

# Impact of community-based intervention in promoting menstrual hygiene-A case study on Project Sankalp

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Sankalp

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## Abstract

Project Sankalp has helped combat the issue of social stigma attached with menstruation. It is a social project driven with the motive to uplift the standard of living among the marginalized communities and help facilitate the Right to Health and Hygiene to more individuals. Along with improvement in sanitation, it also aims to uplift the dignity of women and make them self-sufficient. This project provided the women of Jarga with a means of livelihood. It facilitated increased awareness among the people of Jarga about Menstrual hygiene, reduced the social stigma attached with it and made the women economically independent.

In the world of inequality, marked with socio-economic despair, the Project Sankalp undertaken by Scindia Kanya Vidyalaya under the leadership of the Principal Ms. Nishi Misra aims to bridge this difference. Holding of “Nukkad Nattaks”, having hygiene awareness sessions and setting up of sanitary napkin manufacturing machines all came under the umbrella of SANKALP. This research paper provides a study on how the project was carried out and what were the significant challenges faced. It focuses on the journey of the project. It aims to highlight the 2 contrasting realities of the same region. This paper tries to capture the positive impact experienced by the village of Jarga through the initiative of a school and tries to put forth the drastic changes taken place through this project..

**Keywords:** Menstruation, Project Sankalp, sanitary napkins, manufacturing Jarga, Scindia Kanya Vidyalaya

## Objective

This research was primarily undertaken to analyze the effectiveness of community-based intervention in social issues and understand the behavioural change of people in letting go of social stigmas. It also explores the change of pattern and trend in utilization of menstrual products after receiving due knowledge of the importance of menstrual hygiene. As a secondary objective It also highlights the sociology of the people and also focuses on the action plan used by the school to bring this project to life. This paper also aims to prove that Education and Societal development go hand in hand, suggesting that the expenditure on health and education increases the human capital.

## 1. Introduction

Menstruation is a social stigma deeply embedded in our social structure. It is at its core deep-setted because of the myths and misconceptions held in the Patriarchal norms. Even in the 21st century, there have been reports of some very horrific methods of dealing with menstruation. From using old rags, scrap cloths to using mud and leaves. These have caused significant infection in women like Reproductive Tract Infection, Bacterial Vaginosis and many more. This was a significant issue as the lack of awareness and plethora of associated stigma combated the basic right to life and education. It seemed to be moreover associated with human rights, educational and social issues. It caused numerous girls to drop out of their schools, around one in 10 girls miss their school when they are menstruating. Many infections lurked in the darkness because of lack of open debates and conversation in the matter and numerous SDGs like SDG3 Good Health and wellbeing SDG4 Quality Education and SDG5 Gender Equality were affected. Every year nearly 800,000 women die in India due to poor menstrual hygiene. To bring about a change in the perspective of menstrual hygiene Project Sankalp was initiated in the School - Scindia Kanya Vidyalaya. This project had around 1441 beneficiaries out of which around 648 were women and 793 men. The Project was led out in phases. Phase 1 involved the understanding of the degree of stigma attached to Menstruation. Phase 2 met with the challenge of breaking this stigma. Phase 3 involved educating the people about menstrual hygiene. Phase 4 meant providing the women with a self-reliant system enabling long term adoption. Project Sankalp has held its promise to bring about a change not just in people but in society. The first year held a commendable achievement as they applied around 250 pads in the village. It was evident that with consistent efforts the change would take place. It motivated numerous schools and organisations to undertake a similar project and speak about the seldom spoken topic. It further alleviated the need to feel shy while talking about menstruation. Its positive impact could be seen even inside the campus as the girls started becoming more aware about the causality caused by poor menstrual hygiene. It Opened a platform for open discussions and deliberations, promoting health and hygiene.

## 2. Methodology

The research paper has been made with the help of both primary and secondary data. It involves a field based observation study. Being the Secretary Round-Square of the school, the author has been directly involved in this field of Project Sankalp and benefited from receiving the first hand primary data by being a part of the different surveys conducted in the course of this project. The primary data has been assessed by taking interviews of the staff and faculty involved and reviewing the data related to Sankalp. The secondary data has been taken from the school website and other research papers. This project mainly provides qualitative data.

## 3. Production and Financial Model

The materials used for these are banana fiber and gel cotton which are biodegradable. Many fundraisers like fun fairs and house sales were taken and with help of some alumni and from friends of some Round Square this machine was installed. The whole manufacturing process was learnt by the students and staff in minimal time and effort. The entire Sankalp team with dedication undertook this project. The simple machines are laid out on 8 stations -- each the size of a student's study desk. The process begins with tearing the raw-cotton sheets and mixing with binding cotton in a Mixer Jar. The material is weighed and 12 grams of material is portioned into moulds which are compressed under an air-

powered stamp. After inserting a water-proof strip, this initial napkin is sealed into absorbent tissue-cloth. An adhesive is applied and covered with a strip of oil-paper which can be stripped off to set the napkin in place. A maternity version with longer ‘tails’ is also being manufactured. At the end of the assembly line, the napkin is sterilised in a UV chamber. Sets of 8 napkins are packed together with cling-film and are ready for distribution.



## The seed of sankalp

Phase 1- In the year 2012, the students of Scindia Kanya Vidyalaya undertook a visit to rural and slum areas of Gwalior regarding health care and basic facilities. After the collaborative hard work of over 15 months, the survey undertaken in the visit presented with some horrific answers. The areas in Gwalior lacked the basic facilities of clean water and sanitation and the women folk seemed to be in the most underprivileged sector. It was clear from the data available that the concern for women’s health and hygiene was in their lowest priority.

Phase 2- Village Jarga was taken as the “Karma- Bhoomi”.Nukkad Nattaks were held to use a medium of humorous criticism, efficiently addressing the social taboos related to menstruation and the adverse effects of poor menstrual hygiene.

Phase 3-That was when SKV came up with the idea of distributing low cost sanitary napkins to these underprivileged sectors. As feasibility was the major issue, the school needed a sanitary napkin which could be viable for them. So they came up with the idea of manufacturing the sanitary napkins in-house i.e inside the campus with the help of students and various departments. While the idea seemed fascinating, executing the planned idea met with various obstacles. The first of it being to break the social stigma and taboo related to menstruation inside the campus. But despite all of these hardships, Project Sankalp remained unmoved. An indigenous pad manufacturing machinery was set up in the school tested by Mr. A.Muruganatham of Jayaashree Industries, Coimbatore. Then the students were divided into different batches, they were tasked with imparting education among the women of Jarga related to menstrual hygiene and disposal of sanitary napkins. Even with a lot of obstacles, this project flew long.

Phase 4- But this was not enough, there had to be some way to make them independent and sustain their needs. SKV took this project to its commerce department in the eye of getting a plan for a good small scale business set up in the village of Jarga for the women to carry out the manufacturing. The women there organized a Self-Help group and along with income they also had a raise in the standard of menstrual hygiene.

#### 4. Results and Observations-

“We have got a superb livelihood opportunity. We had never seen a pad. After you’ve introduced it to us, you have opened a new world for us. That’s how we are feeling” said Rajkumari Devi (resident of Jarga village).

“They were very passionate about making pads” said Ms. Nishi Misra (Principal, SKV)

“They also removed bulbs from their houses to work at night” said Palomi Jain (Student, SKV)

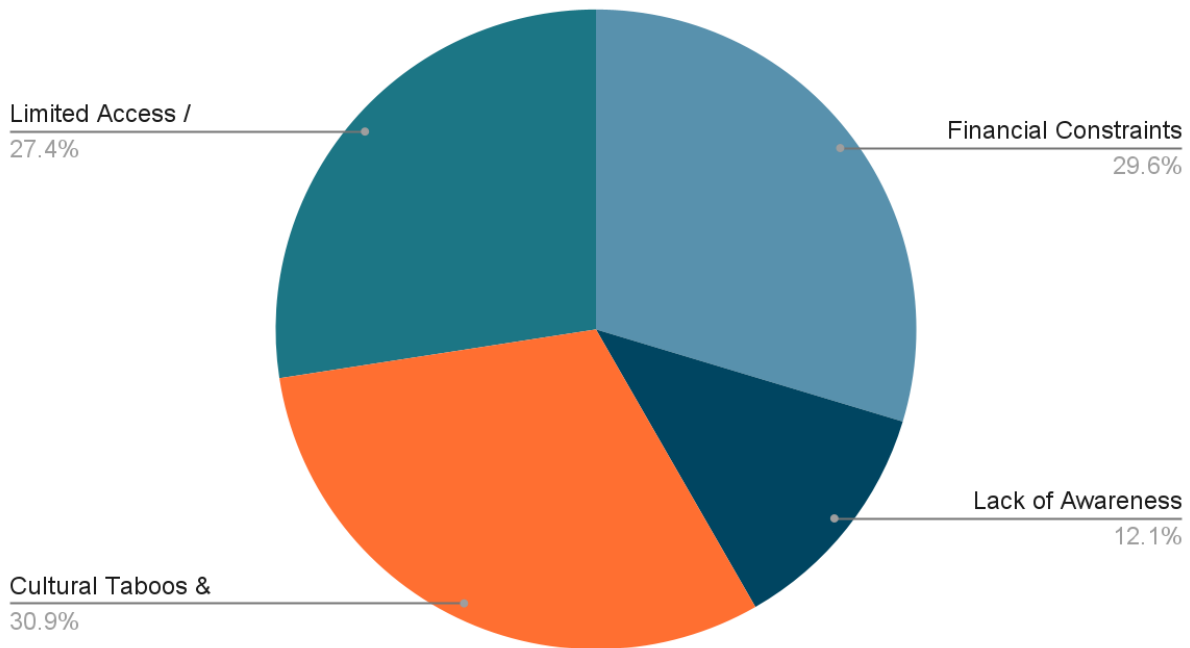
All of these remarks proved that with consistent efforts the impossible was turned into possible. The women in Jarga village were never exposed to the term menstrual hygiene, they lacked awareness and were confined to their little world governed by patriarchal society. But as they got enlightened with a new perspective they did everything they could to live a life of dignity. This observation proved that people aren’t born believing in myths, they learn them from the flawed societal construct but proper education can be a catalyst in eradicating this issue.



#### 5. Achievements

Principal, Mrs Nishi Misra has been awarded the Alexander Award by the Common-wealth Association for Science, Technology, Mathematics & Education (CASTME) for this initiative. In the last 10 years they have sent 2000 napkins for Flood stricken women in Kashmir (2014). During the Nepal Earthquake (2015) also students sent sanitary napkins along with other relief material. In 2018, when the southern state of Kerala was struck by floods, the school set up work shifts to produce 6000 napkins in 48 hours for sending as relief. During the Covid pandemic in 2021, they sent 12000 napkins to the department of Food & Civil Supplies for women in distress.

Reasons Behind the Use of Unsafe Menstrual Hygiene Practices



YEAR	UNITS	PLACE
2021	12000	GWALIOR
2018	6000	KERELA
2015	2000	NEPAL
2014	2000	KASHMIR

The first unit has been set up in Jarga itself. In 2015, one of their Alumni studying in London submitted this project to the Davies Peace Projects and received funding of 10,000/- USD to set up the unit in another village. This was completed in August 2015 at village Veerpur.

## 6. Discussion

The project Sankalp undertaken by SCINDIA KANYA VIDYALAYA , didn't just raise awareness and standard of living of a village but provided the meaningful insight that there is always a scope for improvement only if we believe in the cause, nothing is impossible. . Here, I would like to highlight the fact that India isn't just made up of one singular experience rather it consists of 2 different menstrual worlds.

One side depicts the life of students at Scindia Kanya Vidyalaya. Here, the author being a student herself ,she has experienced the normalcy about periods. Having always access to safe menstrual products, proper medical facilities, menstruation never seemed to be a stop to life. Here, menstruation didn't pause life but rather became a part of life. Being enclosed in this shell the thought never provoked that there might be a

place where all of this is an unachievable dream. Always having open conversations about periods never brought the thought that someplace it might be linked with shame and impurity.

This landscape changed drastically just within a few kilometers of the same district. The jarga village had always been in the mythical side of the world. Menstrual hygiene products were something unheard of. The only materials used there were ragged clothes, leaves and mud. Here, life paused after periods, girls would drop out of their schools. Menstruation was seen as a sign of weakness. This shocking experience had moulded the determination to work for these women and overcome all obstacles faced in between.

Under the initiative of project Sankalp, the school conducted nukkad nataks and had multiple meet ups with the women there. Initially this was met with a negative response, women wouldn't come out of their homes and would be filled with shame. After more tries, things started falling in place. Women started accepting this new comfort. Then a new incentive was drawn in them where the school installed the pad making machines and offered to buy all of their production so that they could earn a living.

## 7. Conclusion

Through the case study mentioned above, it is quite clear that after being subjected to the accurate information and after understanding the rationale behind a particular aspect everything becomes possible. We are met with the perception that people living in slum areas or under-developed regions can never come out of their shell filled with orthodox beliefs. But the story of Jarga village emphasized that when you have the right resources at the right time everything just falls into place. It is the lack of information that binds you, not the lack of zeal. Once the women folk were exposed to the exact science behind menstruation they accepted it and worked towards empowering themselves and the other women along with them. The sort of dedication and commitment they showcased proves that a dream can be turned into a reality once you determine to make it happen. This is a story of just one village, finding its manse in the city of Gwalior, there are many more unheard grandeur tales waiting to be written. This is about the Promise made and the resolution taken by the students and staff of Scindia kanya Vidyalaya. This is about the Sankalp undertaken with the aim to achieve women empowerment.

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