



NO TABOO PERIODS.

HEALTHY BODY
HEALTHY LIFE

COVID-19 OR NOT, NO TABOO FOR PERIODS

COVID-19 is a deadly disease that poses an immediate threat to the African continent and has the potential to kill many people. COVID-19 not only has a devastating impact on the health of people around the world, but also on national economies and the global economy.

On Tuesday 16 June 2020, Speak Up Africa organized a webinar on menstrual hygiene management in the context of COVID-19.

Speakers included Ms. Maimouna Dione, Technical Advisor/Gender Cell Coordinator of the Senegalese Ministry of Water and Sanitation, Dr. Abdoulaye Diop, Gynecologist-Obstetrician and Chief Medical Officer of the NEST Clinic in Dakar, Ms. Yaye Hélène Ndiaye, Founder and President of KITAMBAA and Ms. Aminata Badiane Thioye, Gender Specialist for a youth association for reproductive health and family planning.

More than 50 participants - from civil society organizations representatives to youth group members and WASH professionals - attended the webinar on Zoom and more than 5000 viewers connected via Facebook Live.

Background

- With the advent of the coronavirus pandemic, most health issues have been relegated to the background, particularly the management of menstrual hygiene;
- Every day, more than 300 million women and girls menstruate;
- A large number of them face problems of access to information, quality hygiene products, safe sanitation facilities and water throughout the world;
- In the Covid-19 context, it has become even more crucial to advocate for solutions to allow women and girls to overcome menstrual hygiene challenges while ensuring men and boys also contribute to the conversation.

Below are the key takeaways from the conversation

Menstrual periods remain a biological change that has been overlooked;

- **Menstrual hygiene management challenges for women and girls:**
 - Access to good information;
 - Access to safe water and safely managed sanitation;
 - Unavailability of sanitary and analgesic products;
 - Elimination of menstrual waste;
 - Lack of safe water and sanitation facilities in schools and households..
- **The challenges of access to information:**
 - Unspoken;
 - The taboo subjects at home;
 - Delay in communication around menstrual hygiene in schools in general, as well as with parents.
- **The economic impact:** low purchasing power and household precariousness in urban-peripheries and rural areas, result in difficulties in access to quality sanitary products and medicines for painful periods.
- **Lack of running water and lack of adequate facilities in schools:**
 - Young girls are exposed to mental health problems (i.e. emotional disconnection);
 - Repeated absence of young girls during menstrual periods, approx. 20% of the school year is missed or 5 days per month;
 - Mockery from peers;
 - Dismissals from teachers due to lack of cleanliness;
 - The recurrence of vaginal infections in young girls is among the primary causes of infertility in women;
 - Transfer of the menstrual hygiene management issue from secondary school to primary school due to early onset of menstruation in young girls;
- **Parental responsibility in households:**
 - Clear rejection of communication around menstruations and sexuality from parents with children;
 - Misinformation and wrong approach in communication force young girls to seek information outside the home;
 - The nuclearization of families results in the absence of aunts, whom were traditionally responsible for young girls' sex education;
- **Other issues raised:**
 - Toxic shocks and cervical cancers chances increase due carbon dioxide contained in tampons in comparison other methods;
 - Irregularity in the supply of sanitary pads in women prisons in Senegal, i.e. women in the carceral system are given one pack of sanitary pads per month, which is insufficient to safely manage their periods and causes infections and internal tensions;

- Lack of multi-sectoral approach for menstrual hygiene management development agencies prior to the creation of WSSC¹;
- Redirecting of some companies into production of alcoholic gels at the expense of the manufacturing of sanitary pads.

Advocated for solutions in the Covid-19 Context

- **Promote the use of sanitary products such as:**
 - Reusable sanitary pads;
 - Menstrual cups with a 10-year lifespan easy to maintain and only requiring water rinse;
 - Integration of menstrual hygiene kits in Covid-19 response kits, particularly reusable sanitary pads which are easier to manage;
- **Advocated for community actions within behavioral change communication:**
 - Address menstrual hygiene issues in households to break taboos;
 - Insist on raising youth's awareness to get information on menstrual hygiene management both in households and schools;
 - Sensitize parents and education stakeholders about the central place of family and school in sharing information on menstrual hygiene management;
 - Encourage young girls to learn about menstrual hygiene and inform their peers;
 - Foster the debate on menstrual hygiene management in private circles;
 - Enforce the principle of «doing more with less» with young boys at the community level to adapt to the next economic recession.
- **Actions implemented by the Minister of Water and Sanitation of Senegal:**
 - The Subsidized Connection to Water Policy through the KMS3 Program for increased access to water at lower cost;
 - Distribution of soap and sanitary kits in collaboration with Ministry's partners;
 - Inclusion of a Project on soap and sanitary pad manufacturing in the Ministry of Water and Sanitation's annual work plan;
 - Endorsement of a multi-sector approach to water and sanitation management.
- **The solutions provided by the KITAMBAA association (Swahili linen):**
 - Prioritize the reusable sanitary pads offer to respond to many of the challenges associated with access to sanitary products;
 - The solution offered by Kitambaa addresses difficulties associated with the maintenance of reusable pads while in school or public places with the provision of underwear and pouches to store used pads;
 - Avenues of collaboration between Kitambaa and the Ministry of Water and Sanitation in a soap and sanitary pads manufacturing project;
 - Strengthening advocacy for MHM inclusion in Covid-19 response plans.

The particular context related to the coronavirus pandemic demonstrates the need for a community-based approach and the strengthening of multi-sectoral approaches in menstrual hygiene management. As such, it is imperative to break the taboos around periods in family and school circles and ensure the active involvement of young

people in awareness raising and advocacy. And finally, it is essential to guarantee access to sufficient water and safely managed sanitation facilities to ensure the proper use of sustainable sanitary solutions including reusable pads and menstrual cups.



[VIEW THE FULL WEBINAR HERE](#)

About the «Stay Safe Africa» Campaign

Stay Safe Africa brings together partners, journalists, civil society organizations, private-sector companies and country and local leaders to work towards our common goal of saving lives by increasing investments and awareness to protect our continent from this new threat while ensuring access and treatment from other ongoing health threats. More information on www.staysafeafrica.org

About Speak Up Africa

Based in Dakar, Senegal, Speak Up Africa is a non-profit strategic communication and advocacy organization dedicated to catalyzing African leadership, fostering policy change and raising awareness about sustainable development in Africa. Through our programs, networks and with the help of our partners, we ensure that decision-makers meet with actors on the ground, that solutions are presented, and that every sector - from citizens and civil society groups to financial partners and business leaders - contributes critically to the dialogue and strives to take concrete action for health and sustainable development on the continent.

More information on www.speakupafrika.org