



*Towards breaking
the silence...*



The Red Flags of Menstruation in India

70%

mothers consider menstruation 'dirty', perpetuating a culture of silence²

50%

females change pad/cloth only when it is about to overflow

1%

females change pad/cloth recommended 4 times a day

52%

unaware of menstruation prior to menarche¹

45%

Do not consider menstruation as normal¹

77%

unaware that uterus is source of bleeding¹

63 million

Adolescent girls in India live in homes without toilet facilities

1. van Eijk et al (2016). Menstrual Hygiene management among adolescent girls in India: a systematic review and meta-analysis

2. Dasra - Spot on!



Preface

Menstruation is a normal biological process, yet, the socio-cultural taboos related to menstruation are so strong that 71% of adolescent girls are not aware about the menstruation before their menarche. Due to shame and secrecy surrounding the issue, there exists a communication gap even between mothers and daughters on this topic, resulting in an acute lack of awareness amongst the adolescent girls. Consequently, most of the information received by the girls is from unauthentic sources, which perpetuate the misinformation and stigma associated with menstruation.

Coastal Salinity Prevention Cell (CSPC), under the Tata Water Mission Program has been working in the coastal areas of Gujarat on this very sensitive topic of menstruation, which is not yet discussed openly either in our homes or society.

Our field experiences informs that the women and girls have a number of queries on menstruation and its related aspects. However, unfortunately, they do not have any authentic source of information on the very important issue concerning their health and personal hygiene. As knowledge is power, this important information gap affects their lives considerably.

Under the Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) Program, CSPC has been implementing activities to build awareness and address resultant marginalisation of women from the mainstream due to misconceptions and myths related to menstruation.

The objectives of the program are:

Breaking the silence on the topic of menstruation and help women to discuss it freely;

Help women and adolescent girls to manage the menstruation hygienically;

Make them adopting safe menstrual products and safe sanitation practices during menstruation.

Sujit Kumar Gopinathan

CEO - CSPC



Coastal Salinity Prevention Cell (CSPC)

ABOUT

The Coastal Salinity Prevention Cell (CSPC) works in the coastal regions of Gujarat to provide sustainable solutions to address the multifaceted challenges that are centered around salinity ingress. CSPC works with the unique mandate of knowledge creation (on salinity mitigation) and adaptation issues via both research and implementation, aiming to improve the quality of life of coastal communities. The organisation facilitates knowledge management and implementation of large-scale development projects and undertakes policy advocacy for effective policies on mitigation and adaptation of salinity.

CSPC engages with the communities in an integrated approach to address major concern areas in salinity affected coastal regions of Gujarat to create a holistic and sustainable development model. The intervention areas consist of livelihood, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WaSH), Water resource management, drinking water security, Menstrual Hygiene Management, Animal husbandry and Education.



Water Sanitation
and Hygiene (WaSH)

Agriculture and
Livelihood

Water Resource Management

Education



Menstrual Hygiene Management

Menstruation is something almost every woman experiences in her lifetime. However, the conversations around it are very limited, especially in rural India. The majority of women fail to understand the biological cause behind menstruation and often treat it as 'impure', which in turn leads to low self-esteem and heightened gender inequality. In 2018, CSPC accepted the challenge to tackle the same head-on and initiated a structured program to impart knowledge and awareness on Menstrual Health and Hygiene. The program strives toward creating an environment where a girl or women feel safe and comfortable discussing menstruation and thereby breaking the silence surrounding the menstruation.

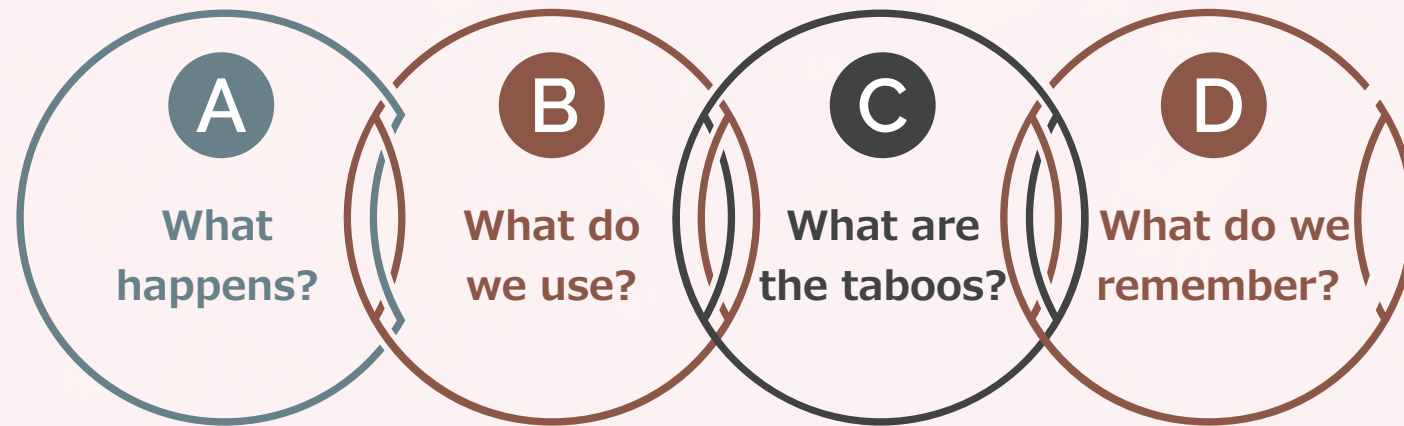
As the behavior change is a process, CSPC took this as an educational program to have long-term generational impacts. Through a four-part module, school-going girls and community women are brought together to discuss various topics that come under female puberty. Each module is conducted within a gap of one to two weeks per group. This is done with the end goal to bring about a change in the mindset of women regarding menstruation and take it ahead by having them treat it as something that is empowering.

Under the program, with the technical guidance from Tata Water Mission, CSPC has developed four modules to aware the women and girls on Menstrual Hygiene.

Ketan Hingu

**Coordinator - MHM Program
CSPC**

The four modules are designed in such a way that they flow seamlessly.



A
What happens?

Teaching participants the science behind the changes in their bodies.

B
What do we use?

Focuses on awareness about various kinds of products. CSPC enables them to choose the appropriate one from the basket

C
What are the taboos?

Focuses on the taboos and superstitions/myths that are followed in families and to make them understand that why these taboos are not relevant in the current era

D
What do we remember?

Make the participants understand the importance of hygienic practices during menstruation, through interactive games



THE OBJECTIVES

- To kickstart the discussion on the unspoken topic of menstruation.
- To help young girls cope with the fear and panic of their first period by spreading awareness about its occurrence at the correct time.
- To educate the participants about the changes that come with the onset of puberty.
- Lay the foundation to change the mindset that periods are impure and educate them about how natural menstruation and menstrual blood is.
- Draw attention to the importance of the regularity of periods.

MODULE 1





THE TOOLS USED

- Apron explaining the female reproductive system
- Charts (anatomy, puberty-related changes)
- Period Tracking Data Chart



THE PROCESS

Pre and Post Test Form

A pre-test form is given to four to five participants (random selection) out of the group to fill out before the starting the session. This is the tool being used to measure the impact of the training session.

Ice Breaker with Audience

The module starts with an introduction of the facilitator and the participants to establish a connection with the participants so they are comfortable enough to discuss this 'taboo' topic. It is then followed up with a conversation on what differentiates girls/women from boys/ men to explain puberty and the various activities that take place in a woman's body which are exclusive to them. This is taught explicitly for the knowledge of young girls but also to older women in the community session for them to educate their daughters.

Introduction to Menstruation

The introduction to the topic is initiated by asking the participants about the various terms used by them for the word 'menstruation'. This is followed up by educating them on the basics: such as the



meaning of the word 'maasik', how it is a natural phenomenon, the time of arrival, different experiences for all yet the same, duration of periods etc.

When one should visit a doctor, for instance, based on abnormality in discharge colour, time or other reasons are also discussed.

The onset of Menstruation

The facilitator connects with the participants further by indulging in a more personal conversation and telling them about her own 'first-time' experience while asking the participants. The facilitator also tries to understand the concept of menstruation from the participant's end, in terms of awareness amongst them before their onset. Specific dos and don'ts during their period are then taught to them based on their prior knowledge through various anecdotes while also teaching them about the ill effects of improper care.

Menstruation, White Discharge and Puberty through Visual Aids

The various changes in a girl's body and its normalcy of it are explained to the participants through the puberty chart, which visually shows the changes in a girl's body. They are also informed about the various discharges from a women/girl's body and the reason behind each through the puberty chart, as

well as about the orifices (openings) below the lower abdomen in a girl's body through interaction. Knowledge concerning the anatomy of the female body is imparted through the help of a detailed apron which describes the various parts and the changes it goes through during the monthly cycle.

Purity and Naturalness of Menstruation



The participants are also made conscious of the naturalness and 'purity' of the process via analogies such as when guests are supposed to arrive- food is prepared for them. If they don't come, this food is thrown out but is not impure. Similarly, period blood is stored for an upcoming baby but is then disposed of from the body when conception does not occur. Many such analogies are used across modules.

Tracking Menstrual Dates

Before closing, people are asked to recall the last date they had their period. This is done to make participants aware of their irregularity in keeping records and make them understand its importance. A tracker sheet is also distributed to all the participants to help them understand their menstruation cycle better and be more aware and conscious about in the future.

Closing

The session ends with an open interaction about the module and any doubts and learnings from the session.

માસિક કેલેન્ડર

	૧	૨	૩	૪	૫	૬	૭	૮	૯	૧૦	૧૧	૧૨	૧૩	૧૪	૧૫	૧૬	૧૭	૧૮	૧૯	૨૦	૨૧	૨૨	૨૩	૨૪	૨૫	૨૬	૨૭	૨૮	૨૯	૩૦	૩૧
જાન્યુઆરી																															
ફેબ્રુઆરી																															
માર્ચ																															
એપ્રિલ																															
મે																															
જૂન																															
જુલાઈ																															
ઓગસ્ટ																															
સપ્ટેમ્બર																															
ઓક્ટોબર																															
નવેમ્બર																															
ડિસેમ્બર																															

☒ ફક્ત ડાઘ પડે છે.
 ☒ ઓછું આવે છે.
 ☒ સામાન્ય આવે છે.
 ☒ વધારે આવે છે.

MODULE 1

Specific to women

More mature women are educated explicitly about the possibility of pregnancy with irregular periods; hence the importance of maintaining the data chart of their cycle for themselves is advised more strongly. They are also made to understand the processes in their body regarding their eggs and the infusion of sperm and the changes in their vagina due to the same. They also try to understand their perspective about menstruation and nudge them to be more aware of the normalcy of menstrual blood in context to its role for a healthy upcoming baby, as well as the metaphor in the context of guests ('mehmaan') explained in the process.

Specific to girls

Before talking about regularity and handing out the data sheet, the girl participants are told a story about rice becoming raw if not cooked properly to make them understand how their body is too young for any form of physical experience (such as copulation) to bear a child and need time like rice to experience this. They are careful with the language used here as they are young, impressionable, and vulnerable at this stage.





THE OBJECTIVES

- To educate women and girls about the different products that can be used during menstruation and to demonstrate the correct usage of these products.
- To discuss the advantages and disadvantages of various products, enabling women/girls to make informed decisions.
- To understand about the symptoms during/before menstruation, simple management of the symptoms and menopause



THE TOOLS USED

Menstrual products:

- Cotton pad
- Timepiece
- Tampon
- Commercial Sanitary Napkin
- Menstrual Cup



THE PROCESS

Revision

The module begins with a revision of the first module. Topics introduced in the first module are brushed upon, which include the anatomy of a female body, puberty, discharge and the causes of menstruation. The workings of a female body are explained, and there is emphasis on the fact that each body works differently.

Symptoms of Menstruation and Remedies for Relief

Symptoms before and during menstruation are discussed at length. Analogies are also used here. The process is compared to cleaning and squeezing a napkin, which is what the breaking of the uterus wall is like. This is what leads to cramping and pains. The remedies to cure these symptoms, such as bathing with warm water, topical application of pearl millet flour ('bajra atta'), drinking warm water with salt, and using a makeshift hot water bottle, are discussed.



Recommendations on Food Consumption

The facilitator provides recommendations on the kind of foods that should be consumed during this period specifically. To make it easier to remember, the participants are asked to include a diet with the colours of the Indian flag- green, white, and orange. They were encouraged to follow a rich diet incorporating food items of these colours- green vegetables, pulses (daal), dairy products such as milk & eggs, carrots, fruits (such as mosambi), carrots, and pumpkins, to name a few. The participants are encouraged to eat more homemade food during this period.



Importance of Health and Hygiene

The facilitator highlights the importance of physical health and hygiene during menstruation. The concept of a gynecologist is restated, along with when to consult one. The participants are made comfortable throughout the entire session with personal anecdotes and stories. They are also encouraged to share their own experiences.

MODULE 2

Menstrual Products

The introduction to the different types of menstrual products begins by asking the participants what kind of product they use when they menstruate. The advantages and disadvantages of each product are then discussed at length. The three parameters, on which the benefits are structured to persuade better, include money ('arthik'), health ('arogya') and the environment ('paryavaran'). Most women and girls are unaware of the causes of infections. They tend to hide the cloth after using it for an excessive amount of time. The material of a timepiece is made of falalen wool, which is combustible and warm, causing rashes. These timepieces usually come in three colours, namely maroon, red and dark pink, due to which the colour of menstrual blood cannot be seen, and consequently, women do not get to know if the cloth has been cleaned properly. Disposable Sanitary Napkins, on the other hand, is made of plastic, gel, bleached wood pulp, which may cause rashes, itching etc. Also there is no full proof disposal method for it and hence not healthy for environment. They are also costlier in comparison. However, some women find it more convenient. The cloth pad is made out of 100% cotton. Cloth Pads are in between Disposable Sanitary Napkins and Cloth. It gives advantages of cotton and has a comfortable design like a sanitary napkin, so it stays intact in the underwear. This encourages the adoption of cotton pads which are more economical, environmentally friendly, and less prone to causing infections, making them better for woman's overall health.





THE OBJECTIVES

- To explain cultural taboos ('manyata') associated with menstruation.
- To create an environment to discuss these taboos freely and open up to each other about them.
- To make women understand the logical root cause of why these practices existed and how it doesn't have to be followed anymore.



- To foster self-reflection on taboos that they follow and to think about if they should still follow them.
- Remove the associations of cultural taboos and impurities.



THE TOOLS USED

For the revision game on activities while menstruating:

- Chart with various routine activities, with a space below each for the coins
- Red Coins (12)
- Green Coins (12)



THE PROCESS

Revision and Recall

The session always starts with a revision session for the learnings from the previous two sessions to see what they recall on puberty, PMS, menstruation, and hygiene.

Taboos followed

They are told that the topic for today would be on taboos ('manyatas'). They are then asked a lot of questions on what their cultural taboos are, as while some of them are universal, many could also be specific to a household/village. They are also probed about the source of these taboos and how much they know about where they come from.



Practicing healthy habits during menstruation

The facilitator gets the group to sit in a circle and places the coin game in the middle of the circle. Then the facilitator gives some red and green coins to the participants. Green symbolizes Yes/ True and Red symbolizes No/ False."

The facilitator then requests participants to read out each picture one by one and answer whether a green or red coin should be placed. The participants then place the coin they think is correct. Facilitator questions – WHY to each coin placed on the board, thereby encouraging conversation and critical thinking for each point.

The idea of the game is to make them understand the hygiene factors, and to realize that each woman is responsible for her own health and she must practice proper hygiene during their menstruation.

Breaking their Taboos through Interactive Games

Next, they are made to play a game of ‘Chinese Whispers’ (‘kaana fusi’/ ‘telephone’) while seated in a circle. They started from one message and within five minutes it became an entirely different message by the time it reaches the end of the circle. This activity is used to demonstrate that the beliefs around menstruation are like these messages from the game- some practices started as something else and with time it changed in content or turned into a myth which no one questioned and simply started following blindly. The participants made understood that these practices might have some logic in that period, but may not be relevant in the current period.



MODULE 3

Breaking their Taboos via Analogies and Anecdotes

There is a use of relevant analogies relatable to them, centered around famous tales of gods and ghosts, and multiple checkpoints to see that the participants are following the stream of discussion (questions asked to be answered in unison). There are also relevant anecdotes shared that act as cautionary tales and for context setting. Comparison of taboos to supernatural elements helps illustrate how human-made and learned these taboos are. There is usage of humor to ensure engagement and attention.

Other topics covered

Here, the session is designed to be more interactive as the greater the frequency of such sessions, the more comfortable the participants get. Additionally, all types of experiences in this area are unique, and various combinations are practiced in each household.

The superstitions are not just centered around menstruation but also general sayings that people have heard, such as shaking your leg, sweeping at night, upside-down slippers, etc. It aims at tackling superstitions as a mindset. The logic behind all is explained thoroughly.

This session also discusses the adverse effects of the pills for preponing or postponing the menstruation, considering the myths and taboos related to menstruation. It is being shared that continuous use of such pills make the menstrual cycle irregular.

In the concluding session, the participants are made to understand that it is very important being a woman of the 21st Century, that- we question, why we do? What we do?. We must question the practice and think about its truth rather following it blindly.



THE OBJECTIVES

- To assess the effectiveness of the past three sessions concerning actionable behavioural changes.
- To understand the importance of mothers having conversation on menstruation, with their daughters before they start menstruating
- To understand the cycle of menstruation from the perspective of most fertile to less fertile days so as to empower women to make safe choices.

THE TOOLS USED

- The Pocket Chart Game
- Snake and Ladder Game
- The Period Wheel
- The Post test survey form



THE PROCESS

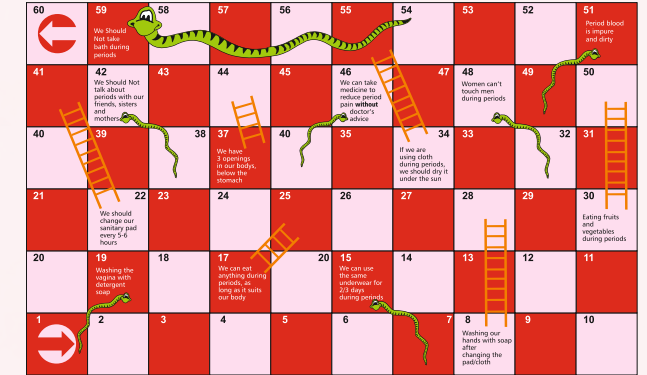
Period Wheel

The session starts with a revision of the previous three modules via games. After that the period wheel is displayed to the women. This is specifically for the community sessions with older women as they are better placed to understand this. The idea is to make them understand the cycle of menstruation from the perspective of most fertile to less fertile days so as to empower them to make safe choices with regard to having pregnancy.



Snakes & Ladders

The snakes and ladders game is much like the traditional way, the only difference is that before a ladder, there is a good practice (during menstruation) mentioned that takes you up in the game, and every time you land on a snake and go down the snake, it is due to bad practices (during menstruation). This is done to create strong associations and intertwine the learning with fun.



Pocket Chart

The next game is a complete/match the following with five categories which are 'Home Remedies,' 'Proper Food,' 'Taboos,' 'Problems/Symptoms,' and 'Personal Hygiene.' Each section with a card has a question to have more discussions on the same. By answering the questions and the sub-questions, the format of the facilitator-led session moves to participant-driven. It is conducted in the community setting to imagine it as a dialogue between mother and daughter, e.g. 'how would you feel?', and converse with them. Anecdotes of other villages also are mentioned here during the discussion.

Conclusion

In the concluding session, the participants take an oath to break the silence around menstruation. They promise that they will share the learnings with others empower them like they empowered themselves. They will try and put in practice all that they learnt so as to stay healthy themselves and raise healthy families.

Post session form

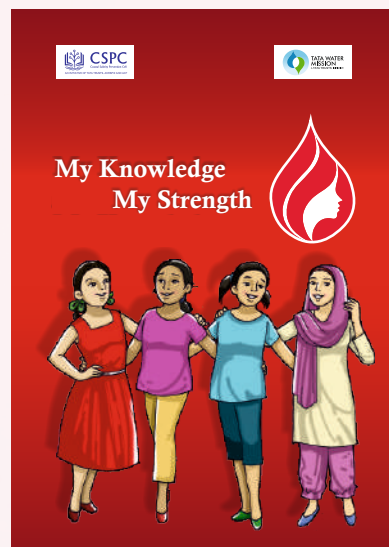
A post-session form is given to some of the participants to fill to compare with the Pre session's forms and thereby to track the changes in the knowledge, attitude and practice.

Information Resources for future reference

Our field experiences informs that the adolescent girls have a number of queries on menstruation and its related aspects. However, unfortunately, they do not have any authentic source of information on the very important issue concerning their health and personal hygiene. As knowledge is power, this important information gap affects their lives considerably.

Hence, considering this, CSPC has developed a comic booklet on the menstruation process and management, for the benefits of adolescent girls. This is a humble effort to equip the adolescent girls with the correct and authentic information on perfectly normal biological process of menstruation.

The District Panchayat, Bhavnagar found the content of the booklet very much relevant and printed bulk copies of the comic booklet and circulated to every AWC of the Bhavnagar district.



CSPC HAS TOUCHED MANY LIVES...

35000 WOMEN AND GIRLS, 250 VILLAGES

★ *Sharing the experiences from the field* ★



CASE STUDY



“ I got very scared and worried when I saw where the blood was coming from. ”

Name: Jayaben
Age: 37 Years
Village: Borla, Talaja-Bhavnagar
Occupation: Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) worker

Jaya Ben, 37 years old, is an ASHA Worker in Borla village in Talaja block of Bhavnagar district. She is the mother of 3 daughters. She works as an ASHA worker to improve the community health and facilitate in providing the health services to the villagers.

“I got very scared and worried when I saw where the blood was coming from,” says Jayaben, having started her period at the age of 16. She felt she could only talk to her grandmother to seek help, who gave her underwear and a piece of cloth to soak the period blood. She was also instructed by her grandmother **to not to enter the kitchen or the temple and not to eat anything that was ‘khatta’ (sour)** and to rest whenever the pain got unbearable.

She spoke about how it was embarrassing and shameful to talk to people about menstruation to the extent that **she used to wash her period cloth and hang it out to dry in a discreet space where no one else was bound to see it.** She also did not change her cloth often when there were people at home because she thought they would come to know, which was something to be ashamed of.

Being an ASHA worker, when CSPC came to deliver their first ever module in Borla village, she was one of the first people to gather the women and girls with her. She claims to have learned a lot in her sessions about menstruation with CSPC. She **learned about white vaginal discharge, its importance, and the role of period blood, what it indicates, and understood the menstrual cycle** in detail. She also learned the different phases and how the body behaves in different phases of the cycle. A major behavioural learning was the hygiene that should be maintained during a menstrual cycle - right from the type of products **(shifted from a timepiece to a reusable cotton pad)** to the **number of times the pad should be changed.** She believes it is essential to talk about menstruation as it is a naturally occurring phenomenon and the importance of educating girls about the dos and don'ts.

She is one of the biggest supporters of what CSPC does in its Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) program. She also went on to demonstrate what she had learned in the modules by using the hand gestures and terms CSPC used to impart menstrual education. She is also the village in charge appointed by CSPC, responsible for selling reusable cotton pads to the women and girls of Borla village.

Jaya Ben is working towards **empowering the women of Borla village by having open conversations and bringing everyone together for the betterment of the community.** She herself has begun to impart education on menstruation by using the tools like the apron and period wheel given to her by CSPC to random groups of unaware women to make sure that no one gets left behind in this wave of change that ensures better health.

CASE STUDY



“My mother and I were shy to discuss this (menstruation) in public.”

Name: Solanki Namrata
Age: 23 Years
Village: Borla, Talaja-Bhavnagar
Occupation: Homemaker

Namrata Ben, a 23-year-old, is an Economics graduate and a proud resident of the Borala Village of Talaja block. Namrata Ben, due to circumstances at home, stopped her education and now works at home and helps her family by doing house chores. She, however, aspires to get back to studying and finish a course in nursing.

When asked about her first period, she recalled, “**I was at my masi’s (aunt) place, and it was too terrified to see what had just happened to me.**” She found comfort in sharing with her elder

sister (her aunt’s daughter), who knew about menstruation and had experience with the same. She was given a timepiece which was very uncomfortable. She was fortunate enough to be in a family where no restrictions were imposed on her while she was menstruating. However, uncomfortable initially, Namrata ben and her mother broke the silence around menstruation and can discuss the same now.

Before attending CSPC’s module, Namrata Ben had prior knowledge about menstruation and the process through other initiatives by NGOs that visited her school back in the day. However, CSPC had much more to offer to her. She was introduced to CSPC by her aunt, Jaya Ben, who herself is an Asha worker.

While talking about the first module, she recalled, “**My mother and I were very shy to discuss this in public, she came for the first session but didn’t show any interest in the following session as I was attending the same. However, personally we discussed it**”.

With no expectations or preconceived thoughts, Namrataben came to attend the modules by CSPC and found herself knowing about her body more than ever. She goes on to elaborate on the new things she learned: ***about the different types of discharges and what is healthy and what is not, the ways to maintain hygiene while using a timepiece, and how very often, the colour of the blood is not visible on the timepiece, which leads to multiple infections.***

After attending the sessions, she encouraged all her friends to stop using tablets to postpone or prepone their periods to be able to participate in religious functions or as painkillers.

Earlier she used to put a single pad on for the entire day. Post the session, she gained knowledge about the best practices to maintain hygiene during her menstrual cycle. Apart from all the learning, she also believed that such knowledge **must be imparted to young boys and men also to make them sensitize enough to** care of their daughters, sisters, and wives when they are menstruating.

CASE STUDY



“Girls in the village struggle with taboos and stigmas associated with menstruation”

Name: Champaben

Age: 32 Years

Village: Gadhula, Talaja-Bhavnagar

Occupation: Aanganwadi Helper
& Diamond worker

Champaben, a resident of Gadhula Village of Talaja block, is a helper in Anganwadi Centre. She is also skilled at diamond crafting. She lives with her ten-year-old daughter, fourteen-year-old son, and husband, who also works in diamond crafting and designing. She studied till the ninth grade, post which she had to discontinue her education due to family issues. She has four siblings, a brother and three sisters.

“**I felt scared, nervous, and weak,**” recalls thirteen-year-old Champaben, describing her first menstrual cycle. She knew close to nothing about menstruation and whatever little information she had was from her friend. Her sister-in-law **asked her to wear underwear and taught her how to**

use a cloth to manage the blood. Other information was limited to the duration and frequency of menstruating.

Girls in the village struggle to get menstrual health products to manage their period hygiene and lack a basic understanding of their sexual and reproductive health. Many struggles with the stigmas and taboos associated with menstruation. Champaben relates to this struggle. “**My grandmother told me not to enter the kitchen, and my mother did not talk about it at all.**”

She was introduced to CSPC modules by her friend, where she learned about the importance of menstrual health, hygiene, and proper sanitation. **She was educated about menstruation through these modules, where periods are openly discussed as a natural biological function.** This makes her feel comfortable and confident while she is menstruating. She lacked knowledge of the dangers of using an old cloth during that time. “**I usually used an old absorbent cloth. That was what I was taught.**” Champa Ben said. She now uses the cotton pads introduced to her in the modules. Hygiene and sanitation is maintained during her menstrual cycles by changing the pads in regular intervals and bathing more frequently, which has made her less prone to infections. She also learned about the importance of discharge in a female body, curtailing the stigma of discharge being dirty and bad for your body.

To explain the impact of CSPC modules in her life, Champaben **drew a comparison between how she brushed off talking about menstruation with her younger sister when she was younger and how now she intends to educate her daughter when she menstruates for the first time.** She wants to engage in open and honest conversation about menstruation with her daughter, educating her about the importance of menstrual health. She also **believes it's important to educate boys about menstruation.**

Today, not only does Champaben effectively manage her menstrual period, but also, advocates it among her peers, telling them about the importance of educating oneself about menstruation.

CASE STUDY



“ I cried and cried until my mother came back from the school where she used to teach. ”

Name: Preeti Ben

Age: 43 Years

Village: Pavthi, Talaja-Bhavnagar

Occupation: Principal of Kasturba Gandhi
Balika Vidhyalaya-Pavthi

Preeti Ben, 43 years of age, is the principal of Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidhyalaya, which houses 150 girls from classes 6th to 11th. The classes here take place only from class 6th to class 8th, the other girls go to the other school nearby for their education. She has been associated with the school for the last three years, which is where she herself resides, away from family. The girls studying here belong to the BPL (below poverty line) category and are children of single parents or orphans.

Recalling her own experience of when she got her first period at 14, she said, **“I cried and cried until my mother came back from the school where she used to teach.”** She knew nothing about menstruation, the first time she got it, but her mother had an open conversation with her and

made her understand everything she knew herself. Being a Paliwal Brahmin, she was instructed not to touch the water stand, not to enter the temple or the kitchen, and to not touch anyone for the first two days (days and nights). When she was young, her father used to cook in case all the women of the house were menstruating. But now since her husband does not know how to cook, she is the one who cooks even if she is menstruating.

Her 19-year-old daughter can now freely come up to her to talk about any issues that she has been facing after having attended the CSPC modules. That level of comfort has been established.

She recalls the first time her daughter got her period and came up to her and said, **“I have begun to menstruate,”** which evoked both a surprised and delighted reaction from Preeti Ben. She was happy to see the level of awareness her daughter has, who, unlike her, did not feel helpless or scared.

She spoke about the different ways in which the efforts taken by CSPC have helped the girls living in the hostel. The girls are now more vocal about any issues concerning personal hygiene and any infections that they might have. They practice better hygiene and use reusable cotton pads or sanitary napkins. They track their menstrual cycle better with the help of the period calendar given by CSPC. CSPC has also provided the hostel with an incinerator for the safe disposal of the used pads.

According to her, ***the visual aids used by CSPC have been very effective in imparting knowledge and helping the students retain it, increasing engagement and driving Q&As.*** She wishes she had the opportunity to attend modules like these back when she was an adolescent. She also hopes to see adolescent training happening for young adult boys sometime in the near future. She believes that it is equally important for boys to be educated on these delicate but crucial matters. Today, she believes it is because of CSPC that the girls in her school feel comfortable and aware enough to reach out to her in case of anything out of the ordinary related to their menstrual cycles and is glad to see this change.

CASE STUDY



“ On seeing blood down there, I thought an evil curse affecting me of some deadly disease.

”

Name - Daksha Jogadiya & Manisha Solanki
Ages - 23 Years and 21 Years
Village - Borla. Talaja-Bhavnagar

DAKSHA JOGADIYA

Daksha Jogadiya and Manisha Solanki are childhood friends and neighbours who have grown up together in the small village of Borla.

Daksha Jogadiya is an ambitious young lady who is preparing for the Delhi Police Services. She smiled and confessed that she was not always the courageous woman she is today. Daksha remembers being horrified at the sight of blood the first time she got her period as a naive class 9 student. She mistook the onset of her menstruation as a curse and, as she quotes, “an evil curse affecting me of some unknown and deadly disease. I could not imagine of any other reason for bleeding down there.”

Now, when she looks back, Daksha wishes that she had someone in her life to educate and tell her about menstruation, its cause, how it affects the female body, and remedies for the pain. She would have been much more prepared for her first time, and instead of panicking about the blood and hiding it from her family, she could have addressed the situation responsibly.

When her bhabhi (sister-in-law) caught Daksha with a blood- stained lower garment, she handed her a 'time-piece'. She simply told her to use this for the 4-5 days she will bleed every month from now on without any further explanation.

Manisha, a class 10 student in the government school of Borla, on the other hand, was not only scared but also confused when she found herself bleeding for the first time in class 8. She started putting together permutations and combinations, trying to reason out how she injured herself down there. She ruled out the possibility of getting injured while cycling or playing rough sports because she did neither.

Even though there is a chapter on 'Reproduction in Humans' in their school curriculum, the teachers never taught it and asked the students to self-study because the classroom was co-ed. When she asked her mother about the same, she handed over a timepiece and told her she was a big girl. Her mother walked out and told her husband that 'Manisha is not well', which is a consistent statement used whenever any female is having her periods.

One day, Daksha and Manisha received a phone call from Devuben (team member from CSPC) asking them to attend an all-women community meeting in their Borla to discuss Menstruation. Both the young girls were taken aback because Menstruation was a closeted topic, and every single woman, including the two of them, was very shy and reserved about the same. But they remember Devuben insisting that this would be a beneficial session for addressing the taboos and lack of knowledge in the field of Menstrual Hygiene.



MANISHA SOLANKI

Though hesitant, the girls considered joining the meeting, thinking they would skip the rest of the modules if things got awkward. But to their surprise, the first module unexpectedly cleared innumerable misconceptions around menstrual blood, white discharge, its causes, how puberty changes the female body, etc. The session impacted Daksha, Manisha, and all the other participants so much that they all asked Daksha to call Devuben and ask her when the next session was scheduled. Daksha and Manisha unanimously said that the second session brought them a significant perspective on switching to winged cotton pads from the traditional timepiece. Daksha says, "After CSPC introduced me to winged cotton pads, I am confident that menstruation will be the least of my concerns when I am a police officer."

Manisha chips in and agrees, "Now, I know that the white discharge is my body's self-cleansing system and nothing harmful."

While talking about taboos and myths, Manisha says, "though I respect the beliefs, myths, and assumptions of my elderly and do not argue with them to dispute the former after attending all the CSPC modules, I do not doubt my state of sanctity anymore."

Daksha pointed out that the CSPC workers have a very human touch in every meeting they hold. 'With older women, Devuben and all the other women listen to their views, do not try to oppose them. They respect all the senior women's experiences, ego, and self-esteem by calling them more experienced and try to communicate the real reasons and rationale behind the practices they treat as sacred. This makes the older crowd more receptive and eager to attend the future sessions', said Daksha. This assures her that her mother will benefit equally from the CSPC MHM sessions.

Summing up their learnings, Daksha and Manisha said they learned how every female body is different. One should be aware of their own body and not only respect their body but also take care of it, how the menstrual blood is pure as every human being once was nurtured in the uterus of a woman consisting of the same uterus lining that breaks down as menstrual blood, the advantages and disadvantages of numerous options available for menstruation; which helps them make a conscious choice as per their lifestyles and the nutrition and remedies young girls and women should inculcate during their periods.

Daksha and Manisha hold the work CSPC is doing in very high regard and fondly remember how they used to wait for Devuben to come & deliver the sessions. The young girls, who are working towards their dreams of becoming a Delhi Police Officer and a teacher, are firm about being very open about this topic with their daughters in the future and want to empower them with education, health, and love.

Voices from the field



JAYABEN
★★★★★

CSPC is doing a wonderful job, they have enabled women to have conversations around menstruation and made sure that girls are made aware at the right age, to ensure they do not feel helpless and scared when they get their first period.

“

There are a lot of misconceptions and taboos about menstruation. A lot of young girls and women used to take contraceptive pills to delay their menstrual cycle for upcoming festivals and occasions, without realising the harmful side effects of these pills. CSPC has successfully shattered these misbeliefs by educating us.

CHAMPABEN
★★★★★



”



PREETIBEN
★★★★★

The modules explain menstruation and related topics in a way that makes the girls remember important things; even I can't explain it the way they do it. The girls are often hesitant to share concerns related to menstruation, but after the sessions, they feel comfortable coming and talking to me about it.

”

Voices from the field



MANISHABEN
★★★★★

“

I am very grateful to CSPC for helping me understand my body and clearing the misconceptions I had attached to it. It is important that CSPC keeps breaking the wrong beliefs young girls like me associate with menstruation due to lack of awareness, since we do not even get to talk to our mothers.

”

“

I talk about periods with my friends, and we don't shy away. What CSPC is doing is great to uplift society. Menstruation is something that every girl goes through, and there should be no shame in talking about the same.

”

NAMRATABEN
★★★★★



CSPC HAS TOUCHED MANY LIVES...

CLUSTER RESOURCE PERSONS

Team members of CSPC-
sharing their own experiences.....



KAJAL BEN

“ I had no idea what was happening; Lugda aa gaya. ”

Name: Kajalben

Age: 32 Years

Village: Zanzmer. Talaja-Bhavnagar

Occupation: Cluster Resource Person at CSPC under MHM Program

Kajal Ben is a 32-year-old CRP of CSPC (MHM Program). After completing her BRS, B.Ed in Rajkot, she went on to work with an NGO known as VRTI on a sanitation project for a year. She heard about CSPC from a boy in her village and due to the added convenience that it is close to the village chose to apply for the position at CSPC. She has been working with CSPC since 2018.

Kajal ben recalled the first time when she got her period to be very stressful as it was in the 9th standard when she was completely unaware of menstruation. **“I had no idea what was happening,”** she said, “ the lower half of my uniform was stained red, my teacher just told me to go home from school immediately.” She still recalls that her mother only told a young Kajal in tears to not worry and explained how to use a timepiece. **For the longest time, she used a maroon timepiece.** She also set some context on what it was like in her house - it was such a taboo topic that soon after the bare minimum, her mother promptly went back to work in the fields. **She also never directly referred to them as ‘periods’ or ‘maasik’ but rather “Lugda aa gaya,”**



which means the cloth (time) has come. Her mother also laughed at her when a young Kajal wanted to tell her father about it. Even before joining CSPC, her family had some apprehensions about her taking on the job - they wondered if she would be able to do it.

She used to menstruate heavily for 8 days which only normalised in college and now adulthood, but during that time, she also skipped school for two days. She observed that even in college, no one used to speak about periods. It was only CSPC that changed that for her. She joined CSPC after a rigorous interview process which included processes that she had never encountered before, such as speaking to a panel of 3 men about periods. However, within 2 months, she got the job and was allotted 7 villages under her. To start, she underwent 10 days of training, after which she had her first session, which almost made her want to quit. **“I was so shy, everyone was laughing. Since I never spoke about periods before, I hated it, and I wanted to quit.”** It was only when she took this to a superior who spoke to her and explained that she would get used to it that made her stay. Now, she can freely discuss this topic irrespective of the audience, **“I am not even shy to conduct these modules with boys; I can speak to anyone about menstruation.”**

It's not just menstruation; even associated social taboos have changed for Kajal. She goes to the temple even with her mother, and her neighbors approach her with doubts about menstruation. She has managed to ensure that everyone around her knows about all the modules. She personally believes the modules to be equally important as there is a **significant lack of awareness concerning topics like discharge, hygiene, sanitation, the downsides of timepieces, contraceptive pills, and dirty/impure associations with periods.**

DEVU BEN

“ I had little to no information, apart from knowing that periods come once a month. ”

Name: Devu Ben

Age: 26 Years

Village: Nichdi, Talaja-Bhavnagar

Occupation: Cluster Resource Person
at CSPC under MHM Program

Devu Makwana, a 26-year-old CRP of CSPC, works in the Menstrual Health Management Program and imparts menstrual education to the women and girls in the Talaja taluka.

After completing her M.Com along with working as an economics and statistics teacher, she heard about CSPC from her elder sister. However, after learning what was expected from her, she chose not to apply. A few weeks later, she got a call from CSPC who told her about an opening in Talaja and told her to inform her friends if she wasn't interested. Upon telling her friend and seeing her react to it positively, Devu Ben herself decided to go for the interview along with her friend. Looking back, she feels this was one of the best decisions she made and has been associated with CSPC since December 2018.

Recalling the first time she got her period, **“I had little to no information, apart from knowing that periods come once a month and you need to wear a timepiece or a pad,”** she said. **She was instructed not to enter the kitchen and not go to the temple.**



Living in a house with her parents, three sisters, and one brother, conversations about menstruation was common among the women of the house. Unfortunately, it remained an uncomfortable topic when talking to a relative of the opposite gender.

Having been sent for field work from day 1, Devuben believed the job to not be for her. The talk around menstruation, even among women, continued to make her feel embarrassed and uncomfortable. It was her team member, working with CSPC under the same program at the time, who encouraged her to keep at it and made her believe that she would be able to do it if she gave herself a chance. Cut to today, Devuben claims that she can talk about menstruation with anyone and everyone, including boys.

For her, CSPC has been a very important part of her life because it taught her the hygiene to be followed and the taboos to be shunned.

She loves what she does as she feels that imparting education about something as crucial as menstruation shows the community a way forward. She has made friends in all the villages she conducts modules in and loves this part about her job, talking to new people and making new friends.

BHAMMAR JIVU

“ It suffices for me to know that I am not ‘impure or dirty’ ”

Bhammar Jivu ben is 26 years old CRP who has been a part of CSPC since 2018. Even before completing her BA from Bhavnagar University, Mahuva, she had started working online with Mahi Dairy. After college, she taught at a school nearby for almost a year. Around this time, Jivuben heard about CSPC and the work they are doing and a potential job opening from her masa-ji (uncle). She was very intrigued and wanted to be a part of CSPC .

Jivuben reminisces that even though she did know about menstruation from a similar NGO session conducted by Aaga Khan Sanstha that she had attended in her younger days. Despite being exposed to an awareness session previously, she still considered menstrual blood ‘dirty.’ She considers herself lucky since she has always been very open to her mother about everything ranging from school tiffs to emotional questions to even menstruation after her father passed away. She says, **"When I first found myself bleeding down there during my tenth-grade vacations, I ran to my mother with tears flowing down my cheeks. On listening to me, she stopped**

Name: Bhammar Jivu

Age: 26 Years

Village: Gundrana. Mahuva-Bhavnagar

Occupation: Cluster Resource Person at CSPC under MHM Program



stitching on her machine and started laughing. I was shocked beyond belief because my mother usually panics a lot at the slightest discomfort that I face and here, she was laughing.” Her mother assured her that irregular periods is very normal at the beginning of menstruation.

During her final interview at CSPC, Jivuben used all the knowledge on the menstrual cycle that she had picked up in bits & pieces throughout her life. She remembers being very nervous and slightly awkward while answering the questions related to menstruation with a male. She had never discussed a sensitive topic like menstruation outside her intimate circle.

Jivuben loves going to the field and addressing the misbeliefs and lack of knowledge girls & women in rural areas have due to reluctance of discussing an issue like menstruation. Jivuben tries to inculcate the much-required awareness in the general crowd of her village also but does not disrespect their age-old beliefs attached to menstruation. She says, **“it suffices for me to know that I am not ‘impure or dirty’ even when I am on my periods and it only validates the well-being of my reproductive health.”**

Alongside her dedicated work in CSPC, Jivuben is preparing for defense competitive exams and aspires to get to wear the uniform soon. She runs long kilometers early in the morning to work on her physical health. After Jivuben taught her mother all the four modules prescribed by CSPC, her mother freed her from all superstitions previously associated with menstruation. Now, Jivuben not only feels empowered but also, free to chase her dreams without any restrictions and also, create an impact in the lives of girls like her.

BHOOMI BEN

“ I can now talk to males about menstruation without any hesitation. ”

Name: Bhoomi Ben

Age: 24 Years

Village: Bhaguda, Mahuva-Bhavnagar

Occupation: Cluster Resource Person
at CSPC

Bhumi is a 24-year-old CRP of CSPC and has been working with them for the last 4 years. Before CSPC, Bhoomi had been studying nursing because she was no longer passionate about her old job. After this, she started working in a hospital, during which she was told about the job opening at CPSC by her brother.

To be a part of CSPC, Bhoomi went through various interviews and discussions. This was her first time talking to so many men, that too about a topic which was barely spoken about in the open with women. She was initially frightened but still tried to give her best. She believed she got the job due to her prior experience in nursing and basic knowledge about menstruation.

After getting the job, she had to attend a 10-day training session in Ahmedabad. She was intimidated by the other girls there as they could answer all questions, having been associated with NGOs before, unlike her.

Bhoomi got her first period when she was in the 10th grade.



She was completely unaware of it and got very scared, but did not talk to her mother about it out of shame. She spoke to her sister, who told her about it and handed her a timepiece to use. Since then, she has been using timepieces until she came to CSPC, where she learned about cloth and plastic sanitary pads and switched to cotton cloth pads.

She comes from a family that has never discussed menstruation, especially with any men in the house. Hence, she was uncomfortable talking about it with the male colleague since they had visited her house earlier. Her family comprises her 4 sisters, two brothers and her parents. But since CSPC, she has started talking about menstruation with the women of her house. She has educated them entirely about menstruation and helps everyone around with it too.

"I can now talk to males about menstruation without any hesitation, but I am still not comfortable with talking about it to my brother, even though I want to inform him regarding the same and hope to speak to him soon."

But since she joined CSPC, she has become much stronger and has also learned a lot. She now knows the logical reasoning behind menstruation and its various aspects. She can speak confidently about it with anyone, even men, without hesitation or shame. As for the various taboos she followed before, she has stopped most of them. She freely uses the kitchen during her menstrual days and also goes to most temples. In the future, she wants to complete the nursing course that she had left midway, in addition to educating the women and girls around her to bring about an impact on other people's life.

Officials from the government sharing their views on the program



KISHORESINH SARVAIYA **Taluka Health Office - Talaja**

The initiative by CSPC and Tata Trusts towards breaking the silence on menstruation is really a remarkable work. The implementation of the program is being done in coordination with the Block Health Office in Talaja. Such efforts will surely be able to bring change in the rural women and girls regarding menstrual hygiene practices and will increase their knowledge on menstruation.

Apart from the rural women, this program has also empowered the ASHA workers and the Multi-Purpose Health Workers (MPHWs) on Menstrual Hygiene Management. With the training, these frontline workers have been equipped with the knowledge and it would make them enable to pass on the information further in the rural community.

Officials from the government sharing their views on the program

SHARDABEN DESAI

Program Officer, ICDS-Bhavnagar



Menstruation even in today's era has been surrounded with many social and religious restrictions, which have been proving the hurdles in the menstrual hygiene management. In the rural areas, the women and girls are not aware adequately on menstruation and hence they have to face many challenges in managing the same.

The adolescent girls are more vulnerable to the Urinary Tract Infections (UTI) because of the inadequate information on the safe menstrual hygiene practices. Moreover, the women and girls in the rural areas do not have the access of the menstrual absorbents and are also not aware about the safe use and the disposal of the menstrual products.

Under such circumstances, the efforts being put in the field by CSPC-Tata Trusts to make the rural women and girls aware about the menstrual hygiene, has been proved a boon to them. Apart from the rural community, the training modules developed under the program, are also very helpful for the Anganwadi workers and has built their capacity to educate others on such sensitive and important issue of menstruation.

Officials from the government sharing their views on the program

NILAMBEN JETANI

District Girls Education Coordinator
SSA-Bhavnagar



Since many years menstruation has been surrounded with many social and religious restrictions, which is very difficult for the women and girls to handle. The demand of the time is to equip the women and girls with the correct information on menstrual hygiene management. In this direction, the efforts of CSPC-Tata Trusts in providing the knowledge to the adolescent girls on managing the menstruation hygienically, are very unique and remarkable.

The training modules have been designed in such an interactive way, that the girls freely discuss about their menstruation.

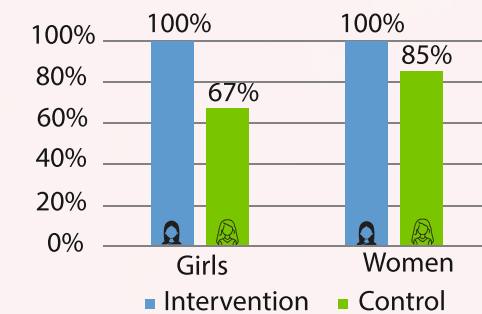
KAP Assessment on MHM

To assess the impact of the Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) interventions, the current study was conducted in five intervention villages of Bhavnagar district, Gujarat. The study aimed to examine the efficacy in terms of knowledge, attitude and practices in relation to MHM following the interventions as well as explore opportunities, challenges and recommendations for further improvements.

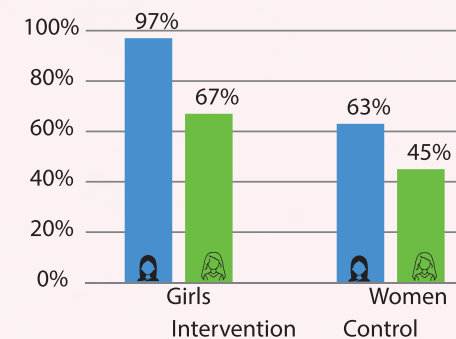
For the purpose of the study, a 30% sample representation from five intervention villages and two control villages of Bhavnagar district, Gujarat was considered. The study used both quantitative and qualitative methods of inquiry and data collection which was primarily through a structured questionnaire and focus group discussion.

Knowledge

Awareness on Menstrual Process

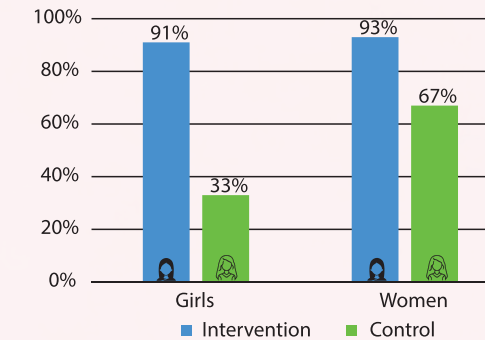


Knowledge on Source of Menstrual Bleeding

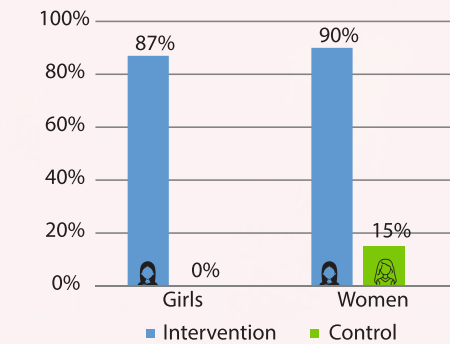


Attitude

Consider the Menstruation as Normal Biological Process

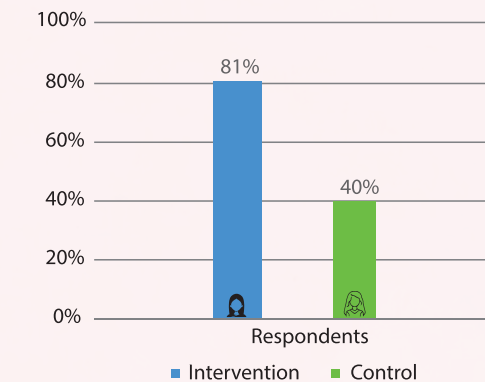


Enter into the Kitchen During Menstruation

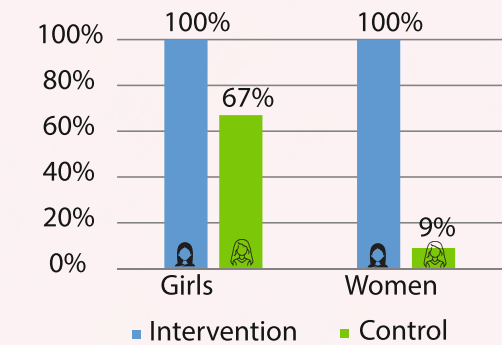


Practice

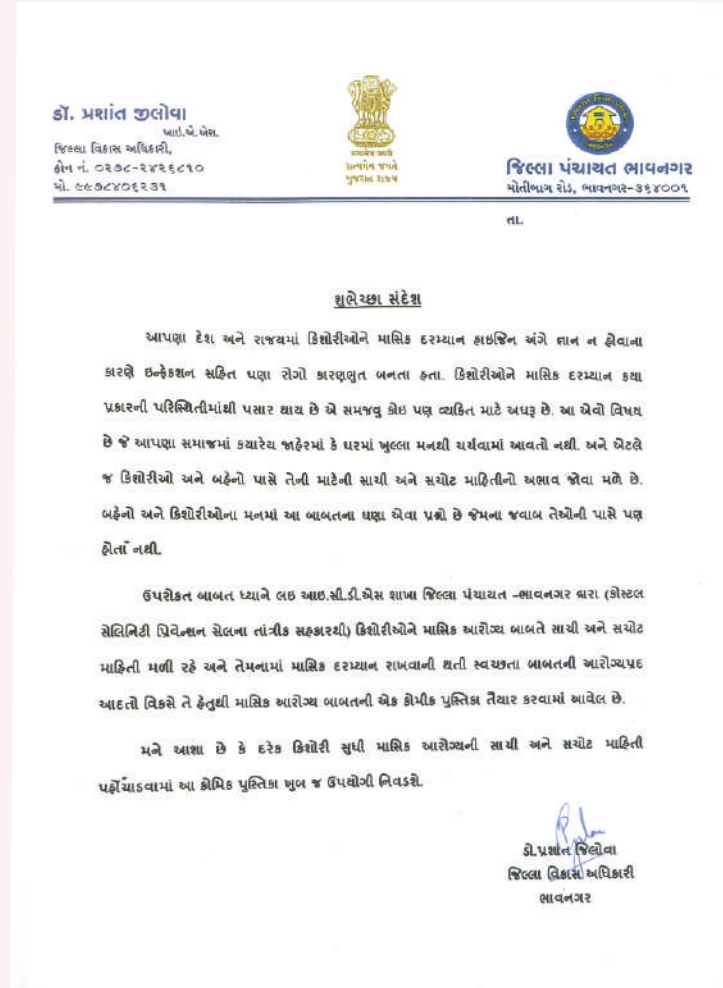
Dry the Cloth in Direct Sunlight



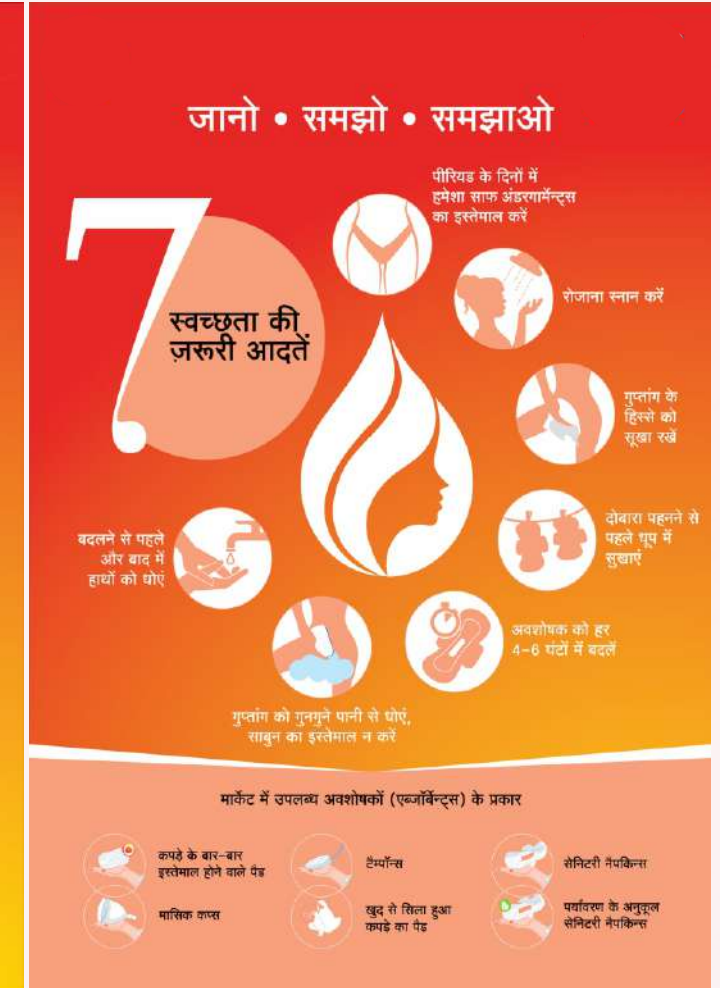
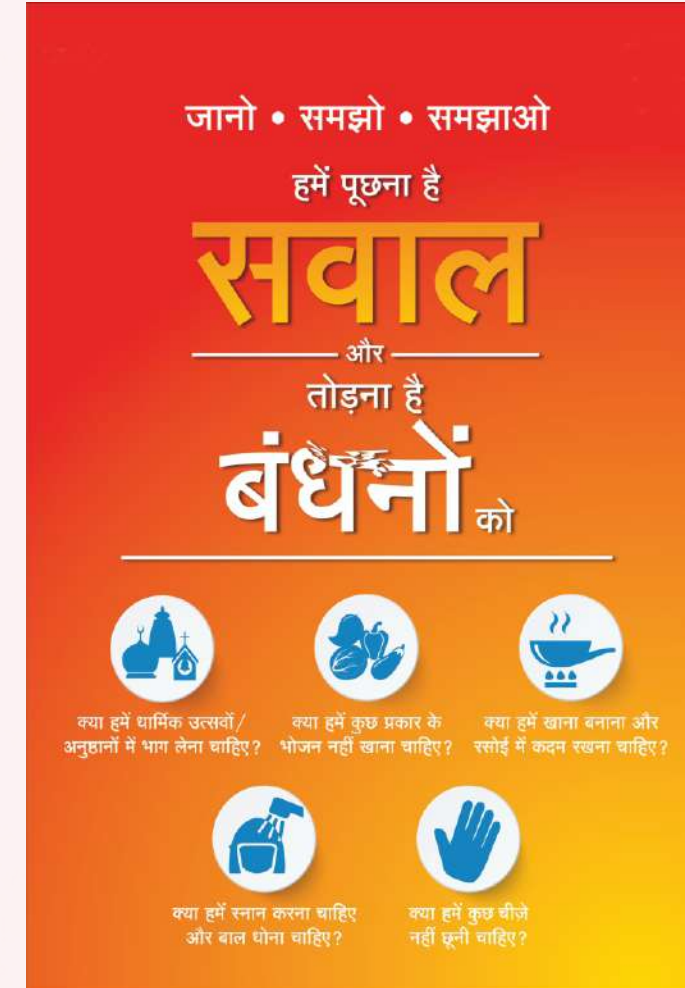
Carry out daily activities during Menstruation



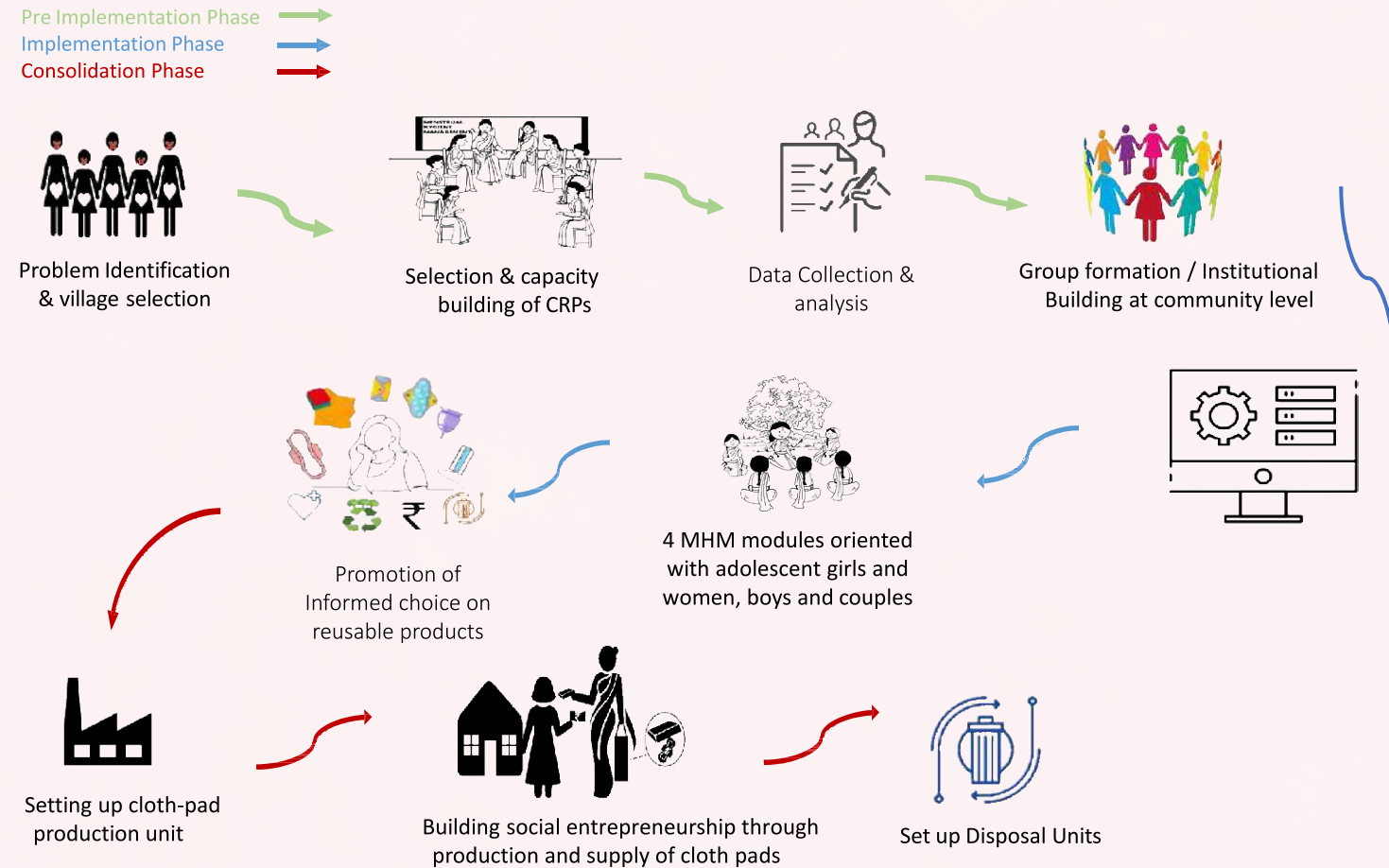
Recognition by Bhavnagar Jilla Panchayat



प्रतिबंध से परे



Implementation Process



The outreach of Program in Gujarat.....



Partners during the journey so far....



Technical Guidance



Coastal Salinity Prevention Cell

3, Sanidhya Bungalow, Opp. Landmark Hotel, Nr. Ashok Vatika BRTS,
Ambli-Bopal Road, Ahmedabad-380058, Gujarat, INDIA
E-mail : info@cspc.org.in • Website : www.cspc.org.in