

IRC SYMPOSIUM: SANITATION FOR THE URBAN POOR
PARTNERSHIPS AND GOVERNANCE

**Partnership for Menstrual Hygiene Promotion for
Poor Slum Girls in Urban Sanitation**

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Introduction:

Poor menstrual hygiene and inadequate facilities in slums for adolescent girls is a **serious threat to Bangladesh as well as other developing countries** impeding and undermining development. Since, it is still considered as not a matter of discussion in the society.

It is important to note that different government agencies/NGOs are promoting sanitation and hygiene programs at slums where **menstrual hygiene issues are absent or limited.**

It is the most ignored area of hygiene promotion in urban sanitation.



Objectives:

The study focuses on **how to involve development partners/government/non-government agencies in menstrual hygiene issue in the slums to break the silence without affecting cultural values.**

Study Area:

The slums selected from urban areas of Dhaka City Corporation, one of the mega cities of the world having **more than 10 million inhabitants.**



Analysis:

Most of the girls in slum areas of Bangladesh **use rags which are usually torn from old soft cotton cloth** instead of sanitary towels/napkin.

It is **difficult to change and clean the rags due to lack of confined place** and dry the rags in a place where other family members can not see it.

The slum girls when asked, given assurance of anonymity the following information was found:

Table 1: Response of urban slum girls about problems facing due to use of rags in unhygienic way	
Opinions	Percentage
Itching	54%
Vaginal Infection	28%
No problem	18%

The survey reveals that **55 % slum girls were not aware about hygienic management of menstruation**. On the other hand, **76 % respondents did not have any idea about the diseases which might cause due to unhygienic use of rags**.

The study also reveals that more than two thirds of the respondents showed interest **to get the sanitary pad with cost sharing as their parents could not bear the full cost**. Again 6% was interested to bear full cost where as one fourth of the respondents showed their **interest to get low cost sanitary pads at their places like nearby shops in the slum areas**.

One of the NGOs distributed hygienic sanitary pad in subsidized rate (20 % of actual cost) **to create a positive sensation** of its use so that in the long run they will be motivated to buy at their own for hygienic protection and convenience.

Lessons learned

Menstrual hygiene should be **linked to a hygiene education program in slums** with the **active involvement of community organizers** of different NGOs and development organizations.

The study identified that **partnership within the line agencies (health department personnel) working in the area influenced** to bring menstrual hygiene as a subject of discussion and **make them realize that it is not a cultural taboo. It made a revolution for the urban slum girls** so that they can easily discuss at home, schools, work place and nevertheless when urban sanitation facilities are built.

Recommendations:

To get a lasting relief, now the time has come to prepare a **concrete plan of action based on partnership with the line agencies/organizations to develop a common policy addressing menstrual hygiene issues as mandatory** in all hygiene education and promotion activities to reduce the sufferings of adolescent poor girls in urban slums.

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