

Tackling Misconceptions About Menstrual Cups in East Africa

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WHO WE ARE

Made up of researchers, manufacturers, activists, and programmers, the Menstrual Cup Coalition was founded in 2017 to connect people and organizations, and share experience and knowledge on cup programming. The Menstrual Cup Coalition aims to improve the quality and range of research, and build the evidence base on the valuable role menstrual cups can play to improve girls' and women's sexual and reproductive health, dignity, and equity.



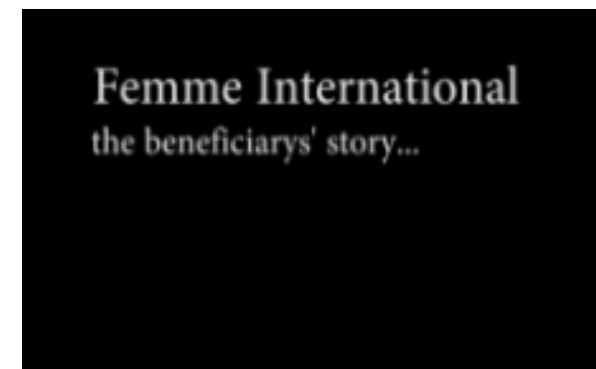
THE ISSUE

There are many misconceptions around the use of menstrual cups in the Global South that often prevent menstruators from learning about them, never mind making the choice to use them. Through their collective work, Menstrual Cup Coalition members have effectively demonstrated that menstrual cups are not only safe, feasible and acceptable to menstruators in LMICs, but indeed become highly desirable and sought after by menstruators and decision-makers alike.



ADVOCACY & IMPACT

The Menstrual Cup Coalition builds evidence-based menstrual cup interventions to inform the policies, decisions, and actions of stakeholders including governments, faith leaders, and NGOs to support, fund, and expand menstrual cup interventions. Members share information and advise each other on ongoing and future relevant activities; identify research priorities and collaborate on joint research projects; and disseminate evidence-based best practice. Members have expertise in a wide variety of sectors, from WASH to government, research institutions to education, health to faith-based organizations. Across these sectors members challenge stigmas, inform programming, and advocate for menstrual health and cup inclusion. Together the Menstrual Cup Coalition has impacted over 100,000 menstruators with training and cups.



The Menstrual Cup from a Beneficiary's Perspective

Aims: This poster aims to demonstrate how programming, research, and advocacy efforts have successfully addressed common myths, barriers, and misconceptions around menstrual cup usage and programming in urban and rural areas, with different religions, cultures, and nationalities, as well as in humanitarian settings.

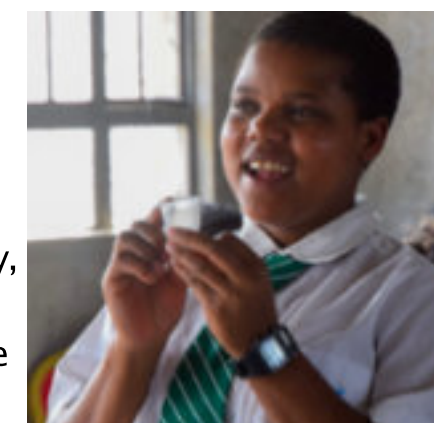
Misconception: Cups are difficult, uncomfortable, and/or inconvenient to use.

Satisfaction with menstrual cups increases over time, with a minimum of 6 months needed to see statistically significant or impactful results. Using cups since 2016, Girl Guides in Malawi describe them as comfortable, private, clean, and reliable. In Uganda, WoMena delivered workshops then offered a choice of menstrual cups or reusable pads. After 4 months, 81% of cup users versus 69% of pad users were satisfied. In Tanzania, Femme International found that 55% of girls reported leaving school early, whereas after using cups, only 4% of girls reported the same. 83% of girls were better able to concentrate in the classroom, whilst all were more confident.



Misconception: In poor and water-scarce areas, using menstrual cups leads to infection.

Water is required regardless of menstrual product. Research in Kenya has detected no adverse events after up to 12 months of menstrual cup use, despite compromised sanitation and hygiene conditions. Additionally, girls using cups had lower prevalence of bacterial vaginosis. A study by WoMena in a humanitarian setting in Uganda found that over the course of one period, menstrual cups use 1L of water vs. 15L for reusable pads.



Misconception: Cultural barriers such as virginity and disgust prevent menstrual cup acceptance.

In conservative Tanzania, Femme International found that culturally-appropriate education and discussions with local government, religious, and community leaders overcame cultural barriers and resulted in positive views towards menstrual cups. Offering secondary school girls small-sized cups led to higher uptake and usage. In Malawi, the Cup Effect increased acceptance amongst schoolgirls by first training and distributing to mothers, who then recommended cups to their daughters, even from their first periods.



Misconception: Cups are not appropriate for certain religions or cultures.

Religion and culture have nothing to do with menstrual cup use. In a humanitarian setting in Uganda, WoMena demonstrated that menstruators of numerous religions, cultures, tribes, and nationalities were able to use cups and satisfied with them. In Tanzania and Kenya, Femme International found no difference in cup uptake and usage between Christian and Muslim users.

