# **Emily Fleitz**

# Plateau Pads

Advised by Colman McCarthy in the School of International Service

**University Honors** 

Fall 2012

**Emily Fleitz** 

**University Honors** 

Capstone Advisor: Professor Colman McCarthy, SIS: International Service

#### **Plateau Pads**

This capstone looked at the problems with menstrual health care and education for girls in rural Tibet and developed a business plan for a project called "Plateau Pads." The solution is to provide girls healthy, safe menstrual care and education through a new initiative with the nonprofit, Machik. This project will provide young women (aged 12 to 18) in Tibet with a kit to make their own reusable cloth pads as well as a trilingual health booklet about safe menstrual practices and other health issues. The project will begin in Machik's Summer Enrichment Program (SEP) in July 2013 in health classes for young women. The goal is to teach 25 girls from across the Tibetan plateau about menstrual health and how to make their own sanitary pads. The business plan details how this project will be implemented in the next coming months and in the long term will be able to empower some of the approximately 600,000 girls in Tibet.

#### **Plateau Pads Business Plan**

#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Health care for women in Tibet is extremely poor and information about menstruation is difficult to come by for young Tibetan women. Without access to proper menstrual products, many girls miss classes and older women are unable to attend work. UNICEF reports, "in countries where menstrual hygiene is taboo, girls in puberty are typically absent for 20% of the school year." Absence may arise out of embarrassment about period stains or because of infection caused by improper health practices.

The solution is to provide girls healthy, safe menstrual care and education. My project, hereby referred to as "the project," or "Plateau Pads," will provide young women (aged 12 to 18) in Tibet with a kit to make their own reusable cloth pads as well as a trilingual health booklet about safe menstrual practices and other health issues. The project will begin in Machik's Summer Enrichment Program (SEP) in July 2013 in health classes for young women. Machik's model of addressing global problems with local solutions is ideal for the implementation of this project. At this challenging time in Tibet, it is difficult to access a group of diverse students to receive training of this kind. The goal is to teach 25 girls from across the Tibetan plateau about menstrual health and how to make their own sanitary pads. This initial group will receive 5 additional kits to share with friends and relatives in their hometowns, reaching a total of 150 women in the first year. This first step of the program will cost approximately \$1781. After initially entering the market through SEP, the project will expand to local clinics in rural communities and transfer leadership to a local social enterprise in Chungba.

#### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

#### **Nature of Business**

The project, tentatively titled Plateau Pads, will provide girls in Tibet with information about puberty and menstruation and also provide them with instructions and materials on how to make their own pads. Partnering with Machik is the best way for these goals to be met. The project will begin with Machik's SEP with plans to expand in later years. By December 2012, the foundation will be laid for the first group of girls to receive Plateau Pads in summer 2013.

#### **Project Manager**

I, Emily Fleitz, am a graduating senior (in December 2012) at American University with degrees in international relations and religious studies. Last year I worked at Machik to fulfill my internship requirement for religious studies. Machik is a nonprofit organization run by Tibetans who do service work in Tibet- a very rare occurrence. I wanted to work for Machik because of my experience during an American University Alternative Breaks trip to Dharamsala, India, which is the center of the Tibetan diaspora.

The idea for Plateau Pads came from a story I heard at Machik about what life is like in Tibet. During their annual Summer Enrichment Program, leaders divided the student participants by gender to teach a health class. They asked the group of girls if they had been taught what a menstrual cycle was before theirs started. In a room of around thirty girls, only

 $<sup>^{1}</sup>$  http://changeobserver.designobserver.com/feature/aspen-design-summit-report-unicef-menstruation-challenge/12007/

one raised her hand. The girls said they were confused and frightened when they had their first period. One thought she was dying, another thought that she had unknowingly cut herself.

The majority of girls in Tibet do not receive education about periods and puberty. Menstruation is a taboo topic of open discussion for religious and cultural reasons. In addition, many Tibetans lack access to clinics and encounter serious problems when they can get to one. Often, women cannot afford the high prices and receive poor care when they can afford a clinic. Many Tibetan women turn to their own communities to learn about health issues. However, discussing menstrual cycles is considered taboo. Because most women do not talk about the topic with other women or to doctors, dangerous practices take place. Sometimes women wear the same underwear for multiple days without adequately washing themselves, increasing the likeliness of infection. Some women will use newspapers as tampons. The toxic ink creates another health risk. While pads are available in more urban areas, they are expensive and unfamiliar to some Tibetan women. In general, tampons are not culturally acceptable to use, so reusable pads are the most convenient, sustainable, and cost-effective. Women in rural Tibet are often an untapped resource; like in many developing countries, their knowledge and talent can remain hidden in private life.<sup>2</sup>

I am uniquely qualified to oversee this project. I have a year's experience of working closely with Machik where I was able to apply my interest of women's issues to their Mother's Wish program. I have represented Machik in Dharamsala, India where I gave a presentation on Machik's involvement in women's issues to a local women's group. Additionally, I have experience working with Tibetan issues through my position as an Alternative Break co-leader to Dharamsala, India in June 2012. My education in international development and the Tibetan diaspora has given me the tools to develop a solution to the challenge of women's menstrual health in Tibet. Additionally, since I will be graduating from American University in December, I will have several months free to implement this business plan alongside next year's Summer Enrichment Program.

#### **Market Needs**

Adolescent girls in Tibet face specific needs. Adolescents, defined as those between the ages of 12 and 17, comprise 20% of the world's total population. Out of 1.2 billion adolescents worldwide, about 85% live in developing countries.<sup>3</sup> Tibet's entire population is estimated to be around 6 million; we can roughly estimate that 600,000 of these are young women.<sup>4</sup> Globally, among adolescents, girls are particularly vulnerable. Girls face many risks, including those from menstruation.

Awareness regarding girl's sexual health in Tibet is generally very low. According to Machik's field notes from 2010 SEP, girls aged 12-17 were reportedly scared, worried, and confused when they first got their period. Without prior education about menstruation, many of these young girls thought they were dying or had contracted a fatal disease. For all of them, SEP was the first time they talked openly about their experiences with puberty with their peers and trusted adults. Without access to proper menstrual products, many girls miss classes and older women are unable to attend work. UNICEF reports, "in countries where menstrual hygiene is

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup>"Coming of Age" from facts to action for adolescent sexual and reproductive Health", WHO/FRH/ADH/97.18, Geneva: 1997. p. 4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> http://www.tibetnetwork.org/tibet-at-a-glance

taboo, girls in puberty are typically absent for 20% of the school year."<sup>5</sup> Absence may arise out of embarrassment about period stains or because of infection caused by improper health practices. Various studies show that intervention increases knowledge about reproductive health.

#### **Proposed Solution**

Given these circumstances, a Girls Health Booklet and the corresponding menstrual pad kit is necessary for the upcoming 2013 SEP. The Girls Health booklet will cover topics such as puberty, menstruation, and sexual health. It will also include a session on how to make sustainable sanitary pad for girls who do not have access to sanitary pads.

For the sexual health classes, girls and boys will be segregated and taught by appropriate staff with teaching experiences related to sexual health. At the end of the program, five copies of the health booklet will be distributed to each girl at SEP who will then distribute the copies to other girls and women in their communities. This distribution system via peers will increase awareness and serve as a medium for open communication among community members. Follow up will occur at SEP right after the lesson and 6 months later to check on success of peer to peer sharing.

Machik's strong connections in the region make it the perfect conduit for this project. SEP is a well-established program and Machik is trusted amongst community members. The Machik staff has experience with working in Tibet and understands how to navigate the political climate.

#### ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT

#### Machik's History and Qualifications

Machik is a longstanding 501c3 nonprofit with an advisory board that includes Gloria Steinem, filmmaker Jody Kemmerer, and National Geographic Explorer Wade Davis. It has a small staff but a large pool of interns and volunteers. Doctors Losang and Tashi Rabgey founded Machik in 2001, though the work began in 1998. Machik began with a primary school in the heart of the Kham region of Tibet. In the late 1990s, Pencho Rabgey began building a school for the children of his homeland in Lithang. The school opened in 2002 with the agreement of the Litang County Bureau of Education in Sichuan. In the years since then, the Chungba Primary School has become a model for rural Tibetan education across Ganzi prefecture - a region of nearly a million Tibetans.

Founded on a core commitment to the ideals of service and engagement, Machik works to develop new opportunities for education and training, as well as supporting initiatives that advance innovative and solutions-oriented approaches to the challenges of community revitalization and sustainability. By providing new resources, networks, tools and technology, its goal is to establish a portal for developing new partnerships and synergies that can help create alternative pathways toward a strong, healthy and more sustainable future on the Tibetan plateau. Through outreach efforts to Tibetans, Chinese and global citizens alike, it seeks to build a shared understanding of the potential of this work for our collective human future.

Machik, along with other non-profits operating in the PRC at this difficult time, faces many challenges, most prominent of which is working within the Chinese government system. Machik's work has been successful because it localizes its programs. Machik's long track record

 $<sup>^5</sup>$  http://changeobserver.designobserver.com/feature/aspen-design-summit-report-unicef-menstruation-challenge/12007/

of service and results and policy discussions with Chinese authorities has allowed them to continue to hold the annual SEP and other programs.

#### **Summer Enrichment Program**

This project would primarily impact Tibetan girls who attend Machik's annual Summer Enrichment Program (SEP). SEP is an unprecedented annual month-long summer learning opportunity that enriches Tibetan students' education with volunteers that are Tibetan, Chinese, and global. For the past three years, one session has been reserved for health class, during which girls learn about, among other topics, menstrual health and, this year, will make their own reusable pads. In previous years, a need was seen for significant programming related to menstrual health, and this business plan is an expanded, updated, and reinvigorated proposal. This year's SEP program will include participants who will be between the ages of 15 and 18, although in other years participants have been as young as 12. Additional programming could include sexual education courses targeted towards both boys and girls, with an emphasis on STD prevention.

The Plateau Pads project will fit within the current Machik structure. There will be no changes initially. In the future, someone will be hired to work within Tibet to organize the project as it expands. This person will most likely come from Machik's network of contacts in Tibet.

#### PRODUCT KIT

Plateau Pads will provide a much-needed product, menstrual pads, to young women in Tibet. It will also provide the service of health education, which in the long term will greatly benefit Tibetan society.

The product is a make-your-own menstrual pad kit. It will include cloth, needles, thread, and buttons and instructions. By creating their own pads, girls will gain ownership over their menstrual health. Materials will be locally available, which will help grow the local economy. As opposed to other menstrual pad programs in developing countries, pads will not be donated, allowing Tibetans to remain independent and gain empowerment. Each girl will be instructed on how to create a pad during the SEP health class. The average woman uses five pads in a day so each girl will make six pads in order to have one leftover.

Additionally, the kit will include the trilingual health booklet so girls are aware of how to have a healthy period. The Girls Health booklet will cover topics such as puberty, menstruation, and sexual health. It will also include a section on making sustainable sanitary pad for girls who do not have access to sanitary pads. Literacy in Tibet is good but students are not always fluent in the same languages. Each book will be written in Tibetan, English, and Chinese in simple writing so it is easy for girls to understand. The printing for these booklets will also be done locally. Each girl will receive a booklet for herself and five others to share with girls in their hometown.

Students will learn how to make and use the pads during the SEP health class. *Students will also practice teaching others so that the knowledge can spread in their hometowns*. The best option is for me to attend SEP as a student volunteer and teach the class. Alternatively if I cannot attend, then I will work closely with the SEP coordinators and train another volunteer how to make the pads and teach healthy menstruation techniques. After Plateau Pads has successfully infiltrated the market, a local Tibetan will be trained on how to teach health classes.

#### Life Cycle

This product is in prototype phase. The pad production design has been tested. There is also a draft of the health booklet and corresponding teacher's guide included in the appendices.

#### **Intellectual property**

The product kit uses instructions from the organization "Donate Pads." The website, http://www.donatepads.org/ promotes the donation of reusable cloth pads. It claims that cloth pads are the best option for women in developing nations since they are a reusable product that allow women to take care of their own menstruation without requiring additional ongoing handouts. The website includes instructions on how to make your own pads. The instructions are free to anyone. Specifically, the website says, "While you may print these and use them with any donated pads you send off to any organization, and you may edit them to suit your needs, you may not copy these and have them for download on your own site." Plateau Pads will conform to these requirements.

#### R&D

This product will continue to be developed after I graduate in December. I will work closely with SEP coordinators to ensure that the project is successfully implemented this summer. Analysis of the success of the project will be done each year before deciding to hand it over to a local Tibetan. Issues to consider include overcoming challenges of Tibetan infrastructure, culture, politics, and language. Research will be ongoing.

#### MARKET ANALYSIS

#### **Target Market**

This project targets all adolescent girls between the ages of 12 and 17. Actual percentage of population reached will be relatively small, based on difficulties in reaching rural areas of Tibet. Actual target, in the first year, will be 25 girls aged 15-18. Students selected for SEP show clear leadership qualities and are chosen based on Machik's network of rural communities. They come from all over Tibet, including a school for the blind. Each student will get six copies of the health booklets, one for herself and five others for peers in her community. Including peer-to-peer sharing, the total number reached will be approximately 150 girls in the first year. Over time, the outreach will increase to communities outside of SEP's scope.

#### **Market Challenges**

Since students from SEP come from varying backgrounds, some do not have easy access to communication tools. While it is possible to contact each student, it is too difficult for Machik to follow up with all students, at least initially. Machik plans to hire a staff member in Tibet who can create a network with SEP alumni, which will allow follow through on girls' commitments to sharing their knowledge about menstrual health with peers.

#### **MARKETING & SALES**

#### **Market Penetration Strategy**

In order to penetrate Tibetan culture the project will approach the younger generation who are likely to be more open-minded about discussing alternative methods of menstrual care. The project will be introduced during the health section of the Summer Enrichment Program.

Students will already be in a state of personal growth due to the nature of SEP so the introduction of this relatively sensitive topic will not be as startling to them.

#### **Growth Strategy**

From SEP, I hope to expand to other rural communities in the long term. This will begin by the designation of a point person to operate Plateau Pads locally in Tibet. Growth will happen organically through the use of regional contacts. In the short term, girls in SEP will receive duplicate copies of the health booklet to share with other members of their community who were unable to attend SEP. Machik will also reach out to Shem, Pentok, Mother's Wish- other organizations who provide services for women in Tibet.

This project is scalable (both up and down as needed) and will include several phases:

- 1. Introduce kit and lesson to SEP 2013 health class (\$1781)
- 2. Alumni peer to peer sharing (no monetary cost, follow up needed)
- 3. Additional programming
  - a. Plateau Pad literature and resources in rural health clinics
  - b. Gender equality programming in SEP
  - c. Young men's health program with STD focus and gender equality
  - d. Additional women's health programs (contraceptives, rape/sexual assault awareness)
- 4. Local product kit production and distribution (donation for raw materials and overhead needed)

#### **Sales Force**

SEP instructors will need to be trained in how to teach girls about menstrual health and how to assemble the pads. Ideally, I will also attend SEP. Regardless, I will be able to provide this training next semester and will work with the SEP coordinators to ensure that the Plateau Pads mission is well understood by SEP volunteers.

### FUNDING REQUEST Required Funds

Items	Quantity	Cost in USD
Girls Health Booklet (5 by 8		
inch laminated flip book with 24		
pages)	200 at \$1.60 each	\$320
Electronic sewing machines	4	\$600
Cotton fabric for sanitary pad	40 yards	\$412
Needle and thread	150	\$20
Buttons	150	\$20
SUBTOTAL		\$1549
Overhead (15%)	15%	\$232.35
TOTAL		\$1781.35

Future funding requirements should be the same, plus an inflation rate of 3%.

Funds will be used primarily on material costs. Overhead will go to Machik for programming costs. Sewing machines will be purchased in the first year as capital investment for the future.

#### **Type of Funding**

I will open a donation page on the Machik website for people to donate specifically to this cause, called Plateau Pads. Donations to Machik are tax deductible. Any additional funds raised beyond the initial \$1781 will be used to fund my travel to SEP and for future years of the program.

#### FINANCIAL PROJECTIONS

#### **Historical Financial Data**

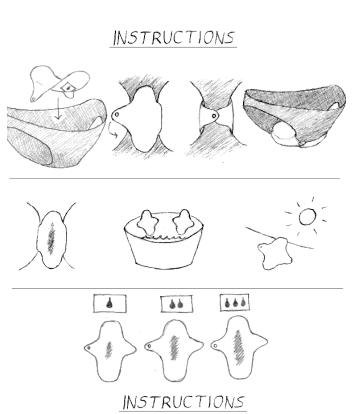
Since this is the first year of the program, there is no financial data available for Plateau Pads specifically. In future years, the program funding should be about the same, less the cost of sewing machines. Funding will shift based on number of kits needed.

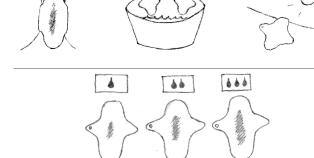
In 2010, Machik raised, overall, \$599,064. It spent \$531,217 on programs, or 88.6% of funds. 5.5% is used on administration. 4% is used on fundraising.

#### **APPENDIX**

- 1. Health booklet draft
- 2. Pad instructions
- 3. Resume
- 4. SEP program guide
- 5. Donation webpage

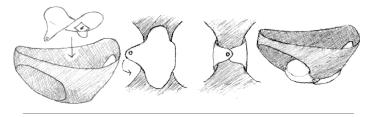
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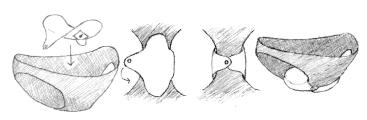


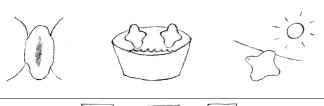




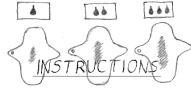
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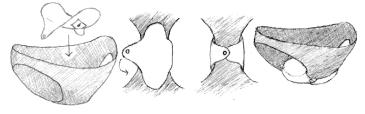


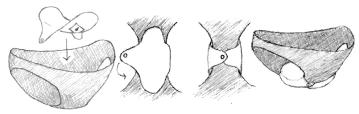


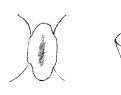














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## **EMILY FLEITZ**

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#### **EDUCATION**

# American University (AU), School of International Service Washington, DC

BA, International Studies and BA, Religious Studies

December 2012

- Focus on Asia and Peace and Conflict Resolution
- GPA: 3.79/4.0 (Present)
- University Honors Program (2009 Present)
- Dean's List (2009 Present)

#### **SPECIAL SKILLS**

- Intermediate Spanish
- Microsoft Office Suite, Apple products

#### **EXPERIENCE**

# National Science Foundation Washington, DC

#### Office Clerk in Cyber Physical Systems

June - October 2012

- Submitted approximately 300 panel review responses to project managers biweekly
- Planned poster information session for annual three day Cyber Physical Systems conference with 130 attendees
- Assisted panel meetings, with 15 scholars debating Cyber Physical Systems proposals for funding
- Panel Coordinator for CPS PI conference at National Harbor, MD, October 2-4

#### Machik

#### Washington, DC

#### **Community Development Intern**

August 2011 - May 2012

- Utilized Excel to input donor contact information and donations totaling \$3,000 per month
- Serve as liaison between Machik and Tibetan Women's Association through the creation of outreach materials and presentation in India in May
- Co-planned Cultural Mapping Project, a summer program for 30 rural Tibetan youth and 10 international volunteers on the Plateau
- Planned Machik two day weekend event, with 30 speakers, meals, and entertainment, for 250 donors within Machik community to learn about year's accomplishments
- Attended one two conferences and panels each month at Brookings Institution and other DC think tanks to learn about issues pertaining to Tibet
- Arranged domestic travel for Executive Director, Losang Rabgey to attend three-four events per month
- Coordinated fundraising event for Machik at George Washington University's International Women's Day conference

### AU Religious Studies Department

#### Washington, DC

#### Teaching Assistant, Religious Heritage of the West

August - December 2011

- Attended two class sessions per week and took detailed notes
- Held weekly office hours for total of 15 hours, and corresponded with 70 students via email

- Graded non-objective tests and pre-graded objective essays
- Held three study sessions for two + hours to help students prepare for tests

# Wright Patterson Air Force Base Dayton, OH

Clerk, Air Force Security Assistance Center (AFSAC)

(seasonal) May 2010 - August 2011

- Organized and consolidated four decades of historical records pertaining to Israel and South America foreign military sales programs
- Worked with General Lanni to coordinate the preparation of gifts and interviews for 20 minute farewell video for going-away celebration for departing Israeli foreign liaison officer
- Attended training on Lean Six Sigma productivity skills, Air Force values and protocol, cultural awareness, and job shadowed in Parts and Repair Ordering Service (PROS) and Worldwide Warehouse Redistribution Services (WWRS) offices in management positions
- Produced references, including annual financial report documenting \$7 million of foreign military sales on Excel, for three-day WWRS Israel conference held in July 2010
- Attended WWRS pre-conference with Israeli foreign liaison officers, documented all action items, and reported on event at follow-up meetings
- Produced 2010 revised edition of the PROS handbook (200+ pages)

#### LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

AU Alternative Break Student Leader Dharamsala, India

May 2011 - Present

- Participated in 25 day social justice trip to Dharamsala, India studying Tibetan Diaspora, meeting with ex-political prisoners, government officials, religious leaders and teaching English to local population
- Co-led 2012 trip to Dharamsala and Leh, Ladakh to study Tibetan cultural preservation as political act with 12 students
- Attend biweekly meetings with other student leaders to learn leadership skills and plan 2012 trip

### **Plateau Pads**

# Why Plateau Pads?



We are launching Plateau Pads
because we care about the
livelihood of girls in Tibet.
Health care for women in Tibet is
extremely poor and information
about menstruation is difficult to
come by for young Tibetan
women. Without access to proper
menstrual products, many girls
miss classes and older women
are unable to attend work.
By supporting Plateau Pads, you

donate

women and improve their quality of life.

# Young women in Tibet



According to Machik's field notes from 2010 SEP, girls aged 12-17 were reportedly scared, worried, and confused when they first got their period. Without prior education about menstruation, many of these young girls thought they were dying or had contracted a

will help empower Tibetan

fatal disease. For all of them, SEP was the first time they talked openly about their experiences with puberty with their peers and trusted adults. Plateau Pads will provide girls with health, safe menstrual care and education through a make-your-own reusable pad kit. The first group of girls will be taught how to make pads during the 2013 SEP and will be provided with informational booklets to share with peers back home.

\$2,000 USD is needed to support this pilot program. With your help we can take the first step to helping young women in Tibet have healthy and happy periods.

Your help is urgently needed. Please DONATE \$10 or more to Plateau Pads to give the gift of empowerment to young women in Tibet.