Ministry of Water Supply and Sanitation
in collaboration with the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC)

Menstrual Hygiene Management Policy Consultation Workshop, February 9-10, 2017

Keynote Address by Archana Patkar, Programme Manager, WSSCC

Your Excellency Honorable State Minister Mr Deepak Khadka

Joint Secretary Rajan Pandey, Ministry of Water and Sanitation

Joint Secretary


Civil society organisations, development partners, national and international NGOs, Agencies of the UN, the private sector and the media.

Most importantly the women and girls who have travelled from Bajura, Jhulma, Achaam, Kapilvastu, Gulmi, representatives of the Federation of persons with disabilities and many others from other parts of Nepal... to share their experiences so that this workshop will commit to a transformative path informed by their lived experiences.

WSSCC Coordinator Gunaraj Shreshta and the entire CODEF team without whom this workshop would not have been possible

Nothing is more poignant than the sad story of the young 15 year old girl who died last December from Gajra village in western Nepal's Achham district.

She lit a fire to keep herself warm and as she slept, the 15-year-old died of smoke inhalation. She was alone, separated from her community because of a biological function that half the world's population experiences every month for almost 6 to 7 years or more of their adolescent and adult life. She is not the only one who has been confined in a menstruation hut because menstrual blood is considered polluting, unclean, impure—or been told not to eat certain kinds of food, not study, work, play, pray --- in fact to stop being human for those 5 to 6 days every month! All of us women and girls in this room have experienced various aspects of these do’s and don’ts—some of us have had the privilege to question while continuing to comply or to break with tradition.

But we are here today and for the next two days to discuss and take transformative action on the monthly silence, shame, pain and inconvenience that half of Nepal and indeed the entire world’s population faces for a good chunk of their adolescent and adult years. More
than 10 million women in Nepal menstruate every month! The average age of menstruation is 12.8, with 87% of girls having had their period at the baseline survey (Table 1). Use of sanitary pads is not very common: only 25% of the girls had ever used them, and only 2% reported using them regularly. The primary sanitary protection is rags. This is not worse than other countries in South Asia—it’s a shared issue recognized by the South Asia Conference on Sanitation (SACOSAN) with Ministers committing to ensuring MHM in WASH facilities through Delhi, Colombo, Nepal, Dhaka Sans, and more.

The strong commitment from the region has resulted in a continual demand from national and local governments to now take action, change policies and match them with enabling human designs and WASH practices that recognize menstruating women and girls as full members of a just society.

Nepal has a range of initiatives, positive experiences and innovations in this area ... and has several matching enabling policies and operational practices such as separate toilets for boys and girls, Water Users Committees representing more and more women and marginalized groups and - most importantly - open consultation and discussion on what must be improved. The Sector Development Plan specifically recognizes, budgets for:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Diversity and Inclusion</th>
<th>GESI, non-discrimination, marginalization and exclusion, cross subsidy</th>
<th>To make the WASH sector more inclusive in service provision.</th>
<th>Equality in WaSH services ensured.</th>
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<td>WaSH in Special Situations</td>
<td>WaSH in Emergencies, Vulnerable, Scarce and Fragile Situations, Resiliency</td>
<td>To capacitate the sector enough to work in special situations.</td>
<td>WASH sector functioned in all situations</td>
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Nepal made huge strides in the MDG period with a 42 percentage point increase in use of sanitation. However, alarming disparities in access usually hit women and girls most and with devastating consequences for their dignity, safety, health and life choices and quality.

The SDP states that the **sector needs to focus on better targeting with equity and inclusion approaches to secure right of all citizens for sustainable and affordable WaSH services. It is essential to ensure meaningful engagement of women and socially excluded groups in decision making processes to identify WaSH priorities so that their special needs can be addressed.**
It is exciting to see that the SDP will integrate WaSH in households, public places and institutions (health, education, community) through improved linkages within the sector and between local development, health, education, and the environment, integrating WaSH into their respective policies and programmes:

**No new bus parks, bus stands, amusement parks, bazaar areas etc., will be permitted without CGD friendly toilets**

**Apply the human rights principles of participation, non-discrimination, transparency and accountability; and standards of WaSH security (safe, adequate quantity and quality, equitable distribution, physical accessibility and economic affordability).**

It is my hope and conviction that we will listen and learn from each other during these two days in order to understand menstrual taboos, silence and restrictions for the deep gender and human violations they are—these are not traditions or simply cultural practices – they are violations against humanity—given that menstrual blood is life blood and without the menstrual cycle humanity itself will stop and cease to exist.

Second: we will commit to take practical action to break the silence – to simply talk about menstruation freely, with information and where we do not have information- to ask questions and seek information—so that this historical dam is broken and women and men freed up to understand this natural biological phenomenon in order to know, respect and treat this natural process with the respect and care it deserves. This means that we can put people back into the toilets and bathrooms and services for which they were meant---men, women, boys and girls from infancy to puberty, adulthood, menopause and old age—with different ages, physical condition and needs and design services, standards, maintenance and our definition of success in WASH accordingly.

Third: while we put people at the centre – we will not forget that this planet is ours to nurture and preserve and that menstrual waste like other solid and liquid waste must be planned for, collected and managed in an environmentally friendly manner. In order to free menstruation of the stigma attached to it—we need to have good services so that the entire chain – from use to disposal od used materials, their collection, composting, incineration or other method of management is an operation of safety and dignity.

Menstrual hygiene management has become a global movement. What we thought was impossible only five years ago was published in the national sanitation policy in India in December 2013 and maintained in the Swachh Bharat Mission, it is now in the final stages of vetting and policy finalization in the Government of Senegal. Hundreds of people are trained in MHM and working on the design of public facilities to welcome children, adolescents, women and persons with disabilities—across to Kenya—where the Ministry of Health chairs the national movement that has spread from 16 counties undertaking MHM training. There are plans across 47 counties—Niger, Cameroon---and all the SAARC countries are keen on integrating this into WASH education and health plans.
WSSCC is committed to achieving target 6.2 of the SDGs and Nepal is a key country in our portfolio. We will support the Ministry of Water and Sanitation in collaboration with a range of ministries in order to ensure a holistic response to this much neglected human condition. I am convinced that Nepal will transform the lives of its 14 million plus women and girls through transformative policies and matching actions on the ground—providing leadership and inspiration for South Asia and indeed the entire planet.

We found that although some girls and families were challenging restrictions, the perceptions of menstruation as a dirty, polluting process with the potential to harm girls, their families and others, as well as crops, and livestock still prevailed in the study districts.

Menstruation was perceived as a time of vulnerability, when women and girls should rest, be around their home, and take care of their body. In addition, fear of suffering ill health, heavy bleeding or infertility if others see their menstrual blood is a constant source of concern for women and girls. The lack of appropriate, comfortable and affordable materials for MHM, of adequate waste disposal, and of adequate toilet facilities at school made leakage and others seeing their menstrual blood a source of stress for girls. Girls avoided changing their sanitary materials at school because toilet facilities were dirty and lacked privacy. Girls preferred to suffer the discomfort of using thick cloth, restricting their movement, and using friends’ toilets rather than use the school toilet.

(Closing words).

References:

Formative research on MHM in Nepal

The education sector in Nepal has substantially increased investment for gender-friendly latrines in Nepal with a specific focus on menstrual hygiene needs