

# REAL CHALLENGES for Adolescent girls in Nepal

Human Centered Design Approach -  
Menstrual Health and Hygiene Management



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# Menstrual Health Management Issues Faced by Adolescent Girls in Nepal: Articulating the Challenges and Framing the Solutions

Human Centered Design (HCD) is a creative approach to problem solving that starts by designing *with* those facing a particular challenge and ending with tailor-made solutions that suit *their* specific need. The underlying premise is that the people who face the challenges every day hold the key to the solutions.

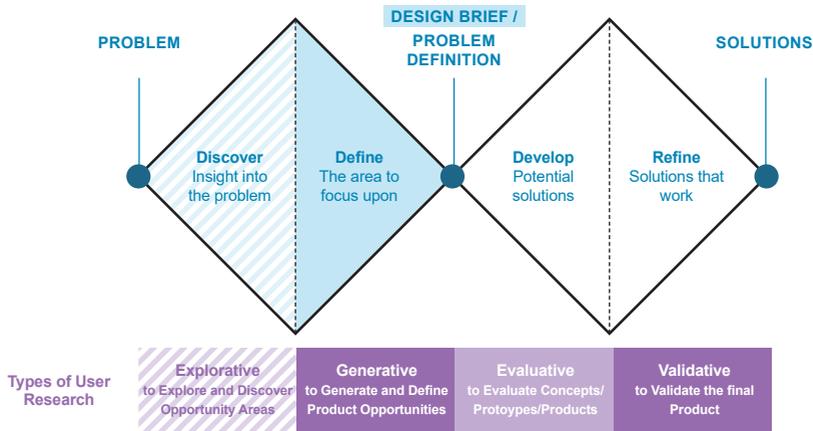


Figure 1 – The double diamond holistic approach of Human Centered Design (HCD) process

PSI/Nepal utilized an HCD Framework (Figure 1) that kept the girls at the centre of the process. By following the DISCOVER and DEFINE phases to articulate the challenges, this approach helped frame the solutions to the Menstrual Health and Hygiene Management (MHM) related issues faced by adolescent girls in Nepal.

## PHASE 1 - DISCOVER

### Understand the Adolescent Girl and the MHM Marketplace Surrounding Her

PSI/Nepal conducted four key studies to understand the MHM situation and discover insights into the challenges faced by the Nepali adolescent girl.

1. **Scoping Review and Preliminary Mapping** (policy, regulatory, experience) – To obtain in-depth understanding of the MHM situation in Nepal, bottlenecks and opportunities.
2. **Peer Ethnographic Study Among Adolescent Girls**– To obtain in-depth insights on adolescent girls' understandings on their behavior, beliefs and practices, influencing factors and accessing products and services for MHM.
3. **Key Influencers' Beliefs, Roles, and Perceptions of MHM** – To identify key influencers' beliefs, roles and perceptions on MHM by adolescent and young girls.
4. **Market Assessment of MHM Products**– To identify the MHM product situation in Nepal, bottlenecks and opportunities.

## PHASE 2 - DEFINE

### Articulate the Problem and Scope the Opportunities

The research findings from Phase 1 were synthesized through a process of empathy mapping, eliciting hopes and fears, distilling influencers and identifying change agents. This process identified a number of common characteristics of Nepali adolescent girls, their culture and practices, and led to the articulation of four 'archetypes'; broadly representing adolescents that face similar MHM challenges in Nepal. (Figure 2)

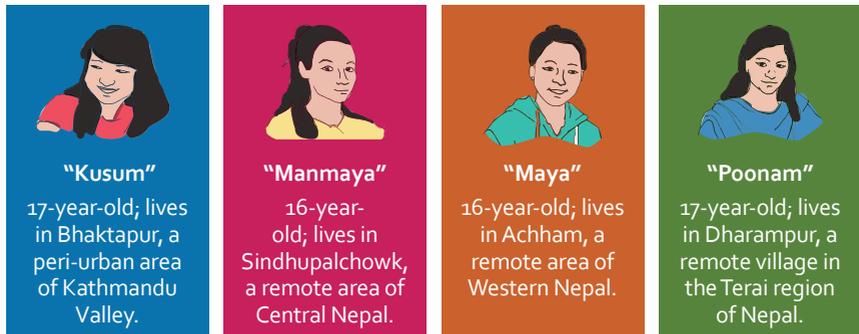


Figure 2 – Four 'archetypes' broadly representing adolescent girls in Nepal who faced similar MHM challenges

A thematic analysis of the report findings identified five themes ('pain points') as the key challenges facing adolescent girls. (Figure 3)



Figure 3 – Key themes ("pain points") that emerged from the research

Co-creation sessions were conducted with representatives and their key influencers' from each of the four archetypes. These sessions explored the specific problems associated with each pain point and distilled them into adolescent centred 'Design Briefs' that articulate the specific challenges and frame the solutions to MHM related issues faced by adolescent girls in Nepal.

These Design Briefs follow, and are available for any partners to take forward into the DEVELOP and REFINE steps of the HCD process, using the research to date to inform holistic, impactful MHM programming.



**KUSUM**  
Bhaktapur



## How to give mothers theoretical and practical knowledge about menstruations to bridge the education gap?

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

**Mothers are the first influencers in their daughter's life. They help their daughters manage their first periods at home and define the restrictions that they need to follow.**

Both girls and mothers agree that mothers are the ones who should educate their daughters; however mothers feel they don't have adequate knowledge to initiate the conversation with their daughters. They are afraid to share wrong or incomplete information.

Girls often get embarrassed, worried and scared when they get their menarche. They need to be informed about the process and physiological changes happening in their body in order to be better prepared to handle the situation.

Considering the trust that girls put in their mothers, they are best positioned to help them maintain proper hygiene and overcome the shyness related to menstruation.



I don't know what to teach my daughter, she knows more than me."

Kusum's mother



My mother should have taught me how to use pads and dispose of them."

Kusum

# How to give mothers theoretical and practical knowledge about menstruations to bridge the education gap?

## ATTRIBUTES THAT A POTENTIAL SOLUTION NEEDS TO HAVE

- **WHO**
  - Health experts are trustworthy sources of information. They can teach about biology (physiology) and hygiene maintenance
  - The teacher should be a female and perceived as knowledgeable
- **WHEN**
  - Time is scarce: Leverage moments of social gathering of the community or find a common non-disruptive time like a religious festival, picnic, mothers group meeting, etc.
- **WHERE**
  - Convenient place: cooperative office, school near-by, someone's home in the community, Yoga hall
- **WHAT CONTENT**
  - Biology of the menstruation cycle and its evolution from menarche to menopause
  - Physiological changes happening during adolescence
  - Practical training on the different blood management options available and their pros and cons, as well as hygiene management
  - Talk about the origin of restrictions and discuss the use of it today
  - Culturally acceptable and language specific content
- **HOW TO DELIVER IT**
  - A group setting from the same community would help with shyness
  - Visual aids, pictorial and engaging message, because of lack of education and sometimes illiteracy
  - Clear and attractive incentive/compensation for the time spent
- **Opportunity:** Start with a small group of women who can become advocates

## CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS

- Mothers' prejudices on menstruation
- Shyness around the topic
- Community pressure to keep the tradition, socio cultural norms
- Individual fear of the consequences of breaking the rules
- No time to go to the training
- Unavailability of experts
- Mothers and daughters want to push away their responsibilities of talking about these sensitive subjects onto radio and TV, they could be interesting media to leverage.



**KUSUM**  
Bhaktapur



## How to give mothers tools to help them start conversations with their children about menstruations?

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

**When menarche comes, girls turn towards their mothers for guidance. Mothers play an important role in whether or not their daughters are prepared for menarche and can manage their first periods at home.**

Both girls and mothers agree that mothers are the ones who should educate their daughters but mothers feel they don't have adequate tools to initiate the conversation with their daughters and don't know when to start talking about the subject.

Girls often get embarrassed, worried and scared when they get their menarche. They need to be informed about the process and physiological changes happening in their body in order to be better prepared to handle the situation.

Considering the trust that girls put in their mothers, they are best positioned to help them maintain proper hygiene and overcome the shyness related to menstruation.

Mothers should also include boys in the discussion, to sensitize them to the issues that their sisters, and later, wives are facing.



I was so scared when my periods arrived for the first time, I thought I was going to die."

Kusum



My mother should have taught me how to use pads and dispose of them."

Kusum

## How to give mothers tools to help them start conversations with their children about menstruations?

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### ATTRIBUTES THAT A POTENTIAL SOLUTION NEEDS TO HAVE

- Pedagogical material to start the conversation: different for girls and boys, adapted for the age. (example: comic book, cards, video, etc.)
- The material needs to be visual because of the lack of education and for a stronger engagement of children
- Indication on age to initiate the conversation
- Guidance on what content to teach at what age
- Showing the importance of teaching boys as well
- Support for mothers that are uncomfortable with talking about MHM: for example, an outspoken mother can explain for several children of the community.

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## How to give girls access to the ideal blood management product?

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

**Commercial pads, NGO supplied reusable pads and home cloths are all accessible to girls but they all bear inconveniences.**

Girls using commercial pads feel comfortable and confident to use them but they are concerned about the disposal after use. They also expressed concerns about the chemical used in the pads and how it might affect their health. Even if they are easily accessible in peri-urban areas, the cost of commercial pad is a barrier for some girls who have to take from their pocket money to buy them.

Girls using cloths/rags consider them as a cheap, sustainable and chemical free solution but find them difficult and cumbersome to wash and dry. They are not as reliable as commercial pads when it comes to leakage not are they comfortable.

Girls tend to use a mix of both solution depending on the situation. Commercial pads for school and traveling, and cloths when they are at home.



I have to take from my pocket/lunch money to buy pads.”

Kusum



Cloths are annoying to wash and I don't want people to see them drying.”

Kusum

# How to give girls access to the ideal blood management product?

## ATTRIBUTES THAT A POTENTIAL SOLUTION NEEDS TO HAVE

- **Girls should forget that they wear it so that they can focus on school/life and feel confident**
  - Reliable in preventing leakage. Strong absorbance.
  - Convenient to wear
  - Comfortable
  - Healthy for the body (no infection, allergies or harmful chemicals)
  - Should be secured to the underwear (should not shift).
- **Easy to manage after use:**
  - if disposable, easy to dispose of.
  - If re-usable, easy to clean and quick drying, looking anonymous, stains not visible
- For young girls, no insert-able solution because of the fear of losing virginity
- Easily available in any shops (ration shops/cosmetics/ pharmacy etc.)
- Affordable and sustainable for young girls (example: it could be partially home made with locally available material)
- The packaging should not look like a sanitary product and be more anonymous

## CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS

- Cost is a key factor for adoption
- Shyness in getting the products
- Lack of awareness on available solutions
- Lack of trust in a new product
- Misconceptions around the use of available market products



**KUSUM**  
Bhaktapur



## How to add to the existing curriculum to engage both students and teachers?

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

**The current curriculum is mostly written and theoretical. Engaging neither for the students nor for the teachers.**

Most of the teachers are not equipped or trained to deliver information on menstrual health, some of them even skip the class and ask students to study on their own. Teachers need tools to engage the class, feel comfortable themselves and achieve intended result.

Students want the curriculum to be more practical and interactive. Girls feel uncomfortable from the presence of male students and teachers. It prevents them from seeking more information on the topic.

Interactive sessions given by different organisations in schools are very appreciated by students. Liking the interactivity and practicality of the knowledge given and the presence of an external facilitator elicits trust and openness.



“Having an outside expert is good for the engagement of the students.”

Kusum's teacher



“I wish there were booklets that contains pictures and diagrams.”

Kusum's teacher

## How to add to the existing curriculum to engage both students and teachers?

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### ATTRIBUTES THAT A POTENTIAL SOLUTION NEEDS TO HAVE

- **Engaging material**
  - Pictorial material for teachers to teach the topic more easily: posters, video, etc.
  - Material to give away to students to add to their classes: a comic book, a game, etc.
- **Delivery**
  - By the teachers at school during the current curriculum
  - Or by external organisations as the extra classes
- **Recommendations**
  - Teachers need training to be more comfortable and confident on the topic
  - Start earlier, before girls get their menarche so that they feel comfortable in later classes when they grow up
  - Assign a focal person (female teachers) who can initiate discussion about menstruation in earlier grades (Grade 5, 6 and 7)

### CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS

- Concerned agencies approval of visual aids to be used in the curriculum
- Content needs to be adapted to the age of the children (information they can understand)
- Schools might not be able to pay for material/training
- Difficulty to recruit female teachers
- Interactive sessions given by external organization is not a sustainable model.



**KUSUM**  
Bhaktapur



## How to dispose of disposable pads?

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

**Disposing of commercial pads is an issue at home and school.**

At home, if they throw it away in containers, girls are afraid that someone might cast an evil eye on their used pads or that dogs might take it to the temple. Some find a solution in washing them before disposing, but doing that takes away the convenient aspect of disposable pads. Some even throw it away in the near-by river, causing environmental pollution.

At school, there rarely are bins for disposal in the toilets. Even when there is one, they do not want to throw it away. Therefore, they have to carry it home, the smell and leakage are problematic and the issue remains at home.



I get scared that someone might cast an evil eye on my used pads when they see blood.”

Kusum



It's disgusting to carry the used pads home.”

Kusum

## How to dispose of disposable pads?

### ATTRIBUTES THAT A POTENTIAL SOLUTION NEEDS TO HAVE

- Specific bins for menstrual materials
- Small enough to discreetly fit at home and in school toilets
- Available at a low cost
- Safe, no opportunity throughout the disposal to cast an evil eye on the blood
- **Recommendations**
  - A specific chain of menstrual product disposal
  - Finding alternatives to disposal: biodegradable, recycling, etc.

### CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS

- Additional cost
- Should not signal that we promote the use of disposable pads
- Women need to be convinced that it is safe.



**KUSUM**  
Bhaktapur



## How to treat pain to avoid the missing of school days?

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Pain is often mentioned as a reason to miss school, or part of a day at school, when girls are on their period.

Medicines are easily available in peri-urban areas and at school but girls and their mothers have concerns that pain killers have side effects on fertility. Instead of taking medicine, girls tend to leave school to rest at home and uses home remedy like drinking hot water.



Medicines have side effects.”

Kusum's mother



I don't take medicine even if I am in pain. I go home and rest.”

Kusum

## How to treat pain to avoid the missing of school day?

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### ATTRIBUTES THAT A POTENTIAL SOLUTION NEEDS TO HAVE

- **Pedagogical information**
  - Effectively counter beliefs on pain killers side effects.
  - Doctors or health professionals should carry the information
  - TV and radio could be good media (ex: Jiwonchakra or Sathi anga man ka kura) as it is widespread
  - If distributed through radio or TV, then evening time is the best time of the day, when everyone is home.
  - Explain the mechanisms of pain killers in the body
- **An alternative is to provide an efficient alternative to relieve pain**

### CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS

- The fear of the side effects of pain killers is not rational
- There is an idea that pain is a normal part of menstruation and that women need to accept it
- The traditional thought that rest is the best medicine



**KUSUM**  
Bhaktapur



## How to allow girls to change products easily while at school? (hygiene, products availability and disposal facilities)

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

One of the main reasons that bring girls out of school while on their period is the need to change product. They usually go back home or to a friend's house, missing lessons in the meantime.

Schools toilets don't have the right facilities that would allow girls to confidently change blood management products. In peri-urban areas the standards vary a lot. There is usually water access, but not always a tap in the toilets, bins for disposal, or emergency material close to the toilets.

Having a constant supply of emergency pads is expensive for the schools and when there is a reliable supply, girls are too shy to ask the teachers for it.



Schools should provide pads so that girls can ask and use when they need it."

Kusum's mother



I don't feel like changing in school as there is no dustbin in the toilet."

Kusum

## How to allow girls to change products easily while at school? (hygiene, products availability and disposal facilities)

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### ATTRIBUTES THAT A POTENTIAL SOLUTION NEEDS TO HAVE

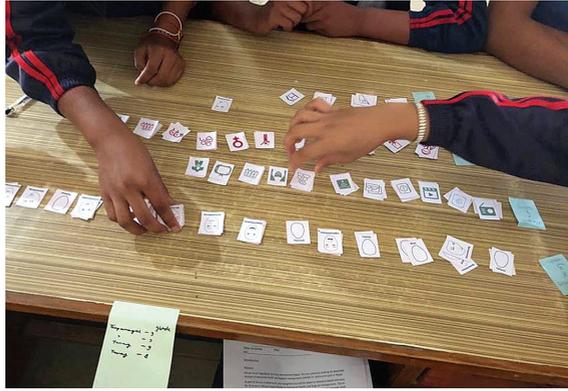
- **Hygiene**
  - Separated female toilets to allow for privacy
  - Water access in the toilets
- **Disposal facility**
  - A way to dispose of used pads (for example, bin or incinerator)
  - In case of disposal bin, an agreement with the school cleaner to handle the used pads
- **Products availability**
  - Emergency blood management product reliably available
  - Placed close to / inside the toilets
  - Appoint a responsible focal person (needs to be a woman that girls trust) that girls can turn to when they need and who would make sure that the stock is always full

### CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS

- Costs of installation and maintenance of facilities
- Reliability of availability of emergency material is critical for girls to trust it
- School cleaner might not want to handle used pads with “impure” blood
- Shyness around the topic is hard to overcome, the habit will need to be taught on the long term
- Finding the right focal person is key for success: is trusted of students, easy to approach, care enough to ensure the stock of products.



**MANMAYA**  
Sindhupalchowk



## How to give mothers theoretical and practical knowledge about menstruations to bridge the education gap?

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

**Mothers are the first influencers in their daughter's life. They help their daughters manage their first periods at home and define the restrictions that they need to follow.**

Both girls and mothers agree that mothers are the ones who should educate their daughters; however mothers feel they don't have adequate knowledge to initiate the conversation with their daughters. They are afraid to share wrong or incomplete information.

Girls often get embarrassed, worried and scared when they get their menarche. They need to be informed about the process and physiological changes in their body in order to be better prepared to handle the situation.

Considering the trust that girls put in their mothers, they are best positioned to help them maintain proper hygiene and overcome the shyness related to menstruation.



**I should be the one to teach my daughter."**

Manmaya's mother



**Unlike educated mothers, uneducated mothers don't know what to teach us."**

Manmaya

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Girls using cloths/rags consider them as a cheap, sustainable and chemical free solution but find them difficult and cumbersome to wash and dry. They are not as reliable as commercial pads when it comes to leakage not are they comfortable.

Girls tend to use a mix of both solution depending on the situation. Commercial pads for school and traveling, and cloths when they are at home.

When they have been exposed to reusable pads from outside agencies (usually at school), they find them comfortable and reliable, advocating for their environmental benefits.



Market pads have chemicals and can cause problems in the uterus."

Manmaya



Reusable pads can be a good option for those who can't afford the market ones."

Manmaya

# How to give girls access to the ideal blood management product?

## ATTRIBUTES THAT A POTENTIAL SOLUTION NEEDS TO HAVE

- **Girls should forget that they wear it so that they can focus on school/ life and feel confident**
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Students want the curriculum to be more practical and interactive. Girls feel uncomfortable from the presence of male students and teachers. It prevents them from seeking more information on the topic.

Interactive sessions given by different organisations in schools are very appreciated by students. Liking the interactivity and practicality of the knowledge given and the presence of an external facilitator elicits trust and openness.



The Content is more theoretical. It would be better to have pictures, visual aids in the form of documentaries.”

Manmaya’s teacher



Nurses and doctors should come to school and teach boys and girls separately.”

Manmaya

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## How to treat pain to avoid the missing of school days?

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Pain is often mentioned as a reason to miss school, or part of a day at school, when girls are on their period.

Medicines are easily available where Manmaya lives and at school but girls and their mothers have concerns that pain killers have side effects on fertility. Instead of taking medicine, girls tend to leave school to rest at home and uses home remedy like drinking hot water.



The health post is nearby but we only take medicines if the pain is severe. We should not take the medicines if the pain is tolerable.”

Manmaya



Young girls should not take medicines. It might affect their health.”

Manmaya's Mother

## How to treat pain to avoid the missing of school day?

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### ATTRIBUTES THAT A POTENTIAL SOLUTION NEEDS TO HAVE

- **Pedagogical information**
  - Effectively counter beliefs on pain killers side effects.
  - Doctors or health professionals should carry the information
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- There is an idea that pain is a normal part of menstruation and that women need to accept it
- The traditional thought that rest is the best medicine



**MANMAYA**  
Sindhupalchowk



## How to allow girls to change products easily while at school? (hygiene, products availability and disposal facilities)

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

One of the main reasons that bring girls out of school while on their period is the need to change product. They usually go back home or to a friend's house, missing lessons in the meantime.

Schools toilets don't have the right facilities that would allow girls to confidently change blood management products. The standards vary a lot. There is usually water access, but not always a tap in the toilets, bins for disposal, or emergency material close to the toilets.

Having a constant supply of emergency pads is expensive for the schools and when there is a reliable supply, girls are too shy to ask the teachers for it.



We have water in the toilets. But they are very dirty and we don't feel like changing there."

Manmaya



Girls don't come to ask for pads, rather they manage by themselves even if we have provision of pads in school."

Manmaya

## How to allow girls to change products easily while at school? (hygiene, products availability and disposal facilities)

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### ATTRIBUTES THAT A POTENTIAL SOLUTION NEEDS TO HAVE

- **Hygiene**
  - Separated female toilets to allow for privacy
  - Water access in the toilets
- **Disposal facility**
  - A way to dispose of used pads (for example, bin or incinerator)
  - In case of disposal bin, an agreement with the school cleaner to handle the used pads
- **Products availability**
  - Emergency blood management product **reliably** available
  - Placed close to / inside the toilets
  - Appoint a responsible focal person (needs to be a woman that girls trust) that girls can turn to when they need and who would make sure that the stock is always full

### CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS

- Costs of installation and maintenance of facilities
- Reliability of availability of emergency material is critical for girls to trust it
- School cleaner might not want to handle used pads with “impure” blood
- Shyness around the topic is hard to overcome, the habit will need to be taught on the long term
- Finding the right focal person is key for success: is trusted of students, easy to approach, care enough to ensure the stock of products.



**MAYA**  
Achham



## How to give sisters theoretical and practical knowledge about menstruations to bridge the education gap?

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Older sisters (didi) are the first influencers in the adolescent girl's life. They are the go-to-person when it comes to menstruation. They help younger girls manage their first periods at home and define the restrictions that they need to follow.

The information the sister delivers is trusted and followed by the younger girl. She turns to her sister because she is not comfortable to talk about menstruation with her mother; however older sisters feel they don't have adequate knowledge to initiate the conversation. They are afraid to share wrong or incomplete information.

Girls often get embarrassed, worried and scared when they get their menarche. They need to be informed about the process and physiological changes in their body in order to be better prepared to handle the situation.



Sisters should teach girls.  
They feel shy to talk to us."

Maya's mother



I wish my sister had talked  
with me so that I wouldn't  
feel embarrassed."

Maya

# How to give mothers theoretical and practical knowledge about menstruations to bridge the education gap?

## ATTRIBUTES THAT A POTENTIAL SOLUTION NEEDS TO HAVE

- **WHO**
  - “Elder Sisters” could be an adolescent girl who has experiences of managing menstruation; not necessarily from the same family (friends sisters, friends/seniors from the school)
  - Health experts are trustworthy sources of information. They can teach about biology (physiology) and hygiene maintenance
  - The teacher could be either a male or a female and perceived as knowledgeable
- **WHEN**
  - Time is scarce: Leverage moments of festivals/cultural programs (Gaura)?, School time for school girls, public water taps, firewood collection, livestock grazing, farming/agriculture
- **WHERE**
  - Convenient place: cooperative office, school near-by, someone’s home in the community, Yoga hall
- **WHAT CONTENT**
  - Biology of the menstruation cycle and its evolution from menarche to menopause
  - Physiological changes happening during adolescence
  - Practical training on the different blood management options available and their pros and cons, as well as hygiene management
  - Talk about the origin of restrictions and discuss the use of it today
  - Culturally acceptable and language specific content
- **HOW TO DELIVER IT**
  - A group setting from the same community would help with shyness
  - Visual aids like pictures would be helpful, however verbal sessions are preferred
  - Clear and attractive incentive/compensation for the time spent
  - Opportunity: Start with a small group of women who can become advocates

## CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS

- Sisters’ prejudices on menstruation
- Shyness around the topic
- Community pressure to keep the tradition, socio cultural norms
- Individual fear of the consequences of breaking the rules
- No time to go to the training
- Unavailability of experts
- Trained sisters getting married and moving to husband’s house



**MAYA**  
Achham



## How to give sisters tools to help them start conversations with their children about menstruations?

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

**When menarche comes, girls turn towards their sisters for guidance. Sisters play an important role in whether or not their younger siblings are prepared for menarche and can manage their first periods at home.**

The information the sister delivers is trusted and followed by the younger girl. She turns to her sister because she is not comfortable to talk about menstruation with her mother; however older sisters feel they don't have adequate tools to initiate the conversation with the younger girls and don't know when to start talking about the subject.

Girls often get embarrassed, worried and scared when they get their menarche. They need to be informed about the process and physiological changes in their body in order to be better prepared to handle the situation.

Sisters should also include boys in the discussion, to sensitize them to the issues that their sisters, and later, wives are facing.

“ Sisters should teach girls. They feel shy to talk to us.”

Maya's mother

“ I wish my sister had talked with me so that I wouldn't feel embarrassed.”

Maya

## How to give mothers tools to help them start conversations with their children about menstruations?

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### ATTRIBUTES THAT A POTENTIAL SOLUTION NEEDS TO HAVE

- Pedagogical material to start the conversation: different for girls and boys, adapted for the age. (example: comic book, cards, video, etc.)
- The material needs to be visual because of the lack of education and for a stronger engagement of children
- Indication on age to initiate the conversation
- Guidance on what content to teach at what age
- Showing the importance of teaching boys as well
- A outspoken sister/girl can explain for several girls of the community. (communication chain)

### CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS

- Sisters' prejudices on menstruation
- Shyness around the topic
- Community pressure to keep the tradition, socio cultural norms
- No time to go to the training
- Trained sisters getting married and moving to husband's house



**MAYA**  
Achham



## How to give girls access to the ideal blood management product?

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Maya does not have access to appropriate blood management product in her everyday life. She has limited access to the nearby market, furthermore, commercial products are not affordable to her.

Commercial pads are both too expensive and not available in Achham.

Even at her home, girls do not always have access to clean and hygienic products/clothes she can use to manage her menstruation because of poverty.

Some girls are using reusable cloth pads that were provided by organizations. They feel those reusable (cotton pads with buttons to adjust in underpants) pads are comfortable, absorbs blood and stick to the underwear and they don't need to worry about the leakage.



We cannot afford market pads. The cloth pads with buttons are a good option.”

Maya



Reusable cotton cloth pads are good ones. Our daughters are using them.”

Maya

## How to give girls access to the ideal blood management product?

### ATTRIBUTES THAT A POTENTIAL SOLUTION NEEDS TO HAVE

- **Girls should forget that they wear it so that they can focus on school/life and feel confident**
  - Reliable in preventing leakage. Strong absorbance.
  - Convenient to wear
  - Comfortable
  - Healthy for the body (no infection, allergies or harmful chemicals)
  - Should be secured to the underwear (should not shift).
- **Easy to manage after use:**
  - if disposable, easy to dispose of.
  - If re-usable, easy to clean and quick drying, looking anonymous, stains not visible
- For young girls, no insert-able solution because of the fear of losing virginity (they were provided ruby cups by some organization and they don't use it)
- Easily available in any shops (ration shops/cosmetics/ pharmacy etc.)
- Affordable and sustainable for young girls (example: it could be partially home made with locally available material)
- The packaging should not look like a sanitary product and be more anonymous

### CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS

- Cost is a key factor for adoption
- Shyness in getting the products
- Lack of awareness on available solutions
- Lack of trust in a new product
- Misconceptions around the use of available market products



**MAYA**  
Achham



## How to add to the existing curriculum to engage both students and teachers?

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

**The current curriculum is mostly written and theoretical. Engaging neither for the students nor for the teachers.**

Most of the teachers are not equipped or trained to deliver information on menstrual health, some of them even skip the class and ask students to study on their own. Teachers need tools to engage the class, feel comfortable themselves and achieve intended result.

Students want the curriculum to be more practical and interactive. Girls feel uncomfortable from the presence of male students and teachers. It prevents them from seeking more information on the topic.

Interactive sessions given by different organisations in schools are very appreciated by students. Liking the interactivity and practicality of the knowledge given and the presence of an external facilitator elicits trust and openness.



*The teachers usually skip the lessons related to sexual and reproductive health."*

Maya

## How to add to the existing curriculum to engage both students and teachers?

---

### ATTRIBUTES THAT A POTENTIAL SOLUTION NEEDS TO HAVE

- **Engaging material**
  - Pictorial material for teachers to teach the topic more easily: posters, video, etc.
  - Material to give away to students to add to their classes: a comic book, a game, etc.
- **Delivery**
  - By the teachers at school during the current curriculum
  - Or by external organisations as extra classes
- **Recommendations**
  - Teachers need training to be more comfortable and confident on the topic
  - Start earlier, before girls get their menarche so that they feel comfortable in later classes when they grow up
  - Assign a focal person (female teachers) who can initiate discussion about menstruation in earlier grades (Grade 5, 6 and 7)

### CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS

- Concerned agencies approval of visual aids to be used in the curriculum
- Content needs to be adapted to the age of the children (information they can understand)
- Schools might not be able to pay for material/training
- Difficulty to recruit female teachers
- Interactive sessions given by external organization is not a sustainable model.



**MAYA**  
Achham



## How to enable the maintenance of hygiene during menstruation?

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Restricted access to water sources during menstruation affect Maya's hygiene and health. She needs a way to maintain her basic hygiene.

Due to myths/ misconceptions related to culture like untouchability, menstruating girls are denied the access to direct water sources in the community.

Girls from a lower caste are often compelled to use dirty or contaminated water sources. They have to bath and wash their clothes with this water.



I wish we had a separate tap so that we don't have to use dirty water."

Maya

## How to enable the maintenance of hygiene during menstruation?

---

### ATTRIBUTES THAT A POTENTIAL SOLUTION NEEDS TO HAVE

- The solution needs to be proven hygienic
- Acceptable for the community
- Sustainable in water scarce areas
- If product, cheap and re-usable, or easy to dispose of

### CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS

- Additional cost
- Opposition from the community to install the supply from the same source
- Water scarcity in hilly areas



**MAYA**  
Achham



## How to allow girls to change products easily while at school? (hygiene, products availability and disposal facilities)

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

One of the main reasons that bring girls out of school while on their period is the need to change product. They usually go back home or to a friend's house, missing lessons in the meantime.

Schools toilets don't have the right facilities that would allow girls to confidently change blood management products. The standards are very poor in Achham. There is not always an access to water, a tap in the toilets, bins for disposal, nor emergency material close to the toilets.

Having a constant supply of emergency pads is expensive for the schools and when there is a reliable supply, girls are too shy to ask the teachers for it.



There should be pads in school for emergency purpose."

Maya



We feel shy to ask for pads to our teacher. They are most of the time busy in classes."

Maya

## How to allow girls to change products easily while at school? (hygiene, products availability and disposal facilities)

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### ATTRIBUTES THAT A POTENTIAL SOLUTION NEEDS TO HAVE

- **Hygiene**
  - Separated female toilets to allow for privacy
  - Water access in the toilets
- **Disposal facility**
  - A way to dispose of used pads (for example, bin or incinerator)
  - In case of disposal bin, an agreement with the school cleaner to handle the used pads
- **Products availability**
  - Emergency blood management product **reliably** available
  - Placed close to / inside the toilets
  - Appoint a responsible focal person (needs to be a woman that girls trust) that girls can turn to when they need and who would make sure that the stock is always full
  - Teachers should be responsible to inform girls about the availability of materials for blood management in school (in class, assembly, school functions)

### CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS

- Costs of installation and maintenance of facilities
- Reliability of availability of emergency material is critical for girls to trust it
- School cleaner might not want to handle used pads with “impure” blood
- Shyness around the topic is hard to overcome, the habit will need to be taught on the long term
- Finding the right focal person is key for success: is trusted of students, easy to approach, care enough to ensure the stock of products.
- Unwilling school management committee



**MAYA**  
Achham



## How to change community's look on menstruations and practice of restrictions?

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Girls in Achham face many restrictions during their menstruation, from not being allowed to touch the common water tap to having to stay in a Chhaupadi shed at night.

Parents know that those are not good practices but they fear to go against the community and the consequences of breaking the tradition (anger ancestors, attack of wild animals, divine retribution) and therefore don't take action.

Most people in the community, women included, describe menstrual blood as "impure" arguing that if it was normal blood it would not smell bad and leave the body.



We know that it is not good for our girls to stay in the chhaupadi."

Maya's mother



The blood that flows is impure. Why would it go out of the body if it was pure?"

Maya's mother

## How to change community's look on menstruations and practice of restrictions?

---

### ATTRIBUTES THAT A POTENTIAL SOLUTION NEEDS TO HAVE

- **WHO**
  - Need of role models to lead by example (those challenging chhaupadi)
  - Can seek help from ward chair person as they have good impact in the community
  - Professionals/ BCC experts can be the facilitators (theatre companies, MHM experts)
- **WHEN**
  - Leverage moments from- cultural festivals (deuda), social gatherings, religious functions, mothers group meetings
- **HOW TO DELIVER THE CONTENT**
  - Activity needs to be very engaging, Visuals (i.e. posters) are not considered sufficient
  - A fun activity with a message, a call to action (i.e. talk programs, street dramas, role play, radio programs, song competitions dohori, etc.)

### CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS

- Community pressure to keep the tradition, strong socio cultural norms
- Key and difficult to find the first ambassadors
- Support from the community to organize and participate activities
- Financial considerations



**POONAM**

Rautahat



## How to give mothers theoretical and practical knowledge about menstruations to bridge the education gap?

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

**Mothers are the first influencers in their daughter's life. They help their daughters manage their first periods at home and define the restrictions that they need to follow.**

Both girls and mothers agree that mothers are the ones who should educate their daughters; however mothers feel they don't have adequate knowledge to initiate the conversation with their daughters. They are afraid to share wrong or incomplete information.

Girls often get embarrassed, worried and scared when they get their menarche. They need to be informed about the process and physiological changes in their body in order to be better prepared to handle the situation.

Considering the trust that girls put in their mothers, they are best positioned to help them maintain proper hygiene and overcome the shyness related to menstruation.



I should be the one to teach my daughter."

Poonam's mother



Unlike educated mothers, uneducated mothers don't know what to teach us."

Poonam

# How to give mothers theoretical and practical knowledge about menstruations to bridge the education gap?

## ATTRIBUTES THAT A POTENTIAL SOLUTION NEEDS TO HAVE

- **WHO**
  - Health experts are trustworthy sources of information. They can teach about biology (physiology) and hygiene maintenance
  - The teacher should be a female and perceived as knowledgeable
- **WHEN**
  - Time is scarce: Leverage moments of social gathering of the community or find a common non-disruptive time like a religious festival, picnic, mothers group meeting, etc.
- **WHERE**
  - Convenient place: cooperative office, school near-by, someone's home in the community, Yoga hall
- **WHAT CONTENT**
  - Biology of the menstruation cycle and its evolution from menarche to menopause
  - Physiological changes happening during adolescence
  - Practical training on the different blood management options available and their pros and cons, as well as hygiene management
  - Talk about the origin of restrictions and discuss the use of it today
  - Culturally acceptable and language specific content
- **HOW TO DELIVER IT**
  - A group setting from the same community would help with shyness
  - Visual aids, pictorial and engaging message, because of lack of education and sometimes illiteracy
  - Clear and attractive incentive/compensation for the time spent
  - Opportunity: Start with a small group of women who can become advocates

## CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS

- Mothers' prejudices on menstruation
- Shyness around the topic
- Community pressure to keep the tradition, socio cultural norms
- Individual fear of the consequences of breaking the rules
- Husbands denial to wife's participation in the education sessions
- No time to go to the training
- Unavailability of experts
- Mothers and daughters want to push away their responsibilities of talking about these sensitive subjects onto radio and TV, they could be interesting media to leverage.



**POONAM**

Rautahat



## How to give mothers tools to help them start conversations with their children about menstruations?

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

**When menarche comes, girls turn towards their mothers for guidance. Mothers play an important role in whether or not their daughters are prepared for menarche and can manage their first periods at home.**

Both girls and mothers agree that mothers are the ones who should educate their daughters but mothers feel they don't have adequate tools to initiate the conversation with their daughters and don't know when to start talking about the subject.

Girls often get embarrassed, worried and scared when they get their menarche. They need to be informed about the process and physiological changes in their body in order to be better prepared to handle the situation.

Considering the trust that girls put in their mothers, they are best positioned to help them maintain proper hygiene and overcome the shyness related to menstruation.

Mothers should also include boys in the discussion, to sensitize them to the issues that their sisters, and later, wives are facing.



My daughter keeps asking why I do and don't do this. I don't feel comfortable to talk."

Poonam's mother



We are close to our mothers. They should be the one to teach us."

Poonam

## How to give mothers tools to help them start conversations with their children about menstruations?

---

### ATTRIBUTES THAT A POTENTIAL SOLUTION NEEDS TO HAVE

- Pedagogical material to start the conversation: different for girls and boys, adapted for the age. (example: comic book, cards, video, etc.)
- The material needs to be visual because of the lack of education and for a stronger engagement of children
- Indication on age to initiate the conversation
- Guidance on what content to teach at what age
- Showing the importance of teaching boys as well
- Support for mothers that are uncomfortable with talking about MHM: for example, an outspoken mother can explain for several children of the community.

### CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS

- Mothers' prejudices on menstruation
- Shyness around the topic
- Community pressure to keep the tradition, socio cultural norms
- No time to go to the training
- Mothers and daughters want to push away their responsibilities of talking about these sensitive subjects onto radio and TV, could be interesting media to leverage.



**POONAM**

Rautahat



## How to give girls access to the ideal blood management product?

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Both home made cloths and market pads are accessible to girls in Rautahat. They find market pads more comfortable but a lot of them don't have experience using them.

Girls using cloths/rags consider them as a cheap, sustainable and chemical free solution but find them difficult and cumbersome to wash and dry. They are not as reliable as commercial pads when it comes to leakage nor are they comfortable.

*According to the teachers girls probably don't use market products as they need to dispose it and it is an issue in the context of plain areas. They have a misconception that burning used menstrual products may lead to infertility.*



I always use cloth pads. We have never used market products. I don't feel comfortable to buy."

Poonam



Cloth are not comfortable as it shifts from the underwear."

Poonam

## How to give girls access to the ideal blood management product?

---

### ATTRIBUTES THAT A POTENTIAL SOLUTION NEEDS TO HAVE

- **Girls should forget that they wear it so that they can focus on school/life and feel confident**
  - Reliable in preventing leakage. Strong absorbance.
  - Convenient to wear
  - Comfortable
  - Healthy for the body (no infection, allergies or harmful chemicals)
  - Should be secured to the underwear (should not shift).
- **Easy to manage after use:**
  - if disposable, easy to dispose of.
  - If re-usable, easy to clean and quick drying, looking anonymous, stains not visible
- For young girls, no insert-able solution because of the fear of losing virginity
- Easily available in any shops (ration shops/cosmetics/ pharmacy etc.)
- Affordable and sustainable for young girls (example: it could be partially home made with locally available material)
- The packaging should not look like a sanitary product and be more anonymous

### CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS

- Cost is a key factor for adoption
- Shyness in getting the products
- Lack of awareness on available solutions
- Lack of trust in a new product
- Misconceptions around the use of available market products



**POONAM**

Rautahat



## How to add to the existing curriculum to engage both students and teachers?

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

**The current curriculum is mostly written and theoretical. Engaging neither for the students nor for the teachers.**

Most of the teachers, who are men, are not equipped or trained to deliver information on menstrual health, some of them even skip the class and ask students to study on their own. Teachers need tools to engage the class, feel comfortable themselves and achieve intended result.

Students want the curriculum to be more practical and interactive. Girls feel uncomfortable from the presence of male students and teachers. It prevents them from seeking more information on the topic. They tend to think that receiving information on menstruation from a men in not culturally acceptable.

Interactive sessions given by different organisations in schools are very appreciated by students. Liking the interactivity and practicality of the knowledge given and the presence of an external facilitator elicits trust and openness.



Girls stay silent in class. The curriculum is also not sufficient as it is more theoretical.”

Poonam's teacher



Teachers skip the lessons as boys keep asking question.”

Poonam

## How to add to the existing curriculum to engage both students and teachers?

---

### ATTRIBUTES THAT A POTENTIAL SOLUTION NEEDS TO HAVE

- **Engaging material**
  - Pictorial material for teachers to teach the topic more easily: posters, video, etc.
  - Material to give away to students to add to their classes: a comic book, a game, etc.
- **Delivery**
  - By the teachers at school during the current curriculum
  - Or by external organisations as extra classes
  - Female teachers and gender segregated classes are more comfortable for the girls but there are a vast majority of male teachers
- **Recommendations**
  - Teachers need training to be more comfortable and confident on the topic
  - Start earlier, before girls get their menarche so that they feel comfortable in later classes when they grow up
  - Assign a focal person (female teachers) who can initiate discussion about menstruation in earlier grades (Grade 5, 6 and 7)

### CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS

- Concerned agencies approval of visual aids to be used in the curriculum
- Content needs to be adapted to the age of the children (information they can understand)
- Schools might not be able to pay for material/training
- Difficulty to recruit female teachers
- Interactive sessions given by external organization is not a sustainable model.



**POONAM**

Rautahat



## How to dispose of disposable pads?

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

**Disposing of commercial pads is an issue at home and school.**

At home, if they throw it away in containers, girls are afraid that someone might cast an evil eye on their used pads or that dogs might take it to the temple. Some find a solution in washing them before disposing, but doing that takes away the convenient aspect of disposable pads. Some even throw it away in the near-by river, causing environmental pollution.

At school, there rarely are bins for disposal in the toilets. Even when there is one, they do not want to throw it away. Therefore, they have to carry it home, the smell and leakage are problematic and the issue remains at home.



We never throw our used materials in school. Mostly we avoid changing in school.”

Poonam



The collected materials should be burnt in school. It is believed that if the used pads are burnt it will lead to infertility. Therefore girls don't dispose used pads.”

Poonam's teacher

## How to dispose of disposable pads?

---

### ATTRIBUTES THAT A POTENTIAL SOLUTION NEEDS TO HAVE

- Specific bins for menstrual materials
- Small enough to discreetly fit at home and in school toilets
- Available at a low cost
- Safe, no opportunity throughout the disposal to cast an evil eye on the blood
- **Recommendations**
  - A specific chain of menstrual product disposal
  - Finding alternatives to disposal: biodegradable, recycling, etc.

### CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS

- Additional cost
- Should not signal that we promote the use of disposable pads
- Women need to be convinced that it is safe.



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Rautahat



## How to treat pain to avoid the missing of school days?

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Pain is often mentioned as a reason to miss school, or part of a day at school, when girls are on their period.

Medicines are easily available where Poonam lives and at school but girls and their mothers have concerns that pain killers have side effects on fertility. Instead of taking medicine, girls tend to leave school to rest at home and uses home remedy like drinking hot water.



We don't take medicines. Taking hot water and resting relieves the pain."

Poonam



I have heard that taking medicines will cause side effects. So it's better not to take any."

Poonam

## How to treat pain to avoid the missing of school day?

---

### ATTRIBUTES THAT A POTENTIAL SOLUTION NEEDS TO HAVE

- **Pedagogical information**
  - Effectively counter beliefs on pain killers side effects.
  - Doctors or health professionals should carry the information
  - TV and radio could be good media (ex: Jiwonchakra or Sathi anga man ka kura) as it is widespread
  - If distributed through radio or TV, then evening time is the best time of the day, when everyone is home.
  - Explain the mechanisms of pain killers in the body
- **An alternative is to provide an efficient alternative to relieve pain**

### CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS

- The fear of the side effects of pain killers is not rational
- There is an idea that pain is a normal part of menstruation and that women need to accept it
- The traditional thought that rest is the best medicine



**POONAM**

Rautahat



## How to allow girls to change products easily while at school? (hygiene, products availability and disposal facilities)

### WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

One of the main reasons that bring girls out of school while on their period is the need to change product. They usually go back home or to a friend's house, missing lessons in the meantime.

Schools toilets don't have the right facilities that would allow girls to confidently change blood management products. The standards vary a lot. There is usually water access, but not always a tap in the toilets, bins for disposal, or emergency material close to the toilets.

Having a constant supply of emergency pads is expensive for the schools and when there is a reliable supply, girls are too shy to ask the teachers for it.



“Pads given in school are not wide and absorb poorly. They cause leakage.”

Poonam's teacher



“There are pads in school but we don't ask. We feel shy.”

Poonam

## How to allow girls to change products easily while at school? (hygiene, products availability and disposal facilities)

---

### ATTRIBUTES THAT A POTENTIAL SOLUTION NEEDS TO HAVE

- **Hygiene**
  - Separated female toilets to allow for privacy
  - Water access in the toilets
- **Disposal facility**
  - A way to dispose of used pads (for example, bin or incinerator)
  - In case of disposal bin, an agreement with the school cleaner to handle the used pads
- **Products availability**
  - Emergency blood management product **reliably** available
  - Placed close to / inside the toilets
  - Appoint a responsible focal person (needs to be a woman that girls trust) that girls can turn to when they need and who would make sure that the stock is always full

### CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS

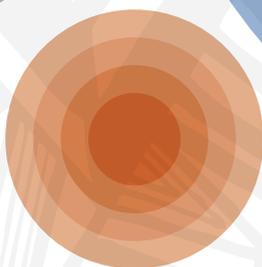
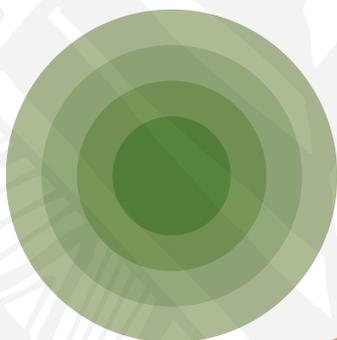
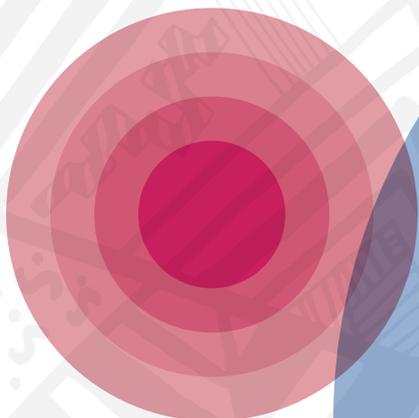
- Costs of installation and maintenance of facilities
- Reliability of availability of emergency material is critical for girls to trust it
- School cleaner might not want to handle used pads with “impure” blood
- Shyness around the topic is hard to overcome, the habit will need to be taught on the long term
- Finding the right focal person is key for success: is trusted of students, easy to approach, care enough to ensure the stock of products.



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