



An Eco-Sisterhood Rising from Rural India: **Healthy, Affordable, and Dignified Menstruation**

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Eco Femme Team.
Photo credit: Eco Femme

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CASE STUDY

*An Eco-Sisterhood Rising from Rural India:
Healthy, Affordable, and Dignified Menstruation*

AT A GLANCE

Company	Eco Femme
Social theme(s)	Education/Children & Youth; Energy/Climate Change/Environment; Health; WASH
Geography	India, with online and retail sales globally
Year founded	2010
Revenues	<€1 million annually
Legal structure	Unique legal entity (Auroville Foundation) established as an Act of Parliament; Eco Femme is hybrid, with commercial and non-commercial activities
Clients	Girls, women, and people who menstruate world-wide
Business model	Sales income (75%) + Grants (25%); Sales income declined during Covid and fundraising has increased to cover the gap and continue education programming
Product/services	Eco Femme develops and produces organic reusable cloth pads for menstruation, and provides education and subsidised pads to girls and low-income women for healthy menstruation
Impact reach	Since 2010, Eco Femme has distributed nearly 1.4M pads, preventing the waste of approx. 104M pads and impacting the lives of nearly 90K girls

Background

More than one-quarter of the world's population is of reproductive age, yet many do not have access to products maintaining healthy, dignified menstruation! These circumstances are especially acute in areas where basic sanitation infrastructure is lacking or menstruation is stigmatised. At the same time, modern menstruation products are mostly made with plastic, and conventional pads each contribute the equivalent of four plastic bags worth of non-biodegradable material to the environment.² These products also contain chemicals that may harm the body.³ Reusable period products can eliminate a significant source of waste from landfills and provide a more sustainable, healthy solution for women and girls.

¹ <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/fast-facts-nine-things-you-didnt-know-about-menstruation>

² <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2666789422000277>

³ <https://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/doi/10.1289/ehp.122-A70>

About the Company

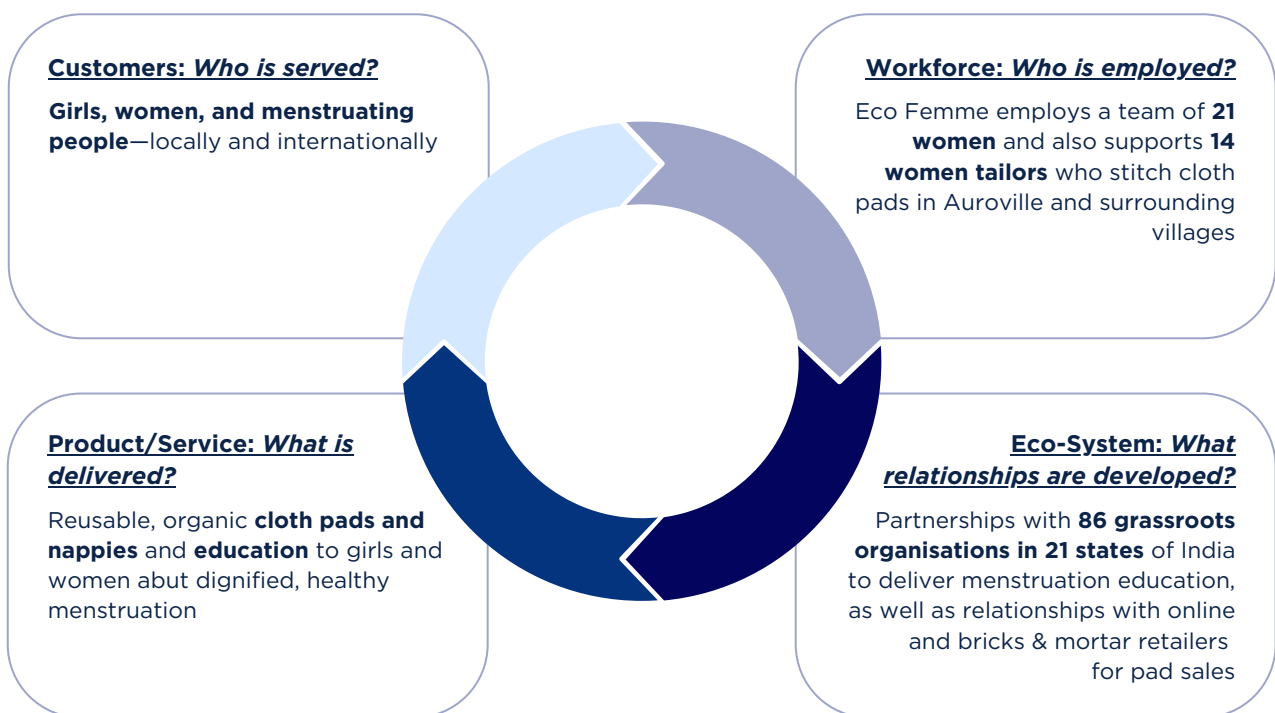
Eco Femme was founded by four women—**Kathy Walkling, Jessamijn Miedema, Anita Budhraj, and Anbu Sironmani**—living in Auroville, a universal township in Tamil Nadu, India. When Walkling moved to Auroville, she experienced difficulty disposing modern menstruation products. Seeking an alternative, these women came together to explore manufacturing cloth pads, providing an eco-friendly solution and creating livelihoods for women in the surrounding rural areas. In focus groups, participants’ positive responses to washable pads and eagerness to learn about menstruation inspired the development of a hybrid model generating commercial sales to finance education and access to cloth pads for girls and low-income women.



Pad for Pad menstrual education session by Kalvi
Photo credit: Eco Femme



Sources of Impact



Innovation Activities

Eco Femme engages in several activities that drive innovation, both in the communities they serve as well as the larger eco-system:

INNOVATION ACTIVITIES



Iterating with product design and impact objectives: Eco Femme continuously improves its product designs, balancing environmental objectives with customer needs. For example, the company strove to reach a certain sales threshold in order to source organic cotton in bulk. Eco Femme also decided to forego a fully compostable product in order to address leakage with a waterproof layer



Introducing a sliding scale pricing model: Eco Femme has a range of prices that cater to different populations. International and urban women purchase pads at a higher price to subsidize pads and education programmes to other populations, while girls in the education programme are provided 'gift' pads and low-income women are able to purchase pads at a subsidised rate

Key Innovation Challenges & Learnings

Eco Femme started as an exploration, with the business model evolving along the way. The founders have learned how to innovate within a complex cultural space with numerous challenges and learnings:

- **Approaching conversations about cultural norms as 'openings':** Eco Femme lets the girls and women lead the way in education sessions. Co-founder Jessamijn Miedema describes the careful balancing act between teaching healthy practices and imposing cultural norms: *"It's always a bit of a balance, not wanting to bring too much of our own personal beliefs and opinions, but also providing a space where women feel strengthened to rethink and redefine what [menstruation] means for themselves. It's an opening of the conversation."*
- **Using evaluation to improve learning outcomes:** Eco Femme has been careful to modify their curriculum to ensure learning retention. Co-founder Kathy Walkling describes the process: *"We started with a one and a half hour class and realised that the girls weren't retaining the information. We worked with a research consultant, which helped us to settle on a 3-hour curriculum. We do a role play too, so the girls get to actually apply their learning and have room for coaching one another. This is a really important part of it, not just pouring information into the girls, but really getting them a chance to share their knowledge."*

Featured Partnership: Sharana

Sharana is a community development nonprofit organization based in Pondicherry, South India. Social workers at Sharana noticed that there was a lack of awareness of menstrual health and hygiene in the communities where they worked.

In 2023, Eco Femme trained five Sharana staff members (4 social workers and 1 health worker) to conduct menstrual health sessions with adolescent girls. Through this training, Sharana has been conducting educational sessions and distributing pads to hundreds of girls through Eco Femme’s “Pad for Pad” programme.



Sharana Education Session
Photo credit: Sharana