

## Engaging Women Entrepreneurs in School Adolescent Health Program to Ensure Menstrual Hygiene Management in Rural Bangladesh

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**Abstract :** Menstrual hygiene management (MHM) and personal health-care practice is a critical issue to prevent morbidity and other reproductive health complications among adolescent girls in Bangladesh. Inadequate access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities lead to unhealthy MHM practices that resulted in poor reproductive health outcomes. It is evident from different studies that superstitions and misconception are more common in rural communities that limit young girls' access to and understanding of the menstrual hygiene and self care practices. The state-of-the-art approach of Social Marketing Company (SMC) is proved to be instrumental in delivering reinforcing health messages, making public health and hygiene products available at the door steps of the community through community mobilization programs in rural Bangladesh. School health program is one of the flagship interventions of SMC to equip adolescent girls and boys with correct knowledge of health and hygiene practices among themselves, their families and peers. In Bangladeshi culture, adolescent girls often feel shy to ask fathers or male family members about buying sanitary napkin from local pharmacy and they seem to be reluctant to seek help regarding their menstrual problems. A recent study reveals that 48% adolescent girls are using sanitary napkins while majority of them are unaware of menstrual hygiene practices in Bangladesh. Under school adolescent program, SMC organizes health education sessions for adolescent girls from grade seven to ten using enter-educate approach with special focus on sexual and reproductive health and menstrual hygiene issues including delaying marriage and first pregnancy. In addition, 2500 rural women entrepreneurs branded as community sales agents are also involved in disseminating health messages and selling priority health products including sanitary napkin at the household level. These women entrepreneurs are serving as a source of sustainable supply of the sanitary napkins for the rural adolescent girls and thereby they are earning profit margins on the sales they make. A recent study on the impact of adolescent program activities reveals that majority (71%) of the school adolescent girls are currently using sanitary napkins. Health education equips and empowers adolescent girls with accurate knowledge about menstrual hygiene practices and self-care as well. Therefore, engagement of female entrepreneurs in school adolescent health program at the community level is one of the promising ways to improve menstrual hygiene practices leading to increased use of sanitary napkin in rural and semi-rural communities in Bangladesh.

**Keywords :** school adolescent program, social marketing, women entrepreneurs, menstrual hygiene management

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