

Women's Global Toolkit
CHALLENGE:

Add a Sustainable, Affordable
Diapering Solution
HERE

Diapering

The absence of an affordable diapering option means infant and toddler poop often falls under the sanitation radar, contaminating water sources.

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Scant attention is paid to how infant and toddler waste is managed in low-resource communities. The general assumption that kids go bottomless and toilet-train early with little effort, since the poorest billion mostly live in hot climates, is somewhat romanticized. Given the high level of infant mortality caused by sanitation deficits, surprisingly little effort has been made to promote diapering as a public health upgrade.

Toilet training is a misnomer when there are no toilets. Urine is not generally hazardous, but children's feces are pathogen-loaded. Children use potties, but this does not solve the problem unless the potties are emptied into safe latrines.

Latrines are unsafe and scary for small children due to the size of the opening. **Innovations for Poverty Action** has pioneered a children's latrine mat, **Safe Squat™**, placed on top of a latrine. Kids like them; mothers save time cleaning up after their children.

Chinese infants' britches have back slits facilitating frequent potty sitting. With one child per family, vigilant parents may manage early toilet training based on this conditioning. Elimination Communication adherents use non-verbal clues

to anticipate babies' excretions, eschewing diapers. There is only a small body of anecdotal evidence, though, that this is what developing world mothers do, though bare-bottomed children generally toilet train earlier than kids wearing super-absorbent disposable diapers.

Mothers use makeshift cloth diapers, but without waterproof barriers, they leak.

In low-income countries, imported disposable diapers are luxuries sold one or two at a time. Sometimes mothers let them dry and reuse them.

Green Mama blogger Manda Aufochs Gillespie winters in Guatemala with her young children. She reports mothers there, immensely curious about her children's diapers, would love better diapering solutions.

She envisions a social enterprise producing a popular triple-decker diaper system:

1. **Diaper covers**, locally-sewn, with elasticized legs holding the inner diaper pad in place and avoiding leaks. Many designs and patterns are available online.
2. A **waterproof barrier layer**, integrated into the diaper cover. **PUL**, polyurethane laminated fabric, is widely used for this purpose.
3. **Inner diaper pads**, cloth or disposable, used interchangeably. Absorbent reusable cloth pads would be locally sewn. For disposable diaper pads, papyrus, water hyacinth, and banana fiber are inexpensive materials used successfully for manufacturing sanitary napkins (#47). They might make effective disposable diaper pads, too.

A diapering social enterprise will need to create a market by educating potential customers. While diapers are an aspirational status symbol, they aren't just an upscale consumer item; they prevent the spread of deadly pathogens when properly discarded or, ideally, composted. They also give mothers and other caretakers more flexibility and save a great deal of mess, liberating time that can be reallocated to other pursuits.

YOU

- Local diaper enterprises could provide employment, improve health and sanitation, and make life easier for the world's mothers – a trifecta of benefits. Start one!