

FEMININE HYGIENE GOES BLOODY CLEAN



Eco Femme plans to amplify its international sales base, as well as, launch an organic cotton range of washable cloth pads and baby diapers for India and abroad

Eco Femme aims to provide women of the world with a healthier, more eco friendly and sustainable alternative to using plastic-made sanitary pads. Its conception took place when Australian native Kathy Walking and Jessamijn Miedema of The Netherlands met in Auroville, Tamil Nadu, in 2010, where both women worked at a local NGO (Auroville Village Action Group or AVAG) for the socio-economic upliftment of rural women. It was at AVAG that one day, while brainstorming for ideas on how rural women could be made to earn sustainably that the duo hit upon the notion of teaching them to sew cotton sanitary pads for export. Thus, Eco Femme product was launched in 2012 (although research and development started in 2010).

While the pads were devised as a means to providing livelihood for rural women in India, Eco Femme's mission is much larger, encompassing limitation of waste disposal as much as possible. It is estimated that a single sanitary pad takes up to 800 years to decompose (due to its high plastic content). In India alone, it is projected that if every menstruating woman (at least 300 mn of us) were to use a sanitary pad, it would generate waste from 58 bn disposable pads each year! Furthermore, the bleaches used in disposable pads are unhealthy, generating dioxins, which are known to be carcinogenic (cancer-inducing). Therefore, the dire need for alternative menstrual products like cloth pads.

Only three years old, Eco Femme has picked up pace in the international market. Indian women, too, have begun to taken note of its virtues. On average, Eco Femme sells 880 pads per month in India, and 1,370 internationally (across 16 countries including UK, USA, Netherlands, Hong Kong, Spain, Germany, Mexico). "Over the past three years, we have sold approximately 55,000 washable cloth pads, effectively replacing about 4 million disposable products. Our work truly has a 'ripple effect' impact. Often, we hear stories of one woman switching to our pads—but it doesn't stop there. She informs her friends and, one by one, they switch over too," says Walking, who migrated to Auroville in 1997.



Jessamijn Miedema (left) and Kathy Walking

The cloth pad maker offers users two kinds of pads—Premium and Subsidised. The premium range trades for full price in India, as well as, internationally, which makes room for the subsidy in the other range. The premium range comprises four different sizes of pads—strategically offered for the “heavier” and “leaner” days of the period. The subsidised range provides pads of the same quality and materials, but with a different pricing structure to accommodate rural women and girls.

The pads are stitched by women Self Help Group (SHG) members of AVAG hailing from rural villages around Auroville, who have been trained in tailoring and are paid fair trade prices (per piece) for stitching. Besides the commercial impact, Eco Femme, has also launched two wonderful initiatives—its ‘Pad For Pad’ and ‘Pad For Sisters’ programmes—both intended to provide economically disadvantaged women and girls with free or subsidised pads for healthy and dignified periods, as they are unable afford sanitary products by themselves.

In the near future, Eco Femme plans to amplify its international sales base, as well as, launch an organic cotton range of washable cloth pads and baby diapers for India and abroad. Also in the pipeline is the unveiling of its exclusive online store and a brand new website.

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Revenue, INR lac	9.3	20.4	39.12
International Sales	4.7	11.5	20.23
Domestic Sales	3.8	7.4	17.56
Rural(subsidised)	0.8	1.5	1.33
Sales, Units			
Sales, Units	9043	18262	28871
International Sales	4406	10812	16473
Domestic Sales	3253	5463	10602
Rural Sales	1384	1987	1796

Table: Eco Femme Revenue Chart