



Empowering Women One Menstrual Cup at a Time

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MAKING CHANGE HAPPEN SINCE 1893



Introduction

Menstruation is a global health issue, especially in many middle- and low-income communities of the world. Research has shown that some girls think they are dying or have a serious illness when they first get their period. Unfortunately, there are still taboos surrounding menstruation in many communities. These taboos can keep women and girls from touching water, cooking, attending religious ceremonies, or engaging in community activities. A report from Uganda shows that 90% of girls surveyed did not think they have adequate education on the topic.

In addition to the cultural and emotional barriers, women and girls also face practical challenges - lack of gender-specific toilets for privacy, lack of hygienic conditions to reduce infections, and high cost of disposable products. Provision of products seems to have a marked effect on reducing school dropout rate and feelings of shame and discomfort. The menstrual cup is an effective, safe and affordable way to manage menstruation; however, overall knowledge remains low compared with disposable products.

OBJECTIVES

In Rochester:

- Increase awareness of the menstrual cup among different community groups who are working directly with women
- Provide information to women who may have less ability to afford disposable products

Globally:

- Reduce stigma and misconceptions around menstruation by improving menstrual health awareness and hygiene management to boys and girls
- Provide reproductive health education
- Provide girls and women affordable and sustainable menstrual products

HISTORY OF THE CUP

1937: Leona Watson Chalmers patented the first commercial cup

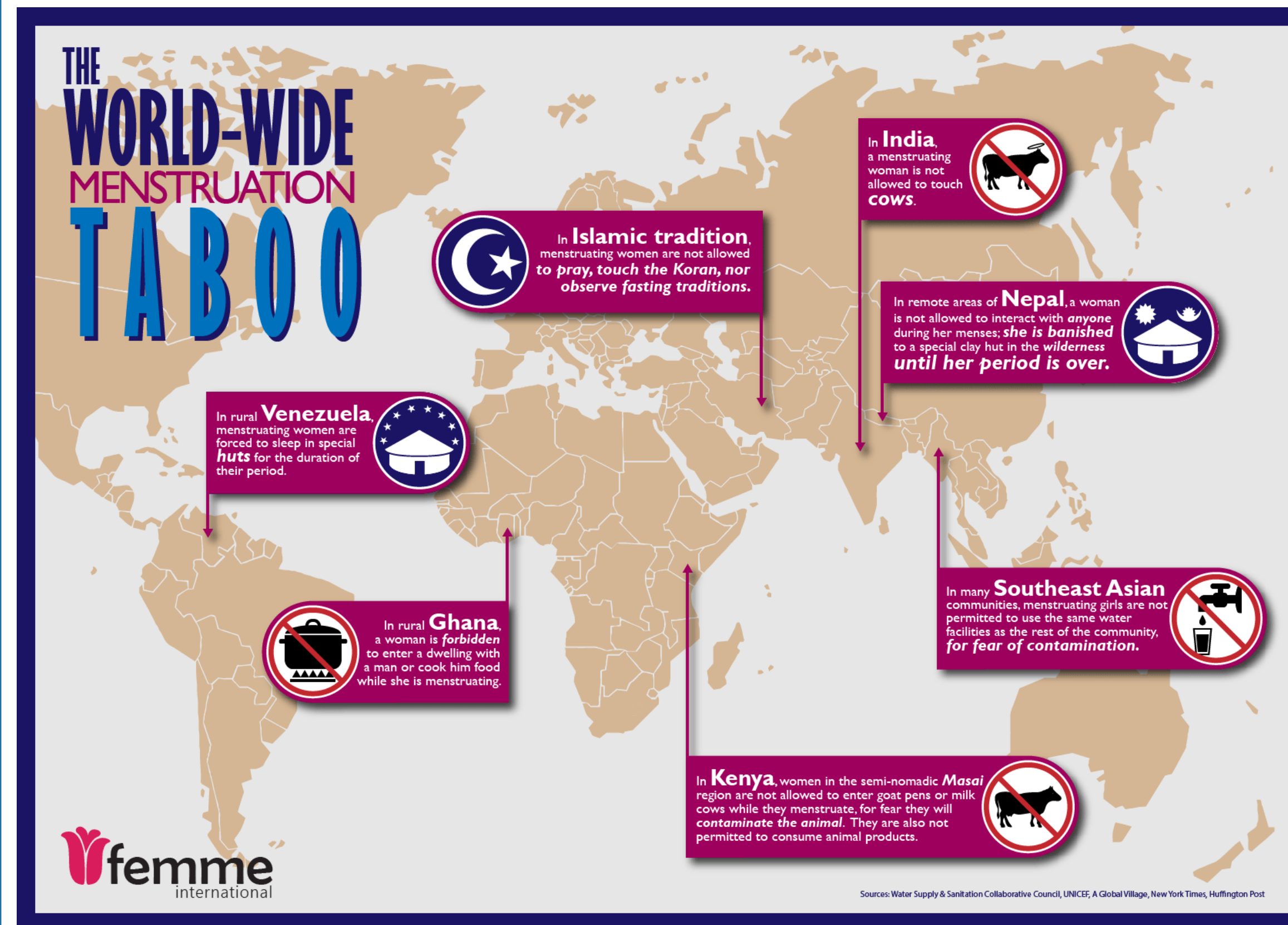
1969 – 1973: Another attempt with disposable menstrual cups (Tassaway). Gained traction but no profit.

1958 – 1963: Tassette was relaunched but folded due to the durability and reusability of the product making it less profitable



https://img.medscape.com/thumbnaill_library/dt_190715_menstrual_cup_800x450.jpg

WHY SHOULD WE CARE?



Developed Countries:

- In high income countries, only 11-33% of women interviewed (n=375) were aware of menstrual cups

- On websites with educational materials on puberty and menarche from 27 countries, menstrual cups only mentioned as option by 30% vs tampon at 77%

- In the USA, only 16 states exempted tax on menstrual hygiene products

Developing countries:

- 800 million women and girls between the ages of 15 and 49 are menstruating worldwide on any given day
- 300 million women and girls worldwide use scraps of clothing, mattress padding, banana leaves, paper torn from schoolbooks, or even soil and ash to manage their periods
- Stigma associated with menstruation can lead to school absenteeism and drop-out
- Some reported transactional sex among school-age girls in order to afford disposable menstrual products

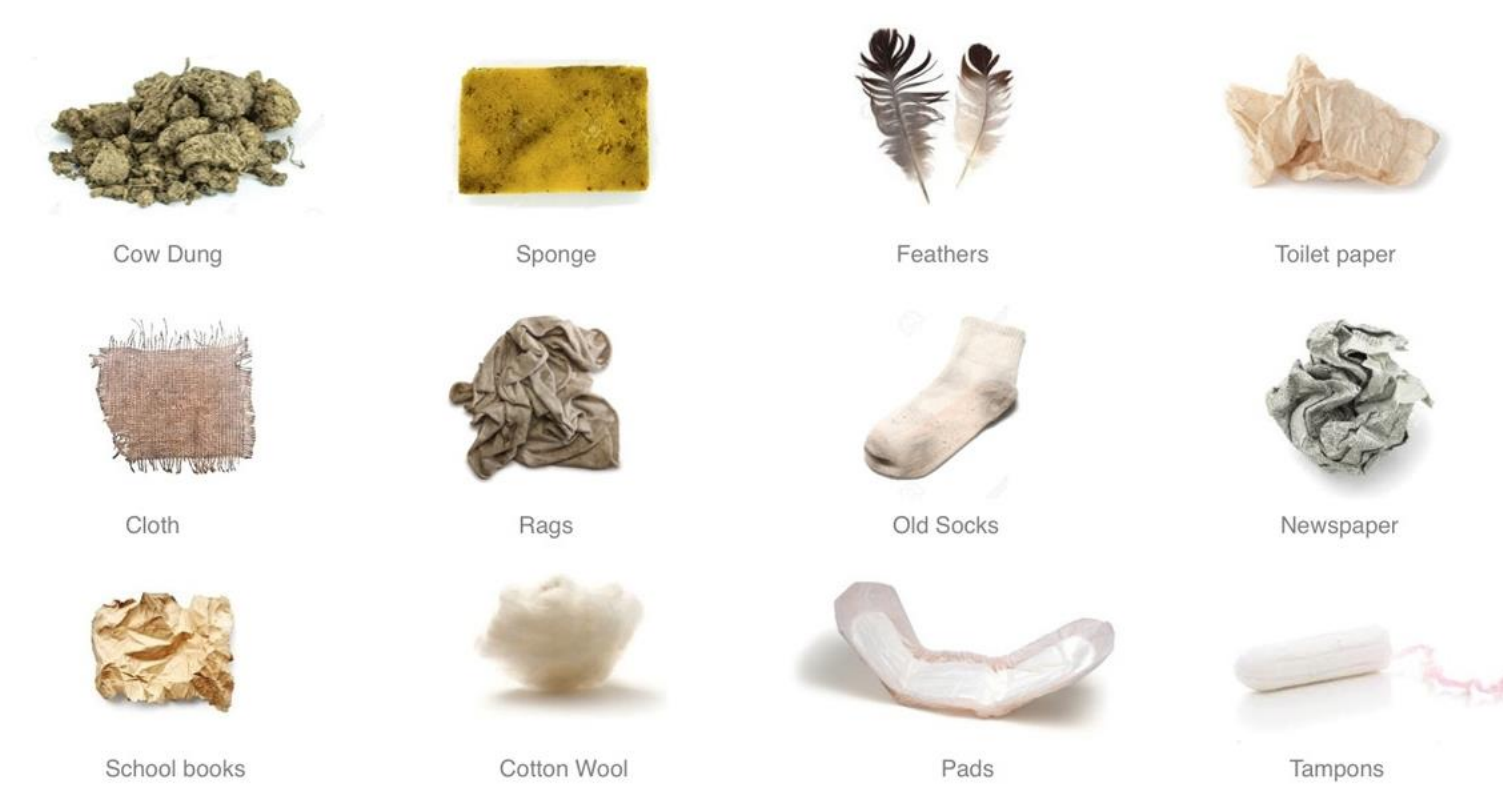
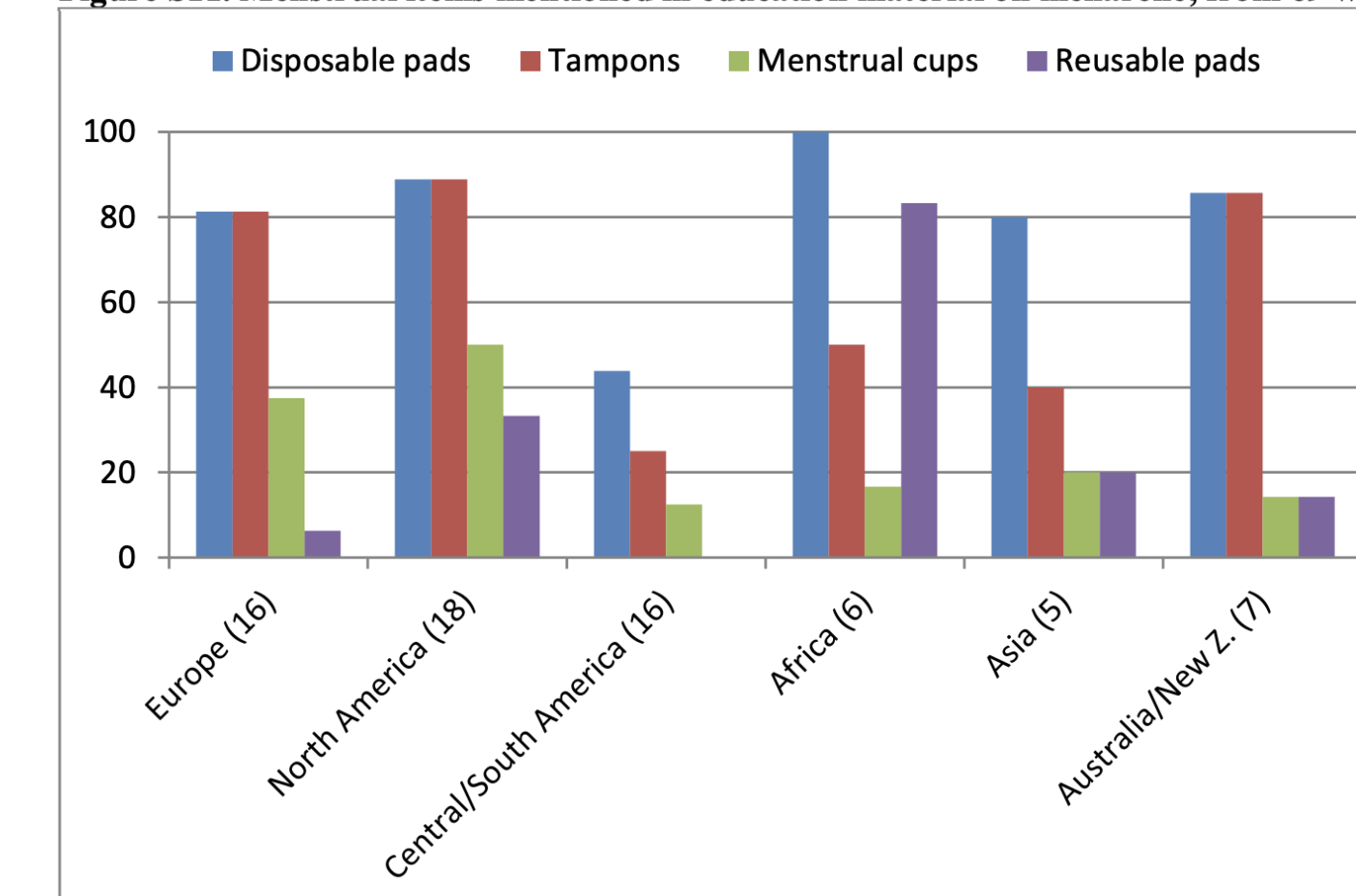


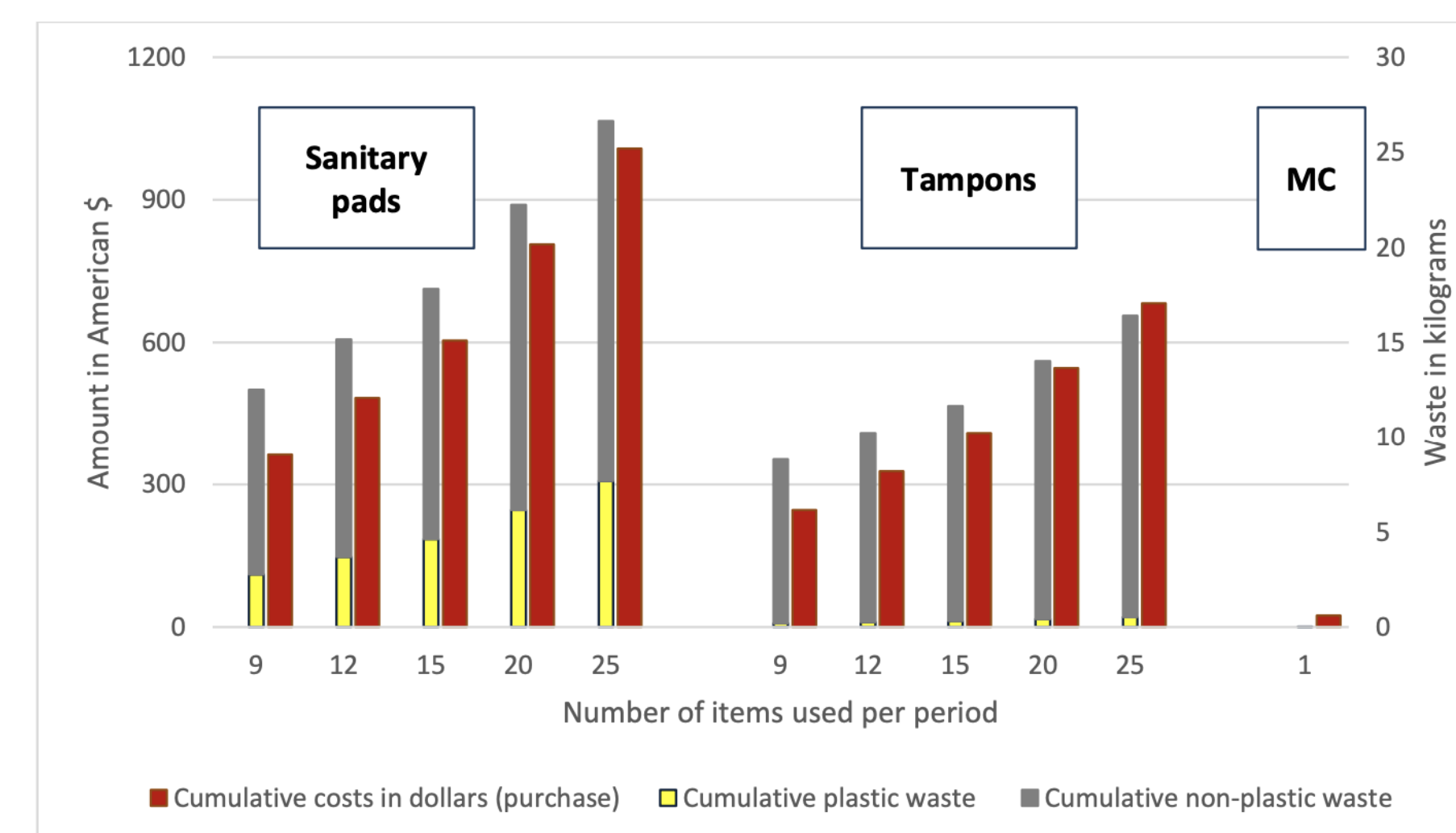
Figure S11. Menstrual items mentioned in education material on menarche, from 69 websites, 27 countries



New Z.: New Zealand
For the methods see section 2; for a table of sources, see Table S15. The number of entries per region is in brackets. By region, disposable pads were mentioned in over 80% except for South America (43.8%); tampons were only in Europe, North America and Australia/New Zealand over 80%, whereas MCs were mentioned between 12.5% and 50.0%.

MENSTRUAL CUP AS A SOLUTION

Benefits	Common Concerns
More affordable - Cheaper after 5-21 months	Upfront cost - \$15-50 per cup
Environmentally friendly - Less plastic waste	Pain or discomfort Difficulty with insertion and/or removal
Physiologic - maintain normal vaginal pH and microbiome	Learning curve - 2-5 months
Large capacity - No need for change up to 12 hours	Leakage - comparable rates to disposable products
Durable - Last up to 10 years	Risk of infection - Made with medical-grade materials - Less risk for toxic shock syndrome
Well-accepted - In 15 studies, 73% of girls expressed willingness to continue using menstrual cups after the study.	Lack of awareness - let's do this project!



MC: menstrual cup. Note: Cost estimates of sanitary pads and tampons conducted in October 2018. Using accumulated estimates over 10 years, purchase costs of and waste from consistent MC-use (vaginal cup) would be a small fraction of the waste and purchase costs of pads or tampons: e.g. 5% and 7% of the purchase costs and 0.4% and 6% of the plastic waste when using 12 pads or tampons per period, respectively. Combined use of menstrual products during a period (e.g. panty liners for light days), the use of more than one cup over 10 years, inflation and production costs, and waste estimates were not taken into account in these calculations.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS - ROCHESTER

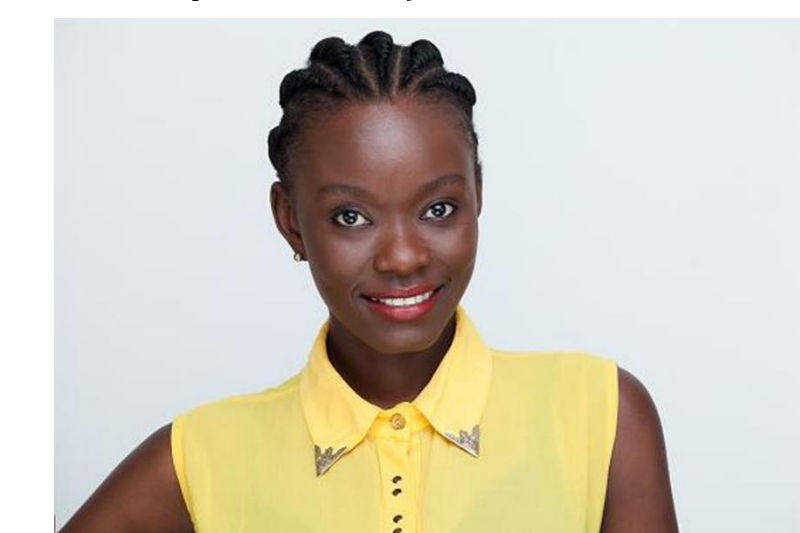
- Design education materials aimed at increasing awareness of menstrual cups
- Present to various groups, starting with medical students
- Reach out to local community organizations who work with women, such as YWCA, Jennifer House
- Partner with National Council of Jewish Women with their P.A.D party to include business-card- size information on menstrual cups (as below)
- Survey audience at each session to improve the presentation and evaluate perception change before and after the presentation
- Identify potential local partner who will be interested in the second phase - provision of cups with follow-up survey on rate of usage



Presentation with URM Medical Students

FUTURE DIRECTIONS - KENYA

- To identify a partner Non Governmental Organization (NGO) who works with communities in Kenya
- Partner with the local company the Grace Cup that manufactures menstrual cups. Founder of Grace cup, Ebby Weyime has generously agreed to provide education on using the cups
- Design education material on reproductive health and menstrual hygiene
- Secure funding source
- Design surveys for evaluating effectiveness of these education materials
- Follow up survey to evaluate continued usage of the cups



Ebby Weyime, founder of Grace Cup: Check out a news clip about her on the [BBC website](#) below

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