

Role of Stakeholders in Menstrual Hygiene Management in schools and community

Kathmandu, Nepal, 28 May 2021 – On Menstrual Hygiene Day, Jagriti Child and Youth Concern Nepal (JCYCN) and National Coalition for Girls Rights (NCGR) with the support of Kanallan jointly conducted an interactive programme in collaboration with National Youth Council Government of Nepal (NYC), National Child Friendly Local Governance (N-CFLG) forum, Social Protection Civil Society Network (SPCSN) on the theme “*Role of Stakeholders in menstrual hygiene management in schools and community*”. More than 240 participants which included representatives from respective networks and alliances, development organizations, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) from all 7 provinces and 77 districts along with peer educators, adolescents’ child club member, teachers, parents, journalists attended for discussions. The virtual event was chaired by President of JCYCN, Mr. Tilottam Paudel and facilitated by Ms. Shraddha Verma which discussed the broad array of menstrual hygiene management in the schools and communities to adolescent and adults.

The programme outcome mainly outlined on the Article 16 of Constitution of Nepal i.e. *Right to live with Dignity*. It also touched upon Article 39 *Right of Children* where the participants and key speakers jointly discussed on the issues of ending child marriage, health care, education, child friendly justice. The sharing experiences with participants also conversed on the need to make necessary provisions on making motherhood and reproductive health service safe, qualitative, easily available and accessible, in order to respect, protect and fulfill the right to safe motherhood and reproductive health of the women conferred by the Constitution of Nepal which links with the *Right to Safe Motherhood and Reproductive Health Act, 2075*.

The Chief guest of the programme Hon. Lily Thapa, Member of National Human Rights Commission said, “*I am happy to see the transformation of girls as they are openly talking about periods today*” as she compares her times of menstruation than of today. To normalize the menstruation issues more in our society, she put high emphasis on the organizations and civilians to focus on three things: need of research and scientific based evidence to educate people on combating menstruation myths in Nepali society; secondly the need of family involvement to reduce menstrual stigmas and taboos as changes starts at home and third menstruation should be celebrated in dignified way. For these changes to happen, she appeals policy makers to start collective advocacy from the grassroots level.

Speaking at the event, the guest speaker, Mr. *Madhav Dhungel*, the Executive Vice-Chairperson of National Youth Council Government of Nepal focused on starting open and honest conversation with the family and community as the key factor in generating awareness on the myth of menstruation. According to him, Nepali society lacks awareness as people don’t want to talk openly about menstruation. He underlined the clarion call for the need to take deliberate and concrete action, to eradicate the stigma and negative conceptions around menstrual hygiene, and provide girls with equal opportunity to maximize their potential at all levels, including families, schools and communities. As a civil servant, he commits, and calls upon the network and alliances working on girl’s rights issues to start a movement by including technical experts in spreading in-depth knowledge of menstruation and its taboos. He also pointed out more government role in advocacy on the availability of sanitary pads in schools and tax cuts mechanism in pads for affordability for girls and women. Emphasizing the participation of youths he informed that National Youth Council is moving forward with strategies to eradicate social taboos through youth involvement.

Likewise, another guest speaker Mr. Milan Dharel, Executive Director of National Child Rights Council (NCRC) rightly pointed out that the concept of Chauupadi is not only in rural areas but also relevant in urban settings today in the form of separate rooms with attached bathrooms. Further he said, *“National Child Rights Council is preparing Child Rights Policy 2078 which will address the stigma of the menstruation myth by focusing on eradication of Distinction, Exclusion and Restriction in our society. Changes don’t come overnight hence educating the people with the right mindset is the key.”*

Ms. Priyanka Budhathoki, co-creator of the podcast “Periods kaa Kura” educated the audience on the existence of biological menstruation in the gender “transmen”. She underlined that the need for hygiene management should start at home which should be extended to communities and societies. As per Ms. Budhathoki, hygiene management does not mean staying in a separate room “Chaupadi” but is taking regular baths thus cleaning the vagina. She reminds the audience to stock sanitary pads during lockdown as menstruation does not stop even at pandemic so girls and women have to take care of themselves from vaginal infections.

The programme included voices of all seven province representatives. Rejina Gharti Magar, the Vice-President of Jagriti Child Club Nepal, first child club of Nepal and peer educator of JCYCN shared her surreal experience of lying to her mother and celebrating the festival with her family. She quotes, “I did not create any sin, and it’s my right to celebrate the festival”. Likewise, Srijana Shahi of Sudurpaschim Province said “Menstruation is not a disease” who is working to create awareness in her community. Talented Sadikshya Ghimire from Gandaki province highlighted on the collective responsibility as one of the ways which can ensure that every girl is equipped with accurate information on menstruation as a normal biological process. An active young participant, Nelisha Giri from Lumbini, gracefully portrayed that educating girls on menstruation management builds their self-esteem and confidence which is one of the essential component in girl’s empowerment. Further, confident Aanchal from Bagmati province specified that adequate personal hygiene and nutrition during adolescence are important which will help young girls to develop to their full potential and safeguard themselves from the most communal and devastating health problems. Participants like Rita Mahato from Lahan shared her experiences, *“My mother in-law limited my activities saying it is an immoral act, a transgression against divine law. But I proved my mother-in-law wrong by doing activities that she didn’t let me do during my periods and I was fine without getting any sin.”* Therefore, the participants also appealed to the stakeholders on the advocacy needed for affordable prices of the sanitary pads by cutting down taxes.

JCYCN had also organized a contest on facebook requesting adolescent girls to post poems and stories on the theme “My first menstruation..”. Winners were announced by Ms. Debaki Acharya, a member of Pragya Pratisthan Gandaki Pradesh. First position was bagged by Ms. Barsha Regmi from Lumbini province, second position by Ms. Sadikshya Ghimire from Gandaki province and third position from Yagyashwori Bogati from Sudurpaschim. The winners also recited their winning poems and shared their experiences. Hence, the programme was concluded with closing remarks by Mr. Deepak Sharma, General Secretary where he emphasized the involvement of men and boys in the girl’s rights issue.