

Introduction to the Documentary film Masika

Traditionally across cultures, women have used cloth to handle their menstruation. While this remains a popular choice for many women in India today, in the past few years disposable napkins, which are the norm in the West, are being promoted as a solution for India, with market penetration currently at 12%.

While disposable products seem to be a preferable choice because of their convenience, a closer analysis indicates that these products, which contain chlorine-bleached materials and petrochemicals, have hugely detrimental effects. The toxic waste generated by the production and disposal of disposable menstrual products has serious impacts on the environment as well as on the health of those sanitation workers charged with dealing with it.

Menstrual hygiene is still a taboo subject in India, and is generally omitted from discussions concerning women's health, education and quality of life. As a result of the silence around this issue, adolescent girls and women lack awareness and access to safe, affordable, ethical, and eco-friendly alternatives to disposable menstrual products. A reported 2% of Indian women use unhygienic material like sand, ash, hay, newspaper to manage their menstrual flow.

Menstrual hygiene management (MHM) impacts not just the 355 million menstruating women in India, but society at large. This one complex issue touches upon many of India's developmental challenges and violates legal and constitutional rights. While activists, public health directors, and development workers have sought to manage the issue, none of them have sought to address menstrual hygiene management through a holistic perspective. They each offer a piecemeal solution to the challenge, ignoring the negative externalities of their solution on the environment and on society. earth&us, in partnership with other organizations, is engaged in an action-oriented social and technological research project to ensure that all women have access to safe, ethical, affordable and eco-friendly menstrual hygiene products.