

FemTech: eHealth for women



I See Africa Report

Index

- Introduction
- Menstrual Equity
- Pregnancy Care
- Sexual Wellness



Introduction

The term **Femtech** refers to any software, diagnostics, products and service that leverages technology and innovation to improve women's health. Coined by Ida Tin, founder of Clue, femtech is disrupting traditional healthcare systems by making services and products accessible in areas of menstruation care, sexual health, fertility tracking and pregnancy care. Women's health is often seen as a niche and under researched market.

However, much of this has since changed. This is due to the availability of targeted services, the advancement of research on women's health as well as the production of innovative products that have highlighted the much needed attention to this sector. Women make up an estimated 3.73 billion prospective consumers globally. Furthermore Frost & Sullivan have reported that the femtech industry is to be worth \$50 billion by 2025.



Introduction

One of the main factors contributing to the rise of femtech and the interest in women's health globally is the growth of the 'She economy'. Women are not only playing a greater role across health continuum, but they also have a higher purchasing power. In an African context organisations have noted the importance of ensuring that the girl child does not fall behind in the industrial and digital transformation in the continent. Which is expected to bring much growth to various African economies.

In conjunction with the provision of education to young girls the goal of reducing the lack of sanitary products, increasing access to sexual education and the encouragement of family planning are some of the issues femtech organisations are tackling with, the aim of empowering the girl child. The organisations covered in this report have not just made female health care accessible. But with the use of solution base innovation and technology they have made the access of various products sustainable for women and young girls.



Menstrual Equity : is equal access to menstrual hygiene products. As a value, menstrual equity contends that the 50% of females who get their period every month have the right to care for it affordably, easily and without shame.

Seventh Generation



Menstrual Equity

Many young girls and women cannot afford proper sanitary products and lack the access to the necessary information and facilities. Taking into account that mensural cycle is a month to month biological factor, menstrual absenteeism becomes very high in low income communities. As many females resort to using mattress foam, toilet paper, cotton wool as an alternative to sanitary pads or tampons. If those alternatives fail, they simply do not go to work or school. This further exacerbate the notion of period poverty which is a global problem.

The United Nations stated that one in ten girls in Africa will miss school during their period. At times this leads to many girls dropping out due the challenge of continuously having to play catch up with work, assignments and examinations.

Menstrual Equity

Countries such as Kenya and Britain have taken an actionable stance on reducing menstrual absenteeism. The Kenyan government puts aside an estimated US \$3 million annually to distribute free pads to girls in low income communities. Britain launched a Period Poverty Fund and appointed a task team to assist in achieving the goal of ensuring that all women and girls gain access to sanitary products by 2050. However, the distribution of pads alone is not enough and it is unsustainable when considering that a projected 288 million women are on their period each day.

Yet one in three females use the correct products and facilities as stated by Charity Water Aid. As more attention is drawn to this matter, various projects and initiatives are sprouting with the sole aim to reduce period poverty in the continent. The pioneers in this sector include organisations such as Afripads, they produce reusable pads in Uganda. Grace Pads produces charity bags with reusable pads for girls in Malawi. The more recent organisations are continuing with the momentum to expand on the provision of sustainable menstrual products for girls in Africa.

Menstrual Equity

Kozo Girls:

Founded in 2017 by Pact's Zambia office, the organization trains young females aged 17 – 24 in making washable, reusable menstrual pads. Kozo Girls pads come in a pack of five, these pads are said to last for at least 12 months.

Sanitary Products Factory:

In Ethiopia Mariam Seba Sanitary Products Factory produces reusable menstrual pads. The company's pads are said to cost 90% less than a years' worth of disposable pads and can last for up to two years.



Menstrual Equity

Grace Health

The company states that their product has placed female health into the pockets of all women around the world. The mobile app is designed to track women's menstrual cycle and ovulation.

The company's target market is women in emerging economies where the access to data, networks or health care is restricted. The app functions through a Chatbot which can be integrated into messaging services such as Facebook, WhatsApp and Telegram for smartphones.

Grace Health believes that all females should be able to follow, understand and plan for their monthly cycle. The app is also able to detect early signs of diagnoses that may need medical attention.

The first pilot will be in Ghana with a gradual expansion to similar countries. The company aims to cater to the 1.2 billion females in low and middle-income countries who have access to mobile phones but limited access to information on menstrual health.

Menstrual Equity

Affordable and Accessible Sanitation for Women (AASW)

AASW produces biodegradable reusable sanitary packages which are said to last for up to three years. A full package consists of two wings, covers made from kintenge, eight cotton liners, and two pairs of underwear, antiseptic soap, hand towel, waterproof bag and a booklet that explains menstrual health which is paired with a calendar.

More than 300 girls in Kenya, Tanzania, Pakistan, India, Nigeria and UAE have benefited from this project thus far.

Menstrual Equity

Sustainable Health Enterprise (SHE)

Based in Rwanda the organisation is using clean technology as a means to provide sustainable pads. Founded by MIT student Elizabeth Scharpf, SHE uses banana trunks to produce fibres to make the product. The company is able to produce pads at 35% the cost of standard sanitary pads in the mainstream market. By up cycling banana trunks the company is also able to increase income for farmers who did not see the value in the banana trunks.





Pregnancy Care

There is a large demographic of women in the continent that struggle with gaining access to maternal and fertility care. For women who are fortunate to bear a child they are faced with the prospect of being part of the high maternal mortality rate in the continent.



Pregnancy Care

Sub-Saharan Africa is said to have a fertility rate that is twice the global average. In the same light there are women who struggle with conceiving a child. Due to the lack of resources, women in many communities are simply left with the emotional and social challenges of not being able to bear a child. Many communities are faced with the 'barrenness amid plenty' phenomenon. This simply means communities' experience both a high fertility and infertility rate. Here lies an opportunity for the development of technology and medication for women in rural and low-income areas. These products could cater to the much needed provision of treatment that can assist with fertility challenges.



Pregnancy Care

Over and above tackling infertility in rural and low-income communities, much can and needs to be done about the high maternal mortality rate in Africa. The World Health Organisation (WHO) reported that an estimated 1000 women die daily from complications related to pregnancy and childbirth. The organisation further states that Sub-Saharan Africa faces the highest rate of maternal mortality with the lifetime risk of maternal death being one in thirty-six. Two thirds of all maternal deaths per year globally are in Africa.

Part of United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) is the improvement of maternal and reproductive health. The SDG target is for the global maternal mortality rate to be fewer than 70 deaths per 100 000 live births by 2030. This will be achieved by ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive health care services. Which will include family planning information and education.

Various start-ups have developed products that remove borders that limit the access of reproductive health products and service to women.

Pregnancy Care

Nabta:

is an online platform that provides a combination of traditional and digital support for women with concerns and challenges regarding fertility, pregnancy and menopause. The platform mainly caters to women in the Middle East and Northern Africa. However, the goal is to provide comprehensive health care services to women globally. Services include clinical advice, personalised health and virtual consultations.



Pregnancy Care

My pregnancy Journey:

The mobile app is aimed at assisting expecting mothers plan for their little one. The mobile app provides access to maternal health information with the goal to educate and train mothers on any issues they may be experiencing during their pregnancy. The app has features such as weekly baby size guides, gynaecologist and exercise videos. App users also get a clinical card to document test appointments which assist in having a healthy pregnancy.

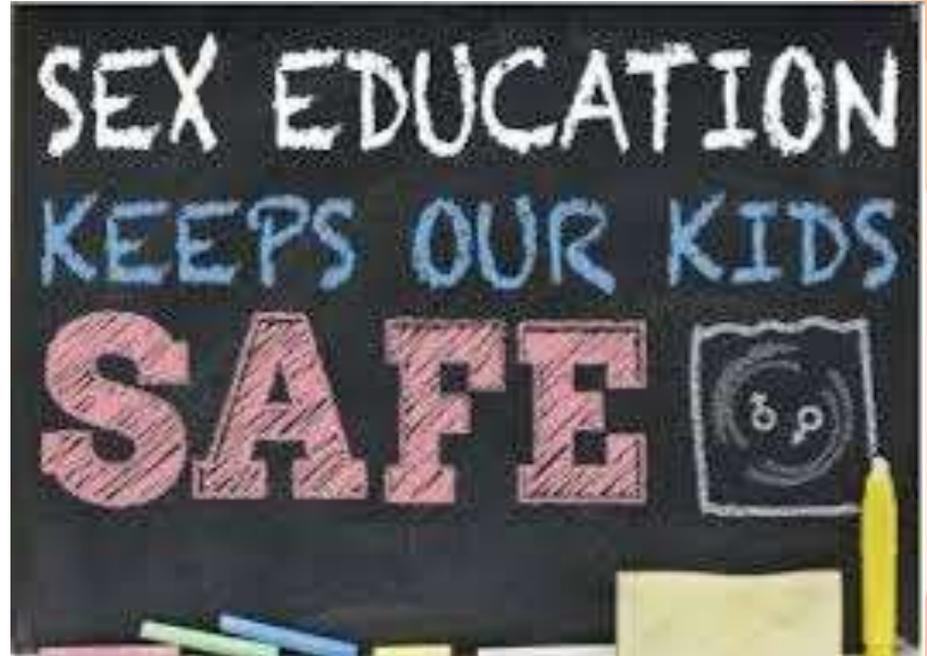
Lumify:

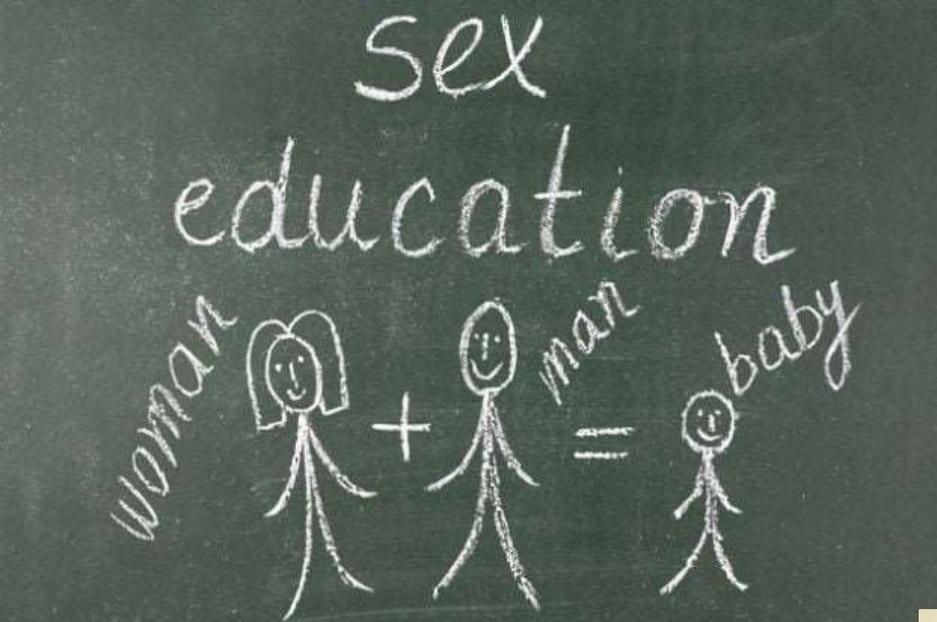
Launched by Philips Africa, the product is a handheld ultra sound device that enables health workers to use in remote areas and home visits. Lumify is a wireless device which connects to a tablet or smartphone. The device is supported by an app that allows for peer to peer image sharing with doctors or other trained technicians. This device is currently available in East Africa, health workers using the device can manage the device and access Philips support, training and IT services.

Sexual Wellness

Comprehensive sexual education is needed to improve sexual and reproductive health in many parts of the continent.

Unfortunately there are many social factors that hamper the access of information that would enable young girls and women to make informed decisions about their bodies. The UN reported that sub-Saharan Africa has one of the highest prevalence of adolescent pregnancies. In 14 sub-Saharan countries 30-51% of girls give birth before they turn 18.





Sexual Wellness

Factors such as child marriage, sexual assault have added fuel to the high numbers of girls quitting school. Combined with the lack of sexual education and health care many women and young girls are left with limited options.

In this regard Femtech is widening the accessibility of some sexual health care supply's and education. The use of mobile technology is taking much needed information to young girls and women's finger tips, this playing a big role in empowering women by informing them on the options available.

Senegal digital distribution:

In 2017 the Senegalese government enrolled a public-private partnership to assist in the distribution of contraceptives in local clinics. The integration of the private sector saw the digitalisation of the distribution channel of the medical products. With the use of real time data, clinics are able to manage supplies of the contraceptives to married women in their communities. The distribution is completed through an online platform that also monitors consumption trends and forecast future needs.

Sexual Wellness

Afrimom:

Developed by Dr Integrity Mchechesi the mobile app provides users with round the clock maternal, sexual and reproductive health support. The app provides access to emergency contraceptives, pre and post exposure antiretroviral therapy medication. Women and girls using the app also have access to local obstetricians and maternity clinics. The app is available in English and local languages spoken in Zimbabwe.

Whispa:

This mobile app gives young people private, anonymous access to a variety of sexual and reproductive health information, products and services. The app is able to make recommendations on the most suitable contraceptive method by taking medical and sexual history into account. The app was founded by Morenike Fajemism and is available in Nigeria.

Fem Connect: created by Asorele Kotu this app provides an on demand service for self-administered contraceptives.

In Closing

The femtech sector is disrupting the traditional health care system one product and service at a time. Products such as cannabis infused tampons, organic pads and fertility tracking apps have made women's health mainstream and highlighted the business opportunities in this sector.

In an African context, femtech means that more women will have access to products and services that will benefit their health. The development of sustainable sanitary products and provision of on demand contraceptives shows that technology needs to take account of the environment it is meant to function in and influence according to the available resources in an innovative manner. However, this points out that there is still a lot that can and needs to be done to reduce and remove period poverty and maternal mortality in the continent.

The Femtech sector has only touched the surface with regards to its impact and development of products that assist in female health.



Reference:

All Africa.2018, UK Launches Global Fund to Help End 'Period Poverty' By 2050,viewed 30 August 2019 [<https://allafrica.com/stories/201903040657.html>]

B Chiou.2019,Why Africa remains an untapped market for femtech, viewed 30 August 2019 [<https://www.raconteur.net/healthcare/femtech-Africa>]

B Bahire Kabeja. 2019, Banana fibers to solve sanitary problems, viewed 3 September 2019 [<https://cleanleap.com/banana-fibers-solve-sanitary-problems>]

Dr I Mchechesi.2019, Dr Integrity Mchechesi (Zimbabwe): Afrimom, viewed 30 August 2019 [<https://ventureburn.com/2019/03/who-africa-innovation-challenge-finalists/>]

D Mutheu.2019, 17-year-old Kenyan student wins global award for sanitary towels innovation, viewed 2 September 2019 [<https://nairobinews.nation.co.ke/life/17-year-old-kenyan-student-wins-global-award-for-sanitary-towels-innovation>]

G Marks.2019,Femtech' startups on the rise as investors scent profits in women's health, viewed 29 August 2019 [<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2019/jun/06/femtech-startups-womens-health-investors>]

Reference:

Health Service. Grace Health raises a seed investment round from Swedish angel investors, viewed 30 August 2019 [<https://nordic9.com/news/grace-health-raises-a-seed-investment-round-from-swedish-angel-investors-news7638281036/>]

Hitlab.2019,Femtech by the Numbers: The Rise of Innovation in Women's Health Technology , viewed 30 August 2019 [<https://www.hitlab.org/blog/femtech-by-the-numbers>]

It/live. 2018, Femtech the next big disrupter, viewed 3 September 2019 [<https://it-online.co.za/2018/03/08/femtech-the-next-big-disrupter/>]

Unctad.2019, Business training graduate helps Tanzanian girls stay in school, viewed 3 September 2019 [<https://unctad.org/en/pages/newsdetails.aspx?OriginalVersionID=1995>]

Telegraph.2018, A Deliveroo for tampons and contraceptives is circumventing stigma in rural Africa, viewed 30 August 2019 [<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/climate-and-people/deliveroo-tampons-contraceptives-circumventing-stigma-rural/>]

Reference:

Scidev.2018, Innovative data spurs healthcare delivery in Africa, viewed 29 August 2019 [<https://www.scidev.net/sub-saharan-africa/health/news/innovative-data-spurs-healthcare-delivery-in-africa.html>]

Pactwood.2019, Kozo Girls, a Pact pilot that provides reusable pads & economic opportunities in Zambia, comes into its own, viewed 3 September 2019 [<https://www.pactworld.org/features/kozo-girls-pact-pilot-provides-reusable-pads-economic-opportunities-zambia-comes-its-own/>]

Ventureburn.2018, Morenike Fajemisin (Nigeria): Whispa, viewed 30 August 2019 [<https://ventureburn.com/2019/03/who-africa-innovation-challenge-finalists/>]

Ventureburn.2019, Women's health startup FemConnect wins Apps for Africa competition, viewed 30 August 2019[<https://ventureburn.com/2019/08/femconnect-apps-africa-winner/>]

Ventureburn.2019, Jacqueline Rogers (South Africa): My Pregnancy Journey, viewed 30 August 2019 [<https://ventureburn.com/2019/03/who-africa-innovation-challenge-finalists/>]

Image Reference:



<https://michiganumc.org/voices/2016/03/28/6277/>



<https://www.childrensfundmalawi.com/the-school-fund-1>



<https://www.changemakers.com/femmesentrepreneuses/entries/be-girl-reusable-sanitary-pads>



<https://www.gofundme.com/f/help-kozo-girls-to-scale>



<https://www.engineeringforchange.org/news/will-take-lot-free-menstrual-pads-end-period-poverty/>



<https://www.wateraid.org/au/articles/empowering-women-in-the-solomon-islands>



<http://www.digitaljournal.com/article/358185>



<https://www.ciytosea.org.uk/category/plastic-free-living/>

Image Reference:



<http://www.peaceau.org/en/article/press-statement-of-the-the-peace-and-security-council-of-the-african-union-au-at-its-407th-meeting-which-devoted-an-open-session-to-the-theme-women-children-and-other-vulnerable-groups-in-conflict-situations-in-africa>



<https://deythere.com/2018/10/04/sex-education-africa/>



<http://www.familyplanning2020.org/index.php>



<https://givingcompass.org/article/here-s-what-pregnancy-looks-like-around-sub-saharan-africa/>



<http://www.stewardshipreport.com/u-n-launches-new-prenatal-care-model/>



<https://citizen.co.za/news/opinion/opinion-editorials/1999205/sex-education-has-become-a-necessity/>

Image Reference:



<https://en.unesco.org/news/conference-lays-out-roadmap-improve-sexuality-education-west-and-central-africa-0>



<https://social-tv.co.za/durex-connect-ed-empowers-youth-to-make-sound-choices-about-sexual-health/>

For customised reports on trends in Africa give us a ring.

Look forward to working with you.

Contact info@iseeafrica.co.za for more information



I See Africa Reports