



CASE STUDY

IIM BANGALORE • ECO FEMME



ECO FEMME CASE STUDY

About your company:

Eco Femme is a women-led social enterprise founded in 2010. Based in Tamil Nadu, India, our goal is to create environmental and social change through revitalising menstrual practices that are healthy, environmentally sustainable, culturally responsive and empowering for women around the world. We produce and sell washable cloth pads, provide menstrual health education to adolescents, and open dialogues on menstruation all along the way.

Our social enterprise has a hybrid model, combining commercial and non-commercial activities. The income generated by commercial activities gives us the freedom to address social and environmental issues in the field of menstruation, a.o. through our programs Pad for Pad (<https://ecofemme.org/in-action/pad-for-pad/>) and Pads for Sisters (<https://ecofemme.org/in-action/pads-for-sisters/>). We would like our products to be available (accessible and affordable) to women of all socio-economic strata, so that we all can take care of our bodies and our earth in a way that feels just to us.

Here a few of the social and environmental reasons that really concern us (and made us create Eco Femme!).

Health:

What is inside a disposable? We do not know (!) what is in most of the Disposable Sanitary Napkins available to us in India as the industry does not disclose this information on the packaging. However, research done on US manufactured products shows it is formed out of different plastics (a.o. super absorbent polymers) and contains dioxins ('by product' of the bleaching process) which has been classified by the WHO as highly toxic, contains BPAs and BPS (disrupt embryonic development and are linked to heart disease and cancer), Phthalates (disregulate gene expression), and DEHP (reproductive toxicity). For more details read the Always fact sheet (<http://www.womensvoices.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Always-fact-sheet-FINAL.pdf>).

Most major brands of tampons and pads contain non-organic cotton or wood pulp grown using agrochemicals and pesticides. Some also use synthetic fragrances, odor neutralizers and other potentially hazardous ingredients.

We wear pads against a sensitive part of our body; the vagina has a very permeable thin skin and we are concerned about what happens when these toxins enter the bloodstream and accumulate in our bodies.

At a more experiential level, many women experience irritations and rashes caused by the plastic pads and therefore opt for cloth.

Environment:

There is also a very large environmental pollution related to the use of DSNs. The plastic napkins are estimated to take 500-800 years to decompose. A woman in her lifetime generates about 150kg of disposable sanitary waste. India right now counts approximately 350 million girls and women of reproductive age. If we all switch to DSNs, we would generate approx. 42 billion pads (waste) per year.

While we are all trying to reduce plastic shopping bags, we might not realise that 1 DSNs is equivalent to 4 disposable plastics bags. The waste of these plastic pads ends up in landfill (polluting the soil and water quality) or gets incinerated (creating toxic ash and fumes). The above mentioned toxins/pollutants -through air, water and organic matter - will find their way into other living beings, to which we as humans are also connected. There is simply no away!

Other reasons to make the switch:

By choosing sustainable menstrual products such as washable cloth pads that are good for your body and the planet, you are also saving money! In general women will spend around Rs70 per month on DSNs, which makes Rs 840/year, and Rs 4200/5 years. A full cycle kit (consisting of 2 pantyliners, 2 days pads, 2 day pad plus, 1 night pad and 1 pouch) will last you 5 years and costs Rs1575, meaning it saves you Rs 2625 - In other words, there is no financial reason not to switch!

The pads are stitched by women self help group members, so by buying the pads you are also supporting fellow women in earning a living wage.

For more on mission and motivation: <https://ecofemme.org/about/about-us/>

On menstrual education: <https://ecofemme.org/in-action/>



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Case Details:

Traditionally women have been using cloth to manage their periods, but have made a major shift to Disposable Sanitary Napkins (DSNs). (For a brief history of menstrual products in India, read further: <http://scroll.in/article/802833/how-the-advertising-industry-persuaded-indian-women-to-start-wearing-sanitary-pads>). Since 1990s, international companies such as Procter and Gamble, Johnson & Johnson and Kimberley Clark have done aggressive marketing to capture customers. As research showed that in rural Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan up to 50% of women are using DSNs we can assume this number is much higher in (semi-) urban areas (see AVAG menstrual survey report) (<http://documents.mx/documents/avag-menstrual-survey-report.html#>).

In DSN marketing, a core message has been that the use of cloth is an unhygienic practice, having a leading influence in how girls and women currently relate to cloth. This makes the reintroduction of cloth pads as a modern and convenient product a hard one to sell.

Our sales and marketing:

We sell our products in India and in 20 other countries, mostly in Europe. Most of our retailers are online stores, to a lesser degree brick store (as pads are not fast moving commodities), we have our own online store, participate domestically in markets/events. Lastly, we work with ambassadors; women who are passionate and convinced about our products & our outreach work and would like to connect with other women to spread the word about the use of washable cloth pads for reasons of health, environment and social justice.

We use facebook and to a lesser degree twitter to reach out to our customers. We use these channels mostly for sharing content information on menstruation.

We have communication materials (leaflets and posters) for our retailers to either send along to the users or which facilitate the conversation in a shop.

We feel we need this combination of channels, of online stores that are easy to access, of physical stores where people can see the product as well as a passionate group that is facilitating thought provoking discussion to help make the switch.

In financial year 2015-2016, Eco Femme had a turnover of Rs. 66 Lakhs and has been distributing 62,000 pads (commercially and non commercially). For the coming year we would like to continue our 50% growth.

Target Group:

Indian semi-urban and urban middle and upper class girls and women who would buy the product at commercial rates, who are concerned about their health and environment.

Challenge/Opportunity:

How do you market washable cloth pads- a product that is not well-known and is for many women (and men) against the current of mainstream mindsets/culture of what we should use?

When we present washable cloth pads, often it is met with negative reactions: "This is taking us back to the past, it is gross to touch your blood, inconvenient to have to wash, dry and carry with us, it is unhygienic to use cloth" etc.

As menstruation (all over the world) is still a taboo and little discussed subject, most girls and women have also not given it much thought and often know little about alternatives, about the health, environmental and social effects of their product choice.

How to reach girls and women and create an opening in which they are willing to listen, connect, reconsider their opinions, change their mind and make a switch to sustainable menstrual products?

Expected Outcome/ Deliverables:

Innovate effective and low-cost strategies to make women overcome these cultural barriers and make a switch to washable cloth pads.



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Recommended Methodology:

Understanding what the cultural barriers are, understanding entry points to washable cloth pads, connecting it to something that is important to them.

Useful References for Facts and Industry Insights:

- "Chem Fatale" report by Women's voices for the Earth, US on chemicals in menstrual products and their potential health risks: <http://www.womensvoices.org/feminine-care-products/chem-fatale-report/>
- 'Seeing Red', by Women's Environmental Network, UK on the health and environmental impact of disposable menstrual products:
<https://ecofemme.org/wp-content/uploads/environmenstrualweb1.pdf>
<https://ecofemme.org/wp-content/uploads/environmenstrualweb1.pdf>
and other related resources can be found at: <https://ecofemme.org/in-action/research-and-resources/>

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Annexures:

1. Why make the switch poster series

(i) Money Rupees

why make the switch?



washable pads | to save money

Cost in India	Per month	Per year	5 years
DISPOSABLE PRODUCTS	Rs. 70	Rs. 840	Rs. 4200
CLOTH PADS (Rs. 1575 for a Full Cycle kit of 7 pads, cost divided over 5 years)	Rs. 26	Rs. 315	Rs. 1575

Over 5 years in India, the average woman spends Rs. 4200 on disposable products.

A one time payment of Rs. 1575 could be all you spend for the next 5 years if you make the switch to cloth.

That means you save Rs. 2625!

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Why make the switch poster series
(ii) Health

why make the switch?



washable pads | for your health

			
Disposable menstrual products are not sterilised and instead are often bleached using chlorine which produces dioxins.	The dioxins produced can cause cancer as well as other reproductive, developmental, immunological, and glandular effects.	Many women experience allergic reactions to synthetic ingredients, fragrances and plastics in disposables.	Using cloth pads or menstrual cups can dramatically reduce risk of infections, irritation and more serious health risks to women.

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Why make the switch poster series
(iii) FAQ

still have questions?



washable pads | FAQ

What is it?

Cloth pads are just like disposables, except you wash and reuse them therefore saving money and creating less waste.

Is it hygienic?

When cloth pads are washed well, dried well (preferably in direct sunlight) and stored properly, they are perfectly hygienic.

How do I wash it?

First soak used pads in cold water, then wash by hand or in a machine at 40° or less.

How do I dry it?

Dry on the washing line for best results or tumble dry on low heat.

Does it stain?

Soaking used pads in cold water prior to washing ensures pads remain stain free.

How long can I reuse it?

If properly cared for, our pads can be used for 5 or more years.

How often do I need to change it?

As often as you would change a disposable pad—every 4 to 6 hours, or as needed.

How many do I need?

We suggest that you would need an average of 6-8 pads, depending on your flow.





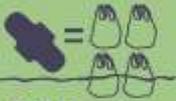
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Why make the switch poster series
(iv) Dom. Environment

why make the switch?



washable pads | for the earth

 <p>150 kg</p> <p>A woman in her lifetime generates about 150kg of disposable sanitary waste. That's 108,000 tonnes of menstrual waste a year in India!</p>	 <p>800 years</p> <p>1 disposable pad = 4 plastic bags. One disposable pad takes up to 800 years to decompose in landfill.</p>	 <p>Incinerating menstrual waste is a dangerous practice as it produces highly toxic emissions harmful to both us and the environment.</p>	 <p>The long-term solution lies in moving to healthier and eco-friendly alternatives such as cloth pads and cups.</p>
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Why make the switch poster series
(v) Empowering

why make the switch?



washable pads | empowering women



Livelihood: Our pads are produced by a women's collective in India to provide a living wage for rural women.



Education: Through our Pad for Pad & Pads for Sisters programs we foster a positive menstrual experience for underprivileged Indian girls & women.



Dignity: Designed by women for women, our pads are beautiful and enable you to experience your period in a dignified and conscious way.



Unity: Eco Femme is a choice in harmony with nature and unites sisters around the world in a project that is seeking to transform lives.

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2. Oo Womaniya Ad

REVALUATING MENSTRUATION BECAUSE LIFE
DEPENDS ON IT

WASHABLE CLOTH PADS

HEALTHY
AFFORDABLE
ECO-POSITIVE

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For more information visit www.ecofemme.org

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