

Case Study: **Madhya Pradesh, India**

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Addressing menstrual hygiene challenges of tribal women and adolescent girls by strengthening the service value chain in Jhabua, Madhya Pradesh, INDIA

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Programmatic Achievement: Jhabua district in Madhya Pradesh State of India, has rolled out the Mission Mahima programme to strengthen the MHM service value chain with a target to benefit 650,000 tribal women and adolescent girls.

Unnati Makwana is a 17-year-old adolescent from *Dhekal Badi* village who volunteers as *Kishori Saathiya*¹ under the *Rashtriya Kishore Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK)*, an initiative of the Government of India (GoI) to mainstream menstrual health and hygiene communication to adolescents in her village through a peer Saathiya Brigade. As she narrates, prior to Mission Mahima, she only disseminated knowledge about the health benefits of using safe menstrual products in the community. But, upon being asked about its accessibility, she was often clueless with no other option but to suggest visiting market situated eight kilometers far from her village. Jhabua district administration oriented group of Saathiyas in block level trainings with collaborative technical assistance from UNICEF and an agency namely Uninhibited on safe menstrual health and hygiene under the Mission Mahima² programme, which ensures not only accessibility but aims to streamline the complete service chain till disposal. Now, she spreads critical and comprehensive messages around menstrual health and hygiene management in her village and nearby places. Champions like her and women self-help groups (SHG) have come forward to outreach their peers in the community to connect on the issues, all thanks to Mission Mahima.



Unnati demonstrates safe sanitary pad disposal at Ajeevika Bhawan, Jhabua District, © UNINHIBITED/Swati Dey



District administration felicitates Deepika on World MHM Day 2022 celebration in Jhabua District, © UNICEF/Sabir Iqbal

¹ Saathiyas are the trained adolescent boys and girls from community to disseminate knowledge on health and hygiene among their peers named Saathiya Brigade as a part of Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK) programme under the ambit of National Health Mission (NHM) by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India.

² Mission Mahima is district wide approach by the Jhabua administration to streamline service value chain around menstrual health and hygiene and to achieve a period friendly environment in the district.

Deepika, a 26 years old married woman from Thandla block in the district runs a sanitary production center with other members from her SHG and was felicitated by the District Administration for her contribution to improve the environment for safe menstruation on World Menstrual Hygiene Day 2022 celebration event at district headquarter. In her thanksgiving note, she narrated her ordeal when she used to buy commercial menstrual pads from market at an exorbitant price. Upon discussing with women in her community, she realized not everyone had convenient access to market neither had the economic affordability. Even if they did, it was not available in every locality and certainly not a business as usual for them to ask the shopkeepers due to social shame and hesitation around it. After all, talking in the open has always been considered a social taboo, especially in a tribal-dominanted district like Jhabua. There, she discovered an opportunity to bring together members of her group to address these issues by developing a business to improve accessibility of safe and low-cost menstrual products while creating livelihood opportunities for themselves with the support from the Ajeevika Mission. But the challenge was disseminating information about it among the community and generating demand. District administration came forward to assist her by building their knowledge on communication and efforts to streamline demand and supply with hostels and Udita corners installed in the Anganwadi centers under Mission Mahima. Members of her group now outreach other groups, women and adolescent girls to develop their knowledge on safe menstrual practices who find comfort in expressing their menstrual needs with them. This is a significant step forward to demystify the social taboo around the subject and provide informed choices to adolescents and women in Jhabua.

1 Background

Menstrual hygiene is a critical challenge for women and adolescent girls if it is not managed safely. Millions of women living in the remotest part of rural India have limited access to knowledge, hygienic menstrual solutions and disposal facilities. They are often forced to manage the monthly cycle unhygienically or reduce their external engagement during those times. The high prevalence of social taboos surrounding menstruation often leads to tribal girls dropping out of school when they begin their periods. They are kept from regular work as 'unclean' women, leading to isolation and neglect. There are over 400 million menstruating women in India, which will have a significant social and economic impact if we don't act.

As per NFHS-5³ data, In Jhabua, 50.3 percent of 15-24 years women use hygienic methods of protection during their menstrual periods (Locally prepared napkins, sanitary napkins, tampons, and menstrual cups) against a state average of 60.5 and a national average of 77.3. A situational analysis of the Udita Yojana⁴ in Madhya Pradesh by the Atal Bihari Institute of Good Governance & Policy Analysis (AIGGPA) in 2019 demonstrates that 24% of schoolgirls reporting missing school days during menstruation⁵.



Jhabua is a tribal-dominanted district in Madhya Pradesh state with an uneven plateau bordering the neighbouring state of Gujrat. NFHS-5 data asserts the fact that 50.3% of the women in the age group of 15-24 years use hygienic methods of protection during their menstrual periods then there are women above 25 years who menstruate, yet no data related to them. Divergent bottlenecks ranging from inaccessibility due to distant hilly geography, poor knowledge of safe menstrual hygiene products, and

³ NFHS: National Family Health Survey

⁴ Udita Yojne: Department of Women and Child development (DWCD) Govt of MP led scheme for women and Girls on MHM

⁵ Source:

https://www.aiggpa.mp.gov.in/uploads/project/Situational_Analysis_of_Udita_Yojana_in_Madhya_Pradesh.pdf

social taboo prohibiting free speech have contributed to rampant "Period Poverty" in the district. Jhabua is home to 1,025,048 people including 510,025 females as per the census 2011.

2 Creating a supportive environment

Jhabua district launched Mission Mahima on 28th May 2022 to commemorate World Menstrual Hygiene Management Day in collaboration with UNICEF and other sector partners. The mass mobilisation involved 320 SHG women members, adolescent girls and NSS⁶ volunteers attended the district-level event. At the event, an exhibition was also organized to disseminate key MHM messages, showcase different menstrual products and demonstrate their usage and disposal methodology. The event was followed by an orientation session for 210 NSS volunteers and SHG women members.



World MHM Day 2022 celebration in Jhabua District, © UNICEF/Aniket Yadav



MHM exhibition in World MHM Day 2022 celebration, © UNICEF/Sabir Iqbal

3 Aim and Objective

Mission Mahima aims to eliminate period puberty for 600,000 tribal adolescent girls and women by strengthening the district's MHM service value chain and demonstrating a model to achieve a period-friendly environment for showcasing gender transformative approaches. Madhya Pradesh state government released the state Menstrual Hygiene Roadmap in 2019. UNICEF was instrumental in formulating and advocating the roadmap that focuses on inter-sectoral convergence and addresses end-to-end solutions to strengthen the menstrual hygiene service delivery chain. Mission Mahima essentially builds on the blocks framed in the roadmap and focuses on sustainability by integrating climate-resilient and sustainable environment programming.

4 Strategic Approach

Institutionalization

The district administration formed a district-level committee under the chairmanship of the District Collector, to steer and ensure a policy environment for delivering menstrual hygiene services. The members of this committee involved representation from key departments (NHM, WCD, NRLM, Tribal Welfare, SBM), and local NGO partners. In addition, all departments have assigned a nodal officer to



District Collector chairing a monthly meeting on Mission Mahima with departmental functionaries and NGO partners at Collectorate Jhabua, © UNICEF/Saswat Nayak

6 NSS: The National Service Scheme (NSS) is a Scheme of Government of India, Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports for Youth.

ensure compliance with menstrual hygiene provisions in their offices. Under the programme, a platform has been created to bring local and expert NGOs working in other states and CSR to unite regularly and collect expert opinions and support to strengthen the implementation. The platform has helped mobilize 700,000 INR as CSR support to improve infrastructure, sanitary pad vending machines and a coordinated actions from sector partners (Educate Girls, INREM Foundation, TRIF) with UNICEF and Uninhibited as collaborative technical partners in Mission Mahima.

“Menstruation is a natural and vital process that women and adolescent girls experience. Addressing menstrual needs involve ensuring access to safe and clean water sanitation facilities as well as promoting open discussion to reduce stigma and demystifying social taboo around periods. Additionally, proper education about menstrual health and hygiene plays a pivotal role in empowering women and girls, enabling them to make informed choices and dispel myths around menstruation. Moreover, by recognizing and meeting menstrual needs, society can support the overall health, dignity and empowerment of women and adolescent girls. UNICEF in collaboration with state government have laid out a roadmap in 2019 that stresses on closing the loop from demand generation, capacity building, accessibility, safe disposal to end-use by strengthening MHM service value chain. Jhabua district in MP is implementing Mission Mahima, a district wide approach programme addressing menstrual challenge for 6 lakh tribal adolescent girls and women. UNICEF is glad to be part of this movement and would be assisting the administration technically for the effective implementation of the initiative. We hope Mission Mahima in Jhabua will pave the way for replication of gender transformative MHM programming in the state.”

-Margaret Gwada, Chief, UNICEF Office for Madhya Pradesh, INDIA

Plan of Action

A district-level orientation session on the MHM service value chain and methodologies to deliver was organized for the departmental functionaries attended by 104 participants and it was followed by a planning workshop under the District Collector's leadership. It was attended by functionaries from seven key departments that included Ajeevika Mission (state nomenclature for Livelihood Mission), Health, Panchayati Raj and Rural development, Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen)- Clean India Mission (Rural), Women and Child Development (WCD), Tribal Welfare, Education and Urban administration of the district. The workshop developed a district-wide action plan to pursue the desired aim.

Capacity Building

Decision Makers: The district administration, from time to time, has organized district-level orientation and meetings for departmental functionaries on various topics, such as improving WASH infrastructure in institutional settings, sensitization, training calendar and monitoring and is continuing to do so.

Master Trainers: The district administration commenced capacity building exercise by developing a pool of master trainers from Ajeevika Mission in two batches. The Mentors trained the 2023 Kishore and Kishori Saathiyas (Boys and Girls) and the cluster-level federation and SHG women members from Ajeevika Mission.

Currently, the district administration plans to identify two to five resource persons from each department depending upon the strength of front-line workers on the ground and develop them as master trainers in the upcoming batch.



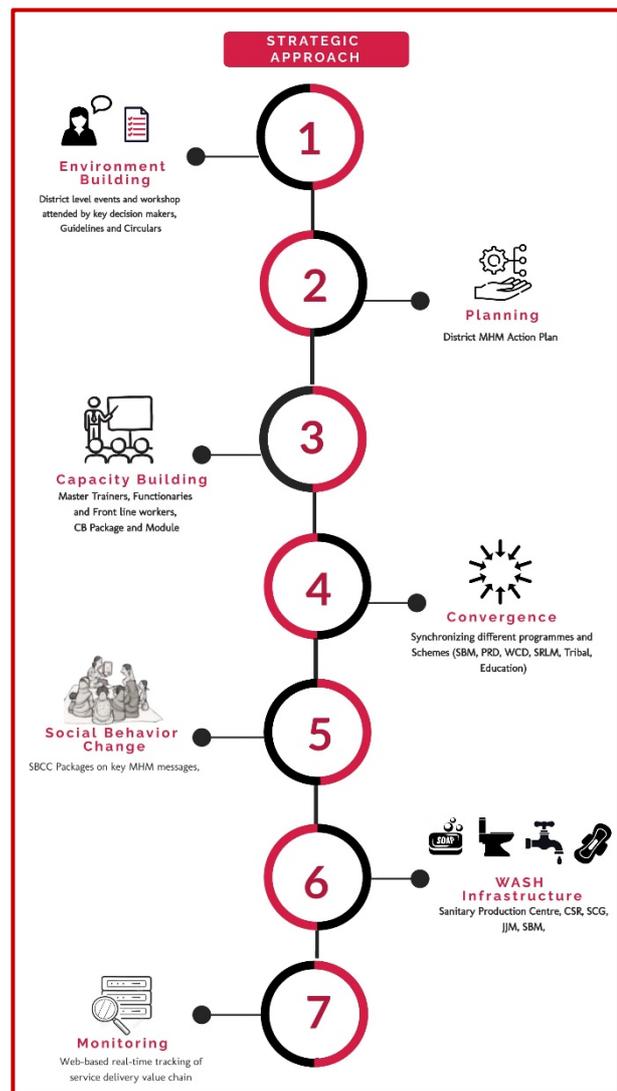
Master Trainers being trained on MHM at CTC Khawasa Jhabua , © UNICEF/Saswat Nayak

Front Line Workers: Under the programme, the department aims to skill and mobilise over 8000 front-line workers from different departments. These front-line workers include ASHAs and Saathiyas from Ajeevika Mission, Teachers from the education department, and Anganwadi (Pre-School) workers. In addition, the administration has organized six block-level orientations and plans to conduct these training at the cluster level to mitigate the logistic issues in the difficult terrain of the district. This training primarily focuses on disseminating knowledge and encouraging the sustained MHM practice among community members, especially adolescent boys and girls.

Social Behaviour Change Communication

The programme integrates critical messages on safe menstrual health and hygiene behaviour and practices as part of its communication framework that focuses on adopting safe menstrual products, appropriate disposal mechanisms, handwashing, and environmental sustainability. Front-line workers from different departments disseminate the messages using various platforms (Anganwadies, School, SHG meeting, Saathiya with Kishor and Kishori brigade etc). Key messages include;

- Health, Economic, Empowerment, Lifestyle and Environmental impact of adopting best MHM practices
- Adoption and appropriate use of safe menstrual product options to enable the users for informed decision making
- Disposal methodologies, including waste segregation, to ensure appropriate procedure
- MHM service value chain with environmental sustainability as a focus



Adolescent girls being trained on MHM at residential Petlawad hostels Jhabua , © UNICEF/Swati Dey



Mission Mahima Utsav with Balloon burst competition among women and adolescent girls in Kankrani village of Jhabua , © UNICEF/Saswat Nayak

Youth engagement is critical in enabling a positive communication environment under the programme. Outreaching adolescent girls by mapping residential hostels administered by tribal and education departments, Saathiya Brigades under Rashtriya Kishori Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK) along with targeting women engaged with Livelihoods Mission and Anganwadi Centers. In selected 40 villages, the administration supported the communities in organizing Mission Mahima Utsav to create a positive communication atmosphere that enabled women and adolescent girls to unite and generate dialogue on this coveted social taboo in an open forum. This year, the administration has further mobilised forty Villages to be developed as model women-friendly in which intensive communication on MHM is currently in the rollout. The administration plans to scale up Mission Mahima Utsav to 180 villages this year.

To communicate the key messages, the administration displayed IEC materials focusing on critical MHM behaviour inside gender-segregated toilets in offices, institutions, and strategic locations.



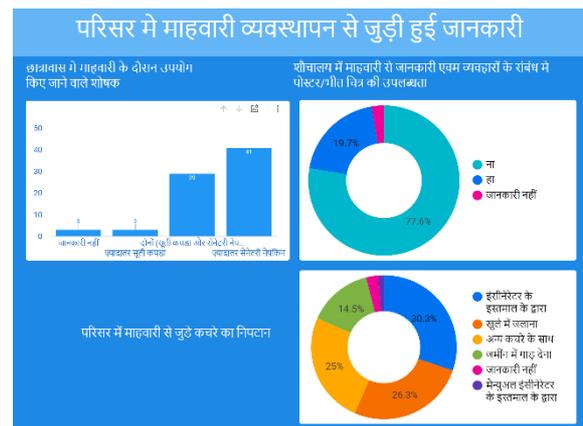
Yellow bin installation in government offices of Jhabua , © UNICEF/Swati Dey



IEC materials in women's toilet in offices in Jhabua , © UNICEF/Swati Dey

WASH infrastructure: Mainstreaming Period friendly facilities in institutions

When you're on your period, everything feels a little more sensitive. To effectively manage their menstruation girls and women must access water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities with adequate privacy. The Jhabua district administration has mandated the government departmental offices to mandatorily ensure accessibility of gender-segregated toilets and upgrade the existing ones with period-friendly features. In addition, the administration is improving the WASH-MHM facilities in the institutions (Hostels, Schools, Anganwadi Centers, Healthcare Facilities, Gram Panchayat Offices and Community Sanitary Complexes).



Dashboard to assess institutional MHM-WASH facility gaps in hostels of Jhabua , © UNICEF/Anand

MENSTROPRENEURSHIP (Enterpreneuship for Menstruation)

Accessibility of safe menstrual products is a major issue. Gram Jyoti Mahila Sangh , a women self help group (SHG) of Viillage Thandla, has taken the initiative to produce affordable and safe menstrual solutions for women and adolescent girls in nearby rural areas while generating livelihood opportunities for the members. The centre with a production capacity of 18,000 sanitary pads per day, primarily caters to the demands from Anganwadi Centres,. The SHG also disseminates on safe MHM practices to it's prospective members.



Deepika with fellow SHG members in sanitary production center, Khawasa © UNICEF/Saswat Nayak

5 Key Achievements

District administration developed a costed MHM action plan building on convergence and dovetailing across all the key departments and schemes. This also includes-

- Institutionalised district MHM cell with the representation of women members from key stakeholders departments/ communities
- A Pool of 72 Master Trainers created to cascade skill dissemination. Administration plans to increase this number to 100 in 2023
- 400 (320 females and 80 males) front-line workers skilled in safe menstrual hygiene practices
- Key departments converged to mobilise resources for MHM amounting to 5 million rupees.
- Government Departments have upgraded their toilets with period-friendly facilities.
- 4,000 adolescents (Boys and Girls) outreached through different platforms for MHM
- Overall, 17,800 people, primarily women and adolescent girls outreached directly and indirectly through social behaviour communication campaigns.



Young girls learning safe menstrual management in schools of Petlawad, © UNICEF/Swati Dey



District Collector's discussion on MHM in Thandla © UNICEF/Swati Dey

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Way Forward

Building on the blocks laid out in its first year of implementation, Mission Mahima moves forward with identified key approaches to intensify focus on scaling up the proven initiatives and integrating sustainability quotient into the programming. The Mission integrates MHM as a component in village action plan/Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) including adequate segregation methodology and safe disposal mechanisms to manage environmental sanitation. This ensures continuous priority and resources to the initiative. Continued focus on intensive communication campaigns emphasizes promoting basket of options to encourage informed decision-making for adolescents and girls. The programme component ensures youth inclusivity to translating them into the flag bearers for the change, to make Jhabua a “Period friendly District”.