

Report on “ Adolescent Reproductive and Sexual Health (ARSH) program in Stone Quarry areas and setting up a low cost sanitary napkin enterprises in Chennai, India.

Summary of the project:

Institute of Research and Development for the Rural Poor (IRDRP) Trust had initiated a unit of menstrual sanitary pads to promote menstrual health management among stone quarry girls and Tribal girls in our target villages. Main objective of the project is to produce Menstrual herbal sanitary pads and promote safe menstrual health practices. The project also aims to Social Market through NGOs. SHGs and CBOs. If the project is successful it can be replicate it another districts through its networking members of NGOs and Women Groups.

DETAILED ACTIVITIES CARRIED OUT:

1. Production, Distribution and Sale of Herbal sanitary pads:

As per the project plan we outsourced machineries for producing sanitary napkins from various places and finally come to concluded buying machineries in Chennai itself from Pucharam mahalir Self help Groups, Gerukampakkam, Chennai. When we purchased machines, the director said there was maternity sanitary pad project which she bought the finished products of maternity pad for Rs.21 for 6 pieces. Its Government supplies. She advised to produce maternity pads also along with wings sanitary pads. We found it was good for start up the project. There was no issue of marketing. Hence we agreed for both pads producing. We started Wings sanitary herbal pads as well maternity sanitary pads.



We produce monthly 2000 maternity pads and 2500 wings herbal pads. Government takes the 4000 maternity napkins two month once and pays us 3 months once. We sale wings herbal napkins and give free supplies to Girls of our research study. We also give it Schools close to our stone quarry and tuition centers as free supplies to promote the products. We distributed to CSI deaf and dump school girls to use our wings herbal napkins.



IRDRP produced Herbal sanitary napkins with the help of SHGs members by giving employment opportunities to women socially backward communities. We promoted special self Help groups for this project. Sakthi Women Napkin production Self Help Groups. In this group 12 members are there. They meet every month and discuss about the project income and productions. Regularly 4 women work in the napkin project. We paid them piece rate. Monthly we pay their salaries as per their monthly productions. Till date

18,000 maternity pads were produced by Sakthi women self help groups. We opened bank account for this group. Each member pay Rs.100/- per month as subscription. Every month Rs.1200/- deposits in the bank on their SHG accounts.

2. Free supplies to Girls:



We reached 7000 girls through our products. We supplied free of cost to 2 Government schools, 3 Private schools, and CSI deaf and dump schools to promote the products as well as safe menstrual practices.

We regularly provided wings napkins to 25 girls in Dharkast and Pazanthandalam. We gave 5 napkins for 5 month for 25 girls and tested the products and usage. The result was amazing. 88% of them felt comfortable, good, and attractive. 92% of them ready to buy and

use it. 100% of them recommend others to buy the products. They are willing to buy from local shops and our teachers.

3. Sale of Products from different channels :

We also sold out the products in different channels like NGOs and SHGs to market to their women self-help group members. We sold out 10500 pads to NAMCO , PEACE, WDPS and DEEPAM NGOs to sale the products to their Women SHGs. It was very successful. Women felt very good about our products. It is soft, herbal gives cool and 6-8 hours protection. Each pad we sold it for Rs.1.50/- Our Sakthi SHG members also use it and introduced to their daughters and neighbors and relatives. Through this channel we sold out 7800 napkins. We have product of 7000 pads presently in office.

We branded the product as SAKTHI – (Power) In the project proposal we thought of having SAFE but later we formed SAKTHI SHG so we named as SAKTHI group name itself for the products also.

4. Outcome of the Project:



- We created awareness to 7000 school going girls in 7 schools. We also created awareness to 82 NGOs in Entire Tamilnadu in Three Zones. This helped us to sale 10500 pads through 4 NGOs. Others also willing to sale the products.
- Better menstrual hygiene was ensured, 25 girls witnessed it.
- Provided Training to 12 local women and hence providing employment opportunities and augmenting their income.
- Incentive for workers for sale of sanitary napkins, thus

encouragement leading to motivational force.

5. Risk and Assumptions:

- Market competition and existence of big players to run the business for providing good quality sanitary napkins on an affordable price and making minimum profit also.
- Adaptation of low cost sanitary napkin by the target population e.g. girls and women by shifting their mindset from the traditional practices of using old clothes in the rural areas.
- Biodegradable materials used in the low cost sanitary napkin would attract once the girls and women would come to know the harmful effect of branded sanitary napkins on their health causes to serious diseases e.g. vaginal & uterus infection and other criticality.
- Women led business enterprise would raise the acceptability of the product made among the girls and women in the local areas since trust upon them already does exist.
- Response from the govt. department and seeking possibility for the linkages was good move to scale up the business enterprise led by the women on a longer run.

6. Contingency Plan:

So far we gathered lots of information and new learning in this project. Commercial pads are harmful to women and girls – lots of complication by using those pads. People need to aware of it. People like only attraction and not care of implications. There are 355 million menstruating women are there in India. They use 110000 tons of disposable pads. All this used disposable pads are not properly disposed it. All are went to sewage and made water blockages, thrown into dust pin and waste management is also issues. We motivate our consumer to burn it or bury it. Few states sugarcane workers remove uterus because they have periods and other complications so they lose their daily income. Few companies gave medicines to control bleeding during menstrual cycle and it also made lots of complications to girls and women and undergo treatment. Hence there are lots of silent things are happening to hindering girls and women reproductive health. Reproduction is the feminine character and so called business people misuse them for money and profit. In this 10 months we learnt lots of information and product knowledge which makes injustice to women.

In the initial idea behind this initiative is not a sole profit making business rather to gear it up as social enterprise within marginalized and poor communities of the working areas where women are taking its ownership and earning small income by providing affordable option to the girls and women for their menstrual hygiene management. But now we identified menses is a serious problem women are facing it. Big exploitations are happening to women and girls in the name of sanitary pads and bills.

We further plan to go for reusable washable cloth pads for best choice to girls and women which will not give any harm to girls and women.



Though it was a traditional practices where the women used old clothes for their menstrual cycle, but it was good practices. Only issue was the old clothes were unhygienic and they use it without properly wash it and dry it. Now we teach them how to wash and dry it.

Our plan for future is to give choices to girls and women like Herbal wings, Non herbal wings, Surgical cotton sanitary pads, reusable washable cloth pads and menstrual cap.



So Beneficiary choose the products which one she wanted to use it. But we tell them the merits and demerits of all products. Its ultimate decision of beneficiaries to choose it and use it.

This we would like to give it through NGOs, SHGs, CBOs. We formed Consortium of Health Association in India (cHAI) a network of NGOs who are working on Health issues in 5 states. Primary focus is to promote menstrual health in their target communities and promote safe menstrual practices.

IRDRP formed this network, and in Tamilnadu 100 NGOs and 10 NGOs in Pondicherry, 15 NGOs in Karnataka and 22 NGOs in Andhra Pradesh were become member in cHAI network.

We motivate the NGOs to take survey among their target groups present menstrual knowledge, practices and build up existing practices to new practices.

7. Future Action plan:

- Survey in all possible areas and consolidate the survey
- Selecting Target communities and Create awareness on Menstrual Health Management
- Producing Reusable washable pads, buying menstrual cap and continuing our wings products
- Sale and promote safe menstrual practices.
- Bring Behavior changes for best practices
- Sustain with safe menstrual practices – Recording best practices
- Promotion adolescent girls groups (AGGs) and women groups, SHGs to check the response quickly and incorporating value addition as per response and feedback on absorbent quality, packing, pricing and so on.
- Reaching to the possible no. of beneficiaries' i.e. adolescent girls and women of desired age groups directly through their groups, community forums to ensure minimum sale of the ready products in a month and year.

- Seeking possibility to scale up by organizing promotional events at the village/community level in the form of Health Fair, join collaboration with Govt. department and involving the services providers.

We thank PPI for supporting very innovative projects and request to support one more year to sale the products through NGOs and SHGs. We are also planning to study the existing menstrual practices of build with our new products. We already submitted project proposal for this.



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Place : Chennai

Managing Trustee