

Water and Pads for School-Girls –Empowerment for Life



Rural Women's Network Nepal (RUWON Nepal)
project in collaboration with International
Alliance of Women IAW

Activities at Shree Jana Jagriti Secondary School, Sindhuli District, Nepal

5 – 6 February 2020

A report by Goma Devi Bastola, President of RUWON

Rural Women's Network Nepal RUWON is a national organization in Nepal engaged in promoting women's rights. It is also an associate organization of International Alliance of Women.

General health situation in Nepal

The girls don't get any basic health education in schools. Nepalese society is a male-dominated society, and this affects health and educational sectors as well. In rural areas especially girls are treated like second-class citizens and considered the property of men, only there to work and fulfil men's desires. Most parents favour their sons in every sector, while girls have to deal with household chores.

In many rural areas there is no knowledge at all provided about women's health, especially because menstruation is a taboo, and menstruating women are considered untouchable.

People believe menstruation is a curse. For this reason in rural areas, menstruating girls are banished from their family homes and forced to live in huts very far from their villages. They are not allowed to see any male, not even their brothers, and cannot be in touch with other women either. They don't have the right to leave the hut before their period is over, even if they get sick, have a fever or pains and need to go to the hospital. Each year women lose their lives in those huts - typically from animal bites or smoke inhalation. Even in urban areas and cities like Kathmandu, women are being discriminated against. There they are also prohibited from temples or other public areas and have to keep away from the kitchen.

In rural districts people live without any easy access to clean water. Therefore the women have to go far and carry water every day. Schools do not provide adequate sanitation for young students. Most of the time girls and boys share the same toilets, and in some rural areas, schools do not have toilets at all. There are no cheap or free sanitary pads available for girls of poor families. They basically use their very old clothes. Girls and women of poor families do not even have access to underwear and live in pitiable conditions. Some local businesses produce reusable pads but only in urban areas, not in the rural parts of the country.

Rural Women's Network Nepal RUWON and health education in Nepal

RUWON dealt with this issue after the horrible earthquake in 2015. At that time, people living in the affected areas lost their homes and the situation became complicated for new mothers, menstruating girls and pregnant women. For that reason, we designed a specific project to support women and girls in the affected area. New mothers did not have clothes to change themselves or the babies. They did not even have a bed to sleep on or food. We provided them with clothes, mats, sanitation kits, nutrition kits etc. Menstruating girls also went through many difficulties with the lack of pads and underwear and no easy access to water to wash themselves and their clothes. We again provided them with underwear, pads and sanitation kits. RUWON was very interested in working together with IAW on the "Water and Pads" project as this is a burning issue in Nepal that needs to be tackled, especially in rural areas where girls face horrible sanitary conditions.

Water and Pads Event on 5 – 6 February 2020

RUWON Nepal could implement this very meaningful and interesting project at Shree Jana Jagriti Secondary School, in the Sindhuli district. The female students who have reached the age of menstruation were provided with an ecological sanitary kit and the educational booklet “ABC’s of being a Girl”. The rest of the students of the school received stationary.

We have provided sanitary kits to 195 girls and school notebooks to all together 470 students of the school. We also distributed the booklets for the girls and boys from grade 8-10, called “Entering Womanhood”.

RUWON also included the boys in the project with the thinking that if the boys will be aware about the girls and women problems it will be helpful to make the change. The boys of the higher grade (grade 8-10) also received the booklets. Because we think if we did inform the boys together with the girls it could be helpful to make more girls and women aware at the boy’s families. They should know that menstruation is just a natural process, and we all should help girls to be neat and clean during the periods. They should be allowed to attend school and get their usual food within their families. One should also prevent them from hard work in the fields.

During two days in the school I have talked with the head of the school, some teachers and the school management committee. According to them after the earthquake in 2015 the school was totally damaged. They had to teach the students outdoors for a few months and later in the TLC (Temporary Learning Center) which was made of bamboos and plastic roofs. In 2019 they got the support from Asian Development Bank and other organization to build the school buildings. But after the heavy damages by the earthquake in 2015 the situation of the parents has not improved. They all hope to get some support for the girl students in the new school year, which begins on 15 April 2020. They still need school bags and stationary.

After seeing this precarious situation with my own eyes I want to ask everybody for support. We are very proud of the meaningful work done for girls and women.