



Thursday, 24 April 2020

Re: Distribution of Sanitary Pads to disadvantaged Women and Girls during the COVID-19 Pandemic

To: Minister of Health, Dr Zweli Lawrence Mkhize

The SANAC Women's Sector (SWS) urges the Department of Health to act diligently in ensuring that economically disempowered women and girls have access to sanitary pads. Access to menstrual hygiene commodities promotes good health, wellbeing, and dignity. The reproductive needs of women do not stop with a global pandemic and women living below the poverty line are significantly disadvantaged.

The Gauteng Provincial Government and social partners are providing relief to poor and vulnerable groups in the country as the country fights against the COVID-19 outbreak. The COVID-19 Solidarity Fund furthermore delivers food parcels to over 250 000 families in South Africa. However, programming and community aid projects have neglected the hygiene needs of women and girls who form more than half of the country's population.

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, women and girls are at high risk when it comes to access to healthcare services, safety, and are increasingly vulnerable to period poverty. Period poverty is the lack of access to sanitary products, menstrual hygiene education, toilets, handwashing facilities, and waste management. It is especially difficult for women to manage their periods safely and with dignity during a pandemic where the loss of income and livelihood is inevitable. It is a particularly worrying time for women who are pregnant and in need of routine health services. Pregnant women also need access to reliable information and quality care. Sexual and reproductive health services and commodities are often overlooked in times of crisis, yet women continue to require family planning, menstrual health supplies and maternal health care. Therefore, it is important that the government must include hygiene and sanitation items (e.g. sanitary pads, soap, hand sanitizers, etc.) for female health workers, women, and girls, particularly those in poor communities as part of essential items for public distribution. There is a need to also scale upon information and communication material on women's health.

Access-Chapter 2 NPC is an organisation based on the South African Constitution which is the Bill of Rights Chapter 2.

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The SWS, therefore, recommends that sanitary pads are distributed together with food parcels across South Africa. We furthermore recommend that information material is shared with communities to empower women about their health, hygiene, and accessibility to care. And finally, we call for the Department of Health to mainstream information about the effects of the pandemic on the health and sanitary needs of women. The topic must not be treated as taboo and communities are sensitised on the importance of programming that is inclusive of women's needs.

Women and girls should not be excluded or treated unfairly, and it is a violation of dignity and health to be inconsiderate of these needs. For more information please do not hesitate to contact us on:

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Yours sincerely



PP

Silungile Mtambo

SANAC Women's Sector, Sector Leader

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