



Bahini Scheme

For Prelims: Bahini Scheme, Menstrual Hygiene Scheme, Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram

For Mains: State of Menstrual Health in India, Issues related to women, Gender.

Why in News?

The Sikkim government is **set to announce a scheme (Bahini) to install vending machines to provide free sanitary pads.**

- This is the **first time that a state government** has taken a decision to cover all girls studying in Classes 9-12.

What is the Purpose of the Scheme?

- It aims at providing **“100% access to free and safe sanitary pads to secondary and senior secondary school going girls”**.
- It is also aimed to **curb dropout of girls from schools** and raise awareness about menstrual hygiene.
- The scheme is based on an **experiment the state government initiated in 2018**, in collaboration with **Sulabh International**, where vending machines were installed in some schools.
 - Sulabh International is an **India-based social service organization** that works to **promote human rights, environmental sanitation, non-conventional sources of energy, waste management and social reforms through education.**

What is the State of Menstrual Health in India?

- **Data:**
 - According to the **National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4) 2015-16**, India has over 355 million menstruating women.
 - However, **only 36% of women were reported** as using sanitary napkins, locally or commercially produced.
 - The percentage of women using **menstrual products did improve significantly across the country**, especially in Daman and Diu and Dadra and Nagar Haveli, West Bengal and Bihar, as estimated in the **first phase of the recently released NFHS-5**.
 - Despite this, menstrual health **remains a low-priority issue in India** marred with taboos, shame, misinformation, and poor access to sanitation facilities and menstrual products.
- **Issues:**
 - **Societal restrictions:**
 - Societal restrictions during menstruation violate women’s right to health, equality and privacy.
 - Several anecdotes reveal that **women and girls are kept in isolation**, not allowed to enter religious places or kitchens, play outside or even go to

schools during menstruation.

- **School Drop out:**
 - A survey conducted under the [Integrated Child Development Services \(ICDS\)](#) scheme by the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MoWCD) in 2018-19 reported that **more than one-fourth of total girls enrolled in class VI-VIII drop out** of school as soon as they hit puberty.
- **Inconsistent Access to Education:**
 - The experience of menstruation for young girls is even more difficult due to inconsistent access to education on menstrual health and puberty.
- **Reduced Participation in the Workforce:**
 - Many employers see **menstruating women as a problem** as they associate periods with **inefficiency in work and reduced participation in the workforce**.
 - There are anecdotal examples of corporate workplaces showing insensitivity towards menstruating women fearing loss of productivity.
- **Related Initiatives:**
 - **Central Government:**
 - In 2015, the central government introduced the **national guidelines on menstrual hygiene management**.
 - **Menstrual Hygiene Scheme (2011) and the Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (in 2014)**, have been launched to promote menstrual hygiene amongst adolescent girls in the age group of 10 to 19.
 - Through the **Suvidha initiative**, the government distributed more than 5 crore brand sanitary pads at Re 1 from 6,000 Jan Aushadhi Kendras.
 - **State Government:**
 - Apart from central government schemes, state governments have also implemented programmes to distribute sanitary pads in schools in Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, and Kerala.
 - The Bihar government provides Rs 300 under the **Kishori Swasthya Yojana** to adolescent girls to buy sanitary pads.

Menstrual Hygiene Scheme

- The major objectives of the Menstrual Hygiene Scheme is:
 - To increase awareness among adolescent girls on Menstrual Hygiene
 - To increase access to and use of high quality sanitary napkins to adolescent girls in rural areas.
 - To ensure safe disposal of Sanitary Napkins in an environmentally friendly manner.

Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram

- The major objectives objective of RKS is:
 - Improve Sexual and Reproductive Health
 - Enhance Mental Health
 - Prevent Injuries and violence
 - Prevent substance misuse

Way Forward

- The need of the hour is to **focus on a strategy that converges key departments** in the government — health, education, women and child development and rural development among others — and **improves accountability towards issues** related to menstrual health management.
- The way forward lies in a **community-based approach** in which local influencers and decision-makers are **sensitised to champion the issue and behavioural change campaigns** targeted at both men and women are deployed to dispel myths and misconceptions.

- There is also a **huge opportunity to create public-private collaborations** to drive such campaigns and increase access to affordable menstrual hygiene products for rural and semi-urban regions.
 - This could be done through the **installation of sanitary pad vending machines** at key public places, workplaces, schools, and colleges, as well as Anganwadi centres or childcare centres for rural areas.
- It is crucial to acknowledge that **menstrual health is not just a women's issue, but a matter of human rights.**

[Source: IE](#)

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