

# GIVING GIRLS THE DIGNITY THEY DESERVE

## Transnet Teenage Health Programme



Women in South Africa have come a long way in making their voice heard and fighting for their rightful place in society. But in some communities, where poverty forces families to live with the bare necessities, there are women who are battling to maintain their dignity and self-esteem. The Transnet Teenage Health Programme is turning this situation around. Through awareness, education and mentoring about feminine health and hygiene, the programme is enabling teenage girls in our country's poorest communities to embrace their femininity, lift their heads, and walk with dignity.

### ANSWERING THE NATIONAL CALL TO RESTORE WOMEN'S DIGNITY

It's hard to believe, but until recently women in remote parts of South Africa have been left to fend for themselves in dealing with the practical hygiene issues of menstruation. In 2010, South African President Jacob Zuma made a call that young girls should not miss out on getting an education because they don't have the necessary feminine hygiene products. This is in line with both the second and third Millennium Development Goals, which commit to universal access by girls to primary education, gender equality and the empowerment of women. Positioning itself as a caring corporate citizen, Transnet's objective of education about good, clean feminine health and hygiene practices underscores these goals. Transnet's corporate social investment arm, the Transnet Foundation, has therefore launched a Teenage Health Programme that

provides education, awareness and feminine hygiene products to the poorest, mainly rural communities of South Africa.

### THE CHALLENGES OF POVERTY-STRICKEN RURAL COMMUNITIES

The Transnet Teenage Health Programme is targeted at poor communities where families get minimal or no income. In these communities, general hygiene, sanitation and proper self-care has moved to the bottom of the priority list and there are often no sanitary amenities or waste management systems. On a financial level, parents, understandably, use the little money they have to buy food instead of toiletries. However, the consequence is that teenage girls stay away from school and other activities when they menstruate because they don't have access to proper sanitation and feel embarrassed and uncomfortable.

### CHANGING LIVES

*"Transnet has helped us a lot and we are grateful for that. If the whole world would think like this company I swear it would be better. Thank you Transnet for the menstrual cup and Dignity Pack.*

- T - Trust-worthy
- R - Reliable
- A - Amazing
- N - Natural
- S - Sustainable
- N - Nice
- E - Energiser
- T - Teacher"

*Baitshoki Mogapi, Kgamanyane High School, North West Province*

### FACTS AND FIGURES

- By December 2012, 3 600 girls had benefited from the programme.
- By February 2014, this number is likely to be close to 8 000, way higher than the initial 2013 target of 5 600.
- In 2012, the project was implemented in five schools in North West Province and seven schools in the Northern Cape. In 2013, this was expanded to 12 and 8 communities respectively for these provinces. The programme was also introduced in KwaZulu-Natal and the Free State.
- In 2015, the programme will also be implemented in the Eastern Cape and Limpopo. In fact, the aim is to run the programme in eight of the nine provinces by 2015.



The positive message on the cover of the booklet the girls receive sums up what the programme is all about.

### GIVING YOUNG GIRLS A FUTURE THROUGH EDUCATION

Through education, awareness and a Dignity Pack that contains basic hygiene products, the Transnet Teenage Health Programme aims to:

- Minimise the school dropout rates for girls,
- Enable girls to participate fully in social and academic activities,
- Teach girls to maintain basic good, clean feminine health and hygiene practices, and
- Improve young girls' quality of life.

The programme helps teenage girls feel comfortable in their own skin and makes them proud to be women.

### A RAY OF HOPE FOR PARENTS

The programme also provides much-needed relief for the financial pressure on parents in poor communities to buy sanitary products. Where families live with the bare minimum, these products are considered an unattainable luxury.

### THE MENSTRUAL CUP – A GREEN, SUSTAINABLE PRODUCT

The menstrual cup is a revolutionary alternative to sanitary pads and tampons that is environmentally- and user-friendly. Made from 100% medical grade silicone, it doesn't have the health risks associated with using pads and tampons, such as infections and toxic shock syndrome, and has various other benefits:

- It's easy to clean, either with water or by wiping it with a cloth.
- It's biocompatible.
- It's non-porous and non-permeable.
- It's comfortable and can be used in an active lifestyle.
- It's beneficial to waste management because there is nothing to throw away, as blood naturally decomposes in water.
- If used with care, it can last up to 10 years.

*A first in Africa: Transnet entered into a special agreement with a supplier for the design of a smaller menstrual cup for teenagers based on initial feedback from the girls in the programme.*

### HOW THE TRANSNET TEENAGE HEALTH PROGRAMME WORKS

The programme involves various groups of people in the community, including the girls' parents, teachers, school governing bodies and government officials. It mainly targets girls between the ages of 13 and 19.

#### Phase 1: One-day interactive workshop

The Transnet Foundation facilitator hosts an interactive workshop session where they talk to the girls about general topics, like recognising their beauty and being proud of who they are, and specific topics about how their body changes, menstruation, teenage pregnancy and self-esteem.

#### Phase 2: The girls are given the Dignity Pack

The girls then each get a 'goodie bag' containing a booklet with the information discussed during the workshop, soap, toothpaste and toothbrushes, roll-on deodorant, hand sanitiser and a menstrual cup. Everything is neatly packed in a Transnet backpack and pencil case that's easy to carry.

#### Phase 3: Feedback and follow-up sessions in small groups

Over a period of nine months, the girls get the opportunity to talk about their experience at small group gatherings hosted by the Transnet Foundation through a process of facilitation. These sessions also involve girls who have been through the programme before, providing the opportunity of peer learning. Taking into account the fact that the girls probably won't be able to buy the general hygiene products again, the girls are provided with indigenous knowledge that they can use as alternatives to store-bought products, such as lemon and aloe.

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shamona.kandia@transnet.net  
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