



## **FEMININE HYGIENE COLLOQUIUM DECLARATION**

**JUNE 2017**

### **Purpose**

There are thousands of learners in South Africa who do not have access to sanitary wear. This impacts heavily on their ability to attend school and receive a basic, quality education while menstruating. This is compounded by physical discomfort during menstruation and stigma at school.

The Gauteng Department of Social Development and the Gauteng Department of Education began a project to roll out dignity packs to learners in 2011. Their target is to reach 1 million learners by 2019. The dignity packs contain petroleum jelly, underarm deodorant, sanitary towels, soap, toothpaste, aqueous cream, lip balm, and hats (for people with albinism).

The programme is currently still administered by the Department of Social Development under the Bana Pele programme which was designed to be a pro-poor integrated package for vulnerable children to access free social services.<sup>1</sup> Bana Pele brings together the Gauteng Department of Social Development, Gauteng Department of Education, and Gauteng Department of Health. However, dignity packs remains a project under Bana Pele without a proper policy to underpin the programme. In addition, the provision of sanitary wear may also be best served under the Integrated School Health Programme (ISHP), which currently limits its intervention in relation to menstruation to education. The ISHP is jointly implemented by the Departments of Basic Education and Health.

The exorbitant pricing of sanitary wear is a major barrier to access to sanitary wear. All spheres of government must join the call of civil society to ensure that National Treasury makes sanitary wear more affordable by dropping VAT on these products.

With these concerns discussed at the Feminine Hygiene Colloquium on access to sanitary wear, the Colloquium makes this declaration.

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<sup>1</sup> Reply by the Department of Education, in the Gauteng Provincial Legislature, Question 5.ED054, 26 August 2016

**The declaration is taken by Equal Education, Livity Africa, Girl Child Movement, Dignity Dreams, Section 27, Amandla.mobi, Equal Education Law Centre and Princess D Menstrual Cup.**

**Declaration**

Menstruation is not optional. It is a natural biological process, by which human life is made possible. Yet many learners are forced to miss school while menstruating or to use materials such as cloth and old socks as pads as they lack the resources to buy proper pads and tampons. Government and civil society is failing in its duty to protect and ensure safe and healthy conditions for women.

We believe that access to sanitary wear for poor learners is a fundamental right. Primary focus must be given to quintile 1, 2 and 3 schools.

The current roll out of dignity packs is both irregular and unable meet the demand. Furthermore it requires a long term strategy to ensure sustainability. We acknowledge and appreciate that the dignity packs contain more than just sanitary wear, and include additional toiletries needed for thousands of learners.

A policy intended to guide the provision of sanitary wear and the implementation of that policy should be underpinned by the following principles:

1. Recognition of the importance of menstruation, and the respect that should be afforded to the biological process.
2. That the lack of sanitary wear affects primarily poor learners in quintile 1, 2 and 3 schools.
3. There is a need to ensure the Gauteng Department of Social Development, Gauteng Department of Education, Gauteng Department of Health ensure learners are afforded the dignity of having sanitary wear made available at in quintile 1, 2 and 3 schools on a sustainable and consistent nature.
4. Oversight mechanism must be put in place to ensure accountability and compliance that maintains the aim of the policy.
5. That the policy is a result of consultative process (with education stakeholders, civil society and the general public).

**FORWARD TO ACCESS TO FREE SANITARY WEAR FOR LEARNERS**