

# Asan cup, the reusable menstrual cup averting the waste of 2,500 tampons

As part of a series about Virgin StartUp's Collective Impact programme, Maddyness spoke to Ira Guha, founder and CEO of Asan.

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On a trip home to visit my parents in Bangalore, I met a domestic worker who had terrible rashes from low-quality sanitary pads. This led her to miss out on work during periods. I gifted her a menstrual cup and it transformed her life – she could easily go to work and do all her activities on her period.

This experience motivated me to work with an engineer at Harvard to design and patent the Asan cup – a reusable menstrual cup with a ring design for easy removal. One Asan cup averts the waste of 2,500 sanitary pads or tampons. For every Asan sells, we donate one to a woman or girl in rural India who can't access safe period care.

## Can you share your elevator pitch?

Eradicating period poverty and tampon waste with the easiest menstrual cup to use!

# Can you tell our readers about your engagement with Virgin StartUp?

I took part in Collective Impact, a Virgin StartUp accelerator for social impact businesses. It was a fantastic accelerator that taught me everything I know about fundraising. I would never have reached my current stage (closing Asan's seed round) without the support of Virgin StartUp – particularly my amazing mentors *Sutin Yang* and Suzanne Coulton.

## Tell us about the working culture at Asan Cup

The Asan team is a little family. We are a majority female team based in London and Bangalore. What brings us together is our shared passion for empowering women and girls to live up to their full potential.

I'm trying to create a work culture where the team feels comfortable bringing their "whole" self to work – I want my colleagues to feel comfortable voicing thoughts and opinions and being able to ask for help when they need it.

We're now in a hiring phase at Asan since we're expanding quite quickly – so a challenge for me is to maintain our relaxed and positive team culture while we introduce new people to the mix!

## What has been your biggest challenge so far and how have you overcome this?

An ongoing challenge is behavioural change. People who have been using disposable pads and tampons for years are sceptical about washing and reusing a menstrual product. There's also a lot of misinformation and fear about how menstrual cups work.

We overcome this challenge with constant education and awareness campaigns. We use our blog and social media to make learning about periods and period products accessible and fun. TikTok has been a great way to make fun content that breaks down taboos, we have some hilarious videos of the Asan cup talking – follow us @asancup if you're on Instagram or TikTok to have a look!

It's also fantastic to see the change in consumer trends, where more and more people (particularly teens) are driven to make eco-conscious and ethical

decisions, leading them to explore menstrual cups.

## What's in store for the future?

Asan's vision for the next 5 years is to transform the lives of over 1 million low-income women and girls, and to avert more than 2 billion plastic pads and tampons from going to landfill.

In terms of our more immediate plans: we're currently focusing on strategic partnerships to scale our sales (both direct-to-customer and B2B). We're also working on entering new markets such as the EU and US, and are expanding our product range to offer some complementary products to the Asan cup.

## Can you talk about why you put purpose at the centre of building Asan Cup?

I founded Asan because of very personal experiences in my community in Karnataka, South India. I learned that period poverty goes way beyond accessing a product – it impacts your ability to go to school and work and has a hugely detrimental impact on mental health, by causing constant worry and anxiety around periods. I was shocked to learn that as a country, India loses \$87 billion in GDP every year as a result from people missing school and work due to period poverty.

Learning about the true impact of period poverty led me to create our 1-for-1 donation model, which puts purpose of centre of Asan's work by ensuring that our revenue is automatically redistributed to combat period poverty in the global south.

## What barriers have you faced in realising your entrepreneurial ambitions? How can we make entrepreneurship more accessible in the UK?

Accessing the right networks is a challenge. In India (where I'm from) as well as in the US (where I went to graduate school), people tend to be more open about asking for as well as making introductions. My personal experience is that networks in the UK are more "professionalised" – if you join the right

membership club or accelerator, then you can start accessing the right networks. Virgin Startups was super helpful for broadening my network in the UK.

## What one piece of advice would you give other founders or future founders?

My one piece of advice is to make sure you're solving a real problem! If you don't have a very clear problem in mind, then it's unlikely that people will really need your product or solution. I remember working next to an entrepreneur who was designing temperature-sensing headphones... amazing technology but who exactly needs that?

If you're hoping to start a business, focus less on what you'd like to sell and more on what real world problem you'd like to solve.

## And finally, a more personal question! What's your daily routine and the rules you're living by at the moment?

I start work around 8am with a daily stand-up call with my team in India (which on a good day I take while walking in the park!). I work closely with my Indian colleagues till around 2pm, when they log off for the day. I then have in-person meetings in London or catch up on emails. I try to squeeze in an hour of exercise most days.

Something new I'm trying is phone-free Sundays. I put my phone on airplane mode on Sunday morning and put it in a draw and then check it on Monday morning, it's very liberating!

Ira Guha is the founder and CEO of [\*Asan\*](#).

[\*Virgin StartUp\*](#) is the not-for-profit home of entrepreneurship at the Virgin Group, helping early-stage founders start, fund and scale the businesses they're passionate. Its [\*Collective Impact programme\*](#) is an investment-readiness accelerator specifically for UK startups that want to have a positive impact in the world and are raising investment for the first time. In 2022, 24 founders completed the seven-week programme and raised £4M.

