



Better menstrual health and hygiene for women and girls in Tanzania

Adaptive programming contributes to gender equality by catalysing broader systems change. In Tanzania, I4ID applied a market development approach in partnership with private sector to expand the market for menstrual health and hygiene products. Today, more women and girls who live in poverty or in rural areas have access to better quality and more affordable products. In addition, Tanzania's Ministry of Health incorporated menstrual hygiene management in the revised National Health Policy, as a result of MHM Coalition advocacy activities supported by I4ID.

This case study presents the experiences of the Institutions for Inclusive Development (I4ID) Programme's partnership in improving menstrual health and hygiene in Tanzania. It documents the lessons learnt by Palladium, SNV in Tanzania, BBC Media Action, and ODI UK throughout four years of programme implementation (2017-2020). Supported with UKAid and IrishAid funding to address several service delivery and economic issues, the partnership contributed in:

- strengthening inclusivity and accountability practices in Tanzania's institutions for long-term social progress and economic growth; and
- enabling the delivery of equitable services to benefit women, young people, people living

in poverty, and vulnerable groups across Tanzania.

The challenge

A study by SNV in Tanzania in 2014 showed that most girls in rural primary schools who have reached puberty do not use appropriate sanitary wear during their monthly menstruation. Often, they use local pads, e.g., rags, raw cotton, and maize cobs, which have been linked to increased incidence of diseases, such as fungal and urinary tract infections (UTI).¹ The same study found that 48% of girls miss classes during menstruation, 36% stay at home during days of heavy flow, and 12% do not attend school at all when

¹ SNV, *Girls in Control: Compiled Findings from Studies on Menstrual Hygiene Management of Schoolgirls*, Addis Ababa, SNV in Ethiopia, 2015, https://snv.org/cms/sites/default/files/explore/download/snv_girls_in_control_baseline_report.pdf (accessed 9 March 2021).

² SNV, *Girls in Control*, 2015.

³ SNV, 'Girls in Control – Tanzania', *SNV website*, The Hague, SNV, n.d., <https://snv.org/project/girls-control-tanzania#:~:text=In%20Tanzania%20most%20girls%20in,pads%20poses%20a%20serious%20challenge> (accessed 10 March 2021).



MHM celebration supported by SNV under the Girls In Control project supported by the Dutch Government of the Netherlands (SNV/Aidan Dockery).

Every month, millions of women and girls face the challenge of managing their menstruation due to limited access to adequate, safe, and/or hygienic menstrual products.

menstruating.² Three-quarters of girls report that menstruation affects their academic performance. Nearly half suggest that they fail to concentrate on their studies due to fears that poor sanitary materials will cause stains on their skirts. Understanding barriers and exclusion are key to ensure that no-one is left behind. Affordability and accessibility are the biggest challenges for women and girls. In Tanzania, 91% of shops in rural areas do not sell disposable menstrual pads.⁴ Affordability has been cited as the biggest challenge by most adolescent girls.

I4ID aimed to improve the affordability, accessibility, adoption, and choice of Menstrual Health Products for Tanzania's women and girls so that they can manage their menstrual cycle with safety, confidence and dignity. By introducing improvements to women and girls' menstrual health and hygiene, the partnership contributed to expand their opportunities to actively engage in education and economic activities.

I4IDs engagement

In 2017, an opposition politician tabled a Private Members' Bill to legislate for free sanitary pads at schools.

As interest in menstrual health and hygiene grew, I4ID met with the Tanzania Menstrual Health Management (MHM) Coalition to co-create major

impact on an issue affecting gender equality. I4ID consulted activists in Kenya, where a similar policy change had been enacted several years ago. During the consultations, I4ID discovered that this policy change had limited impact. This was largely because of continuing challenges in the education system to implement and monitor regular supplies across all schools. Lessons from Kenya encouraged I4ID to aim higher, i.e., to improve the entire market for menstrual products, for all women and girls, in and out of school.

Under I4ID's leadership, the MHM Coalition changed its International Menstrual Health Day event strategy from general awareness raising to targeted advocacy for market reform.

I4ID conducted a market systems analysis to identify opportunities to redress menstrual health and hygiene barriers and exclusion. The results of the study were used to amplify messages during a targeted International Menstrual Health Day event in Dodoma, Tanzania's capital city and location of the national parliament. Asked to lead the MHM Coalition, I4ID coordinated advocacy efforts and consulted senior figures in government on what kind of policy change they might be willing to support. Soon, a group of interested and influential figures coalesced around the idea of offering VAT exemption on menstrual products. The idea was supported by data provided by I4ID, which demonstrated the impact VAT had

⁴ Lund University, 'Towards Sustainable Menstrual Health Management in Tanzania,' *Policy Brief*, Lund, Lund University Centre for Sustainability Studies, 2018, https://www.lucsus.lu.se/sites/lucsus.lu.se/files/policy_brief_mhm_saragabrielsson.pdf (accessed 9 March 2021).

on unfavourable retail pricing and the small contribution it has been making to government revenue.

The tax exemption was passed along with the approval of the National Budget in June 2018, only to see it reversed a year later; when policymakers saw little impact on retail prices. Reducing the cost of wholesale goods by 18% should have delivered greater impact. But similar cost reductions were not reflected in retail prices quick enough for policymakers to see changes. Influential, local producers also complained that the VAT reduction unfairly advantaged importers, winning the support of policymakers keen on local industrialisation. Fortunately, when the government reversed the VAT reduction, they found a way to leave incentives in place for local producers. The government also kept the door open to discuss further reforms.

Out of these discussions and the active lobbying of the MHM Coalition, in 2019 the Ministry of Health agreed to incorporate menstrual hygiene management as a specific policy issue in the revised National Health Policy. The National Health Policy serves as the government's overarching policy document for health-related resource prioritisation. The policy also commits the government to continue to mobilise health policy reform and resources towards menstrual hygiene issues into the future.

An important element of systems change approaches is to identify and try different interventions to unlock the multiple barriers that hold back systems transformation.

I4ID had several interventions in play, based on multiple rounds of research to understand constraints in availability, pricing, consumer perceptions of different products and brands, relationships between supply chain actors, product stock levels, as well as the policy environment and social norms. Working with companies, the I4ID partnership experimented and embedded new business practices that could,

- be adopted by companies at scale, and
- influence broader market behaviour based on reliable data that support decision making, de-risking new pilots and ideas, and technical advice on new products, distribution models, and last-mile challenges.

The partnership found that most companies had not really invested in distribution capability beyond the larger urban centres. Companies had little understanding of where their products were being sold and at what price. Without sales agents at sub-national level to support and provide feedback, companies were pushing out products with little regard to market dynamics. No effort was made to motivate and build the capacity of distributors and retailers to market products themselves.

Systems change approach and results

Shifting markets: impact through new product lines

An I4ID consumer perceptions survey underscored that there was demand for new product lines, at better quality and affordable prices. Survey findings prompted a major global brand to respond to this demand. The company's response was accompanied by significant investments in advertising, which helped to change social norms around the whole product category. Consumer demand led to the introduction of the new product line, 'Always Soft', which retailed at a cheaper price point and offered better margins to retailers and distributors.

Smaller pack sizes – a well-tested strategy to improve product affordability for rural consumers living in poverty – were introduced. Through its new product line of disposable sanitary pads for low-income customers, Tanzania's biggest domestic brand took up this challenge. The I4ID partnership helped the brand launch *Mzuri* in 2019 by trialling the product across six districts in Morogoro Region. As part of this collaboration, the company transported one container of the product into the districts, while I4ID covered market activation and distribution costs. *Mzuri* has now been established as the most affordable pack in the country. At US\$ 0.50 for a pack of five, *Mzuri* retailed approximately half the price of most other disposable sanitary pads. Having established a firm place in the market, within six months of launching, *Mzuri* expanded distribution to an additional four regions in Tanzania.

The I4ID partnership also helped a Tanzanian entrepreneur launch a reusable menstrual cup, which was completely new in the Tanzanian



Sanitary pads promotion during a Menstrual Health Day activity at Chato (SNV/Aidan Dockery)

market. I4ID offered to cover any research or consultation costs needed by the Tanzania Food and Drug Administration (as it was then known) contributing to TFDA's decision in 2019 to approve retail sales of menstrual cups over the counter.

Shifting markets: impact through new rural markets

Following TFDA approval, Flora Njelekela, Founder/CEO of Anuflo Industries Ltd; began selling *Hedhi* menstrual cups, but her reach was limited to Dar es Salaam and 15 retailers. To support her business expansion to Morogoro, Arusha and Kilimanjaro, I4ID strengthened her company's sales and marketing capacity by engaging a marketing consultant and providing seed funding to cover market activation and transport costs. Flora Njelekela's product is now available in over 100 outlets.

I4ID also demonstrated to a large-scale importer that rural distribution can be profitable and can reach scale. The partnership encouraged the importer to invest in stronger relationships with wholesalers, retailers, and regional sales staff. I4ID also supported the development of the company's rural marketing strategy, which included a social marketing campaign in menstrual health and hygiene reaching over 25,000 school children. During the first six months, the company successfully sold close to 1.5 million packs. Interestingly, this has influenced the company's marketing philosophy worldwide, demonstrating

the viability of rural distribution markets. They are now investing beyond urban centres in other markets like Cameroon.

Shifting 'business as usual' practices: Government Ministries are now active members of the MHM Coalition

I4ID transformed the MHM Coalition from an occasional grouping of 4-6 organisations who would meet once a year to plan annual MHM Day celebrations to a 150-member coalition. Today, coalition members meet regularly, with a clear purpose, which has been formalised through a Terms of Reference.

More officials from government – including at senior levels – started joining and participating in the MHM Coalition as a result of regular interactions with I4ID since late 2017. Regular engagement between government, civil society and private sector, joined by a common purpose, is relatively infrequent in Tanzania. Increased and active commitment was made possible through a process of continuous engagement with individual leaders that builds up diverse stakeholders' personal interest in the issue.

Since I4ID became the Chair of the MHM Coalition in 2018, four ministries (Health, Trade, Water, and the President's Office, Regional Administration and Local Government) have begun participating in regular meetings. Today, the coalition comprises over 150 members. On its third leadership cohort,

it is currently led by co-Chairs from the Ministry of Health and WaterAid. Operating under an established strategic and activity plan, recent discussions within the coalition have focused on the burden of taxes imposed on producers and users of menstrual product. Government officials have also started encouraging the raising of collective voice on menstrual health and hygiene issues, as opposed to individual organisations.

Lessons

Relationship building takes time, skills, and know-how. Expectations, priorities, and practices differ among public and private sector partners. Relation building demands patience and flexibility, particularly when collaborating across sectors. It requires a mutual understanding of the respective priorities and capabilities of each partner, and an alignment of expectations and continuous follow-up. A prerequisite to effectively convene a wide range of actors, and to broker relations and agreements, is long-term local presence in areas of implementation.

Jointly identifying and developing business model innovations is key to good market systems development. The sustainability of markets can only be realised if innovations are co-created, with partners in the lead. Co-creation and challenging and testing ideas together – particularly when the scale, ambition and background of each market player is so different – are important. Moreover working with private sector requires in-depth understanding of business practices and challenges as well as an assessment of entrepreneurs' and companies' commitment to social advancement beyond pure profit maximisation.

Encouraging continued dialogue between public and private sector fosters understanding on both sides which can open up opportunities despite setbacks. This was highlighted by the reinstatement of VAT on commercial menstrual products but subsequent successful policy change. The policy developments created huge discussion and good will amongst politicians, leaders, and the media which continues today: challenging stigma, social norms, and accelerating product adoption and market growth – ultimately, improving access for women and girls.

Increasing product uptake as a means to improve menstrual health and hygiene requires long-term education and customer awareness raising. Women and girls need to be made aware of the range of menstrual hygiene products available to them, and how each can be used. The success of the company behind the importation and distribution of *Mzuri* pads highlighted the need to raise awareness. Experience with the *Hedhi* cup also validated this. As a new product, uptake of menstrual cup has been constrained by fears, concerns, and hesitations that do not always have a basis. More time has to be spent with potential users to alleviate fears and to provide them with guidance on use; before and after product purchase. However, media campaigns need careful planning. An experimental social media campaign with a local menstrual product producer really failed to ignite. But this only underscores the importance of a multi-pronged and integrated approach.

A note in enabling greater choice and access vs potential additional environmental impact of pads

The I4ID partnership thought long and hard about the impact of disposable sanitary pads on environmental sustainability. The partnership took the view that women's agency is undermined in so many ways in Tanzania that the benefits of enabling greater choice and access to menstrual health and hygiene products far outweighed the potential and additional environmental impact of pads. Beyond disposable sanitary pads, I4ID invested considerable efforts in promoting a reusable alternative, the *Hedhi* cup. SNV's work in waste management – under its urban sanitation programme – concluded that in countries like Tanzania, the far bigger challenge has not been waste reduction. Rather, the need to improve systems for waste collection and management. At global level, the aid industry has been spending billions of dollars pushing out tonnes of products in plastic packaging, from condoms to fertiliser bags. Despite this, there has been a tendency to push back on gender equality enabling products such as sanitary pads, in the interest of protecting the environment.

About I4ID

Institutions for Inclusive Development (I4ID) is a programme implemented by Palladium, SNV, BBC Media Action and ODI UK, funded by UKAid and IrishAid. Between 2017 and 2020, I4ID partners piloted new and innovative approaches to introduce inclusive growth approaches and better public services to benefit the largest number of people possible in Tanzanian society.

This case study was put together by staff from the I4ID team, including Julie Adkins (SNV), who edited this brief for SNV.

About SNV in WASH

SNV contributes to sustainable change in WASH delivery systems. Ultimately, we envision a world that enables all people's access to affordable and reliable WASH services – leaving no one behind.

In households, schools, and health facilities, our programmes are designed to build professional, organisational, and inter-institutional capacities to deliver environmentally and financially sustainable rural and urban WASH services. Through programme implementation, joined-up thinking, and our research – conducted with partners in government, private sector and civil society – our contributions:

- provide evidence to integrate sanitation information in wider district-, provincial and city planning;
- assist public authorities to better target investments and oversee the efficient operationalisation of services;
- create the conditions and capacities for private sector engagement in WASH; and
- instil long-lasting sanitation and hygiene behaviours amongst consumers and professions in the front-line of WASH services delivery.

SNV

SNV is a not-for-profit international development organisation that makes a lasting difference in the lives of people living in poverty by helping them raise incomes and access basic services. We focus on the Agriculture, Energy, and Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) sectors and have a long-term, local presence in over 25 countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Our team of more than 1,300 staff is the backbone of SNV.

Systems change case studies

SNV projects directly benefit millions of people. At the same time, our projects also drive systems change – strengthening institutions and kick-starting markets to help many more people work their way out of poverty, well beyond the scope of projects.

In this series, SNV documents and explores lessons on the way it achieves systems change, with special attention to four key parameters of success:

- leveraging finance,
- kick-starting/shifting markets,
- adoption of improved approaches by government and others,
- shifting values, norms and mindsets.

The growing number of case studies will cover a variety of geographic contexts, (sub-) sectors and development challenges.

Cover photo

A glimpse into the annual MHM day celebrations in Tanzania (SNV/ Aidan Dockery).

For more information

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SNV, 'Better menstrual health and hygiene for women and girls in Tanzania', *I4ID systems change case study*, The Hague, SNV, 2021.