



**Breaking the Bloody Taboo:  
The 28<sup>th</sup> of May is Menstrual Hygiene Day -  
Let's Start the Conversation About Menstruation!**

**April 28, 2014:** On May 28<sup>th</sup> – the first global Menstrual Hygiene Day – more than 90 international and local organisations are coming together to break the silence around menstruation and raise awareness about the fundamental role that menstrual hygiene management (MHM) plays in enabling women and girls to reach their full potential. Bringing to light the ways menstrual hygiene impacts education, health, the economy, the environment and human rights, **Menstrual Hygiene Day advocates for a world in which every woman and girl can manage her menstruation hygienically, in privacy, in safety and with dignity – where ever she is.**

Menstruation is a normal biological process and a key sign of reproductive health, yet in many cultures it is treated as something negative, shameful or dirty. The continued silence around menstruation combined with limited access to information at home and in schools results in millions of women and girls having very little knowledge about what is happening to their bodies when they menstruate and how to deal with it. A study from UNICEF revealed that **1 out of 3 girls in South Asia knew nothing about menstruation prior to getting it while 48% of girls in Iran and 10% of girls in India believe that menstruation is a disease.**<sup>1</sup>

Additionally, a wide range of cultural taboos and social stigmas attached to menstruation impact the lives of women and girls around the world. Many families in rural Nepal observe the tradition of '[chhaupadi](#)' wherein menstruating women and girls are isolated into separate huts or cowsheds. Other restrictions menstruating girls and women face include not being allowed to prepare food, wash their bodies, or enter places of worship.

In addition to persisting taboos, women and girls' capacity to manage their periods is affected by a number of other factors, including **limited access to affordable and hygienic sanitary materials** and **disposal options** leaving many to manage their periods in ineffective, uncomfortable and unhygienic ways. In some contexts, natural materials such as mud, leaves, dung or animal skins are used to manage the menstrual flow.<sup>2</sup> These problems are further exacerbated by **insufficient access to safe and private toilets** and **lack of clean water and soap for personal hygiene**. As one schoolgirl from Bettiah, India explains, *"I hate menstruation because I have to miss my school during those days and I love my school. My school does not have any facilities where I can change and dispose menstrual waste. On those days my mother always forces me to stay at home."* **A study at a school in Uganda found that half of the girl pupils missed 1-3 school days a month, or 8-24 school days a year.**<sup>3</sup>

**Missing school and productive workdays due to menstruation causes poor and marginalised women and girls to miss out on life opportunities.** In one study, 73% of the Bangladeshi garment workers interviewed missed work for an average of 6 days per month (resulting in unpaid work days) due to vaginal infections caused by using extra cloth collected from the factory floors.<sup>4</sup> **The negative impact is not just felt by women and girls, but by economies as a whole.** In Bangladesh, women and girls not being able to manage their menstruation at school and at work causes an estimated loss of \$22 million due to health costs and absenteeism.<sup>5</sup>

*"In 2014, it is completely unacceptable that a normal biological process like menstruation prevents women and girls worldwide from reaching their full potential. It's time to break the silence around menstruation!"* says Ina Jurga, Head of WASH in Schools at WASH United.

Initiated by [WASH United](#), Menstrual Hygiene Day will be celebrated in Berlin, Nairobi, Delhi, Kathmandu and many other locations around the world with exhibitions, film screenings, workshops and gatherings, all aimed at

<sup>1</sup> WaterAid, 2013: Menstrual Hygiene Matters

<sup>2</sup> UNESCO, 2013: Puberty Education and Menstrual Hygiene Management

<sup>3</sup> The Netherlands Development Organization/ IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre, no date: Study on menstrual management in Uganda: Main report on the study results.

<sup>4</sup> HerProject, 2010: Female Factory Workers' Health Needs Assessment, Bangladesh.

<sup>5</sup> World Bank, 2012: Economic Impacts of Sanitation, Bangladesh.

breaking the deafening silence around menstruation. Visit <http://menstrualhygieneday.org/28-may-celebrations/> to learn more about local events. Throughout May, the hashtag **#MenstruationMatters** will be used on social media to educate and to generate awareness about menstruation and menstrual hygiene, featuring a **#PeriodTalk Twitterchat with menstrual hygiene experts on May 20<sup>th</sup> at 10AM EST / 16:00 CET / 20:00 IST.**

Please visit <http://menstrualhygieneday.org> for further information.

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**About the initiator:** [WASH United](#) is a Berlin-based, award-winning international social impact organization that uses the power of sports superstars, interactive games and positive communications to change attitudes and behaviors around sanitation and hygiene at scale.

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