



AGA KHAN DEVELOPMENT NETWORK

Prioritising Menstrual Hygiene Management in India



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India Prioritising Menstrual Hygiene Management

In India, menstruation is the subject of cultural myths and taboos; a period associated with impurity that should be kept hidden. Stigmatisation has produced an immense gap in knowledge about menstruation and hygienic practices among women and girls, leading to increased health risks, absence from school and work, and loss of dignity. Recognising the impact of poor menstrual hygiene on the quality of life, Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) has become a core component of the AKDN Comprehensive Sanitation Initiative.

The AKDN Comprehensive Sanitation Initiative was launched in response to the Government of India's flagship programme, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, or Clean India Mission. Started in 2015, the five-year programme is facilitating access to improved sanitation and hygiene to 700,000 beneficiaries in six states: Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Telangana. Its implementation is a careful collaboration of several AKDN agencies: the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF), the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP), the Aga Khan Agency for Habitat (AKAH) and the Aga Khan Health Services (AKHS).

The Initiative focuses on enhancing access and use of sanitation at the household, school and community level in both rural and urban settings. This is done through a community-led integrated

approach of hygiene promotion, behaviour change and capacity building of local village and government institutions. In schools, the AKDN is improving water, sanitation and hygiene infrastructure, regularising hygiene promotion and empowering student committees to drive changes forward.

A Critical Component of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

Menstrual Hygiene Management activities are being reflected at various points within the AKDN Comprehensive Sanitation Initiative, including design innovations in girls' toilet facilities, mechanisms for safe disposal of menstrual waste and reliable water sources for hygienic management.

Providing women and girls with appropriate health messaging is also essential. Baseline assessments found that on average, 63 percent of girls did not know about menstruation before reaching menarche. Without adequate knowledge, the risk of reproductive health infections increases from poor menstrual hygiene practices such as reusing unhygienic cloths. This meant that the greatest need was for girls and their mothers – who predominantly educated their daughters – to be provided sufficient information in a timely manner. Providing women and girls with knowledge on safe menstrual



Left: Access to separate private and gender sanitation facilities is important to ensuring good menstrual hygiene practices. **Right:** A toolkit developed to assist field teams in facilitating discussions on key Menstrual Hygiene Management themes through the use of interactive tools, games and product samples.



An awareness session with a women's self-group conducted by a trained facilitator using materials from the Menstrual Hygiene Management kit. Sessions like these provide an environment of peer support, a space for discussions to take place freely and where problems can be addressed regularly.

hygiene practices is essential for their health and their ability to participate fully in daily life.

Creating a Supportive Environment

Information on Menstrual Hygiene Management is provided to women and both in- and out-of-school adolescent girls through the platforms of women self-help groups and adolescent girls groups. Awareness sessions provide an environment of peer support, a space for discussions to take place freely and where problems can be addressed regularly with a trained facilitator. Topics discussed in the groups cover all aspects of the MHM value chain, including the natural process of menstruation, how to manage menstruation hygienically, the importance of tracking the cycle, myths and taboos, types of hygienic absorbents and proper disposal of menstrual waste.

Innovative Learning Tools

The AKDN developed an interactive Menstrual Hygiene Management toolkit to provide facilitators with hands-on training materials and

engaging tools to communicate with women and girls. The kit contains a flipbook where through 15 sessions facilitators can spread awareness and facilitate discussions around the core themes of MHM in a sensitive and comfortable manner. The toolkit also contains interactive games, posters and menstrual product samples. These materials were developed in response to the need to further strengthen facilitators' knowledge and capacity to effectively disseminate MHM-related messaging.

Capacity Building

Frontline health workers and AKDN staff undergo capacity building training on facilitating group discussions with women and girls. They are trained on effective and sensitive facilitation skills, technical knowledge on Menstrual Hygiene Management and how to use the MHM toolkit. Designated focal points also undergo training to lead the initiative in all of the geographies where the AKDN Comprehensive Sanitation Initiative is underway. They regularly monitor progress, report on key indicators and liaise with

government departments to improve sanitation facilities and increase access to safe menstrual products.

Informed Product Choice

Assessments have taken place in various geographies to understand preferences and factors affecting menstrual product choice including cultural, socioeconomic and environmental considerations. A few pilot initiatives are in progress to determine which products are most beneficial for a particular area and how access can be facilitated. Due to the wide variety of factors affecting hygienic management, women and girls are educated on a range of menstrual products available and how to use them. Conscious of the environmental impact of non-compostable, disposable sanitary napkins, facilitators are trained to provide sufficient information on safe and hygienic disposal methods and the benefits of using reusable or compostable sanitary products.



Conveying information on adequate hygiene practices during menstruation through a life-size Snakes and Ladders game.

WHO WE REACHED 1 YEAR REVIEW



- + **9,500** Women & girls sensitized on MHM, from biology to disposal
- + **275** Adolescent Girls Groups & Women SHGs strengthened and formed
- 170** Villages in which the menstrual hygiene initiative is being implemented

Support AKDN

Partnerships

When AKDN refines its development approach in a given area, it looks to partners to help expand the scale. A significant portion of the funding for its activities therefore comes from national governments, multilateral institutions and private sector partners. For more information, visit: akdn.org/partners

Individuals

Individuals can support the AKDN. For more information, visit: akdn.org/support

For more information

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About AKDN

Founded and guided by His Highness the Aga Khan, the **Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN)** brings together a number of development agencies, institutions, and programmes that work primarily in the poorest parts of Asia and Africa. **It works in over 30 countries for the common good of all citizens, regardless of their gender, origin or religion.** A central feature of the AKDN's approach to development is to design and implement strategies in which its different agencies participate in particular settings to help those in need achieve a level of self-reliance and improve the quality of life.