



Global South Coalition
For Dignified Menstruation

REPORT ON



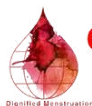
TRAINING OF TRAINERS (TOT) ON DIGNIFIED MENSTRUATION



1ST - 5TH JULY, 2024
COLOMBO, SRI LANKA

Organizers:

Global South Coalition for Dignified Menstruation
The Colombo Plan



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Table Of Contents

Background of the Training for Trainers.....	03
Menstrual Discrimination.....	03
Dignified Menstruation.....	03
Global South Coalition for Dignified Menstruation (GSCDM).....	03
The Colombo Plan.....	04
ToT on Dignified Menstruation.....	05
Objectives of the Training for Trainers.....	05
Methodology.....	05
Day 1: Established the Foundation for Dignified Menstruation.....	06
Day 2: Dignified Menstruation as a Human Right.....	07
Day 3: Expanding the Scope of Dignified Menstruation.....	09
Day 4: Dignified Menstruation is Everyone’s Business.....	11
Day 5: The Way Forward for Dignified Menstruation.....	13
Conclusion.....	14
Reading Materials.....	15
Acknowledgment.....	15



Background of the Training for Trainers

Menstrual Discrimination

Menstrual Discrimination is an umbrella term that includes the taboos, stigma, shyness, abuses, restrictions, violence, and deprivation from resources and services associated with menstruation throughout the life cycle of menstruators (GCSDM, 2019). It is widespread globally, perceived and practiced in various forms, names, and magnitudes. For instance, last year, when we conducted trainings in Sri Lanka and explored various discriminatory menstrual practices with the help of the participants, we got to know over 100 types of such practices. Likewise, a report from Bangladesh revealed that 70% of women take unpaid leave during menstruation due to uncomfortable workplace culture. In Kenya, a 14-year-old girl committed suicide in 2019 due to being teased by her schoolmate while having her first menstruation at school, even though the Kenyan government has been distributing free menstrual pads since 2017. In the UK, according to a report by Plan International (2021), nearly 2 million girls have missed a half-day or a full day of school due to a lack of proper education on menstruation and stigma and shame around menstruation. Thus, menstrual discrimination is very complex, multifaceted, and omnipresent. It is not only a form of gender-based violence but also the cause and effect for many forms of gender-based violence, including child marriage. It is a violation of a series of human rights at once.

Dignified Menstruation

It is a state of being free from any forms of menstrual discrimination throughout the life cycle of a menstruator that includes all spectrums of society, like individual, family, school, community, workplace, and institution, even parliament. It is an innovative and holistic approach. Additionally, it is a transformative, inclusive approach that should be endorsed across all sectors and programmes, including climate justice.

Global South Coalition for Dignified Menstruation (GSCDM)

GSCDM is a global network initiated by the Radha_Paudel Foundation in 2019 in order to change the narratives around menstruation from a five-day occurrence to a life cycle phenomenon and from a hygiene perspective to comprehensive dignified menstruation. It is a survivor-led and Global South-led network. It has been engaging everyone around the globe through its members and chapters. Despite having funding constraints and other challenges, it has been doing research, trainings, webinars, conferences, publications, internships, and so on.

Background of the Training for Trainers

Its second tenure is steered by the people from Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, the USA, and Nepal. It conducted two training workshops and three orientations on dignified menstruation in Sri Lanka, where the local NGOs, Viluthu, Shantimargham, Family Planning Association, and other partners, such as the World Bank Sri Lanka and the French Embassy in Sri Lanka, organized for these events.

The Colombo Plan

The Colombo Plan is an intergovernmental organization that began operation on 1 July 1951. Its membership has expanded significantly over the years to the current 28 governments.

Dignified Menstruation

ToT on Dignified Menstruation

The visible and invisible forms of menstrual discrimination and its primary role in constructing and shaping power and patriarchy have been overlooked for decades. Despite having huge institutions and ample policies on gender equality and social inclusion, we, global actors, fail to acknowledge the role of menstrual discrimination in the construction of power relationships and patriarchy and its socialization since childhood. The global gender equality and social inclusion policies do not address the discrimination related to menstruation and menopause at home, school, community, and workplace, including parliament. Thus, the acknowledgment of the urgency of dignified menstruation has been missing throughout the course of human rights and development for decades. In this given context, The Colombo Plan sets an example by hosting a weeklong training program and allowing us to unveil two books on dignified menstruation.

Objectives of the Training for Trainers

The main goal of this ToT is to make a global call for urgency for dialogue on dignified menstruation through the following specific objectives;

- To build capacity of NGO leaders/academia on dignified menstruation so that they can act at the global level,
- To expand the network for global movement on dignified menstruation,
- To create better awareness and call for urgency through various like-minded organizations,
- To make the movement robust on dignified menstruation,
- To collaborate with the government agencies to formulate required laws and policies for dignified menstruation.

Methodology

This training was based on the principles of emotional intelligence, Miteri (the mutual love and respect beyond marriage and blood because we are all born not by choice and we are all human), and transformational approach. It had sets of intensive individual and small group activities at various levels to challenge our own selves at first to unveil the menstrual discrimination and address accordingly. The guided meditation, games, songs, poems, storytelling, small and big group works, brainstorming, lecture, presentation, question answering, and mini training (almost all participants presented various themes) are used as methodological activities. Often participants worked at regional, national, and individual levels and challenged their menstrual perceptions and practices by using the human rights lens called dignified menstruation. The entire training was designed, led, and facilitated by Dr. Radha Paudel, the person who coined the approach of dignified menstruation first ever globally. Likewise, Sapana Poudel, Lal Sharan Chalaune, Gobinda Bahadur Khadka, and Samir Pariyar, co-facilitated various sessions. The training was formally inaugurated and concluded by the Columbo Plan's Chief of Finance, Ms. Merlyn Francisco, and Secretary General, Dr. Benjamin Reyes, respectively.



🌀 ToT on Dignified Menstruation, Colombo Sri Lanka

The training started at 8.30 in the morning and closed at 5.00 in the evening every day. In the evening of the fourth day, the participants witnessed the 73rd anniversary of the Colombo Plan, where two books—Training Manual on Dignified Menstruation and Menstrual Stories from the Global South, Menstrual Anthology—launched. Dr. Radha Paudel delivered her speech by appealing for endorsing dignified menstruation as a cross-cutting theme after the welcome speech of the Secretary-General Dr. Benjamin Reyes. This report is a summary only because most of the materials are available on the website of Dignified Menstruation, training manuals, and other reading materials (Dignified Menstruation is Everyone's Business, Dignified Menstruation to Neurodevelopmental Disorders, Unholy Blood, Menstrual Stories from the Global South, Dignified Menstruation: A Practical Handbook).

Day 1: Established the Foundation for Dignified Menstruation

A week-long Training of Trainers programme on dignified menstruation was formally inaugurated by Ms. Merlyn Franciso, Chief of Finance of The Colombo Plan. After welcoming the 24 participants, comprising of academia and civil society from four different continents, an introduction with objectives and required logistics was presented to set the stage for the event.

The initial session involved mapping exercises that illustrated the diverse menstrual perceptions and practices at individual, regional, national, and global levels through various individual-to-group exercises, e.g., the "Menstrual River" activity, to visually represent these practices and associated feelings, which underscored the varying degrees of menstrual discrimination as experienced and observed by the participants. The participants mentioned both positive feelings such as curiosity, interest, and the urge to share with others the experience of menarche in the family and negative ones such as feeling left alone, silence, stigma, and distress. The individual stories shared by each participant resonated with the audience, highlighting the importance of personal narratives in understanding and addressing menstrual discrimination.



An additional mapping exercise reflected a deeper understanding of how systemic menstrual discrimination pervades schools, communities, and workplaces, significantly impacting the lives of menstruators.

🌀 ToT on Dignified Menstruation, Colombo Sri Lanka

Throughout the first day, a lot of personal stories of menstruation were shared, providing vivid illustrations of the ubiquitous influence of patriarchal norms associated with menstrual discrimination. These stories not only highlighted the challenges faced by menstruators but also the resilience and creativity used in overcoming them. Additionally, the day focused on defining key terminologies related to menstruation including menstrual products, menopause, menstrual health, menstrual hygiene, menstrual discrimination, and dignified menstruation. This foundational understanding was crucial for more detailed discussions to follow, setting a collaborative and reflective tone for the subsequent days.

Day 2: Dignified Menstruation as a Human Right

The participants delved into the deeper implications of menstrual discrimination on day two. The day began with a recap of the first day. The first session analyzed the power dynamics associated with menstruation, revealing how various social constructs shape menstrual practices more than natural phenomena at the very early stages of both menstruators' and non-menstruators' lives. Participants were encouraged to deconstruct these norms and redefine dignified practices for themselves, fostering a critical understanding of the issue.

The most significant revelation during this day was the identification of menstrual discrimination as a form of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). This session was eye-opening moment for many participants, as they realized that many commonly accepted menstrual practices fall under the United Nations' definition of SGBV. The discussions underscored the need for developing legal frameworks to address menstrual discrimination as a form of violence against women and girls.



The link between menstrual discrimination and child marriage was also explored, illustrating how patriarchal norms perpetuate the practices. Also discussed on the day was why menstrual discrimination should be discussed as a harmful traditional practice. Menstruation is often associated with a significant stress on menstruators, and thus it contributes to disrupting their education significantly, which is one of the key drivers of child marriage. Menstrual stress leads to absenteeism, lack of concentration, and noticeable school dropout, as households may deem school pointless due to these issues.

🌀 ToT on Dignified Menstruation, Colombo Sri Lanka

Menstruators often face challenges like waking up early for washing, sleep disturbances from sleeping in unsafe places, irregular meals, limited access to drinking water and food, poor access to menstrual products and facilities, and constant fear of leaking blood, all contributing to lower educational outcomes and increasing the odds for child marriage. Thus, there is an urgent need for interventions that address the root causes of menstrual discrimination.

Further discussions emphasized the human rights aspect of menstrual discrimination, advocating the need for policies that protect and promote dignified menstruation. While neither the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Human Rights Declaration from 1948, the UN CEDAW, nor the Convention of Child Rights make direct reference to dignified menstruation or menstrual discrimination, these declarations mention various fundamental rights that make menstrual discrimination unlawful, such as the right to worship and observance of rituals, the right to education, the safeguarding of reproductive organs, as well as access to health.

Participants explored provisions of constitutional rights in their home countries' constitutions that conflict with menstrual practices. While only the Nepalese and Indian constitutions seem to make direct reference to menstrual discrimination, most other constitutions have paragraphs that guarantee fundamental rights associated with dignified menstruation, such as the right to live in dignity, access to health, equality, and freedom from discrimination. One participant from highlighted the issue of conflicting customary laws and national laws.

The day concluded with a session on menstrual products and the 3P approach, focusing on Person, Planet and Pocket. The approach highlights freedom of choice of products, the importance of considering the environment as well as accessibility and affordability, and advocating for policies that ensure human rights for all menstruators.

🌀 ToT on Dignified Menstruation, Colombo Sri Lanka

Day 3: Expanding the Scope of Dignified Menstruation

The third day expanded the conversation to environmental and social contexts. Starting with a recap of the discussions on power and patriarchy, participants explored the complex link between climate change and dignified menstruation. The heightened sensitivity for topics of climate change leads to an increasingly narrow focus on the environmental impact of menstrual products, which further constrains menstruators in opting for their product of choice appropriate to their financial means and infringing on their right to live with dignified menstrual practices.



Furthermore, this approach ignores the additional burden placed on menstruators as a consequence of climate change, such as being blamed for water shortages, having to walk long distances to fetch water, and being exposed to higher levels of sexual violence. Dignified menstruation is a concept that directly addresses the underlying systemic discrimination of menstruators and advocates for Climate Justice.

The impact of disasters and pandemics such as Covid-19 on menstrual dignity was also examined. Participants discussed the challenges faced by menstruators during crises, emphasizing the need for emergency responses that include dignified menstrual management options that go beyond simple product provision. This session underscored the importance of considering menstrual dignity in disaster preparedness and response plans, ensuring that menstruators are not left behind during emergencies.

One of the most significant proposals discussed was the recognition of December 8th as Dignified Menstruation Day, celebrated by GSCDM since 2019. This proposal aimed at raising awareness and promoting global advocacy for dignified menstruation on a separate day. Dignified Menstruation Day has been celebrated as part of the 16 days of activism against Gender Based Violence (GBV) during the Human Rights month of December. Participants discussed strategies for mobilizing support and creating impactful campaigns around dignified menstruation.

ToT on Dignified Menstruation, Colombo Sri Lanka

Another session addressed the often-overlooked issue of menopause in a talk by UK-based author and menopause expert Diane Danzebrink. A life-cycle approach to dignified menstruation needs to include dignified ways of living menopause and to advocate for dignified treatment and support for menopausal women. This crucially includes investment in research as well as training of medical and mental health practitioners. Next, discussions on creating menstruation-friendly schools highlighted the importance of supportive environments for students' menstrual health and dignity. Ms. Usha Paudel shared her experience of implementing dignified menstruation at a public secondary school in Chitwan, Nepal and how to overcome initial parental scepticism. Finally, the inclusion of LGBTQIA++ individuals in menstrual discourse was emphasized, advocating for policies that address their unique needs. A representative, Puja Bisunkhe, from LGBTQIA++ community emphasized the often-neglected challenges that menstruating trans men have been facing with, such as the impact of hormonal therapy on their menstrual cycle as well as diverse mental health issues, highlighting the need for inclusive menstrual practices and education across all sectors of society.

Dignified Menstruation



Day 4: Dignified Menstruation is Everyone's Business

We focused the fourth day on inclusive approaches to dignified menstruation. The first session linked dignified menstruation to sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) and HIV. The participants involved in the role-playing activities that helped participants understand the challenges faced by menstruators in accessing SRHR services despite having facilities for SRHR in place.

The unique challenges faced by menstruators with disabilities were also discussed. Participants talked about the barriers to accessing menstrual dignity services, including products, infrastructure, and care for people with disabilities, and advocated for inclusive and accessible services. While this poses a particular challenge in low-income contexts, participants shared encouraging and creative examples of dignified menstrual experiences in environments with poor funding opportunities.

The following session emphasized the role of non-menstruators, in particular men and boys, as allies in the fight against menstrual discrimination. Engaging non-menstruators in advocating for dignified menstruation was seen as crucial for breaking down patriarchal norms and promoting gender equality. Samir Pariyar shared a real case with various activities that non-menstruators can initiate to promote equal power relationships, such as celebrating menarche, forming menstruator-friendly sports teams, engaging religious leaders to challenge stigmas and promote positive narratives around menstruation, using the correct terminology, as well as advocacy using social networks.

The media's role in shaping public perceptions of menstruation was examined. Discussions highlighted the media's role in reinforcing menstrual stigma and shaping menstrual discourse but also highlighted its potential role to challenge stereotypes and promote positive and accurate representations of menstrual health. Reporting of menstrual discrimination in Nepal that often comes with sensationalist headlines and product advertisements portraying menstruation as a vilified process in need of being managed highlight the need for more balanced and informative narratives. They highlighted recent successful media initiatives such as the movies "Padman" and "Period. End of Sentence." The participants also delved into Nepal's experience with media engagement in advocating for dignified menstruation for the last three years, such as radio jingles, radio and television serials, print media, as well as policy dialogues with policymakers covered in the media to promote dignified menstruation.

🌀 ToT on Dignified Menstruation, Colombo Sri Lanka

And even a portion of the session was spent to discuss the GSCDM's emphasis on the potential of digital platforms and social media in promoting dignified menstruation, including strategies for effective online campaigns, such as using hashtags, crowd funding, and creating engaging content to raise awareness and advocate for policy changes. In addition, WhatsApp groups, webinars, and newsletters are effective means to network and spread information about dignified menstruation.

The day concluded with the annual celebration of the Colombo Plan that marked its 73rd anniversary in the presence of 25 ambassadors and the workshop participants. Dr. Benjamin P. Reyes expressed his opinion with celebratory words, and Dr. Radha Paudel delivered a passionate speech highlighting the urge to incorporate Dignified Menstruation in global policymaking. GSCDM's "Training Manual on Dignified Menstruation" and Menstrual Stories from the Global South and Menstrual Anthology were also officially launched



Dignified Menstruation

Day 5: The Way Forward for Dignified Menstruation

The final day focused on the ways forward and how to include dignified menstruation in current and future programming and policymaking. Lead Facilitator explained the 3E (Educate, Empower, Emancipate) model for running effective dignified menstruation campaigns, including offering people a choice to adopt Dignified Menstruation in their own way. The Bee Approach was suggested to ensure the presence of new narratives across different community subgroups, including the individuals, the family, school, community, and the political level, emphasizing the importance of local engagement and sustained efforts to avoid backlash and achieve sustainable behavioural change. The lead facilitator emphasized the need to be patient, particularly when working with faith healers and religious leaders, as negotiating a new social norm takes time.

The importance of monitoring and evaluating dignified menstruation initiatives was emphasized, advocating for evidence-based approaches to policy and programme development. The concept of Theory of change that helps to develop project-specific indicators to measure and compare the success of different interventions was explained, and the importance of innovative ways to properly measure indicators on sensitive topics as well as the need for qualitative research was underscored. The participants were encouraged to reach out to research institutes and universities to collaborate on rigorous impact evaluations and contribute to the body of evidence on menstrual management.

Participants then developed action plans at individual, family, organizational, and programme levels, focusing on spreading awareness, incorporating dignified menstruation agendas, improving access to menstrual products, and advocating for policy changes to outline specific steps that they would take to promote menstrual dignity in their respective contexts. Some examples brought forward included conversations with family members, school interventions, community-level organisations, and collaborations with governments, universities, and other stakeholders.

Finally, a post-test assessed participants' learning on the concept of dignified menstruation. The workshop concluded with a certification ceremony and remarks from the Colombo Plan, encouraging participants to continue advocating for dignified menstruation in their respective spheres of influence.



Conclusion

The International ToT on Dignified Menstruation in Colombo was a landmark event that brought together diverse voices to address menstrual discrimination. The workshop provided a comprehensive platform for participants to share experiences, learn from each other, and develop strategies for promoting dignified menstruation. For donors, supporting initiatives like these is crucial for promoting equality and just society.

The insights and action plans developed during this workshop provide a roadmap for impactful change, ensuring that menstruation is treated with the dignity and respect it deserves. The collaborative efforts and diverse perspectives shared during the workshop underscore the need for continued advocacy and action to promote dignified menstruation worldwide.

This summary captures the essence of the workshop, emphasizing its importance and appeal to donors who are committed to advancing gender equality and promoting menstrual dignity globally. The commitment to addressing menstrual discrimination as a form of SGBV, the focus on inclusive approaches, and the recognition of climate justice within the menstrual discourse highlight the multifaceted nature of dignified menstruation. Supporting such initiatives can lead to significant progress in promoting menstrual dignity and gender equality, making a tangible difference in the lives of menstruators and non-menstruators worldwide.

Dignified Menstruation



Additional Reading Materials

1. Menstrual Stories from Global South, Menstrual Anthology, 2024
2. Training Manual on Dignified Menstruation, 2023
3. Unholy Blood, 2022
4. Dignified Menstruation for Adolescent Girls with Neuro-Developmental Disorders, 2021
5. Dignified Menstruation, A Practical Handbook 2020
6. Dignified Menstruation is Everyone's Business, 2019

Acknowledgment

The GSCDM secretariat expresses its deepest and sincere thanks and gratitude to the Colombo Plan team, especially to Dr. Benjamin Reyes for adopting Dignified Menstruation as a signature program. This training is a historical milestone in the course of the global menstrual movement and human rights. Likewise, the thanks go to Merlyn Francisco, Chief of Finance, and the entire team of the Colombo Plan for their unwavering support since conceptualization of this training program. The GSCDM is also thankful to all participants for their active and productive engagement throughout the training.

Dignified Menstruation





Dignified Menstruation

- The liquid drop becomes the earth with the lines of latitudes and longitudes.
- The earth is painted more than 50% to signify the symbolic representation of more than half of the people who are menstruators (born with uterus and ovaries).
- The painting is colorful, which symbolises the menstrual blood from the beginning to the average days of the menstrual period.
- Menstrual blood makes it possible for this planet to exist and keeps us moving forward with the birth of non-menstruators.
- Therefore, dignified menstruation is the responsibility of all of us.



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