

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

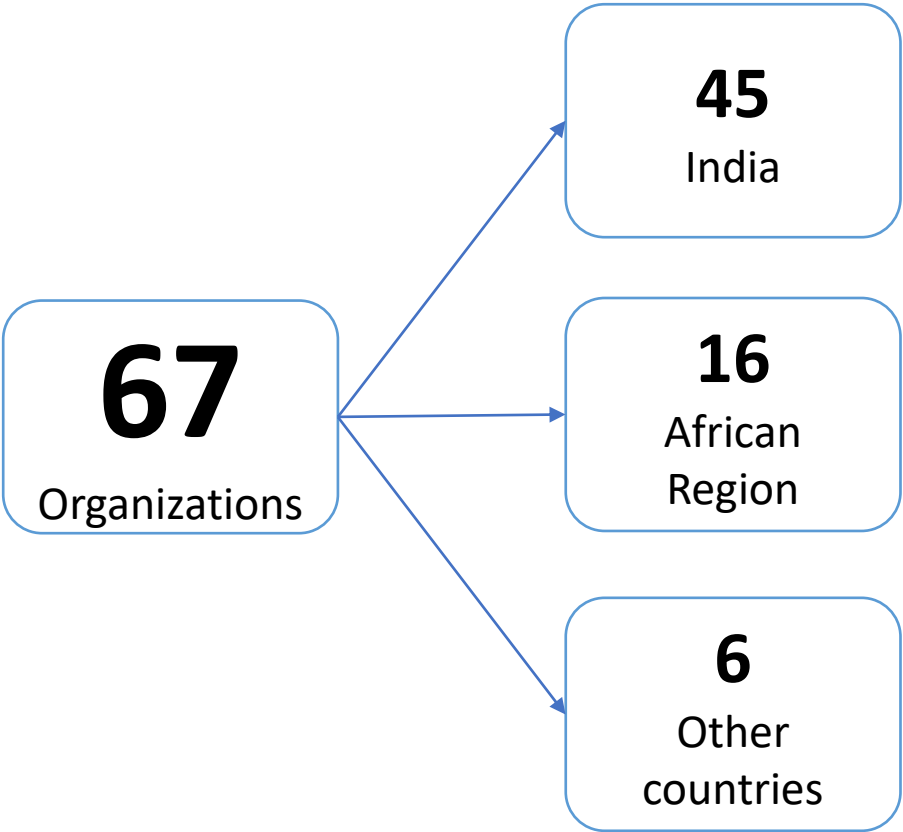
Findings from a Rapid Survey

27th April 2020

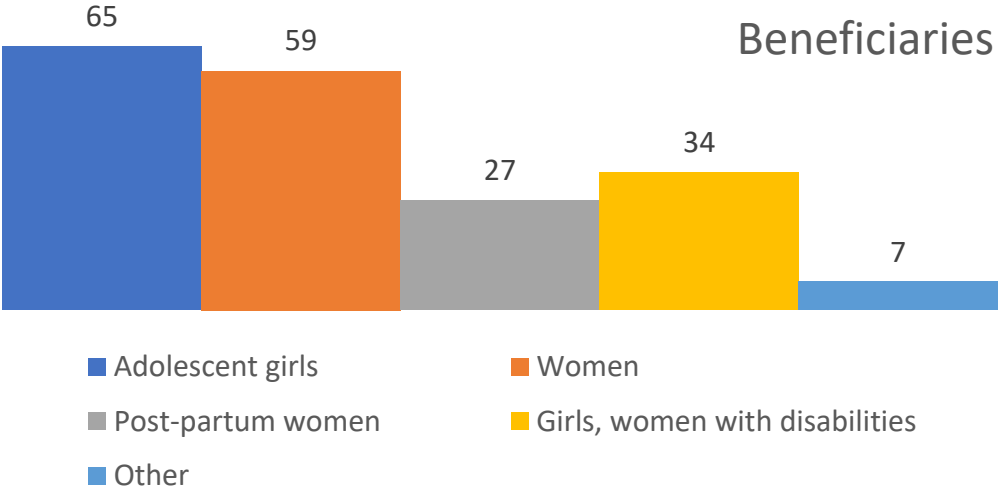
Why do this survey?

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

Respondent Profile



- 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

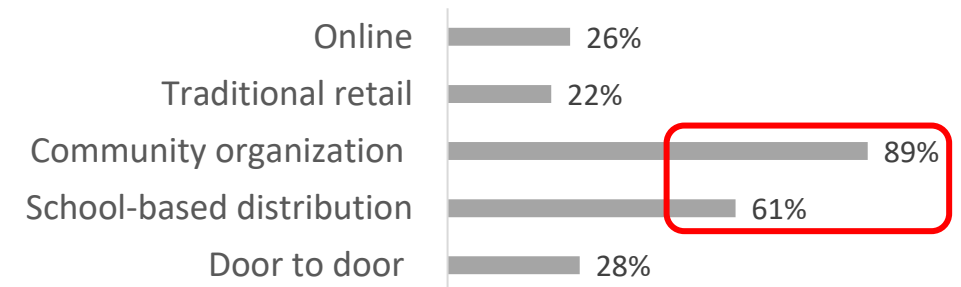
Status of production, distribution and access

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

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

- 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

Pre-lockdown distribution channels



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

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.”

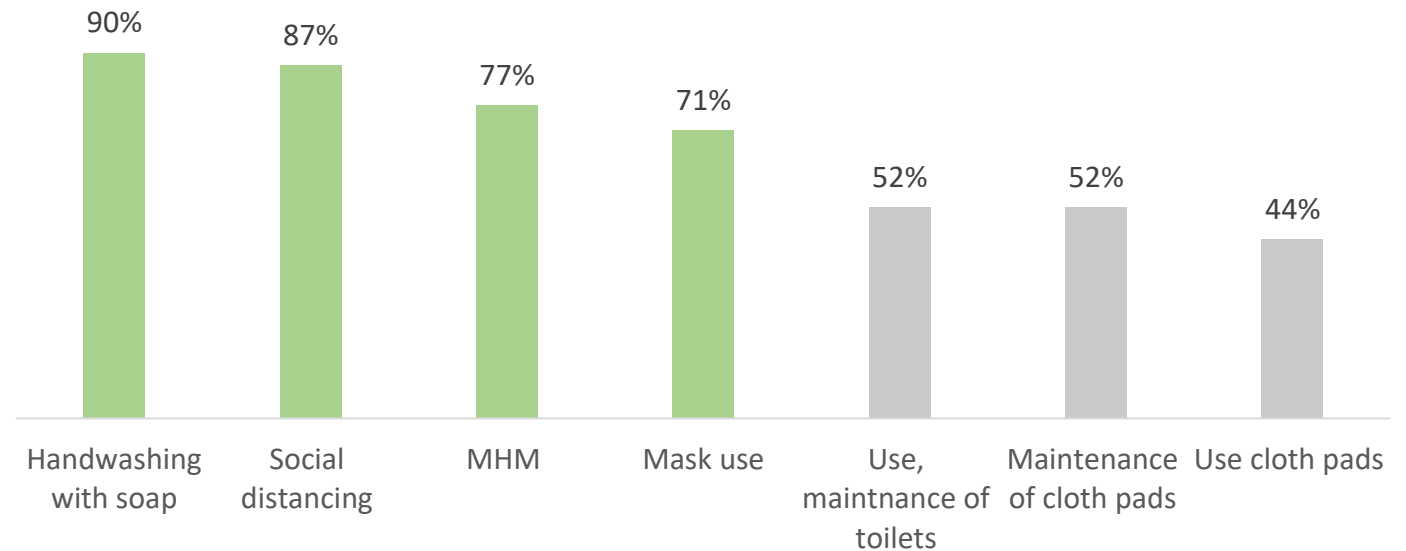
“For long term solutions, we are working on Import Substitution raw materials, particularly absorbents on the basis of locally available raw materials, like Jute etc. We are also working on upgradation in technology so that the production system is mechanized for ensuring viability of the enterprise.”

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



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, ANC
 - 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)

Who	What	links	Contact person
Sukhibhava	Innovative IEC		<u>Pragna</u> pragna.shekar@sukhibhava.org.in
Nine	Posters	Link	Richa Singh richa@nine.com
Baala	Videos Other resources	About Link to resources	Soumya Dabriwal soumya.dabriwal@projectbaala.com
Tata Trusts	Various resources being developed on MHM		Lara Gulia lgulia@tatatrusters.org
Myna Mahila Foundation	Various resources being developed on MHM (on an App)		Suhani Jalota suhani@mynafoundation.com
Sachhi Saheli	Infographics on MHM	Link	Rikita Narula sachhisaheli@gmail.com
WASH United	Globally available resources	Link to word document	Ina Jurga ina.jurga@wash-united.org

Organizations providing product support

Who	Product	links	Contact person
Nine	Disposable sanitary pads		Richa Singh richa@nine.com
Baala	reusable cloth pads	About Link to resources	Soumya Dabriwal dabriwalsoumya@gmail.com
Real Relief	Safe pad (reusable cloth pad)		Karthik Thangavel kt@realreliefway.com
Aarogya Seva		Link	Autumn Eastman autumn@aarogyaseva.org
Jatan Sansthan	Reusable cloth pads	https://youtu.be/H4CvWzT2bRc	www.jatansansthan.org ; buyuger@gmail.com
Aakar Innovations	Disposable sanitary pads (compostable)		Jaydeep Mandal sales@aararinnovations.com
Saathi pads	Disposable sanitary pads (compostable)		Shreyans sales@saathipads.com