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Support & Guidance

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2014 theme: **“Menstruation Matters”**

2015 theme: **“Let’s end the hesitation around menstruation”**

2016 theme: **“Menstruation matters to everyone, everywhere”**

2017 theme: **“Education about menstruation changes everything”**

2018 theme: **“No More Limits – Empowering Women and Girls through Good Menstrual Hygiene”**

2019 theme: **“Its time for action”**

Menstrual Hygiene Day celebrations held on 29th May 2019 has had unexpectedly wide range impact on the MHM issue which is affecting 50% of the human population namely women. Functions were organized in different parts of the country to mark the day in which the physiological, psychological, social, economic, educational and environmental impacts were discussed.

Menstrual Hygiene Day (MH Day) is celebrated on May 28th of every year which offered a common platform that brought together government agencies, the private sector non-profit organisations, individuals, and the media to converge advocacy and action towards a world where women and girls are no longer constrained because of Menstrual periods. MHM day every year is celebrated around a central theme on 28th May from the year 2014. It has symbolic meaning. May is the 5th month of the year and women menstruate on an average is for 5 days every month. The menstrual cycle averages 28 days

The day holds immense significance for girls and women as a segment without any sort of barriers. The poor, the marginalized and those in rural areas are the worst affected.

Objectives of Menstrual Hygiene Day

- To highlight at all levels that Menstruation, its challenges the related issues especially environment issues are not just confined to WOMEN ONLY BUT BOTH MEN AND WOMEN.
- To spread awareness about the challenges women and girls face during their menstruation and find a reasonable solution for them.
- To discuss innovative solutions to address the challenges.
- To bring together women and organisation working towards women issues at the national, regional, and district level and take the message right upto the village and hamlet level with the active support of the various line departments.
- To actively advocate for the integration of menstrual hygiene management into global, national and local policies and programmes.

* The day urges participation from people from all walks of life. A collective effort is the only way to improve the lives of women and girls around the world, with at least providing them with the basic sanitary facility (the lack of which will lead to personal problems, Environmental problems and to the basic principle of social justice when looked from the angle of the millions of sanitary workers).

The theme this year 2019 is **“It’s Time for Action”**. It emphasizes the urgency of this public health issue. It highlights the potential to empower women and girls through Increased awareness on MHM. It can have a tremendous and transformative impact on the education and economic opportunities, especially in a country like India which is bound by several social taboos.



Chennai City

The Government will install SN vending machines and incinerators in all hospitals in the State in a phased manner announced Ms.V.Saroja, Minister for Social Welfare at the function at the The Tamil Nadu Government Multi Super Specialty Hospital. Mr.C.Vijayabhaskar, Minister for Health inaugurated an Exhibition on MHM. V. Anand Kumar, nodal officer, TNGMSSH, said the nursing students, Staff and Public would be greatly benefited by the eight vending machines and 12 incinerators provided at the hospital.

Mrs.Santha Sheela Nair I.A.S, (retd.) Mrs. M.P. Nirmala I.A.S. Retd and many MH activists participated. The Nursing students and the Staff of the Hospital had organized an exhibition, a rangoli display and awareness program and a skit on MHM. They stressed the importance of safe and hygienic disposal of used pads.

An exhibit highlighted the Do's and Don'ts of Menstrual Hygiene. Women experience their menstrual cycle every month, during which women lose anything between 20 to 80 mL of blood (per cycle). To make up for this blood loss, women must consume healthy foods rich in Iron, protein, Vitamin C and also carbohydrates. Women may feel weak and also experience low blood pressure due to the blood loss during periods. That is why they require a balanced diet which includes cereals (whole), nuts and seeds to gain back lost energy. The occasion of Menstrual Hygiene Day gives women the chance to develop awareness, inculcate safe and sanitary practices and pay attention to their physical and mental health. Amudha Hari, obstetrician and gynaecologist, Apollo Hospitals, spoke on the myths and misconceptions of menstruation. "Menstruation does not have to happen every month. For about 20% women, it happens once in 35 or 40 or 50 days, and it is still normal. Any rhythm variation means that something is wrong and needs to be checked by a doctor," she said.



In Chennai the Tamil Nadu Corporation for Development of Women and the TNSRLM organized a two day orientation workshop for community level professionals of the Menstrual Hygiene Management and members of the Sanitary Napkin Producers Federation. And also they were trained as community level resource persons on various aspects of MHM. And Mr.Praveen Kumar,I.A.S, Managing Director of the Corporation distributed the certificates to the Community Level Resource persons (CRPs).

The accreditation certificate was awarded to nearly 65 participants who were certified as Menstrual Hygiene Management Professionals (MHMP) by Tamil Nadu Corporation for Development of Women, Bharat Institute of Higher Education and Research and the training institute Karupa Institute of Development Initiatives.

Mr.Selvaraj Additional Director, welcomed the gathering and highlighted the need to create awareness on this subject. The orientation programme was meant to provide details of the upcoming programme for awareness creation under the State Planning Commission – (State Balanced Growth Fund). The participants took an oath that they would always promote MHM among adolescent girls, women and also ensure that the used pads are disposed of safely and hygienically without causing any harm to the environment.

Dr.R.Sujatha, Director, Karupa Institute of Development Initiatives emphasized that the SANFED should ensure transparency, High quality and also explain the need for proper disposal of sanitary pads. There were many options now available in the market for women such as the napkins available in the market, reusable sanitary napkin (upto 2 years) and menstrual cups which could be used for a minimum of seven years prized around Rs.900. The public should be made aware of the different choices and they can select the model as per their requirements. The demand for pads in Tamil Nadu was so high that even present only 20% of the pads were produced by small producers and the rest by MNCs and big companies.



Mr.K.Sampath, Additional Director, TNSRLM spoke about the impact on health if adequate awareness is not created to the adolescent children and women in both urban and rural areas.

Mr.V.Ganapathy, nominated Member, State High Level Committee on Liquid Waste Management, Solid Waste Management and Menstrual Hygiene Management emphasized that safe disposal of used pads was a critical item of the Menstrual Hygiene Management. He explained that different models of incinerators, electrically operated or manually constructed could be selected depending on the specific local needs of the schools, colleges or institutions. Even though 2017 SWM rules made it very clear that disposal should be given the highest priority, unfortunately it was the weakest link of MHM. All line departments should converge and ensure that suitable incinerators are provided.

The center for women development and research (CWDR) an NGO organized a procession to highlight the MHM day.

Volunteers formed a human chain and raised slogans to break the taboo around menstruation and the importance of menstrual hygiene. The aim of this campaign was to urge the government to implement the plan to provide free sanitary napkins to all adolescent girls, said K.R. Renuka, director of CWDR. "Schools are opening on June 3. So, we want proper toilet and water facilities to be provided to all girl students at government schools. Many girls do not attend schools on their menstrual days," she said. At present free sanitary napkins are distributed only to rural adolescent girls.

A red Thiruvizha was organized by the Tamil Nadu Urban Sanitation Support Programme in which officials of various Government and private institutions participated. At the meeting the concept of **red dot** was explained which ensured that the user of the napkins wrapped the used pad in a cover and marked a red dot in bold over the cover so that those who were handling the same - mostly sanitary workers would know the contents and will be segregating them separately. This would also help the sanitary workers from handling the pads directly and in the segregation process for transport etc.

Menstrual Hygiene Day in Tiruchirappalli



Tiruchi city has played a key role in propagating MHM throughout the state for over a decade. The Department of Women's Studies of Bharathidasan University under the leadership of Dr.N.Manimekalai had made special studies on the subject and also collaborated with UNICEF in propagating the ideas in various parts of the State. Several leading NGOs and activists worked to break the culture of silence shrouding MHM and also highlighting certain age old taboos and traditions which stood as barriers for bringing out to the open certain basic facts about MHM.

MHMC:

The MHMC (Menstrual Hygiene Management Consortium) of Tiruchi inaugurated at Chennai in 2010 by the then Health Secretary, Rural Development Secretary was a combined effort of various women's organizations in the State to promote the cause. Women NGO of Keeranur, WISH (Women in Sanitation and Hygiene) of Bharathidasan University, WEAT (Women Entrepreneurs Association of Tamil Nadu) ENABLE of Tiruchi and Shri Cheema Foundation of TVSE group were all active members who were engaged in both production of Sanitary napkins, awareness on MHM in urban and rural areas and highlighting the need for safe disposal.

WISH BDU BHEL PPP:

WISH under the CSR program of BHEL, Tiruchi , a Maharatna Public Sector Company organized MHM awareness camps in over 200 schools and colleges and mainly through the NSS volunteers during their annual camps in rural areas. Sanitary napkin Incinerators were supplied to about 80 colleges and schools for safe disposal of used pads in the eight districts covered by the university.

TCC IIHS MHMC & SCOPE:

World Menstrual Hygiene Management Day was organized in Tiruchi by MHMC in Collaboration with Tiruchi City Corporation, IIHS and SCOPE an NGO on 28th May. On the occasion Mrs.Nagalakshmi, newly elected President and Mrs.Susheela, SANFED member were honoured for their services. Various aspects of MHM were discussed on the occasion by Doctors, Environmental activists and Corporation officials. Mr.N.Ravichandran, Corporation Commissioner said that vending machines will be installed in all Corporation schools and already guidelines have been issued to all flat promoters and Heads of Private and Government Institutions to install SNIs for safe disposal of pads. Dr.K.Meena former Vice Chancellor of the Bharathidasan University, Mrs.Amudhavalli, Tiruchi City Engineer, Mrs.Kannaghi, President, Women NGO, V.Ganapathy, Advisor, ExNoRa International, M.Subburaman, Director SCOPE, Mr.Parameshwar, IIHS, Tiruchi spoke. Mrs.Amudhavalli , City Engineer, TCC addressing the World MHM meeting at Viragupetta.

Department of Women's Studies of BDU organized an MHM Awareness program in SIX SLUMS of Tiruchi City on 28th May. Mrs.Amudhavalli, City Engineer was the Chief Guest at the Viragupetta toilet complex.

Menstrual Hygiene Day Celebrations from across Tamil Nadu



Gramalaya:

Gramalaya, a three decade old NGO focusing on sanitation organized World MHM Day celebrations at Tiruchi. The speakers stressed the importance of reusable sanitary napkins designed and promoted by Gramalaya. The highlight of the program was the Appointment of Mrs. Sneha Shergill, Mrs. India the queen of Substance 2016 was announced as the Brand Ambassador for MHM for Gramalaya by Mr. Sai Damodran, Director. Mrs. Geetha Jegan, Director of CSR Initiatives, said Gramalaya has constructed over 200 girl friendly toilets in Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry.

Cuddalore:

The MHM Day celebrations under the auspices of the Center for Sustainable Development, Cuddalore was exclusively organized by adolescent girls and students. A rally was taken out with MHM message placards. An MHM pledge was taken about safe disposal of used pads.



The days of the monthly cycle are allotted to the female body's rest, rejuvenation and recovery. Along with menstrual hygiene, menstrual health is important too. The discomfort of cramps, sensations of nausea, physical pain, and irregular menses are all topics that are addressed under this subject. Yoga plays a significant role in regulating your monthly cycle and also alleviating the pain to a large extent. The practice of yoga is also beneficial for balancing emotions that may cause irritability, mood swings, depression, anxiety or anger. Awareness on Yoga and menstruation was also highlighted.

A programme – Menstruation And Psycho Social Support (MAPS) was designed by Ms. Sarayu during her tenure in Pudukkottai District as Additional Collector and now she continues with it as part of her work in Cuddalore District to provide support to women during their menstruation time particularly during the post-partum period – the time after delivery and during the infant care period. A Help line has been created to support women and adolescents during their menstrual cycles. DIAL **8695006006** for Menstrual Hygiene and health related queries.

Sanitation and MHM Champions – Ms. Santha Sheela Nair, I.A.S (Retd)



In December 2004, Tsunami devastated Tamil Nadu; many families lost their living spaces and were forced to live in temporary Shelters for prolonged period(2-3 years). It was at this time, menstruation emerged as a major issue for the women. The relief supplies had so many items but no sanitary toilets nor sanitary napkins for use. Furthermore, one found that many women had started menstruating around the same time.

Ms. Santha Sheela Nair I.A.S(retd). Nodal Officer for Tsunami relief gave a call for the mobilization of sanitary napkins as part of the relief materials. It is to be noted that soon after, even UN agencies recognized the need to include sanitary napkins as a part of the relief package kit for disaster management areas. Even as Rural Development Secretary, she had started the programme of setting up sanitary napkin units as one per Panchayat block so that low cost sanitary napkins were available even in rural areas. Post-Tsunami, she started giving a thrust to this initiative and we saw the setting up of many sanitary napkin units across the State.

Ms. P.Amudha I.A.S designed a low cost sanitary napkin incinerator in a school in Nemeli near Chennai, which was one of the first low cost incinerators. It gave rise to emergence of various technology options and ideas for empowering women by engaging them in sanitary napkin production also. A separate stall on Menstrual Hygiene Management was put up by Mrs. Santha Sheela Nair I.A.S., R.D. Secretary, Government of India in the third South Asian Conference on Sanitation, in New Delhi. A paper on various aspects of MHM and Public Private partnership in the field was presented by Dr. R. Sujatha, project coordinator, Shri Cheema Foundation of Tamil Nadu. In 2009-10, she (who) discussed with her Colleagues in the Health Department and asked them to visit Tamil Nadu and see how Self Help Groups could manufacture Low cost sanitary napkins locally.

Mrs. M.P. Nirmala, I.A.S (retd) then Director Social Welfare Department convened a State Level Conference on MHM and Mrs. Girija Vaidyanathan, I.A.S., the then Director of Reproductive Child Health coordinated the issue. When the Government of India mooted the idea of centralized procurement and supply of sanitary napkins, Tamil Nadu requested for a key role for SHGs of women in the production and supply of SNs to the R.D. Secretary, Mrs. S.S. Nair, I.A.S. Government of India agreed to allow for State Procurement for Tamil Nadu and a role for SHG napkin producers. In 2010 the State for the first time in the country opted for free supply of sanitary napkins to rural adolescent girls, prisoners and post-natal mothers. After her retirement as the Vice Chairperson of the State Planning Commission and also when she was Officer on Special Duty, she worked closely to link the free supply to the production units.

The role of women SHGs in napkin production TNSANFED

In the beginning in 2002-03, as part of the initiatives under Total Sanitation, Menstrual Hygiene was promoted and as Rural Development Department Secretary she encouraged every block to have a sanitary napkin unit that will be able to cater to the market in that area. Tamil Nadu had SHG units that were producing sanitary napkins and distributing it in a small scale in their areas way before others entered the fray. These scattered SHG units had to be brought under a common umbrella and so came up the Tamil Nadu Sanitary Napkins Federation which brought all the sanitary napkin producing units under a common platform.

Tamil Nadu Sanitary Napkin Producers Federation was formed under the auspices of the Tamil Nadu Women's Development Corporation. Ms. Santha Sheela Nair I.A.S (Retd) is now an advisor to the TNSANFED It has 52 SHG production units and is now supplying to the Government of Tamil Nadu nearly 2,00,000 Packets (6 napkins per Pack) to the Department of Health.

The Challenge of total solution to MHM:

The Oscar winning film “The Pad man” brought global attention to menstruation, emphasizing how deeply entrenched social norms restrict girls’ freedom and affect their health in India and other developing countries. A solution offered was sanitary pads. Lauding sanitary pads as the solution to menstrual health and hygiene is not new. The film played a pivotal role in spurring conversations around periods and positioning sanitary pads as the saviour. Though this is a hygienic option for millions of girls and women to manage their periods, there are important considerations about the blind promotion of sanitary pads that have implications on the health of the young girls and women. National Family and Health Survey 4 found that 58 per cent of young Indian women (15-24 years) used a hygienic method of protection (mostly sanitary pads), which in itself a significant increase from the 12 per cent is using pads in 2010 (as reported by the Plan and AC Nielsen study). This is a direct impact of the attention given to menstrual hygiene management (MHM) over the past few years in India. Corporates also have expanded their product range and market reach. Several government (SBM) and non-government programmes have promoted menstrual hygiene through health awareness schemes and free or subsidized distribution of sanitary pads.

Small-scale sanitary pad manufacturing units by Self Help Groups have been supported to make low-cost pads more easily accessible and available at reasonable costs, at the same time generating income for women. Social entrepreneurs, driven by quality, health or environmental concerns over regular sanitary pads, have innovated with a range of menstrual products introducing reusable cloth pads, menstrual cups, and “eco-friendly” or compostable sanitary pads.

T.N.’s potential to solve the NEW DILEMMA

Tamil Nadu is a State that Pioneered the Menstrual Hygiene Management revolution has seen the State taking a positive mode in leading the movement. The free supply of Sanitary Napkins to the rural adolescent girls, maternity pads for postnatal mothers and women prisoners have all been part of the State’s Welfare Schemes for girls.

The MORAL DILEMMA exists on whether use of sanitary napkins is environmentally sustainable and is awareness promotion is indirectly pad promotion overlooking disposal. This issue is particularly worrying primarily for two inter-related reasons. First, when girls lack access to disposal facilities, they tend to use a sanitary pad that is a hygienic/safe product in an unhygienic manner —by extending its usage beyond recommended time (Girls use a pad for a whole day). This increases the risk for infection, and has critical health implications. Secondly, in terms of disposal facilities, there are still huge gaps in the facilities available. So the question is: are we back to square one – cloth pads which were used earlier? The pressure from environmentalists on the huge burden of the pads due to being dumped in water bodies and landfills is worrying! So what is the answer...???

As editors, we are opening up this debate and hoping to stimulate a discussion that will broaden our options on safer and sustainable MHM.

(Next Issue) Focus on Incinerators and different options of napkin available in the market.

We welcome articles, comments / suggestions

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