



Aga Khan Agency for Habitat

Improving quality of life of women through menstrual health management and awareness programmes



India, 7 June 2019 - Across the spectrum of population affected by poor sanitation facilities, women and girls are often more adversely and disproportionately affected. They face a loss of personal dignity and are at a safety risk because of a lack of access to sanitation facilities. Absence of facilities often forces them to restrict their diet, which can have adverse nutritional and health impact. Monthly menstruation makes toilet access even more important for women and girls: without a safe, private space, with adequate facilities for

bathing and washing, women and girls face difficulties, and experience has shown that adolescent school-going girls are especially vulnerable to discontinue their studies. Many are reluctant to continue their schooling because toilet facilities are either not private, not usable, not safe or simply not available in many government schools. Like defecation, menstruation is also the subject of cultural taboos that significantly impact women and girls' lives and reinforces gender exclusion. Both would need to be addressed in any comprehensive sanitation and hygiene initiative and menstrual hygiene management (MHM) must form an important component of any programme centred on community water and sanitation, school sanitation and hygiene promotion.

Menstrual Hygiene Day is an annual awareness day celebrated on 28 May each year to educate women about the need and importance of good menstrual hygiene management. Initiated in 2014 by WASH United, a Germany-based NGO, the day is targeted to benefit and empower women and girls around the world. Despite the modernisation and advancements, menstruation is still considered a taboo topic to discuss and people often find themselves uncomfortable at the prospect of discussing the subject. This leads to women usually being deprived of access to safe menstruation practices, thereby compromising their overall health. It is the basic right of women to manage menstruation hygienically and also in a dignified manner. So it becomes essential for women to have access to clean water and toilets and also safe hygiene practices, an area that faces a lot of neglect.

On the occasion of the 2019 Menstrual Hygiene Day, Aga Khan Agency for Habitat India (AKAH India) organised orientation programmes related to awareness in its project offices in Mahuva, Rajula and Una. The Mahuva project office teamed up with Coastal Salinity Prevention Cell (CSPC), Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and Triveni Kalyan Foundation's (TKF) staff members to organise block-level awareness programmes on menstrual hygiene. The students from a local village in Konjali presented a short play for community awareness aimed at breaking the silence on the taboo subjects of menstruation and hygiene.

The Rajula project office teamed up with Gujarat Heavy Chemical Limited (GHCL) Foundation to organise an awareness programme at Victor village in Rajula block. The awareness programme

was organised with a prime objective of breaking the silence, raising awareness and changing negative social norms surrounding menstruation. Gynaecologist Dr Sunita Katariya and other female leaders educated a 200-strong crowd of young girls and women about menstrual issues and hygiene practices. The Una leg of Menstrual Hygiene Day celebrations saw a participation of 300+ girls and women. AKAH India staff members from Una office conducted sessions on the importance of sanitation and its overall impact on health, and the significance of maintaining menstruation hygienically.

AKAH India is taking concrete measures towards creating a realm where every woman can manage her menstruation in a hygienic way and with dignity. AKAH India has been working on MHM since 2012. Government of India through its flagship programme Swachh Bharat Abhiyaan has also laid emphasis on MHM.

Read online: <https://www.akdn.org/press-release/improving-quality-life-women-through-menstrual-health-management-and-awareness>