Breaking the Silence: Menstrual Hygiene Management in rural India.

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Background

- Discussions on cultural and religious taboos related to menstrual hygiene is started at various platform
- Govt of India & other civil society have taken initiatives for addressing MHM issues
- Comprehensive approach to menstrual hygiene promotion is still neglected at policy & program level
- After attaining menarche girl students are reluctant to attend school during menstruation, due to lack of facilities at school
- A woman on an average require 7000 pads up to the time of her menopause to manage menstruation days
- Majority of women in India don’t have access to the sanitary products and facilities which are essential during menstruation
- Poor demand for sanitary napkins discourages rural vendors from maintaining stock of napkins
Understanding Realities

- 89% of the respondents use cloth as absorbents, 2% respondents use pieces of cotton, 7% use sanitary napkin, 2% use ash.

- 38 respondents from Sheopur of Saharia tribe disclosed that they spend their days of menstruation in the cow shed.

- 50% of the respondents are not aware about the sanitary napkin

- Diseases reported were White discharge (48), Leucorrhoea (2), itching / burning (277), ovaries swelling (15), cuts on thighs (9) and frequent urination (4).

- 37% of the respondents did not have access to a household toilet as a result they are compelled to manage during menstruation at places like bathroom, open area, cow shed, dark room

- Very few schools of India have access of sanitary napkin & menstrual waste disposal facility

- An assessment in Pali Block, CG revealed that none of the shops from 65 villages stock sanitary napkin or other protection products
WaterAid India’s Initiative

**Project level**

- In 2007, decided to include Menstrual Hygiene and its management (MHM) in the programme for the effectiveness of overall WASH programme
- Process began with structured training of NGOs’ field workers and other following initiatives
  - Understanding of existing practices of menstruation management
  - Focused discussions with CBOs for demystifying the myths and misconceptions about menstruation
  - Awareness generated for why & how menstrual hygiene management
  - Local Solutions - Production of sanitary napkins & disposal of waste

**Networking & Liaisoning**

- Learning shared at various forums – state workshops, civil society network meetings, visit of govt officials to the project area
- Training support to health & sanitation department officials
- National level Workshop for designing MHM-IEC strategy

**Advocacy efforts**

- SACOSAN 2008 – Issue of MHM presented in Exhibition
- Regular meetings with WCD, PHED, Education, Rural department & politicians for giving priority to MHM in their programs
- IEC material & Training modules provided to train health workers on promotion of MHM
GOI initiative & sector players initiative

• SACOSAN 2008 – Delhi Declaration did mention the Gender friendly sanitation including menstrual hygiene
• Under Total Sanitation Campaign provision made of separate toilets for boys & girls in all co-educational schools
• Provision of availability of dustbins / incinerators in toilets for safe disposal of napkins is also made
• The Union Health and Family Welfare Ministry on [15 June 2010] approved a scheme for providing highly subsidized sanitary napkins to adolescent girls in the rural areas to promote menstrual hygiene. The scheme, to be launched in 150 districts across the country in the first phase, will cost Rs. 150 crore [Rs 1.5 billion = US$ 32.2 million] for the current financial year.
• Maharashtra & Tamilnadu state promoted cost effective sanitary napkin production through entrepreneurship training and equipping Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in napkin production.
• On an experimental basis, the Government has installed sanitary napkin vending machines in secondary schools
• Civil societies & research institutes conducted study on present practices & menstrual waste disposal mechanism
• Dept of Rural Development Tamil Nadu have installed Incinerators in 341 women toilet complexes and 33 girls’ toilets in schools in the state facilitating simple disposal of the used napkins. (http://www.tnhealth.org/currentGOs/g.o(2d)6.doc)
• Goonj, a civil society initiative, helps women’s groups to recycle used cloth as sanitary napkins. http://www.goonj.org/not_just_apiece.html
• Organisation like VACHA, Vikalp design, Goonj, Ogilvy action, Unicef & others have developed communication material for Menstrual Hygiene Education
Need to be addressed

**Ignorance of MHM issues**
- Denial of Human Right
- Development Loss
- Adverse Impact on health

**Call for Action**
- Hygiene education: Importance for health & menstruation practices and eliminating the shame surrounding menstruation
- Creating support for managing and dealing with menstruation: Like closed bathing shelter facility in schools with water and soap and access to sanitary protection material.
- Managing the waste, like decomposing sanitary waste and developing alternatives to commercial pads (Non degradable).
- Increased availability of resources

**Effective communication strategy for**
- Promotion of environment and human friendly alternatives
- Reaching out to a diverse set of population
- Preparing other disseminators like CSO members, parents, teachers etc
- Influencing other stakeholders like
  1. Policy makers
  2. Private manufacturers
  3. Families towards accepting this issue as a biological reality and supporting women in dealing with it
  4. Without any impact on equality status
  5. Giving actual right to choose and not making it a matter of embarrassment
Thanks