g. **rags, tissue paper, school exercise books, pieces of sponge torn from mattresses, bark cloth** and other unhygienic methods
- Unhygienic and inappropriate methods have far-reaching implications including:
 - Reproductive infections
 - Leakage, social stigma and discomfort
 - Have been linked to infrequent school attendance, high dropout rates and reduced participation in income-generating and social activities

Potential **solution**: Menstrual cups

- The menstrual cup is a MHM method with the following advantages:
 1. One cup is reusable for up to 10 years
 2. Economic (\$10-25 per cup)
 3. Minimal impact on the environment
 4. Effective: less leakage than many methods
 5. Comfortable (for many women)
 6. Probably safer than many traditional options (if used hygienically)
 7. Can be used without knickers
 8. Needs less water than reusable pads
- Menstrual cups are increasingly being considered as a possible way to improve MHM, especially by NGOs that want to provide MHM methods to girls and women but want to do so on a **sustainable** basis
- However: only few studies have been conducted on the use of menstrual cups' impact on health, and accessibility remains very low



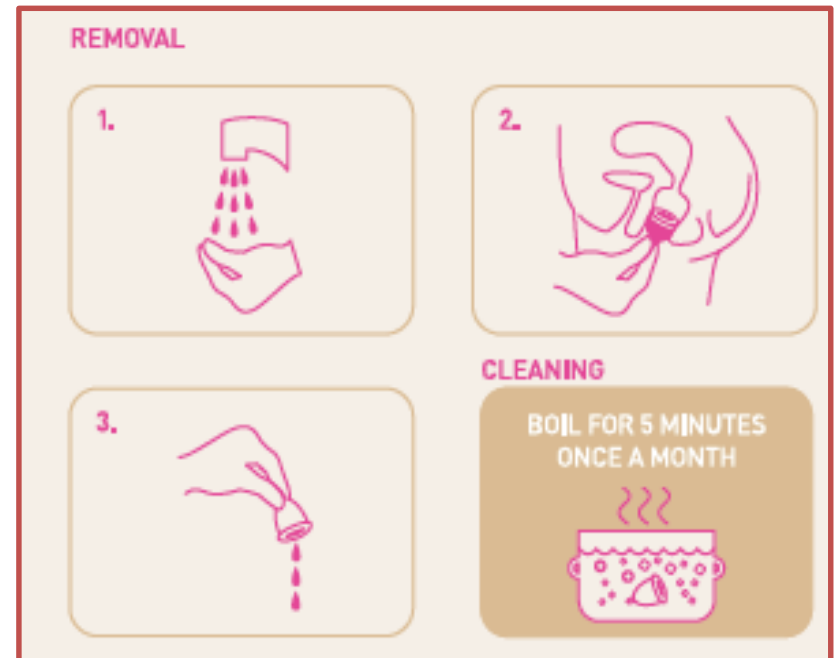
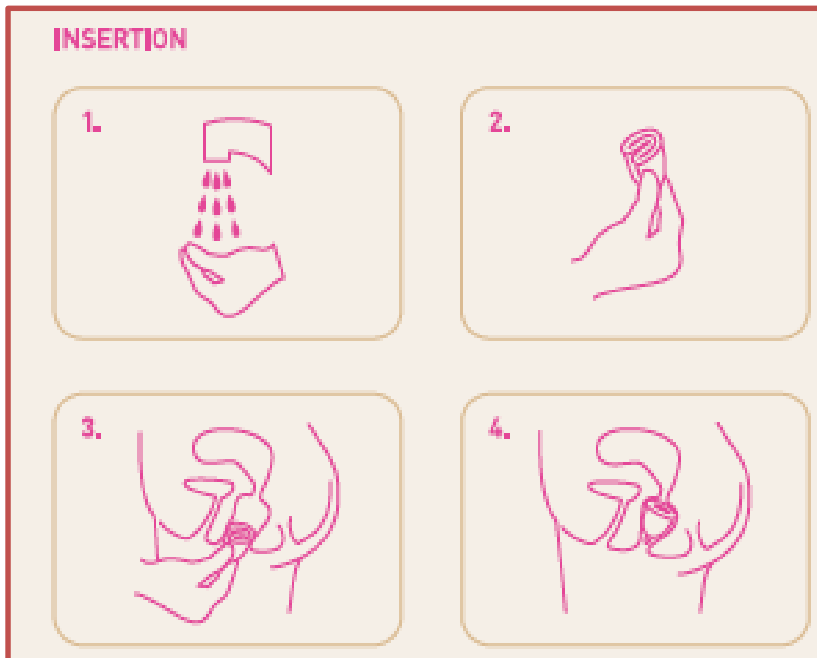
Ruby Cup (menstrual cup brand)

A menstrual cup – how does it work?

- Wash hands
- Fold the cup in a C shape
- Gently insert it into the vagina
- After 4 – 12 hours, pinch the base to release the vacuum
- Remove the cup, empty it, wipe/rinse it off (tissue, water) and reinsert

In between periods:

- To disinfect the cup: Boil for 5 minutes OR put in water with sterilising tablet for 15 min OR pour boiling water on it 2-3 times
- Store in safe place (container/empty plastic bottle)



WoMena – Organisation & Activities



Our purpose

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN INNOVATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

- WoMena works with **implementation of innovative reproductive health solutions** in low-resource settings.
- Currently focusing on **menstrual hygiene management (MHM) and menstrual cups (MC)** in Uganda.
- **Objectives:** to identify neglected reproductive health issues, research, communication and policy gaps, and **develop evidence and tools** to address them.
- **Ultimate goal:** **making appropriate MHM methods including MCs widely available in Uganda** (if MCs are found to be an appropriate solution in this context).



Our activities

Four types of activities:

1. Research & evaluations
2. Implementation support
3. Raising public awareness
4. Advocacy & policy

Our name embodies our key interests:

- **Women** - heavily affected by reproductive health issues
- **Men** - involving men in implementing health solutions
- **Mena** - goddess of menstruation



WoMena volunteer presenting a menstrual cup to girls from Gulu school MC research study (Tom Saater, 2014)

Introducing menstrual cups in Uganda



Relevant projects, Uganda

	Project	Activity type	Partner(s)
2012	Kitgum: Menstrual cup pilot study (31 young women)	Research & evaluations	Uganda Red Cross Society
2013	Gulu: Schoolgirl menstrual cup study (194 girls)	Research & evaluations	Uganda Red Cross Society
2014	Katakwi: Menstrual cup intervention (first 150 then scaled up to 400 girls)	Implementation support	DanChurchAid & Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation
2015	Kitgum, Gulu & Katakwi: Menstrual cup intervention follow up study (150 girls/women, family & community members)	Research & evaluations	DanChurchAid & Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation, Mbarara University of Science & Technology
	Lira: Menstrual cup distribution/education to female staff & their partners (15 couples) & radio program on MHM & menstrual cups	Awareness raising	Radio Wa, Straight Talk Foundation
	Moroto: Menstrual cup intervention (70 young women, to be scaled up to additional 200 girls & women in 2016)	Implementation support	Welthungerhilfe
2016	Mpigi: Menstrual cup distribution & training for "Ask Without Shame" team (25 young women & male colleagues)	Awareness raising	Social Innovation Academy
	Entebbe: Menstrual cup intervention for secondary schools (26 girls)	Implementation support	London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, Uganda Virus Research Institute, Menstrual Cup Uganda
	Kampala, Mbarara: Information sessions on menstrual cups & other menstrual management methods, menstruation & puberty at secondary schools and universities	Awareness raising	Public Health Ambassadors Uganda, Improve the Youth Uganda, Mbarara University



USER LEVEL:

Needs & challenges identified

Needs

- Good understanding of how to use the new solution (“mastering use”)
- Supportive environment (teachers, peers & parents)
- Possibility to get questions answered once girls had started use

Challenges

- Often little water available, less soap
- Difficulties in finding containers & places to boil/sterilize cups privately
- Especially younger girls not always comfortable to ask their questions in training sessions
- Many concerns about “breaking” the virginity

Addressing needs: Support structures

- Teacher, school nurse and/or mother focal points with cup experience & relevant training skills
- (In)formal peer support groups
- Info sessions & follow up meetings with parents & school management
- Including boys in selected sessions of girls' training
- Mail/whatsapp Q&A groups for teachers



WoMena volunteer and teacher presenting a menstrual cup to girls in Gulu (Tom Saater, 2014)

Do you have a sexual problem or question?
Are you afraid to tell or ask anyone?

(+256) 070 6666 001

ASK WITHOUT SHAME!
free and confidential

SMS, WhatsApp CALL or download "Ask Without Shame" in 

- Android-based app "Ask Without Shame" with menstruation & cup Q&A (cup component to launch in June 2016)
- Follow up visits & troubleshooting

Addressing challenges: Solutions

- **Young, friendly trainers, interactive training approaches & tools** encouraging participants to explore methods & talk about menstruation (participant presentations, demo bags, role plays, possibility to ask questions anonymously)
- Dedicated **education sessions for girls on the hymen & menstrual cups** (& relevant info in parent leaflets)
- Provide **menstrual cup kits** with:
 - menstrual cup, bowl, small towel, soap dish and soap (Femme Intl)
 - menstrual cup, containers that can both store and sterilize cups, small mirror, soap



WoMena volunteer at MH Day event discussing with students

- **Enable schools to make their own soap** – school start up kit with enough material for income-generation till it becomes self-sustainable (yet to be tested)

STRUCTURAL LEVEL:

Accessibility challenges & solutions

- Inadequate **evidence-base** on MHM practices, benefits, risks & preferences of women/girls regarding MHM method use, including menstrual cups → *Generate & package evidence*
- Inadequate documented **programmatically experience** from wider Ugandan context on menstrual cup use → *Strategically select sites & generate appropriate tools & training materials*
- **Lack of awareness** about menstrual cups amongst the general public therefore little demand → *Interventions, radio, apps & media*
- **National guidelines/policies** do not yet support cups → *Advocate with Ministries of Education & Health to integrate*
- **Price too high** for the most vulnerable, e.g. product **tax exempted** like other MHM methods but not respected → *Advocacy, WTP surveys*
- **Limited outlets** supplying the product especially out of Kampala
 - Product not approved for use in **public health facilities**
 - Product **not yet accredited** by National Drug Authority (NDA) → *Get approvals, work with NGOs to create supply*



Impact of our work

*"Staying at school when you have inserted the cup doesn't disturb your head because once you insert it, **it collects all the blood inside and it doesn't leak but like the pad when you are using have to keep changing if not it leaks.**" (Ajok, 13)*

*"**You stay freely**", "doing everything is easy – jumping, playing, everything", "I never liked to ride a bicycle or play, but now I can play freely." (Study participants)*

*"I feel free, unlike pads, because pads you have to check all the time, you also cannot drive your bike. **Now I can drive my bike and I don't have to look back, I don't fear ... now I can stay for a long time at gatherings ... You even sleep freely, no problems with anything.**" (Gloria, 25)*



Menstrual cup study participant (Tom Saater, 2014)

*"It is better than pads because I can keep on using them and it **doesn't waste any money** you only need to boil it." (Faith, 17)*

*"Because like pads when you have put it you feel like it is going to fall and that one (cup) **when I have inserted it even if I run I do it freely because am sure that it is not going to fall.**" (Sarah, 14)*

*"**Before with the pads I would get wounds between my thighs ... I had to change [pads] all the time, now the cup gives me much more time ... I encourage my friends to use it because it saves money. My husband is also happy because I am not complaining anymore.**" (Grace, 30)*

*"**My husband is positive about [the menstrual cup]. He asked my how it works better, he now knows and I no longer ask for money for pads ... I used to spend 5,000 Ugandan shillings for pads, now I can spend it on something else, I am so happy for that.**" (Ann, 25)*

*Using the cup] is so much more easy. When pads have been there for long, it gets too warm, and uncomfortable. **It was as if I am not in my period ... [The cup] doesn't leak, it is comfortable, and I can even bike. It doesn't hurt like disposable pads, where sometimes I wouldn't feel like walking. Now I am free to do whatever I want and walk and bike as long as I want.**" (Rachel, 29)*

*"It is so good to have a cup, it should be extended to younger girls in school, they also need it, **you know a young girl can even get HIV-positive by looking for money to buy pads, if she prostitutes herself, it will really help our girls.**" (Rachel, 29)*



Thank you!

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