

Success Story of Menstrual Hygiene Scheme (Dhubri district, Assam)

‘Freedays’ paves way for increased school attendance among girls

Missing school four or five days a month has been a routine affair for Aruna, a Class X student (name changed on request). Not that she does not love going to school or that she engages in any entertainment activities by bunking school, but she does this out of her inability to continue with her classes during the four or five days during her menstruation. Says Aruna, “I feel hesitant to ask my teacher to use the bathroom several times a day. That is why I prefer to stay out of school during those four or five days in a month.” Aruna’s father does not earn enough to buy her costly sanitary napkins available in the market and hence she is bound to use traditional materials like clothes during her menstruation.

It was a moment of tremendous joy for Aruna when she came to learn from her ASHA *baideu* working under Golakganj Block PHC in Dhubri district during a meeting organised by her that the government is supplying sanitary napkins at a very affordable price. “I was elated to hear from my *baideu* that our government is providing ‘Freedays’ sanitary napkins at the rate of Rs.6/- for a pack of six napkins. Now I regularly buy ‘Freedays’ from my *baideu* which helps me in effectively overcoming those difficult days,” says Aruna. “And now I do not have to miss school four or five days a month,” she smiles shyly.

At first there were some reservations regarding the efficiency of the napkins. “Some of my friends who had used ‘Freedays’ told me that the napkins were thin and had less glue. So I was a bit hesitant while buying the first pack,” says Aruna. But thanks to the Behaviour Change Communication skills of the ASHAs and the knowledge gathered by her during training for Menstrual Hygiene at the block PHC, the ASHA became armed with the knowledge and skill. The ASHAs during meeting with adolescent girls, made the girls understand how using unsterilized clothes was not good and how ‘Freedays’ was one of the best options to take care of menstruation. Eventually, the girls came to realise the importance of hygiene to be maintained during menstruation.

This is the case with many other girls like Aruna who are forced to skip classes four or five days a month during their menstruation. The introduction of ‘Freedays’ has helped many girls like Aruna to overcome the embarrassment and attend school regularly even during ‘those four or five days a month’. Says a school teacher, “Many girls cannot concentrate properly and have low confidence levels during their menstruation. Providing them with sanitary napkins at subsidised rate will help them wade through those difficult days without missing school.” The ASHAs are also happy about the fact that they have got an opportunity to help that segment of the community whose education is very important for a developing country like India.

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