Pushing the Boundaries on the MHM Dialogue in India

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.
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.

- **48%** girls are aware of menstruation prior to menarche
- **23%** girls are aware that the uterus is the source of bleeding
- **55%** girls consider menstruation to be normal

Researchers have also highlighted that girls have few sources of correct and comprehensive information on menstruation.

- **54%** girls say that mothers are the main source of information
- **70%** mothers consider menstruation ‘dirty’, perpetuating a culture of silence

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.

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2. 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
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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