



Family Digest 72

June 2026

Sanitary Dignity Programme

"Menstrual health is not a luxury or a peripheral issue, but a basic human right and a key factor in ensuring access to and retention in education". <https://pmg.org.za/committee-meeting/42758/>

The Sanitary Dignity Programme (SDP) is a national initiative launched in 2019 to mitigate period poverty by providing free sanitary products to vulnerable learners in non-fee-paying schools (quintiles 1, 2, and 3), farm schools, and special-needs schools. It is led by the Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities (DWYPD) in collaboration with the Departments of Basic Education (DBE) and Social Development (DSD). The [Sanitary Dignity Implementation Framework \(SDIF\)](#) outlines national standards, while provinces receive an equitable share of funding and distribute the products.

<https://southafrica.unfpa.org/en/publications/report-sanitary-dignity-programme-financial-flows-analysis>

The government introduced a [zero-tax rating on sanitary products](#) in April 2019, to increase affordability. In addition to provincial funding, the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) covers female university/college students, providing a monthly stipend of R290 for personal items, including sanitary products. However, concerns have been raised by members of the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee (PPC) on DWYPD regarding the lack of adequate sanitary disposal facilities at schools, and the committee has called for interventions to address these infrastructure challenges.

<https://tinyurl.com/2we73746>

Many rural schools still lack the necessary WASH (Water, Sanitation & Hygiene) infrastructure, which is essential for the programme's full success. On the positive side, various enterprises run by women, youth and persons with disabilities have emerged which manufacture and distribute menstrual products through provincial government public procurement processes. <https://tinyurl.com/3t5tuu3n> For example, a small local brand called Lindiwe Pads has been assisted to grow and create its own sanitary pads manufacturing factory in Gauteng. <https://tinyurl.com/527b5a7h>

On the same topic, the Portfolio Committee questioned the strategies in place to reinforce local manufacturing of sanitary products, which would drive job creation and economic transformation. Members probed how to prevent cost inflation in public-private partnerships and emphasised the need for accountability and transparency in procurement processes. <https://tinyurl.com/2we73746> Furthermore, all distributed products must be SABS compliant to ensure safety and quality. A recent colloquium discussed possible opportunities for local entrepreneurs in the safe collection and disposal of sanitary waste. <https://pmg.org.za/committee-meeting/42758/>

Recently concerns were raised regarding the safety of sanitary products after a study conducted by the Department of Chemistry at the University of Free State indicated that there were endocrine disrupting chemicals in sanitary pads. However, according to experts the study was not found to establish a causal relationship between the detected chemicals and adverse health outcomes in women or girls. Health Minister Dr Aaron Motsoaledi announced that experts agreed that women and girls could be reassured that it remains safe to use sanitary pads. <https://www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/experts-assure-public-sanitary-pads-remain-safe-use>

Procurement delays, corruption and lack of monitoring undermine the success of the programme, while several provinces have faced significant delays and underspending due to administrative bottlenecks. PPC members have raised concerns about the fragmented structure of the Sanitary Dignity Programme spread across the nine provinces, as budget flows directly to the provinces and there is limited national oversight. They have demanded accountability for underspending and better monitoring. Infrastructure gaps, such as lack of water and sanitation in rural areas, remain a major hurdle for effective menstrual hygiene management. Committee chair Liezel van der Merwe said the SDP is not getting the attention it deserves and that more oversight is needed. <https://pmg.org.za/committee-meeting/42619/>
<https://www.parliament.gov.za/press-releases/media-statement-committee-women-youth-and-persons-disabilities-briefed-sanitary-dignity-programme>

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