

MENSTRUATION AND MENSTRUAL PRACTICES

It is well known to everyone that people are suffering from many diseases mainly due to the unhygienic living conditions. So, to reduce such diseases among the people, the foremost steps should be developing a clean, hygienic living environment. The major hurdle in this is lack of awareness among people especially women. The women and girls majorly from weaker sections generally do not maintain cleanliness during menstruation period. As a result, they become the host of many infectious diseases. Lack of awareness among the family members regarding this along with poor financial condition further worsen the situation for them, as they are not able to buy sanitary napkins. Usually different varieties of sanitary napkins are available in the market. But these napkins are not affordable for poor women and girls of slums. For young girls, limited access to safe sanitary product and facilities is believed to be one of the main reasons for constrained school attendance, high dropout rates and ill health due to infection.

Thus, if the use of hygienic sanitary napkins could be promoted among the women and girls at low cost then the growth of such diseases could be minimized to a large extent.

Sahyog Care targeted different slum areas where the women and girls are found suffering from diseases relating to infection due to menstrual periods. So, our organization desire to work on arresting the growth of such diseases caused among girls and women.

The programme supported by our different donors reached out to around 30,000 women from the period April 2011-March 2017. The project helped the women to move towards economic self-reliance. During the project, they were oriented about issues of women welfare, rights, health, and hygiene. The project focused on holistic development of the beneficiaries aiming towards their social as well as economic self-reliance. However, there is still a lot that needs to be accomplished based on the lessons learned in the 5 years.

The project is promoted to around 1,00,000 women in different Jhuggi clusters and rural areas by educating them and bringing awareness amongst them regarding sanitation and hygiene. This programme majorly aimed for the female living in below poverty line and EWS in all areas.

SOLUTION

We are procuring low-cost sanitary napkins made by self-help groups from cotton waste and rags. For their guidance and technical support, coordinator and instructor would be there. These sanitary napkins prepared at low cost would then be sold in the same area at low prices making it affordable for everyone.

The project would operate with an objective of instilling positive aspirations amongst the women and girls and motivate them towards a better future. Also follow up of the women after completing courses would be a very vital part of the project. Also, sanitation campaign and awareness would be organized in Jhuggies, rural areas and government schools.

OBJECTIVES

- To popularize the use of sanitary napkins among the women and girls of slum areas and thereby rescuing them from diseases.
- To produce and supply cost effective/low-cost sanitary napkins in a scientific way to make them affordable to women and girls of slums.
- To engage SHG groups in production and marketing.
- To provide and supply quality based sanitary napkins to women and girls income operatively low price than the napkins prevalent in the present day markets.

NUMBER OF BENEFICIARIES

Our target group is the 1, 00,000 Jhuggies cluster, railway line, slum areas and below poverty line areas and migrated people in every state. The location of the project is an area where the majority of people are illiterate. Their financial dependence on the men has led to their inability to have said. The area has a very high rate of illiteracy, especially amongst its women.

HEALTH AND SANITATION

Throughout history, directly or indirectly, women have been told that having periods is shameful and burden for them. Even today most of the societies continue this thinking and accordingly they practice certain activities, which are not acceptable in the so-called civilized world. For instance, women do not enter temples or carry out auspicious activities during their menstrual periods. Since menstruation is looked down upon, women also tend to neglect the importance of proper menstrual management. In studies, it has been found that only 12% of India's 355 million menstruating women use sanitary napkins and rest i.e. 88% of women follow unhealthy practices.

A closer look at the traditional practices adopted by women and girls in India throws light on a shocking scenario. Women commonly use all kinds of clothes (rags, rejected cloth) as a sanitary napkin in rural & slums in India. This

is due to unawareness of menstrual management and costly available substitutes in the market (70% of Indian families cannot afford costly napkin pads). Often women in slums dry their napkins behind the doors and remove it (even if it is wet) before the male members come and use it again with dirt & moisture, that leads to vaginal infections, skin irritations and other related diseases.

In case of adolescent girls, the situation is even worse in backward areas. In studies, it has been also found that 70% of women are more prone to reproductive tract infection (RTI) among the 88% who practice traditional methods of menstrual management. The government of India (GOI) has taken an initiative in the year 2010 to provide sanitary napkins to disadvantaged communities at cheaper rates with a budgetary allocation of INR 150crores. However, this project is limited to certain districts in certain parts of the country.

Therefore, there is an immediate need to provide sanitary napkin pads to the other parts of the country too through innovative models & also linking different schemes to benefit women in remote areas.

VOCATIONAL AND INCOME GENERATION ACTIVITY

This project is a unique combination of education and awareness building coupled with providing cheap choices and options to adolescent girls. We believe that when health education is combined with the availability of an option or product, it will ensure greater behavioural change and actual utilization of a clean, safe product (in this case sanitary napkin).

Education and awareness is necessary but not sufficient and simply selling sanitary napkins is also not enough. Thus, a combination of behavioural change education along with the promotion of a cheap, safe product i.e. is a combination approach will work best. Therefore this project has two objectives:

First, to make adolescent girls aware and educated about the importance of menstrual hygiene and management in certain selected districts of the area chosen; Second, to ensure that a program to build and operate 'sanitary napkin making machines' in the same districts as above is also put in place.

The sanitary Napkin making machines will be operated through women self-help groups in the region. This will provide ample opportunity for the local women to generate income by making sanitary napkins. Thus, this program not only educates women about the importance of menstrual and reproductive health but also provides a platform to generate employment.

This project is innovative in its approach because it looks at technological innovation as a development process. This not only materialises the cause of income generation but also look into the health and sanitation issues of larger masses.

This project will have 2 key stakeholders; funding agency (Corporate PSU), & Sahyog (Local women group/ SHGs). Funding agency would support the project financially, and Sahyog will support all other SHGs, contribute for the machinery, will ensure mobilisation of SHG members would act as technological/operational/marketing backbone for the units and SHG would manage the unit after a certain period to achieve self-sustainability.

Sahyog Care will be working for overall management of the product and provide end to end solutions. SHG will look after the day to day operations & local sales. SAHYOG will continuously motivate SHG members, and create an enabling environment in the community & facilitate local sales.

SUSTAINABILITY OF THE PROJECT

After setting up of the unit the production will continue. In the first year, the produces will be marketed through Sahyog Care's SHG groups in different slums areas of 5 States. Whatever return comes in term of money will again be utilized in production and management of the projects in the next year. Over time, when the units achieve economies and adequate demand, more returns could be generated and they will then work independently.