

Can the menstrual cup become a mainstream feminine hygiene product in Uganda?

Menstruation is a normal body function and a sign of reproductive health. Although it is a fundamental human right for girls and women to have the ability to properly manage their menstruation, it is a long-neglected issue in low-income countries. Pilot studies have provided optimism for the menstrual cup's potential to improve the quality of life for Ugandan girls and women. Several actors are involved in creating a market for menstrual cups in Uganda, both commercially and through donations. However, diffusion of the menstrual cup among Ugandan girls and women proposes many challenges connected to affordability, acceptability, awareness, and availability.

Affordability

Due to the high price of 16,5 to 22 USD, the menstrual cup is currently an unaffordable menstrual management method for most Ugandan girls and women. However, when the cost per month is compared to disposable or reusable pads, it is the cheapest option. With a partial payment model, the perceived affordability of the product could increase. To implement a partial payment model, a third party willing to take the financial risk must be identified. Further, if the menstrual cup would be exempted from value-added tax, as its substitutes currently are, the price could be lowered by at least 18 percent.



The menstrual cup is a feminine hygiene product that is worn inside the vagina during menstruation. It collects the blood instead of absorbing it, which makes it a reusable product with a product life time of 10 years.

Acceptability

The skepticism that the menstrual cup faces, mainly due to it being a foreign product that requires insertion into the vagina, needs to be met by information and education. Since Ugandans put great trust in the government and local leaders, official government support would significantly increase the acceptability of the menstrual cup in Uganda. Official approvals from either the national Bureau of Standards or from the National Drug Authority would be the first step in receiving official government support.

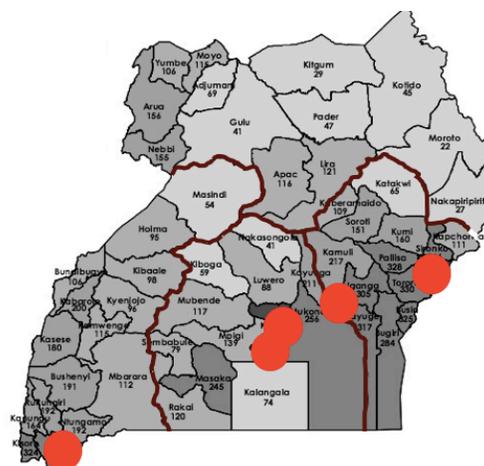
Awareness

Currently, the awareness of the menstrual cup is limited and was identified as the largest challenge in the study. To raise awareness among the Ugandan girls and women, proposes a challenge due to the taboo subject and dispersity of the Ugandan market. Therefore, to enhance word-of-mouth effects, smaller segments should be identified and targeted. Based on the high population density, and the average income

per residence being almost three times as large compared to the country average, Kampala should be the initial geographical target. When raising awareness outside of Kampala, initial segments to target for each geographical area needs to be identified in collaboration with local actors who have a deep understanding for the local culture.

Availability

The menstrual cup is currently commercially available in eight pharmacies in Kampala. Its high value and lack of governmental approvals makes pharmacies and other outlets reluctant to stock the menstrual cup. Therefore, official approvals and VAT exemption is necessary to increase the availability of the product. Initially, the availability within Kampala must be increased as it was identified as the place from where new ideas spread across Uganda. To increase the availability beyond Kampala, partners with established distribution channels need to be identified who are willing to promote the product. As the market expands, distributional hubs are suggested to be in Kabale, Mbale, Jinja and Wakiso and the use of micro-entrepreneurs should be investigated for last-mile distribution.



Conclusion

Initiating the process of mainstreaming the menstrual cup in Uganda proposes several challenges. However, with a coordinated effort from all actors, the challenges can be overcome and the quality of life for Ugandan girls and women can be improved. Together, we must increase awareness among decision-makers and larger organizations to absorb the financial risk, increase affordability through partial payments, increase awareness through heavy investments in marketing and education, and increase availability.

*Authors: Mathilde Hagander & Sara Velin
Industrial Engineering and Management
Lund University, 2017-05-29
Sweden*