

The Ruby cup and MHM experiences from Kenya

Posted by Maxie - 06 Dec 2011 17:42

(**Note from moderator:** to read the conversation on the Ruby cup business idea that preceded this post please have a look here: forum.susana.org/forum/categories/24-men...ess-idea-in-kenya#22)

Hello everyone!

It is so great with this vast interest about our project on the SuSaNa site. I haven't been posting updates recently but now it is time for an update and comments on your questions that are really hitting the point.

Status of the Ruby Cup business is that we have established our corporate infrastructure here in Kenya, which took some time, have received our final version of the Ruby Cup and it is working great! We have received very positive feedback from wmen that tested the Ruby Cup in Nairobi:

"I was out an entire night with the Ruby Cup and I danced and danced and it didn't leak!", Bilha (24), University student, Nairobi.

"I inserted my Ruby Cup in the morning and in the afternoon, I was worried if it would leak but when I checked it, it wasn't even half full", Grace (27) working mother, Nairobi East-lands.

We also received our packaging (see the picture attached) and expect market entry by january/february next year. We are very excited!

In regards to the questions that Sally asked I will try to answer them as best as I can.

Sally, you mention hygiene and washing hands as a potential risk factor that could make the usage of Ruby Cup dangerous to girls and women in areas with water scarcity or even for girls and women that lack general education about handwashing and personal hygiene.

This is why we are working together with partner organisations, like Unicef WASH (Water Sanitation and Hygiene) and begin in areas where education about these issues exist and where latrines and water supply is secured.

Also, our mission is to facilitate menstrual hygiene through education, which is why we are working with the direct sales models and peer-to-peer education in order to make sure that all our customers get the right education about menstrual hygiene and hygiene in general through our women vendors, who will be educated in these areas. We know that education about hygiene is crucial in order to ensure proper usage.

In regards to water, Unicef in fact conducted a study showing that in comparison to other menstrual hygiene products, a menstrual cup is the product requiring least water. In many poor communities, scarcity of water is a daily challenge. Compared to cloth or re-usable pads, Ruby Cup only uses water once a month for boiling, and is thus the solution that uses the least water.

The problem with re-usable pads are twofold: the water is scarce and not necessarily clean, so the pads are not being washed properly, which breeds bacteria. Also, they are not being hanged outside where the sun can dry them (which would sterilize them through the sunlight) but hid somewhere inside the house, where they don't dry properly. The risk of infections from re-usable pads, it has been shown, is thus quite high in especially arid areas and where social stigma about menstrual hygiene are prevalent.

In regards to insertion, I will post the following quote by a woman from Kibera:

Joanne: "Here, there is no problem with inserting something, but I think it takes some time for me to get used to it. But if I have other women I can ask, I know this will be okay and even more healthy for me" Kibera, Kenya, June 13th, 2011

Insertion is an issue in some communities and not so much in others. This is a risk for our business, but our ambition is only to provide one solution to women and girls that really need it and that feel comfortable with inserting something. We know that a menstrual cup will not be used by every single girl/woman in Kenya and other developing countries, just like some prefer pads over tampons. We will be happy if we can help some girls and women with our product and totally accept the fact that for others pads (re-usable or biodegradable) are the preferred solution.

Also, you touch upon virginity, or more correctly, the intactness of the hymen that is required before marriage in many regions and cultures. The menstrual cup can affect the hymen as well as doing

sports or riding a matatu can potentially break it. We communicate openly that if girls are concerned about their hymen, they should not use the Ruby Cup before their first sexual intercourse. For most girls and women that we have talked to, however, the hymen was not an issue. However, we need to communicate open how the Ruby Cup may affect it.

For your interest:

The cultural acceptability has been tested through three studies (formal and informal). From 2008 – 2010, the African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC) made a formal study with a sample size of 55 school girls and 45 women in urban slums in Kenya and the findings included that acceptability of a menstrual cup was 97% positive.

Moreover, there exists one school in Western Kenya, where menstrual cups are donated informally by a British woman. Girls choose this school over others precisely because they receive a menstrual cup, which allows them to attend school without worrying about leakages.

Finally, through a partnership between a Swedish NGO and a Kenyan young woman, the acceptability of menstrual cups was tested on five secondary schools around Nairobi, with 10 girls on each school, receiving extremely positive feedback and demand from other girls, which she was unfortunately unable to attend, due to lack of affordable menstrual cups on the market in East Africa.

That said, in general, the Ruby Cup business is a learning experience for all of us and we will take it step by step with close monitoring about the implications of providing Ruby Cups to girls and women in Kenya. We do not wish to do any harm. We wish to help and if we achieve doing so through the Ruby Cup, we have helped to make a little difference in this world and to girls and women that today struggle with accessing sanitary products.

Warmest greetings from Nairobi!!

Maxie

=====

The Ruby cup and MHM experiences from Kenya

Posted by jkeichholz - 19 Jul 2012 18:54

@theJourney1

Great idea, but could you please define "plastics"? Are we talking about PET, HDPE, PVC, LDPE, PP, PS or a mix of other/various plastic materials?

Also, is the downcycling of the recycled plastic such a sustainable approach?

And: could your manufacturer guarantee that the created products are free of any toxic substances (~ biocompatibility)?

=====

The Ruby cup and MHM experiences from Kenya

Posted by theJourney1 - 20 Jul 2012 10:23

Thanks alot for the interest, we realy enjoy recieving the feedback;

With "plastics" we are talking about Recycled Polyethylene either LDPE or HDPE (still looking into this). To ensure similar performance as the regular menstrual cup we will be adding an additive in the production process. This additive would only be a small portion of the final product and ofcourse will be an environmental friendly and non toxic material.

For the downcycling part, we believe that every plastic that is removed from the environment and turned into a new usefull product is better then using up new raw materials. In this way we believe this is a sustainable approach (offcourse keeping in mind the added proces and logistic emissions). As the production of 1 cup, doesn't use too much raw materials the impact on this side of the chain may remain limited. But as we've said: we can provide a more sustainable product then the original cup and at lower costs. Keeping in mind the targeted customers we feel that our product provides added value to the customers.

Logically we check to make sure the created products are free of any toxic substances and assure biocompatibility. The final product performs the same as the silicon based cup, only then produced with recycled materials.

We are currently looking into how the end consumer would respond to having such a personal product be made out of recycled materials. We believe that as we can assure the same performance as the original product this should not be too big an issue. What are your thoughts on that?

Please feel free to ask more questions, we love to discuss our idea.

With kind regards,

Elleore(FR), Erik(NL), Miriam(CH) & Munya(DE)

Climate-KIC TheJourney Participants

=====

The Ruby cup and MHM experiences from Kenya

Posted by Ecowaters - 23 Jul 2012 03:32

The menstrual cups are not without their usability issues, as you know if you talk to current users. (An amusing account of the issues is on an Amazon.com page for one cup brand on the North American market.)

The cups must be flexible to allow insertion and to be securely in place. Most easily recycled plastics are rigid. Also, the plastic can go "biological" fast. To avoid toxic shock syndrome and other bacterial diseases, a plastic that does not harbor bacterial growth is best.

Cleaning, pain in use and removal, and sizing are issues.

Note that women using a diaphragm for birth control already are using something not unlike a menstrual cup. It can be used the same way.

Just an aside: We hear historical accounts of women using the hollow-out rinds of small oranges and lemons for this purpose.

Good luck with finding a solution.

Carol Steinfeld

Ecowaters (etc.)

=====

The Ruby cup and MHM experiences from Kenya

Posted by Maxie - 18 Aug 2012 17:32

Dear Elleore, Erik, Miriam and & Munya,

Thanks for your great interest in finding more ways of producing menstrual cups. There is a German brand, called Meluna, that are producing emnstrual cups of a material calle TPE: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thermoplastic_elastomer.

You might want to talk to them about your idea :
meluna.eu/meluna.html

We have contacted our partners in regards your idea of producing Menstrual Cups out of these recycled plastic materials and I will let you know as soon as I know more about it. It is to be noted, however, that silicone is a very eco friendly material accoring to various articles on the Internet.

Have a lovely weekend!

Maxie

=====

The Ruby cup and MHM experiences from Kenya

Posted by Maxie - 12 Sep 2012 20:54

Dear all,

Thanks for you valuable cost break down of sanitary towels. We provide Ruby Cup at affordable prices in slums. And currently we are looking into ways of further lowering the price. So far, we can sell Ruby Cup at a price that equals 6-8 months (depending on the menstrual flow) of spending on pads. At the same time, as Elizabeth mentioned, we are also a for profit company and need to get costs covered and in some areas this kind of up-front investment, although it saves money on the long run, is difficult to make. For these areas we are looking at different payment methods, distribution methods and are also looking for partners that can help us either cross-subsidizing the price or purchase the product, so that we can sell it below costs while we distribute and educate about Ruby Cup including menstrual hygiene and basic reproductive health.

One challenge has also been to establish trust in the product. Since it is so unknown in Kenya, we have faced scepticism in regards to longevity and benefits of the product. This requires awareness building and marketing. The positive thing: we are on it and going to make it work! However, any input in regards to distribution/marketing is highly appreciated.

Greetings from Kenya!

Maxie

=====

The Ruby cup and MHM experiences from Kenya

Posted by Maxie - 24 Jan 2013 16:21

Happy New year to everyone!

A quick Ruby Cup update from Kenya. We are currently available in 60 pharmacies in Nairobi but not yet available outside the city. We are working on making Ruby Cup available in Kisumu.

Here is a list with pharmacies where you can get Ruby Cup: ruby-cup.com/default.asp?page=buy_now.as...p;diffdel=&idc=3

The price for one Ruby Cup is 1800 KES in Kenya but we are currently running a promotion and you can get Ruby Cup for 1250 KES for a limited period.

Also, we have a discounted price for Ruby Cup if organisations or individuals wish to provide the product to underprivileged school girls. We offer the provision of Ruby Cups, the education involved about menstrual hygiene and reproductive health and of course how to use Ruby Cup.

In Europe, for every Ruby Cup we sell, we sponsor one and provide it to a school girl from underprivileged backgrounds in Kenya.

Last year, we conducted a study with the Red Cross in Uganda and I am sharing the positive results with you in the attached document. Happy reading and speak soon!

Sunny greetings from Nairobi!

Maxie

Re: The Ruby cup and MHM experiences from Kenya

Posted by Maxie - 05 Jun 2013 11:35

Hello everyone,

We've got news for you! Ruby Cup has established an office in Berlin. This means we are present in East Africa (Kenya) and Europe (Berlin) with sales increasing in both regions.

In Europe we sell Ruby Cup mostly through the Internet. For every Ruby Cup we sell online, we sponsor one to a school girl in Kenya. The school girls who received Ruby Cups have founded Ruby Cup Clubs, in which they talk freely about menstrual hygiene and what it means to grow up as a girl in Kenya.

In Nairobi, we engage in sales through pharmacies and supermarkets. Here are pictures from our team in Kenya during an event called Blankets and Wine where we promote Ruby Cups to girls and women from Nairobi.

Best greetings!

Maxie

=====

Re: The Ruby cup and MHM experiences from Kenya

Posted by carlottadenis - 07 Aug 2014 10:29

Hi Maxie,

I have been silently but attentively following and reading about the Ruby Cup experience since I registered in SuSanA forum. Congratulations for your success!

I recently read about MHM in developing countries in a French magazine (*Causette*) and they mentioned the Ruby Cup, drawing the attention on the problem of excision and how it prevents women from using the cup. I know the development of cup sales does not aim at reaching all women, however it is surely something to consider, since it excludes a significant proportion of women. Have you experienced such situations?

(I am sorry my question may be really naive, I am not at all an expert on these matters, and I guess

excision is less common in Nairobi where most of the Ruby Cup sales take place).

Kind regards,

Carlotta

=====

Re: The Ruby cup and MHM experiences from Kenya

Posted by mwaniki - 07 Aug 2014 20:17

Hi Maxie and the Ruby Cup Team

I remember meeting you at the Ministry of Health and Sanitation, Nairobi, Kenya as we waited our turns to see the Chief Health Officer, Dr.Kepha Ombacho. I advanced the idea of publishing a short note of your project in the *Africa Water, Sanitation & Hygiene* but you said that the matter was in the teething stages.

That was two years ago and a lot of water has passed under the bridge to say the least.

Isn't it the high time we had that short write-up of your experiences on the hygiene aspect of the '**Ruby cup**' for the benefit of thousands of our readers who are not members of this forum?

Kind regards / *Mwaniki*

=====

Re: The Ruby cup and MHM experiences from Kenya

Posted by Maxie - 13 Aug 2014 14:49

Dear Mwaniki,

I have attached our latest Report on [Ruby Cup's](#) work in Kenya, Kisumu.

Hope this helps to clarify? Otherwise, I am available via email on

This e-mail address is being protected from spambots. You need JavaScript enabled to view it

.

We are still looking for implementing partners on the ground in Kenya, so should you know of any organisation that wishes to assist in the distribution process, please drop me an email.

All the best,

Maxie

=====

Re: The Ruby cup and MHM experiences from Kenya

Posted by mwaniki - 17 Aug 2014 22:49

Hi Maxie

Thanks for the material for publication in the oncoming edition of the ***Africa Water, Sanitation & Hygiene***. Could I please use the pictures of the sales girls you posted in May and the pix of the product earlier on?

Kind regards / *Mwaniki*

=====