

## **#LPRD# A Field Worker's Diary [#Part 45](#) # 11 September 2020**

“If these companies were in reality making these pads for environmental reasons, why weren't they targeting the middle-classes and upper-classes? In fact, they will have enough water and private space for washing and drying these pads without difficulty. Why do we always confuse environmental sustainability with solutions for the poor? Why should poor people bear the burden of environmental conservation? - These were some unanswered questions that have stayed with me till date.”

Interacting with adolescent girls is a part of the work we do. In addition to supporting them on issues related to girls' education, we raise awareness on issues like health, nutrition, personal hygiene. We discuss with them about the menstrual cycle, precautions to be taken at during their periods time, diet to be eaten, changes in their body, psychological issues etc. We also provide sanitary napkins to them for maintaining personal hygiene.

A few years ago, some people from a company met us. They said that they manufactured reusable sanitary napkins, and stated that by giving them to the girls and women, the money they spent on sanitary napkins will be greatly reduced as their reusable napkins can be used for up to 2 years. They went on to add that non-biodegradable sanitary napkins currently being used by everyone are very harmful to the environment, and that they started making reusable pads with the intention of curbing this pollution.

According to them, their pads had reached nearly 1 lakh women, and in just 3 years, they had stopped around 1,89,00,000 non-biodegradable sanitary pads (i.e. about five thousand trucks) from polluting the planet. The gist of the marketing campaign was that they focused mainly on voluntary organizations as these organizations tend to give sanitary napkins to lots of girls, which would not only reduce the cost of sanitary napkins for the girls in the future but also help the environment at the same time.

We also thought it would be a good idea to distribute reusable pads when buying next time around. However, instead of buying a large quantity at once, we decided to give it to fifty girls and make a decision based on their feedback. In line with our plan, we bought some pads, selected some girls and provided them a small training on how to use them,

how to clean them before reusing, etc., at the same time, we also called their mothers to explain to them as well.

When we met the girls again after a few months and asked them for their opinion on the pads, more than half the girls stated that they used the reusable pad for only 2 months and stopped using and went back to using the regular sanitary napkins from the market. After finding out the reasons behind it, we realised that it wasn't related to the quality of the pads — it was troublesome to wash them and dry them. In fact, the girls can get sanitary napkins from the market at very low prices nowadays. Buying them and using them was not a big issue for them. Anyways, we thought of convincing them to use these pads instead because they were environmentally-friendly.

After reflecting on it a little bit, I wondered that if using things that are not biodegradable is harmful to the environment, so why are we not using biodegradable sanitary pads ourselves? Why do the reusable pad-making companies focus their marketing strategies on poor households only? If these companies were in reality making these pads for environmental reasons, why weren't they targeting the middle-classes and upper-classes? In fact, they will have enough water and private space for washing and drying these pads without difficulty. Why do we always confuse environmental sustainability with solutions for the poor? Why should poor people bear the burden of environmental conservation? - These were some unanswered questions that have stayed with me till date.

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