

Report of Virtual Conference on DIGNIFIED MENSTRUATION Amid COVID-19, Pandemic

Organized by



Global South Coalition

For Dignified Menstruation



Government of Nepal
Ministry of Women,
Children and Senior Citizen

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Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizen

Menstruation is a biological process. However, it has always been surrounded by taboos and myths that exclude women from many aspects of socio-cultural life. In Nepal, the topic has been a taboo, impacting women and girls' in the psychological, social and physical level. Unfortunately, many girls and women are subject to restrictions in their daily lives simply because they are menstruating.

As soon as I was appointed as the Minister of Women, Children and Senior Citizen, I noticed that Nepal was “branded” as a country of menstrual sheds. This was particularly done by global news media following the incidents of death in menstrual sheds. I was determined to change this negative portrayal of Nepal and more importantly was committed to ensuring each woman and girls can lead a dignified life while menstruating or not.

When I met Radha Paudel, I was impressed by her passion and vision on the concept of “Dignified Menstruation”. After the meeting, I was convinced that Nepal can lead the way and bring various stakeholders in ending all the taboos associated with menstruation. Following the meeting, Ministry also organised an interaction program where I announced to make Nepal free from menstrual huts and a country of Dignified Menstruation. I think not a single woman/girl should be banished from their own house because of the menstruation. Importantly, “menstrual sheds” on people’s mind should be dismantled by ensuring dignity to each menstruator. Dignity during menstruation is larger than the issue of menstrual hygiene and dismantling of menstrual sheds. It is important to understand the issue of menstruation in relation to human rights.

I strongly feel that campaign on Dignified Menstruation should be amplified and incorporated in every household and organisations. As the minister of women, I am committed to ending all forms of discriminations including ill-practises and taboos associated with menstruation.

I am glad to share that our International Conference of Dignified Menstruation was successful in addressing the gaps around the issue of menstruation. I would like to thank the National Human Rights Commission and Global South Coalition for Dignified Menstruation for the collaboration on organising this event.

I would like to congratulate friends from Indonesia, Sri-Lanka, Uganda, UK, USA for endorsing the DM at their respective programs and countries. I also thank all the stakeholders and particularly GSDM and Radha Paudel for this collaboration with the Ministry. We have just started our journey of DM and I would like to request everyone to join us on this journey.



Parbat Gurung
Minister
Women, Children and Senior Citizen

Founder, Global South Coalition for Dignified Menstruation

It was immense pleasure to co-host the ever first international conference (virtual) on DM amid COVID-19, Pandemic along with government of Nepal, Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizen, Kathmandu Nepal. Albeit, the original plan of three days International Workshop, May 26-28, 2020 for same was postponed due to flare-up of Novel Corona Virus.

Personally, it was bit emotional moment in my life from the moment of leaving home for committing suicide at the age of nine and leaving home for five days during first menstruation due to terrified from menstrual discrimination that I learned from my late mother, three sisters and neighbourhood. The pain I experienced, cultivate the passion within myself and provoke me to take all risks and challenges for the sake of dignity during menstruation. Eventually, I dedicated my life by quitting all my luxuries since 2009. It was tough choice but no way to the person like me who is coming from ground and represent them at each breath or pulse. As changes the scope of campaign, the trends of risks and challenges are mounting every day and put me intense suffocation and frustration. Contrary to rural, uneducated people, I am over the time bomb among educated people and organizations at capital city. Even today, I have very little friends and organizations who are standing for cause; dignified menstruation. In this connection, I am so fortunate and humbled to have Hon. Minister Mr. Parbat Gurung who dare to lead the dignified menstruation as an ally.

Whether people acknowledge or not, December 8, 2019 was a significant day for activism of menstruation, feminism, human right and development where Hon. Minister announced for menstrual huts free country and endorsed a December 8, as DM day as a day of 16 days activism in Nepal and beyond. DM is very powerful and holistic approach to shift the thoughts, and practices around menstruation, peace, empowerment, human right and SDGs. Personally, it is already 40 years of campaign and for my nation, it's just begun. However, it is tool to save girls, women, transmen, and queer from the abuses, discrimination, and violence from menstrual practices.

Here, I extend my sincere thanks and gratitude to Ministry's team specially Hon. Minister Parbat Gurung, Manamaya Pangei Bhatrai, Dr Samiksha Koirala, Lenin Banjade for their tireless work and unconditionally trusting for cause. Likewise, I am indebted with the individuals, steering committee members, organizations, volunteers, friends from across the globe. I also humbled with media who are advocating the dignified menstruation. At last but not least, I blessed and proud to have Archana Patkar, India and Anupa Regmi, Founder of Radha Paudel Foundation for her courage to stand along with me by quitting all her luxuries.

I strongly believe that each menstruator deserved dignity during menstruation today and for ever. I am with them till my last breath.

Radha Paudel,
Founder, Global South Coalition for Dignified Menstruation



Dignified Menstruation

I. Background:

The Global South Coalition for Dignified Menstruation (GSCDM) is a global coalition, based on Kathmandu, Nepal as a wing of Radha Paudel Foundation. It is formed and operated to transform the global community through changing the narratives on menstruation from impurity to purity, from hygiene to dignity and from five days bleeding to life cycle approach. It is steered of five members represented from Indonesia, Uganda, PNG, USA, Nepal and members across the globe. For details: <https://dignifiedmenstruation.org/>.

GSCDM defined the Dignified Menstruation (DM). Menstruation is not simply the average five days of bleeding or approximately seven years of bleeding. It is also not only one's reproductive years; it is the whole experience of human life. Simple definition for daily business is a 'state of free from any forms of abuse, discrimination, violence associated with menstruation'. There is no difference between 25 days and five days in terms of discrimination. Further, in deeper level, dignified menstruation means three 'P'; Principally, Practically and Psychologically.

1. Principally: As Human Right Declaration proclaimed, menstruation as an inherent, inevitable feature of human civilization. Thus, each menstruator deserves dignity during menstruation. Menstruation is no longer women's private business. It should consider through the human right lenses in alignment with national and international human right instruments.

2. Practically: Menstruation is not only 60 ml or five days bleeding. It is complex and multifaceted phenomena. This it has to consider as holistic approach. Due to practices during menstruation, menstruators are experiencing series consequences at immediate and long term at various aspects of the lives of them. Therefore, dignified menstruation should consider in two ways as follows:

- **Womb to tomb or life cycle approach:** While working around menstruation, developmental stages from pre-puberty to menopause should be considered into account. In some cultures, the discrimination goes even after death. The death rituals are different for women due to consideration of impure or inferior.

- **Sectoral Integration:** By considering the impacts of menstrual practice throughout the lives of menstruators, the sectors the following sectors Water, Sanitation, Hygiene, Education, Health, Environment, Human Right and Empowerment should consider simultaneously. Picking up one issue is untouched the issue of menstruation.
- **3. Psychologically:** Menstrual practices plays vital role for power construction among boys and girls since childhood. Between the age of 6-12 years, boys learned some practices around menstruation. Reconstruct the power Since childhood/home

In partnership with GSCDM, National Human Right Commission, the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizen (MoWCSC) take the leadership on dignified menstruation

by endorsing the December 8, Dignified Menstruation day as a day for 16 days activism, 2019. To further implement and push practices in favor of Dignified Menstruation, 8850 menstrual huts were demolished in some parts of west Nepal and the promotion of Dignified Menstruation was implemented in: Doti, Nepal (January 18, 2020), Mangalsen Achham, Nepal (January 19, 2020), Dullu, Nepal and the Narayan Municipality (January 20, 2020), Surkhet, Nepal (January 21, 2020). The ministry also planned the first global International Workshop on Dignified Menstruation for May 26-28, 2020 at Kathmandu, followed by a Press Conference (February 23, 2020). Unfortunately, the international conference postponed till further notice due to COVID-19, Pandemic. Therefore, as well as a webinar on Dignified menstruation amid the COVID-19 Pandemic. In this connection, MoWCSC organized an



Figure 1: Team of Ministry

international virtual conference in May 26, 2020.

2. Objectives

- To discuss the various aspects of the menstruation towards dignity
- To examine the impact of COVID-19, Pandemic on dignified menstruation
- To explore the strategies to ensure dignified menstruation

3. Methodology:

On May 26th, 2020 11:00 AM (GMT+5:45) the MoWCSCs launched the webinar through the Zoom App accessible to anyone. Approximately 400 people attended from 20 different countries across the globe including (but not limited to): Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, France, Germany, Indonesia, Nepal, Philippines, Sri-Lanka, UK and the US. The program was moderated by Dr. Samiksha Koirala, Advisor to MoWCSC who also presented the opening statement and welcomed by Ms. Manamaya Pangeni Bhattarai, Joint Secretary of Ministry. Ms. Archana Patkar- gender expert, Ms. Radha Paudel-Pioneer on Dignified Menstruation highlighted the practices and urgency of dignified menstruation amid COVID-19, Pandemic. Honourable parliamentarians from federal and provincial governments, media activists, representative of MHM Partner alliance were presented briefly (please see the annex for details). Vice Chair, CEDAW Committee Ms. Banadana Rana delivered her remarks from the lenses of CEDAW. Hon. Chair, Anupa Raj Sharma Highlighted the

relevancy of dignified menstruation for promotion of human right. The vote of thanks delivered by Ms. Yamkumari Khatiwada, Secretary and concluding remarks delivered by Hon. Minister, Mr. Parbat Gurung, MoWCSC. The conference adopted the call for joint action amid COVID-19, Pandemic and press release.

4. Main Highlights of the Conference

Conference examined the impacts, policies, and practices till the peak time of Novel Corona Virus. The overarching discussions articulated in following points. The two hours conference informatively investigated the impact of the lack of dignity in regards to menstruation and how to approach the issue during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

4.1. Menstrual Practice in Nepali Context:

4.1.1. Dignified Menstruation in Madhesi Community, Nepal:

Hon. parliamentarian, Province 2, Ms. Manju Yadav spoke in this regard. In contrary to many scholars claimed, Ms. Yadav highlighted the invisible forms of abuses, stigma, discrimination and restrictions in Madhesh. During menstruation, girls and women are following many restrictions related with touch, food and mobility such as not allow to cook, not allow to do any religious activities, not allow to participate in cultural activities, washing and drying cloth secretly. For long time, Madhesh community do not realize that the menstruation

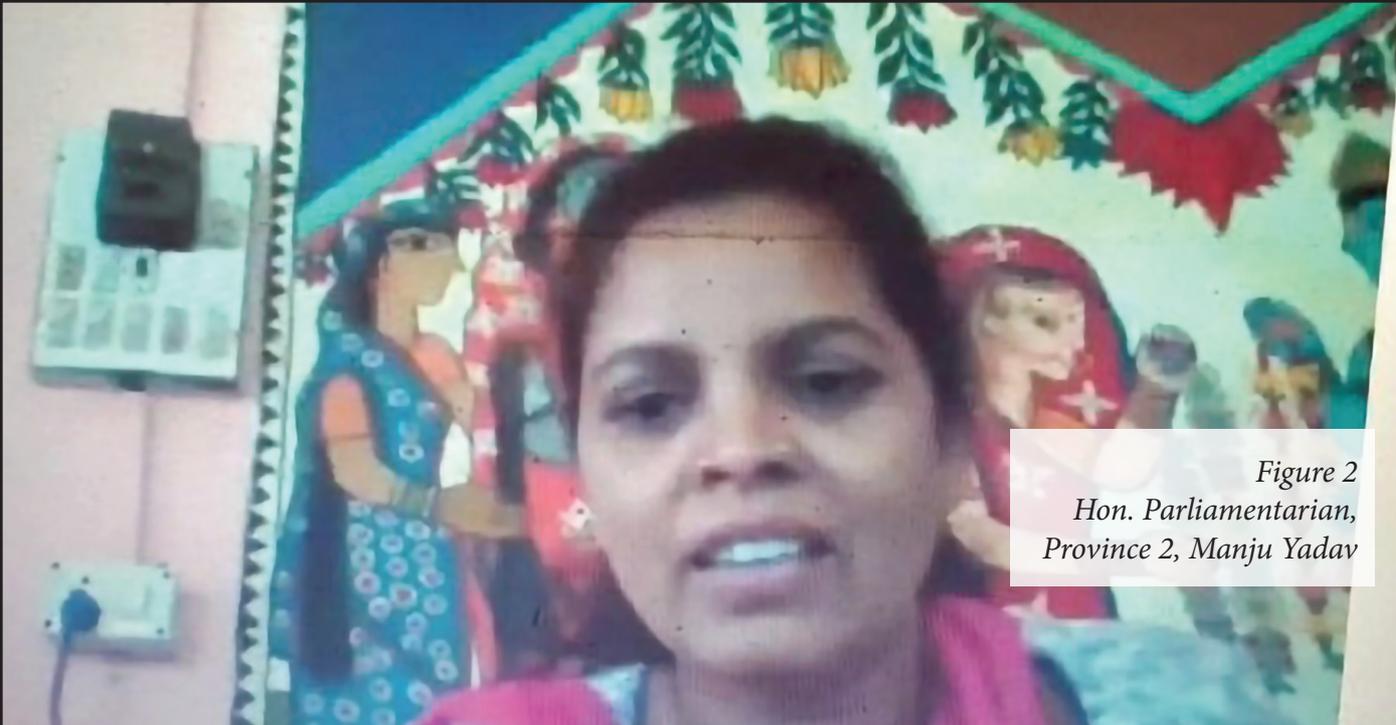


Figure 2
Hon. Parliamentarian,
Province 2, Manju Yadav

practice is issue for violation of human right and occurring gender-based violence. Madhesi community always reported that the witchcraft, dowry, child marriage, rape, girls school absenteeism, poverty etc are only the violence. Indeed, menstrual practices constructed the power within person and played for occurring the violence, she said. Further, she added, Madhesh deprived from having programs on promotion of dignified menstruation from government. She requested Ministry to launch the activities and resources towards Madhesh specially on research, awareness raising, production of bio-degradable sanitary pads and economic empowerment. They are dyer need for it and deserved as well.

4.1.2. Dignified Menstruation and Media

Mr. Mahesh Nepali, media activist was highlighted the situation of menstruation in media from the perspective of journalism, from west Nepal along with the mixture of caste and gender. He expressed his frustration of discrimination done by government and stakeholder because the restrictions during menstruation

is happening not only in west Nepal. The role of media is to transform the society and working in Nepal for last 133 years. However, the space for dignified menstruation is merely absence, Mahesh said. About a decade ago, when the media reported the death cases in menstrual hut, the issue of menstruation was appearing



Figure 3: Participants of conference

in national media and diluted after couple of days. The total 18 girls and women have already lost their live over a decade course. Menstruation is a natural process but it is associated with religion or god thus, should engage the

faith healers in campaign of dignified menstruation. The media should consider: demystifying the rumours around menstruation, advocate for dignified menstruation including the mental health and hygiene, he concluded.

4.1.3. Menstrual Practice and National Policies

Nepalese constitution is one of the gender responsive constitution. The ten fundamental rights are directly assured the dignity during menstruation. Regrettably, these rights such as right to dignity, education, health, untouchability, shelter, women right etc. are violated during menstruation. There is huge gap in understanding and practice of constitution during menstruation.

Likewise, the Domestic Violence Act 2009 defined the any form of physical, mental, sexual and economic harm considered as violence. None of national interventions are considered the dozens of physical, mental, sexual and economic harms caused by menstrual practice. Menstruation is still bypassed and neglected in course of 25 years of foundation of Ministry of Women and 20 years course of National Women Commission. In this connection, the distribution of free sanitary pad, clean shed and dismantle of shed are important elements for the dignified menstruation but not guarantee the dignity before having menstruation and after. In other words, these approaches reinforce the ideas of menstrual blood is dirty and shame

so need to hide in positive negative manner.

4.2. Menstrual Practices at Global Context

4.2.1. Stigma, Taboo and Restrictions during menstruation

Menstruation has been defined as something “impure” in all the major religions like Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity. Therefore, there are number of religious restrictions.

Likewise, scholars claimed that menstruation is practicing in west Nepal due to poor, uneducated and rural status. It is also myth and judgmental projection. Regardless of class, caste, education, religion and region, stigma, taboo and restrictions are prevailed not only in global south but also practicing in global north. The differences are names, forms, severity and visibility. For instance, in Australia, the menstruation has considered tabooer than sex, STD's and mental health where 3 out of 4 girls believed on menstrual stigma. The deeper level of stigma, taboos are known through the use of blue liquid while advertising the menstrual pads. The vocabularies such as `whisper', `sanitary products' or `Feminine Hygiene Products' for the menstrual products showed the deeper level silence and stigma around menstruation. However, it is pretended that there is no any problem in public life.

4.2.2. Menstruation and its impact:

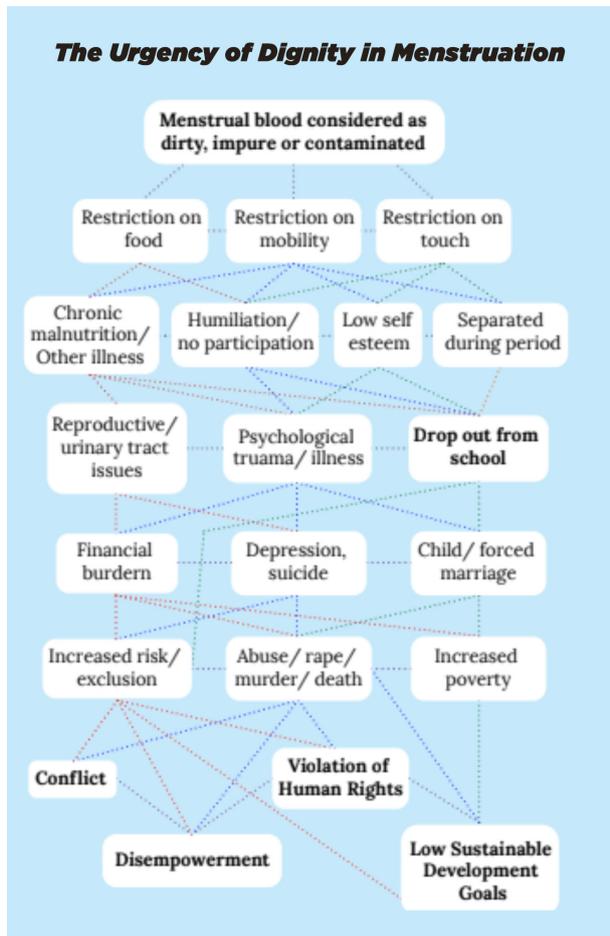


Figure 5: Impact of Menstrual Practice

Menstruators are experiencing the negative consequences at all aspects of their lives throughout the life cycle and even after death in some cultures. Menstrual practice is very complex and multifaceted phenomena. However, it is not examined well till now. For instance, the child or early marriage is one of the hindering factors for the education, reproductive health and economic empowerment at long run. Globally, the connection merely examined between child marriage and menstrual practices. Without having dialogue on dignified menstruation, the elimination of child marriage almost impossible. Because of the

series of practices even before having menstruation, specially girls considered them as an impure, powerless, disadvantaged and remained as silence whatever she experienced within her body and outside. Eventually, she trapped on child or early or voluntary marriage and other forms of abuses and violence.

Likewise, the menstrual practices hindering the women's health and dignity. Due to menstrual perception and practices, menstruators are experiencing several conditions related to mental, physical and social health as defined by WHO (World Health Organization) in 1948. Unfortunately, globally, few concerns such as abuse, rape, unemployment, school dropped out etc. are trying to address without understanding and addressing the underlying causes of poor health status of menstruators.

Globally, thousands of millions of dollars spent, decades of time, for peace, empowerment, human rights and now for SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals). These concepts and practices are floating over the sky instead of changing the lives of women and marginalized communities. Without having dialogue on dignified menstruation, these overarching goals won't be possible means repeating the same mistake and compromising the needs of future generations at the name of them.

4.2.3. Menstruation and Global Policies

The WHO has been working for 72 years and Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) become one of the key elements of intervention since the ICPD (International Conference on

Population and Development) 1994. In such course, it's never discussed the menstruation explicit form. In a way that the menstruation is everywhere while talking the SRHR but there is no room for dialogue. There is just assumption of discussion of menstruation while talking about the adolescent health. The menstruation is life cycle concern and without having explicit dialogue on dignified menstruation, women can not talk about either breast cancer or family planning. The menstruation is an entry point for SRHR. Sadly, it remained as nowhere and everywhere.

Likewise, the global community has come up with CEDAW (Convention of Elimination All Forms of Discrimination against Girls and Women) 42 years ago as first and strong human right instrument for women's right. The article 1 (Discrimination) does not considered the discrimination, abuses and violence that occurred from menstrual practices globally. The reports and discussions of CEDAW discussed the menstruation is under the harmful traditional practices (Article five, Sex Roles and Stereotyping) likesuch as FGM (Female Genital Mutation), Child Marriage, Chhaupadi....It is very wrong analysis for last 42 years indeed. Here the global community fails to analysis the scope of menstruation and cause-effect relationship between the menstrual practice and other traditional harmful practices. Indeed, the menstrual practice is cause and effect for child marriage. It should not discuss like this. In 2017, Radha Paudel Foundation started the petition to Chair of CEDAW committee for discussing the menstruation as an independent

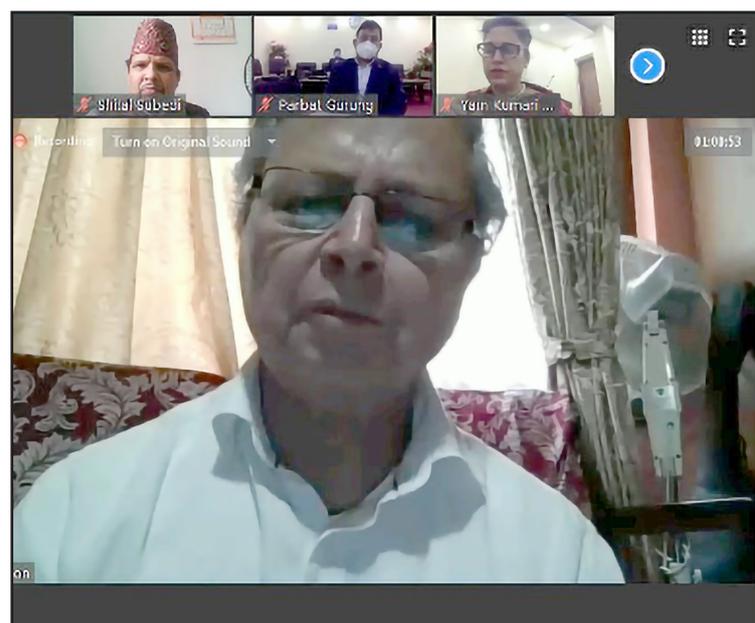


Figure 6: Hon. Chair, Anup Raj Sharma, National Human Right Commission

concern not under traditional harmful practice.

Similarly, the UN's definition on Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) is also incompatibility with the practices around menstrual practices. UN defined the SGBV, 'any act that is perpetrated against a person's will and is based on gender norms and unequal power relationships' but not considered the abuses, discrimination, violence due to menstrual practice. Thus, it concluded that the data of SGBV also not correct globally because entire globe or half of the planet is suffering from menstruation in a way and the other round.

The UNSCR (United Nations for Security Council Resolution)1325 has been its 20 years journey already. It also incompatible with the needs and consequences of menstrual practices globally. The kitchen or dinning table is the primary unit of parliament or peace talk dialogue. In many cultures (Japan, Nepal, Burundi, Egypt

etc), menstruators deprived from participation during menstruation. Likewise, many cultures exclude menstruators to participate any cultural gatherings.

4.2.4. Menstruation Activism

Globally, the menstruation is remained with deep silence and ignorance except academia. The word of menstrual rights is more common there. The concept of Menstrual Health Management is used since 2012 (UNICEF and WHO), Menstrual Hygiene Management is used since 2014 (UNESCO 2014). The dignified menstruation is initiated by Nepal government since 2017. The policy drafted and has been using since then. However, the majority of organizations who are visibly working on menstruation, they focused on more hygiene and those who are working on peace, human right, SGBV, empowerment and SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) are yet to incorporate in to their programming.

Recently, the movie and documentaries are made and awarded at global level. It is really good steps for creating the space for menstruation by breaking the silence around it. But we all need to see its essence regards to dignity. In other words, these documentaries and awards are also more directed towards hygiene instead of dignity. The pads are not ensuring the dignity as always.

4.2.5. Mainstreaming of Dignified Menstruation

Mainstreaming of Dignified Menstruation is very crucial and

Menstrual Restriction: Shouldn't Discuss Under Traditional Harmful Practice in CEDAW.

2,730 have signed. Let's get to 5,000!

Adriana Monteiro signed this petition

Radha Paudel Foundation started this petition to Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Palais Wilson 52 rue des P Dalia Leinarte.

Madam Chair,

This petition asks you to take immediate action to discuss menstrual restriction as an independent article instead of under harmful traditional practices by your committee.

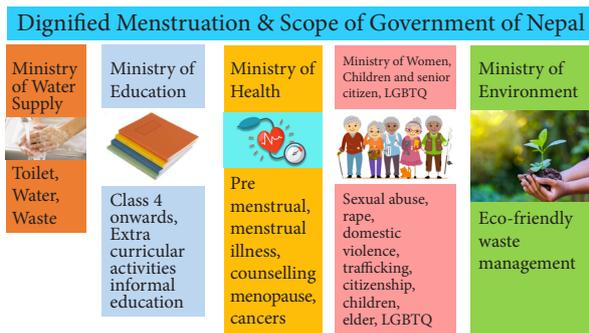
First, I would like to congratulate for all

Share this petition

Figure 7 Petition to Chair, CEDAW Committee

important for preventing SGBV, improvement of SRHR and promotion of human rights. Because menstruation is very complex and multifaceted issue so it can't be possible to address by one sector or project. However, it depends on the country's government structure while talking the responsibilities for dignified menstruation.

In Nepal, the infrastructure and some parts of hygiene goes to the Ministry of Water Supply, the incorporation of dignified menstruation in to formal and informal education goes under the Ministry of Education,



address the menstrual related health issues and counselling goes under Ministry of Health, the waste management and quality goes to the Ministry of Environment and the education, awareness, engaging faith healers, men and addressing abuse, discrimination, violence go under Ministry of Women. The scope of work is deeper and wider with Ministry of Women. However, the other ministries also need to incorporate the dignified menstruation as an everyone's business. For instance, in irrigation project, of Ministry of Agriculture, women cannot join in meeting and visit the field during menstruation due to the stigma and keep considering herself as inferior than man folks due to menstruation. Thus, dignified menstruation is urgent to mainstream across all sectors as priority. Thus, Hon. Minister, Mr. Parbat Gurung, Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizen appealed to all stakeholders to mainstream the dignified menstruation while postponed the planned International Workshop too.

4.2.6. Essence of Slogan 2020: Menstrual Talk, Dignity First

In order to change the narratives on menstruation from hygiene to

dignity, the slogan was chosen entitled 'Menstrual Talk, Dignity First'. The dignified menstruation day is December 8, since 2019. However, the international program planned in Menstrual Month and Menstrual Hygiene day for same purpose. The researches and incidences from Nepal to Kenya and across globe, the dignity during menstruation is missing at large. Without having the talk on dignity, the menstrual talk is just formality or fails to build the confidence of menstruators and each individual who are working or supporting the campaign. Dignity First is also the process of holding accountability as an individual level while talking menstruation. No one has right to point others before practicing the dignified menstruation by own selves.

4.3. Menstruation Amid COVID-19, Pandemic

In this universe, the pandemic documented 2449 years before from Athens Typhoid whereas Menstruation prevailed since last four billion years. The COVID-19, Pandemic appeared about four months before. Each crisis impacted men, women and others differently. They further in crisis if they represented the poor, rural, marginalized communities.

Because of deep silence and ignorance around the menstruation globally, the menstruators who are working in frontline, are suffering more. Estimated 70 % women are working as frontline workers for COVID-19 response included cleaners, security personal, chefs, nurses, doctors, pathologist and so on. They deprived

from getting menstrual products, rest, flexible hours during menstruation. In Wuhan, China, doctors and nurses took birth control pills for avoiding menstruation, used same dipper for the urine and bleeding due to not available of extra PPE which is not healthy behaviour for them at immediate and long term. The Indian doctors and journalist experienced same. In other hand, the service receivers or patients also equally are in need for menstrual rights at quarantine, isolation, ICU beds and everywhere. Because the COVID-19 does not STOP the menstruation. The gender policy or gender analysis fails to address the menstrual needs and rights of menstruators.

5. What Next

By considering the nature of menstruation and practices around it, existing global policies and intervention, the following points suggested to implement during COVID-19 responses and other emergencies.

1. Stakeholders who are working on menstruation or GBV, human right, empowerment and peace, have to ready to change the narratives around menstruation like from charity to human right, from hygiene to dignity,

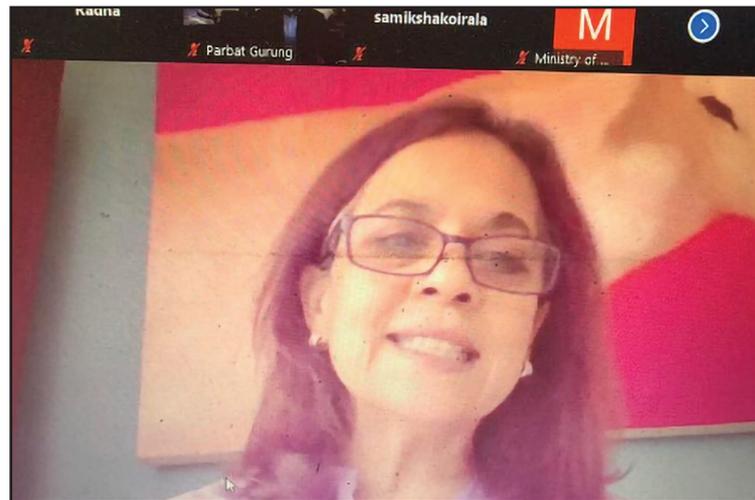


Figure 9: Archana Patkar, Gender Expert

impure to purity, and five days to throughout the life

2. In order to get disaggregated data of menstruators, the dignified menstruation policy should mainstream and execution where could ensure the menstrual products, more importantly acknowledge the menstruation

3. The menstrual product needs to consider as essential medical supplies of PPEs, relief package in COVID19 and other emergencies.

4. Stakeholder should accept and act that menstrual practice is cause for GBV, deteriorate of SRHR, violence of human right, thus should be a priority across all sectors and levels.

5. The menstrual talk, dignity first is the best strategy to build the confidence of all girls, boys and everyone to acknowledge the essence and importance of menstruation at large.

I. Call for Joint Action on Dignified Menstruation amid COVID-19, Pandemic

The original call for joint action on dignified menstruation is here.

Statement adopted on 26 May 2020

Public health emergencies and natural disasters often exacerbate gender inequalities in society exposing the deep-rooted structural fault lines of an unequal world. While such emergencies and disasters impact people differently based on various factors like gender, class, ethnicity, age, geographical locations; they can also be an opportunity to challenge and positively transform the existing status-quo.

Disasters and public health emergencies oftentimes compound gender inequalities in societies. But they don't have to, and in fact, could present opportunities for change. We know that public health emergencies and disasters impact people differently based on factors such as gender, caste, class, ethnicity, age, health, (geographical) location and occupation to name a few. There is strong evidence that the COVID -19 pandemic has highlighted gender inequality, discrimination and vulnerability even further. There is also recognition that while women may be the worst affected, there will be no recovery from the pandemic without

women and girls at the forefront whether at home or in the workplace. A engendered understanding of the pandemic and its response is essential to avert any untended harmful consequences, while proactive measures are needed to ensure a differentiated, rights based response.

Women globally make up over 70 per cent of workers in health, including those working in care institutions. They are on the front line of the fight against COVID-19. As a result of the pandemic they are facing a double burden: longer shifts at work and additional care work at home. Half the world's population menstruates for a significant part of their lives. Women, girls, intersex and gender diverse individuals such as those who identify as transgender queer menstruate and have historically battled the combined injustice of stigma and neglect by humanity of a purely biological phenomenon. COVID restrictions and disruptions have only exacerbated these challenges but more often than not – the subject of menstruation is pushed aside as we continue to focus on 'what is really important' during this pandemic. But menstruation is central to the sexual and reproductive health of every menstruator.

COVID-19 does not spread through faeces or blood, including menstrual blood. To date there is no evidence of impacts of COVID-19 on the menstrual cycle directly, though stress, anxiety and

malnutrition can impact reproductive health¹. The lock down and linked restrictions and barriers have led to the emergence of new stressors and coping strategies. Stress may influence cycle length, vaginal bleeding patterns, painful periods, and premenstrual symptoms².

The pandemic has exposed the fault lines of a deeply gendered and discriminatory world, wherein the first services to be cut are essential sexual and productive health information and services. Millions of children and adolescents are out of school and likely to be denied essential sexuality education at a critical and vulnerable stage in their life course- compromising, health, safety, opportunity and productivity. Violence against women remains a major global public health and women's health threat during emergencies³. Emerging data, including from France, Cyprus, Argentina, Canada, Germany, Singapore, the United Kingdom and the United States shows that since the emergence of COVID 19, violence against women and girls and particularly domestic violence has intensified⁴. Due to COVID-19 the cost of violence against women and girls (VAWG) which was previously estimated at USD 1.5 trillion is certain to increase because of the increasing incidents of gender based violence during the lockdown⁵.

So how can we ensure that this present pandemic does not leave menstruators voices, needs and demands

even further behind- nullifying and negating the hard fought gains of the last two decades?

We, at the Government of Nepal would like to start by calling all menstruators in Nepal, Global South and globally to speak out clearly calling for a recognition of their right to dignity during menstruation without an interruption in or barriers to information, essential menstrual supplies, pain management our support. Our Ministry has endorsed December 8 as Dignified Menstruation day as a day for 16 days Activism in partnership with of the Global South Coalition for Dignified Menstruation (GSCDM). Thus, along with Nepal Government, Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizen, and other partners are calling for a holistic, human centred approach to menstruation based on dignity. Although, the form and severity of the stigma, taboo and restrictions prevailing across the globe vary, they are universal in shaming menstruators and preventing them from embracing this biological phenomenon responsible for humanity itself, with pride and dignity.

Thus, the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizen, Nepal in association with the National Human Right Commission and GSCDM is proud to host an International Workshop on Dignified Menstruation under the slogan of 'Menstrual Talk, Dignity first' in December 2020, once COVID-19 is behind us. In the

¹UNICEF 2020. *Mitigating the impacts of COVID 19 on menstrual health.* <https://www.unicef.org/media/68446/file/Mitigating-the-impacts-of-COVID19-on-menstrual-health-and-hygiene-Brief.pdf>

²Sarah Toler, DNP, Science Writer for Clue, March 20, 2020 citing Yamamoto K, Okazaki A, Sakamoto Y, Funatsu M. *The Relationship between Premenstrual Symptoms, Menstrual Pain, Irregular Menstrual Cycles, and Psychosocial Stress among Japanese College Students.* *J Physiol Anthropol.* 2009;28(3):129–36.

³WHO, April 2020, *Violence against women and COVID 19*

⁴UNWomen *COVID 19 and Ending violence against women and girls*

⁵<https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/cedaw/pages/cedawindex.aspx>

interim we take great pleasure in sharing our commitment to dignified menstruation for all menstruators globally through this virtual conference. Menstruation with dignity more urgent than ever than before during this COVID-19 Pandemic. We call on everyone to:

- Change the narrative on menstruation, from charity to human rights, from hygiene to dignity, from impure to purity, and from five days to a life course approach;
- Integrate menstruation with dignity into health, education and gender policies and strategies;
- Menstrual management supplies

must be included in the list of essential supplies (like PPEs and other health supplies in COVID19) and other emergencies.

- Any stigma, taboo, restrictions or insensitive, discriminatory treatment linked to menstruators should be considered as a violation of human rights, form of Gender Based Violence and punishable by law.
- Menarche, semen Arche, the sexual reproductive system, safety, respect and responsibility must be considered essential elements of information and education including during lock down and post COVID 19.

2. Program Schedule

Activities	Responsibility	Time
Moderation Dr. Samiksha Koirala, Advisor to the Minister		
Welcome and objectives	Manmaya Pangeni Bhattarai, Joint Secretary	5 Minutes
Dignified Menstruation amid COVID 19, Pandemic	Archana Patkar, Expert	10 minutes
Dignified Menstruation and global practices in the era of COVID 19	Radha Paudel, Activist	15 Minutes
Dignified Menstruation and Media	Mahesh Nepali, Journalist, Jumla	5 minutes
Dignified Menstruation and Madhes	Hon. Manju Yadav, Parliamentarian, Province 2	5 Minutes
Why Dignified Menstruation	Hon. Dr. Bimala Rai Paudyal, Federal Parliamentarian	3 minutes
Dignified Menstruation and role of Parliamentarian	Hon. Niru Devi Pal, Chair of Parliamentarian Committee of Social Development	3 Minutes
Why Dignified Menstruation	Hon. Dr. Binda Pandey, Federal Parliamentarian	3 Minutes
Dignified Menstruation and Human Rights	Hon. Chair. Anup Raj Sharma, National Human Right Commission	5 minutes
Dignified Menstruation and Nepal Government	Hon. Parbat Gurung, Minister	10 Minutes

3. Press Release

WEBINAR ON DIGNIFIED MENSTRUATION

26 MAY, 2020
KATHMANDU

Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizen organized a webinar on Dignified Menstruation stressing on the need of solidarity against menstrual taboos. The event was organised to mark the Menstrual Hygiene Day (May 26) in association with Global South Coalition for Dignified Menstruation (GSCDM).

Speaking at the webinar which lasted for two hours, honorable minister of Women, Children and Senior Citizen, Parbat Gurung stated that traditional narratives of menstruation have to change and dignified menstruation should be understood with a holistic approach. Minister Gurung highlighted the fact that the stigma of menstruation was also impacting the fight against gender inequality. “The government is against any sort of gender-based violence including any violence associated with menstruation,” he added. He further stressed that the government was continuing its effort to make Nepal free of menstrual huts (chhaupadi) mainly by mainstreaming dignified menstruation in all the relevant plans and policies.

Chairperson of Women and Social Committee Niru Devi Pal informed that the government has taken strict action against by criminalizing the action and dismantling the huts and was committed to fighting against menstrual taboos.

Similarly, secretary of the ministry Yam Kumari Khatiwada expressed commitment to fight against all the gender-based ill and harmful practices including the stigmas and taboos associated with the menstruation. Chairperson of Nepal Human Rights Commission Anup Raj Sharma said that issues of menstruation should be understood as the issues of human rights.

“Presenting a research paper, founder of GSCDM and a pioneer Menstruation activist highlighted the overlapping links of menstruation to gender-based violence, child marriage along with various issues of education, health and various aspects of human rights. “It is a big achievement that the government of Nepal is organizing an event purely dedicating to dignified menstruation. This speaks a volume about the government’s commitment in fighting against all the stigmas, taboos and restrictions related to periods,” she further said that each individual and organisation should also join hands with the government in this effort.

The event was participated by more than 400 participants including politicians, activists, I/ NGO workers and journalists from Nepal and abroad.

The ministry was previously planning to organize an international workshop on Dignified Menstruation with the slogan “Menstrual Talk, Dignity Frist”, which however was limited to webinar because of the Covid-19.

The practices of forcing women to menstrual huts have significantly declined following the various initiatives of honourable minister Gurung including a week-long awareness campaign in Sudur-Paschim, Karnali and Bagmati province early this year.

4. Media Coverage

S.N.	Name	Date	Link
1	Breaknlinks	26 May 2020	https://www.breaknlinks.com/nepali/news/35121660?fbclid=IwAR2X78EpH-YmNyM_gqzGCK-eS7l7R8f5F2P2jkhQBN0W12J2gQY-jhNhdL6Jk#.XszxI0qQ0uc.facebook
2	CloudPatrika	27 May 2020	http://cloudpatrika.com/27109?fbclid=IwAR34IzwDNGC-1mP59EHnX2-A0pk_KZ9bOw-HY-7orVF-_MnKhaPbl2frjRcVw
3	Gorkhapatra Online	26 May 2020	https://gorkhapatraonline.com/national/2020-05-27-15149
4	HimalKhabar	25 May 2020	https://www.himalkhabar.com/news/114423
5	Imagekhabar	26 May 2020	https://www.imagekhabar.com/news/33806/-?fbclid=IwAR1riOE-FYlJwdE9Ox72ijerAt77NTfp_DTP-WYS-higBBuXJHZKqRG0M2hUY
6	Mahilakhabar	26 May 2020	https://www.mahilakhabar.com/news/2020/05/26/52976.html?fbclid=IwAR2tyQY0IrnX-mcv6qN6Hnm-Gf5hn4Ub2oqS5F-pAbMzWXrN-GmmFPxG0Ahk0
7	Mahilakhabar	24 May 2020	https://www.mahilakhabar.com/news/2020/05/24/52945.html?fbclid=IwAR0LYVvD0LkaLHQFLT-5W6EShFviFeQzJuMtfrQiVM-gy7lOryIRod4jc7GE
8	Navadristi	27 May 2020	https://navadristi.com/archives/38151?fbclid=IwAR2_Sh24E5r7qiDAY7ziC-sxfyfGzH-KV1EQe5KjOHLc3HVwyhswAM-J1vK-E

9	Narimag	27 May 2020	https://narimag.com.np/news/2020-05-27/20200527100955.html?fbclid=IwAR0Qg-z0s-YQkbFX-2Z2xWTsszh2k-EVzl6vRVKOiN-musthQqSEKhNUVpkmE
10	Narimag	25 May 2020	https://narimag.com.np/news/2020-05-25/20200525131620.html?fbclid=IwAR0zaUV-ga1OIHqvb1B01SSEzwwCu-iTIhRL29zw5ed5R7FScogwS3Vm-BRfB8
11	Nepal News	30 May 2020	https://nepalnews.com/news/nation/23863-2020-05-26-14-45-16
12	Pariwartan Khabar	27 May 2020	https://english.pariwartankhabar.com/the-value-of-dignified-menstruation-should-be-established-to-deplete-all-forms-of-discrimination-minister-gurung/?fbclid=IwAR1NGLiF9LRoKvz-JkK60bEyyVXcCt8ijPZeUi71sd-QpAz1U3BG_zbrQdgl4
13	Ratopati	26 May 2020	https://ratopati.com/story/131711/2020/5/26/parbat-gurung?fbclid=IwAR0DJIG_fNnFcZv-vMqfkQKzx5WYj2FT-p6vxsU-eZ-Pz0Ek-H1heMHP4wP1E
14	Ratopati	21 May 2020	http://www.ratopati.com/story/131041/2020/5/21/dignified-menstruation-?fbclid=IwAR26lZPSOxMaMSNYv-v7E4kcIOewjYO5FNWstlJt5YVMo-qUCRbE405m8fhZo