

THRIVABLE INSIGHTS FROM THE THRIVABILITY MATTERS WEBINAR

Hi, passionate thrivability enthusiast. We live in unprecedented times. The numbers prove that climate change is here to stay. Social injustices corrupt the very fabric of our society, and misinformation and false narratives clog our devices through mainstream and social media. It's important to have reliable information from people who stand to gain nothing from sharing it with you. A person's agenda defines their motivation. THRIVE's agenda is to assist others to build a thrivable future, while our passionate volunteers walk the talk to deliver an authenticity that is difficult to find elsewhere.

Every month, THRIVE delivers a knowledge-filled [webinar](#), straight to your screens, providing statistics, facts, tips, tricks, and hints on how we can solve the problems our world faces everyday. from new innovations and discoveries, to the actions that people and communities take every day to make our world just a little more thrivable.

Each month, a particular solution is unpacked, disseminated, and investigated, to see how it applies to us and how we can play as a global team, on the playing field of Earth, to reach these goals. It isn't enough for us to sit passively by and let governments and businesses make our decisions for us. After all, their motivation is driven by their agenda. What does that mean for us?

Our aim is to arm you with the knowledge to change from being simply sustainable to terrifically thrivable. Therefore, I'd like to introduce you to Ute Michaela Arndt. She was an esteemed guest for the March 2024 Thrivability Matters Webinar who spoke to us on SDG3: Good Health and Well-Being. Ute's focus was on an important issue that impacts half the population - the menstrual period. The thrivable insights that follow are her precious pearls of wisdom that she generously shared with us during the Q&A session that follows every webinar.

INTRODUCING UTE MICHAELA ARNDT



Ute Michaela Arndt is an experienced marketing leader and has worked for some of the top global brands such as amazon.com.

Her passion is experimenting with challenges and working in product categories which are surrounded by taboos and shame.

Her journey has taken her to Africa, to Tanzania where, in 2021, she founded an NGO dedicated to empowering children and young women in poorer areas through education.

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What has been the biggest challenge you have faced in each of your respective pursuits?

Overcoming the stigma around menstruation and promoting body positivity for women faces its most formidable obstacle in the deeply ingrained beliefs and perceptions that women encounter within their own families.

These age-old convictions and biases have persisted for centuries, making it exceptionally difficult to dismantle them.

Moreover, beyond these beliefs and perceptions, the way women are viewed varies significantly across different cultures.

African societies still have progress to make in terms of empowering women, lagging behind other more advanced societies in this regard.

Can you speak more on how industries perpetuate the shame cycle by pushing to sell more products for 'stains' and 'dirt'?

What has been the general response and acceptance to your school on education about periods and female health?

The menstrual product industry encourages women to rely on disposable products by subtly instilling fear of stains and exposure. A prime example of this is the emphasis on nighttime usage; women often believe they experience heavy bleeding during the night, leading them to use extra-large pads or towels. However, most women have their heaviest flow in the morning, not at night.

Despite this, the industry heavily promotes nighttime products.

Approximately 80% of women wear products that exceed their actual needs, absorbing more than necessary. Additionally, women tend to change their products more frequently than required. These continuous implicit narrative places the blame on women for any stains on their clothing or bedding, rather than holding the industry accountable.

As a result, major brands consistently increase their production of disposable products by 3-5% each year.

In our Tanzanian school, situated in a remote and economically disadvantaged area, we approach topics related to menstruation and female intimate health with

great care. Within the parents' group (predominantly women), there exists significant resistance to openly discussing these matters. Some women return with questions, but often in hushed tones, treating the subject as a secret. Others are genuinely shocked by the mere consideration of discussing it.

Given the historical lack of open dialogue around female health, we proceed cautiously. Women have long been left to manage their periods independently.

Our current focus is on educating women about using clean clothing during menstruation for protection. Due to financial constraints, they often resort to old rags and garments instead of proper sanitary towels. Additionally, we emphasise the importance of thorough hygiene for their intimate areas.



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Is it shame that makes women not talk about their periods? Some would argue there is just no need to talk about it when the situation doesn't call for it.

For example, I don't need to say that I am going to empty my bowels when there is no need for it to be said. This is also a natural bodily function that is essential for our wellbeing.

Throughout history, women have been conditioned to perceive menstruation as something impure. Consequently, shame—often unconsciously—plays a significant role. A recent study reveals that women would rather request a pay raise than openly admit they are on their period.

The goal of breaking the shame cycle is not to encourage women to publicly announce their menstrual status. Instead, it aims to foster a sense of comfort with their natural bodily functions. Women should feel free to seek advice, ask questions, or address issues related to menstruation (such as forgetting protection or experiencing pain) without the fear of being labelled as “dirty.”

While there is no doubt about period shame, some women go into seclusion because they are

unable to afford sanitary products. Are you working on interventions around providing free or affordable sanitary products, for instance: menstrual cups.

In Africa, period poverty poses a significant challenge, leading many women to seclude themselves during menstruation.

Consequently, numerous women miss work (without openly discussing the reasons for their absence every four weeks), putting their family income at risk.

Our primary goal is to distribute free period underwear, recognising it as the most suitable option for women in Africa. Menstrual cups present challenges:

- **Insertion:** Some religions prohibit the use of menstrual cups due to the insertion process.
- **Lack of clean water:** Properly cleaning the cup is difficult due to limited access to clean water.
- **Circumcision:** Unfortunately, female circumcision is still practiced in Africa, causing extreme pain when attempting to insert any product into the vagina.

While we reach out to suppliers requesting free protection, the

process is arduous, and response rates are slow.



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When you say exercising is a must during your period, what about women that experience a significant drop in energy levels during their period?

Exercise takes on various forms. For some women, it's running, while for others, it's a yoga session. Staying active contributes to overall well-being and can help alleviate discomfort associated with menstruation, including:

- **Decreasing pre-menstrual syndrome (PMS) symptoms:** Regular exercise can help reduce fatigue and mood swings that often occur in the days leading up to the period and during the cycle
- **Tapping into endorphins:** Exercise triggers a natural endorphin release, elevating mood and making women

feel better. These endorphins also act as natural painkillers, potentially providing relief from uncomfortable period symptoms.

- **Experiencing strength and power:** During the first two weeks of the menstrual cycle (starting from day one of the period), low levels of female hormones may allow women to achieve greater gains in strength and power.
- **Enhancing mood and circulation:** Exercising during menstruation can improve women's moods and increase circulation. It may also alleviate cramps, headaches, and back pain associated with period pain.
- **Combatting painful periods:** Light walking or gentle movements can help decrease symptoms if experienced painful periods.



Given that companies are out to make money which sometimes are to the detriment of people and the planet, does your intervention extend to working with relevant government bodies to sanction organisations that provide harmful feminine hygiene products?

No, I am not currently collaborating with organisations or government bodies. In my efforts in Africa, this is not a top priority due to the limited use of disposable period products caused by period poverty.

My primary goal in this field is to assist companies that create products beneficial for women while also being environmentally friendly. One of the reasons I ceased working for a major global player is their promotion of disposable items like towels, liners, and tampons.



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In what form will making room for periods in workplaces, schools, and universities take?

Room for periods encompasses far more than merely providing women with period protection and potential medication for menstrual pain. It extends to creating spaces where women can find comfort and support during their menstrual cycles.

Here's what "room for periods" truly entails:

- **Physical facilities:**
 - **Rest areas:**

These spaces allow women to take a break if they experience cramps, pain, or fatigue.
 - **Shower facilities:**

Women can freshen up when needed.
 - **Open communication:**

Women should feel comfortable openly expressing that they are unwell due to their period, experiencing pain, or feeling low on energy.
- **Workplace considerations:**
 - **Flexible work arrangements:**

Employers should

accommodate women during their periods. Options like working from home (home office) or reduced working hours can be beneficial.

- **School support:**
 - **Puberty challenges:** Girls often face irregular and heavy menstrual flows during puberty. Schools should allow them to rest when necessary.

Creating an environment that acknowledges and supports women during their menstrual cycles is essential for their well-being and productivity.



What are your plans for scaling within the continent and outside?.

Given our small organisational size, we currently have no immediate plans for scaling within the continent or beyond.

However, if we establish partnerships that allow for growth, we will certainly reevaluate this decision.

Do you mind sharing with us something that made you realise you are making an impact? It could be a story, anything really.

I observe that I am beginning to make an impact, as an increasing number of the women I collaborate with are posing questions and expressing a desire to learn more. Some of these women are gradually realising that reality differs from what they had previously believed. They recognise the importance of discussing intimate hygiene with their daughters and actively making efforts in this regard.

Additionally, I have initiated cautious conversations with some (younger) men—fathers, brothers, and spouses—about periods and female health. Notably, a few months ago, one of them approached me seeking advice on how to best support his wife during her menstrual cycle. This interaction was exceptionally meaningful. These small steps demonstrate the potential for positive change.



If you found value in this webinar, and loved it as much as we did, please register for our next exciting webinar at thrivabilitymatters.online.

We can't wait to see you there. Keep on thriving!

*Thank
You*

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