

Water and Pads for School-Girls –Empowerment for Life



Rural Women's Network Nepal (RUWON Nepal)
project in collaboration with International Alliance
of Women IAW

Activities at Bal Uddhar Secondary School, Kapan Kathmandu Nepal on 2 January 2023

A report by Goma Devi Bastola, President of RUWON

A.General information

Rural Women's Network Nepal RUWON is a national organization in Nepal engaged in promoting women's rights, headed by Ms. Goma Devi Bastola, President.

The girls in rural Nepal

The girls don't get any basic health education in the schools. Nepalese society is a male-dominated society and this affects health and educational sectors as well. In rural areas especially, girls are treated like second-class citizens and considered the property of men, only there to work and fulfil men's desires. Most parents favour their sons in every sector, while girls have to deal with household chores.

In many rural areas there is no knowledge at all provided about women's health, mostly because menstruation is taboo, and menstruating women are considered untouchable.

People believe menstruation is a curse. For that reason in rural areas menstruating girls are banished from their family homes and forced into huts very far from their villages. They are not allowed to see any male, even their brothers, and cannot touch other elder women either. They don't have the right to leave the hut before their period is over, even if they get sick or have a fever or feel pain and would need to go to the hospital. Each year women lose their lives in those huts - typically from animal bites or smoke inhalation. Even in urban areas and cities like Kathmandu, women are being discriminated against. There they are also prohibited from visiting temples or other public areas and have to keep away from the kitchen.

In rural districts people live without any easy access to clean water, and women have to go far and carry water every day.

Schools do not provide adequate sanitation for young students. Most of the time girls and boys share the same toilets and in some rural areas, schools do not have toilets at all.

There are no cheap or free sanitary pads available for girls of poor families, who basically use their very old clothes. Girls and women of poor families do not even have access to underwear and live in pitiable conditions.

Some local businesses produce reusable pads but for those who are not in the position to buy it, there is always the problem.

RUWON dealt with this issue at different occasions, like after the horrible earthquake in 2015. At that time, people living in the affected areas lost their homes, and the situation became complicated for new mothers, menstruating girls and pregnant women. For that reason, we designed a specific project to support women and girls in the affected area. New mothers did not have clothes to change themselves

or the babies. They did not even have a bed to sleep on or diet food. We provided them with clothes, mats, sanitation kits, nutrition kits etc. Menstruating girls also went through many difficulties with the lack of pads and underwear and no easy access to water to wash themselves and their clothes. We again provided them with underwear, pads and sanitation kits.

B.The Water and Pad Project in 2022-2023

With the partnership of IAW RUWON Nepal did a very meaningful and interesting project at Bal Uddhar Secondary School, Kapan Kathmandu on 2 January 2023. The female students who have reached the age of menstruation were provided with an Eco-friendly sanitary kit and an educational booklet. The rest of the students of the school were provided with stationery and booklets. We are very proud of the meaningful work done for girls and women.

RUWON also included the boys in the project with the thinking that if the boys will be aware about the girls and women problems, it will be helpful to make the change. The boys of the higher grade (8-10) also received the booklets, because we thought that we could raise awareness among the boys all together with the girls. It could also be a helpful information for girls and women living in the homes of the boy-students. They would understand that menstruation is just a natural process, and we all should help the girls to be neat and clean during the periods. We also should give them nutritious food, let them go to school and to live within their family. One should also prevent the girls of doing hard work in the fields.

We provided sanitary kits for 150 girls, and we also distributed booklets to the girls and boys from grade 8-10.

During the two days stay at this school I have talked with the school management committee chair, head teacher/teachers and the students in the school. According to them the school has a very good compound, good buildings and a generally good foundation. But there is a problem with the lack of clean drinking water.

Also the financial situation of the children's parents is precarious. This means that they cannot afford drinks with clean water for their children. So the students remain thirsty during almost the whole day at school. Also other health items such as pads, and primary health kits are lacking. This prevents the students of access to good health.

The school management committee chairperson talked to me about the lack of finances. This is the reason that the school is not in a position to provide clean drinking water at the school. He told me, that the whole school family is trying to solve his problem. He also requested me to ask whether our IAW organization might be able to support some future access to drinking water. This would be great.

06.01.2023