

## Pushing the Boundaries on the MHM Dialogue in India



### Awareness

# Normalising MENSTRUATION

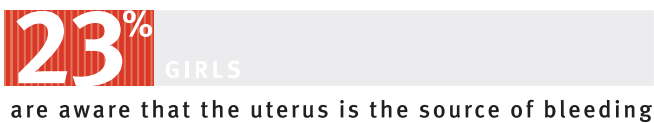
## Calls to Action

- **Make MHM programmes comprehensive**, providing complete information on menstruation, menstrual hygiene, product basket available, disposal and treatment, and equip girls and women with the self-confidence and self-efficacy needed to address harmful socio-cultural norms.
- **Build capacity of functionaries** at the district level and below with streamlined, comprehensive MHM messaging.
- **Include relevant influencers** - boys and men, frontline health workers, educators, health care providers, religious and political leaders in MHM conversations and programming.
- **Increase positive reporting** on MHM in media, addressing taboos.

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- **THE BIOLOGICAL PROCESS OF MENSTRUATION IN INDIA CONTINUES TO BE SHROUDED IN A CULTURE OF SILENCE AND SHAME. INEQUITABLE GENDER NORMS MANIFEST IN THE SOCIAL, RELIGIOUS AND FOOD INTAKE RESTRICTIONS IMPOSED ON MENSTRUATING GIRLS AND WOMEN, AND THE PERVASIVE BELIEF THAT MENSTRUAL BLOOD IS IMPURE AND THAT MENSTRUATING WOMEN ARE UNCLEAN.**

Traditional practices around menstruation that may have once served to provide comfort to women during this time, have disintegrated and are now tools that entrench inequitable gender norms and power relationships. These changes have created a fundamentally negative and unhealthy narrative of menstruation.

**Research on MHM in India underscores low levels of awareness, and several myths and misconceptions<sup>1</sup>**



**Several socio-cultural restrictions on interactions, food consumption, religious worship etc.**

**Additionally, girls have few sources of correct and comprehensive information on menstruation<sup>2</sup>**

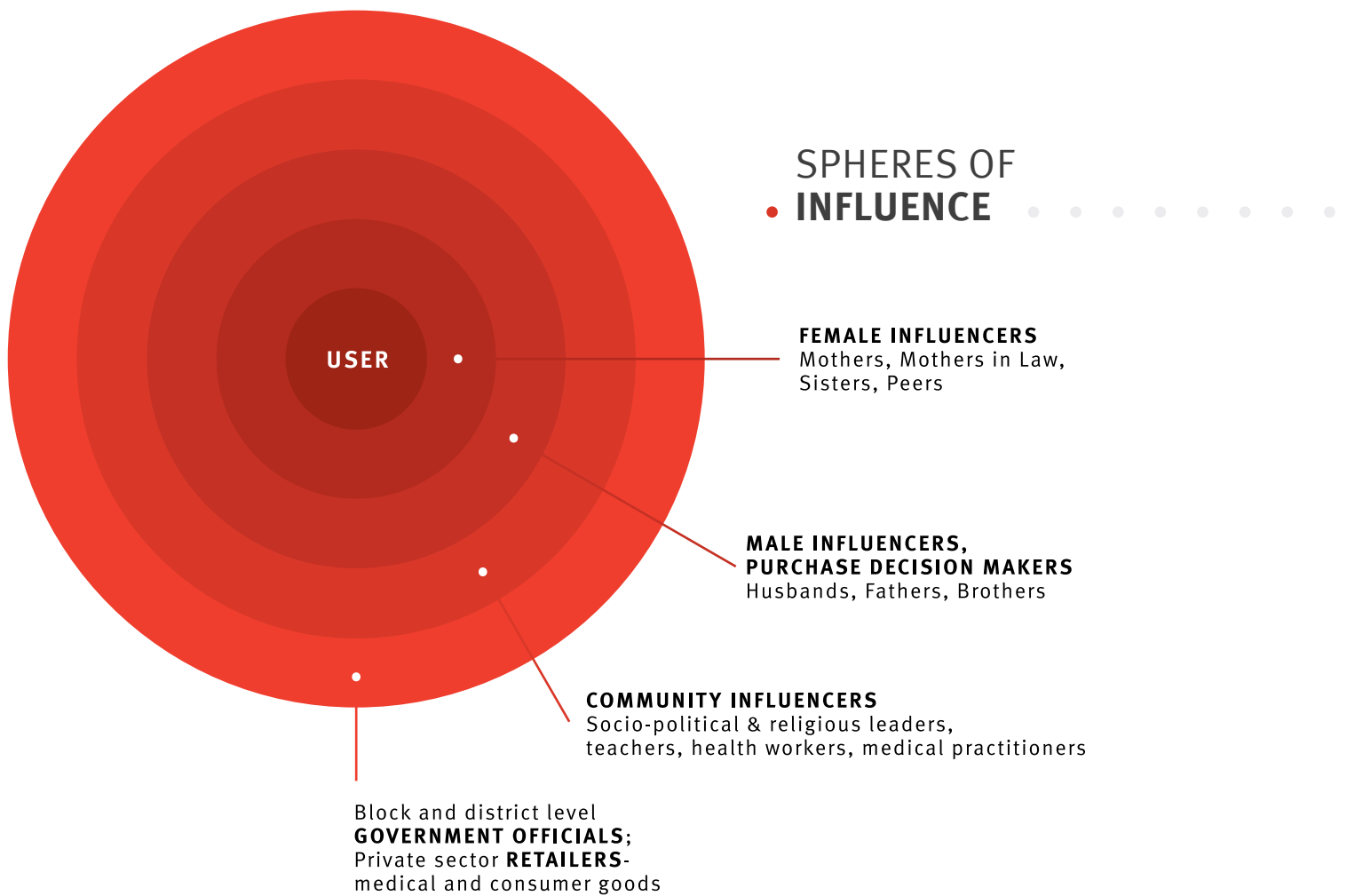


**Teachers and health workers are not common sources of information, mothers are**

Various stakeholders including National and State Governments, private sector, civil society organisations and non-Governmental organisations have been working towards normalising menstruation. While making great strides in their individual spheres, these efforts have been disaggregated. It is essential to streamline efforts and messaging related to normalising menstruation and reach out to influencers at all levels (from families to policy makers) to shift the conversations on menstruation from impurity and shame to 'normal' and healthy. Normalising conversations on menstruation in all these spheres will help create a platform to provide comprehensive information, safe products, infrastructure and health services to women to help manage menstruation safely.

<sup>1</sup> van Eijk AM, Sivakami M, Thakkar MB, et al. Menstrual hygiene management among adolescent girls in India: a systematic review and metaanalysis. *BMJ Open* 2016;6: e010290. doi:10.1136/ bmjopen-2015-010290

<sup>2</sup> Dasra (2014). *Spot On! Improving Menstrual Health and Hygiene in India*



In order to be effective, it is important that messaging to these various **influencers** on MHM from various organisations working on MHM, sexual and reproductive health, WASH, gender and other entities are correct and consistent.

MHM conversations have focused on addressing myths and taboos and providing information on product access and use.

**However, normalising menstruation requires addressing gender inequalities and provision of correct information across the value chain of menstruation to ensure that**

Girls and women overcome stigma, shame and taboos

Girls and women are able to manage their menstruation safely, and

Influencers have a comprehensive understanding of their experience and barriers

**WHAT IS NORMAL?**

What is menstruation – the physical process and its implications

Socio-cultural norms and perceptions including myths and taboos

Linkages of gender and sexual and reproductive health with menstruation

# MENSTRUAL HYGIENE MANAGEMENT

## • VALUE CHAIN

Awareness generation on menstrual hygiene management has typically focused on use of sanitary pads. Information to users and influencers should speak to each component of the value chain from addressing social norms and taboos, choice of and access to products, hygienic use, access to facilities and waste management.

### AWARENESS

- Socio-cultural norms and perceptions about menstruation



### ACCESS

- Product features

Cost to consumer (including price)



Types of products by environmental impact



Points of availability (community based, Government agents, retailers, schools etc.)

Sources of information



### USE

- Safe and hygienic use

Taboos related to menstruation that affect menstrual hygiene



Health seeking behaviours



Access to WASH facilities

Design of WASH facilities



### WASTE MANAGEMENT

- Mechanisms for safe disposal

Considerations for on-site incineration

Considerations for adding to solid waste stream

Implications of throwing in fields, water bodies, sanitation systems

Considerations for deep burial, composting

Design of WASH facilities



Normalising  
**MENSTRUATION**