Impact of COVID-19 on Access to Menstrual Hygiene Products and Information

Findings from a Rapid Survey
27th April 2020
Why do this survey?

- Understand challenges faced by partner organizations
  - Access to menstrual hygiene products
  - Communication with beneficiaries/communities
- Propose actionable recommendations
Respondent Profile

- **67 Organizations**
  - **45** India
  - **16** African Region
  - **6** Other countries

- **65** Beneficiaries: Adolescent girls
- **59** Beneficiaries: Women
- **27** Beneficiaries: Post-partum women
- **34** Beneficiaries: Girls, women with disabilities
- **7** Beneficiaries: Other

- **Geography focus** – 54 rural, 49 urban
- **Product Focus** - 23 disposable pads, 28 reusable pads, 13 cups
- **19 production** (Centralized and decentralized), 24 distribution/sales
- **94% respondents** are either in lockdown or state mandated social distancing

*All numbers here are absolute numbers, not expressed as percentage.*
Status of production, distribution and access

- **Production Units (n=44)**
  - **Units open**
    - Yes: 25%
    - No: 25%
    - Partial: 50%
  - **Availability of raw materials for 3 months**
    - 25%
    - 35%
    - 40%
  - **Can service community demand**
    - 24%
    - 30%
    - 46%

- **Pre-lockdown distribution channels**
  - Online: 26%
  - Traditional retail: 22%
  - Community organization: 89%
  - School-based distribution: 61%
  - Door to door: 28%

- **18 organizations** engaged in mask production, 11 are planning

- **67% have paused normal retail operations**
- **24% are able to service demand**, 50% only partially, others not at all

- **62% state access from regular channels for consumers has become challenging**, 22% report NO ACCESS
- **52% respondents report an increase in demand** as regular channels become restricted
- **58% state that local administration not taking any measures to facilitate access**, 19% say they are facilitating access
Supply chain challenges

- Online sales had stopped – few organizations were using India post – should start to ease up again
- Road transport restrictions had constrained wholesale distribution – easing up again
- Higher transportation costs (road and air freight) can be expected even as restrictions ease
- New production is likely to be at limited capacity given social distancing norms for factories, many workers having gone back to villages
- Mask production has taken priority for many small-scale manufacturers
- Cash flow, especially for SHG units is a looming challenge
- Import of products being restricted is challenging for menstrual cups and raw materials for disposables
Alternatives Explored for Relief Efforts

• Relief channels both Govt. and NGO
• Food distribution centers for relief efforts
• Govt. Health workers who have PPE and are travelling in the community for surveillance instead of communities and schools
• Door to door within walking distance (2-3 kms) where staff are operating home sales unit
• Distribution of sanitary pads from ‘dump storage’ of Govt. (schools, Panchayat etc.)

“Contacted Ruby Cup Manufacturers to find emergency cups for distribution. Challenge is the cost of importation of the menstrual cups and how to deliver them to Uganda. Reaching out to the beneficiaries due to cost of emergency travel.”

“For long term solutions, we are working on Import Substitution raw materials, particularly absorbents on the basis of locally available raw materials, like Jute etc. We are also working on upgradation in technology so that the production system is mechanized for ensuring viability of the enterprise.”
Community Outreach

• Messaging focus on handwashing and social distancing
• Given regular supply is restricted, guidance and messaging on cloth pad use is critical
• Key messages targeted at men and community stakeholders on ensuring access to WASH facilities, keeping them clean, water and privacy to help women manage menstruation (given social distancing is forcing most members to be at home)

Most organizations keeping in touch with communities - 63% by phone, 55% over whatsapp groups, 29% through community volunteers, 22% through health workers

Key hygiene messages promoted in communities:

- Handwashing with soap: 90%
- Social distancing: 87%
- MHM: 77%
- Mask use: 71%
- Use, maintenance of toilets: 52%
- Maintenance of cloth pads: 52%
- Use cloth pads: 44%
Community Outreach

- Simple IEC for phone/whatsapp is required, connectivity is an issue
- Audio messages, IVRS and posters in addition to limited size videos ideal
- Key Messages
  - Use of clean cotton cloth
  - Basic guidance on folding and using and washing, drying and storing
  - Soak and wash (given scarcity of water and multiple people in community)
  - Reach out to FLWs (ASHA, ANW) if any RH supplies or services are needed e.g. contraceptives, ANCs
  - RTI syndromes given likelihood of poor hygiene practices with water scarcity and lack of privacy
- Masks are also competing for cotton cloth as Govt advocates use of gamcha as a mask – hence, ensuring access to cotton cloth for MHM needs becomes critical as it may not be a priority within homes/communities

“Taking help from local textile traders for procurement (500 meters, 1000 meters)” - Jatan
Engagement with Relief Work

- 30% working with migrants
- 23% working with temporary shelters
- 16% working with quarantine/isolation facilities
- 45% working with women in urban slums

Majority note that challenges have intensified
- No menstrual hygiene materials
- Lack of water for personal hygiene
- Lack of toilets (clean, safe and private)

- Coordinated advocacy with Government stakeholders, especially State and local administrations needed on addressing women’s needs
- For quarantine and shelter facilities, also high density communities like slums
- Ensuring gender segregated toilets with sufficient water and maintenance
- Ensuring access to menstrual management materials
Support requirements identified

• Identifying mechanisms to include access to products and information with other essential services

• Sharing of menstrual health and hygiene awareness materials

• Guidance on how to reach particularly vulnerable groups

• Coordination to release Government stock of products

• Engagement with large manufacturers on support
Key Recommendations

Access to menstrual management products

- Short term distribution through relief centres and food supply operations
- Manufacturers are unable to access the last mile network of informal retailers
  - Need to facilitate linkages from wholesaler to last mile retailers (community level women entrepreneurs, SHGs) as restrictions ease
  
- Need for regional coordination to allow easy flow of products being manufactured in green zones to red zones where manufacturing is disrupted

- Costs of transportation and raw materials likely to be higher, long term innovation and investments needed in
  - Substitution of wood pulp with locally available materials like jute, banana fiber
  - Mechanization of manufacturing, especially small scale manufacturing units operated at SHG levels – SHG models should look at labour reallocation to retail and sales rather than manufacturing, with investments in skills upgradation
Key Recommendations

- **Increasing dependence on reusable products** - Cloth pads and menstrual cups. Opportunity to expand use of sustainable menstrual management materials, however, hygiene messaging has to be more focused
  - Provide knowledge and information on making cloth pads, maintenance, safe use.
  - Messaging targeted at men and other community stakeholders on ensuring women have access to private and clean WASH facilities is critical
  - Units that make masks can make cloth pads as well (with adequate guidance/capacity building)
  - Reach out to local Government who are keen to establish units for cloth masks production. Explore how these units can co-produce masks and cloth pads, and ensure adequate supply of cotton cloth

- **Communication**
  - Digital tools platforms will be key - WhatsApp and YouTube as the main platforms
  - Animation and celebrity videos, Voice message, IVR, digital posters – many organizations are developing these and will be open to sharing with the network
  - Radio (FM and community radio) are also being used to facilitate in-kind donations for pads
  - Direct community outreach through SHG members, frontline workers where possible
Key Recommendations

• **Leverage local administrations for**
  - Distributing menstrual products in storage in schools, CHC/PHC, with ASHAs
  - Integrating WASH and hygiene messaging with COVID related messaging on handwashing
  - Ensuring gender segregated WASH facilities which are clean, safe and private in quarantine facilities and isolation centers

• **Waste Management**
  - Important to provide guidance on segregation and safe disposal of menstrual products and masks at levels of household, community (Panchayat and ULB) and health facilities
# Organizations providing content support

(IEC in various formats and languages)

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<th>What</th>
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<th>Contact person</th>
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<td>Innovative IEC</td>
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# Organizations providing product support

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