**ASANI SANITARY NAPKIN PROJECT: EXPANSION MODEL**

**For Women By Women** -an initiative by Gram Vikas Trust.

**Organizational Background**

Gram Vikas Trust (GVT) came into existence as a result of the motivation and personal initiative of its founder, Mr. Ramesh Kasondra, to enhance the socio-economic status of the underprivileged people. Hailing from a rural family, the founder was no stranger to hardships faced by the underprivileged. Having overcome economic and social challenges, due to the backing and economic blessings from certain elder society leaders, the founder set out to do his best to make a positive difference in the lives of fellow underprivileged.

Working with a team of committed people, GVT’s aim has been to secure integrated development through people’s participation. The key areas identified for interventions include child rights, education, health and hygiene, sustainable livelihood, and women empowerment. Our efforts have developed lasting association with government, non-government and corporate organizations as also with the communities and groups with whom we have worked.

We have come a long way following a small beginning in June 2001, and have implemented a wide variety of projects related to child rights for change, reproductive child health care, quality education, watershed development, wasteland development, tribal development, low cost sanitation, alternate energy sources, self-help groups, vocational training to youth, and women empowerment in Bharuch and Narmada Districts of Gujarat state in India. While implementing different developmental projects, our thrust has always been on working through people’s participation. At GVT, we have always believed in the capacities and capabilities of the communities, and have always strived to channel their hidden energies for the betterment of society at large. Our efforts have always been directed towards creating an environment that is conducive of enhancing opportunities to local people to think and act positively. We have always endeavored to develop skills and competencies of the local communities with a view to enabling them to operate and maintain the assets created through the implementation of the projects on sustainable basis.

This philosophy of ours has led us to adopt a holistic and participatory approach to rural development. We believe in inclusive approach, covering all the sections of the society, particularly the underprivileged, in a village. We work with the existing village level fora (and creating new ones wherever necessary) through Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) approaches, principles and techniques.

**Project Background**

* Problem Statement

According to research over 80% of women in India do not use sanitary napkins. Sanitary napkins are generally unavailable in rural areas of the country and if available, they are too expensive for rural households to afford.

Therefore, women resort to age-old alternatives like cloth, ashes, and husk sand during menstruation. These substitutes are not only extremely uncomfortable but also the cause of various diseases and infections, some of which have lifelong effects.

Unhygienic menstrual practices can affect the health of the girls/women and there is an increased vulnerability to reproductive tract infections and pelvic inflammatory diseases and other complications.

The issue of menstrual hygiene is inadequately acknowledged and has not received proper attention. Good hygienic practices, such as use of sanitary pads and adequate washing of the genital areas, are essential during menstruation period. Women and girls of reproductive age need access to clean and soft absorbent sanitary products which in the long run protect their health from various infections. To this effect, the practice of good menstrual hygiene reduces the incidence of reproductive tract infection (RTI). Every year approximately 10 % of women worldwide are exposed to genital infections including urinary tract infections and bacterial vaginosis.

As there are lots of myth and taboo associate with menstruation and also due to lack of education, rural women are not aware of the consequence of unhealthy sanitation nor are they keen to discuss about menstruation related problem in the open.

Rural female will almost never ask a male shopkeeper for a packet of sanitary napkin. Even in the urban area, females are also hesitant to purchase napkins.

Lack of accessibility and awareness are two common factors which further hinder the usage of napkin. Affordability is another issue in rural India where there is a constant fight for survival; usages of sanitary napkin become a want more than need.

* Project Justification

Women from rural area are not using sanitary napkin due lack of awareness, non availability at village level, high cost of marketed napkins and also shame to buy it from male shop keeper when available. To overcome these all reason and to make women and girls to use sanitary pad for better menstrual hygiene, Desai foundation start Asani sanitary napkin- for women by women program. In Asani program high quality low cost sanitary napkin prepared by a group of women and also sale by women at faliya level. This makes sanitary napkins both accessible and affordable to women by women in this region and also eliminate the shame involve during purchase from male shopkeeper. Simultaneously this program encourage women empowerment and to dream beyond.

With the help of SHG members, ASHA worker, local leader or any other NGO in the village DFT run campaigns to create awareness among adolescent girls and women about the importance of hygienic sanitation practices. We also discussed and explain the truth behind every myth and taboo. We encourage them to use clean napkins regularly and dispose of used ones properly. We also promote basic practices like washing hands after using the toilet.

* Project Goals

Basic menstrual awareness and easy accessibility of low cost high quality sanitary napkin at village level is our prime goal. Through sanitary napkin program we want to reach more than 2,50,000 women and girls in south Gujarat regions in 1st phase. Awareness about menstrual hygiene will empower girls and women to take control over their health, livelihood and enables girls to pursue higher education beyond the onset of menstruation.

Through this program group of women will get training and employment in manufacturing, distribution and selling of high quality, low cost sanitary napkin in their communities. This will help the women empowerment at rural level.

* Project Current Status

Sanitary napkin manufacturing unit is to be installed in Bharuch and Total 20 women involve in the production unit.

Manufacturing of sanitary napkin is done by automatic machine but quality checking of each napkin, than cutting, folding, sterilizing , packing actives done women. With the use of this manufacturing machine our women are producing two different size of ultra thin sanitary napkin: large and extra large.

Currently there are more than 25 women in selling part. Per pack we provide reasonable commission to our distribution women.

**Project Expansion Activities ( or steps)**

As Desai foundation wants to spread more and more menstrual awareness as well as want to develop women livelihood through Asani program any organisation with same motto can be associate with DFT for these social cause.

**Step for expansion:**

1. Identification of local partner/group :
   * Any organization who wants to work in area of health , education and livelihood for women and child.
   * Having basic infrastructure
   * Having good Management capability- staff
2. Identify women leaders, volunteers and leaders, government workers
3. Local infrastructure
   * such as school, community hall, organization owns building etc room /place for storage, production and supply for routine basis
   * having regular electric supply
   * easily accessible place of village or town ( where many women come and go daily )
4. Identification of barriers (eg. cultural access, lack of knowledge, societal and family obstacles, local emphasizes)

After getting confirmation about each above mention point we can start asani program with respective partners. Following are the milestone to

1. Start Asani program
   * MHM Awareness and data collection
   * Appointment of distribution women and training
   * Asani selling and distribution
   * Start production unit on the basis if need
2. Start other women and children programs to increase general participation and empowerment

**Detail description of activities and responsibilities:**

1. The plan starts with **spreading awareness** and knowledge sharing regarding menstrual hygiene to the rural women. Initially 5-10 villages of new District will be covered one by one. As soon as the awareness ratio increase we can move to more villages. The training regarding the same would be provided to the SHGs, ASHA worker and Aganwadi women by stressing on the use of sanitary napkins & its advantages.
2. During the awareness program or with the help of local volunteer we have to identify 3-5 women per village as per population of village. These women will help to survey basic thing regarding women health, hygiene, MHM, women livelihood. They have to visit each and every home of the village to gather this basic information and to record in the given format.( Check Annexure I ) This data can help us to know actual picture of area. ( we can give 200 rs incentive to visit 50 homes and gather data in one day). In Such way within 10 days we can get village wise survey data. Some of the data can get from census data, Sarpanch office, and state records ( eg name of Asha workers, population, etc)
3. These women can work as Asani distribution women after completion of survey on the commission basis. As soon as we get data of menstrual management technique used by women in that particular area we can easily connect them with asani project. Distribution channel would also be built with the help of SHG members, ASHA workers, Aganwadi etc. We also provide special training to the distribution women. Each distribution woman will get fix benefit per pack selling.
4. Initially Asani sanitary napkin would be distributed from nearest Asani unit. After min 3 month data of selling we can decide to installed new dedicated machine for that particular area/district.
5. In the last for the new machine we have to identify group of 15 women for production. Special training regarding production, quality parameter , daily record, maintenance etc will be given to these group of women.

**Expected Project Results**

* Basic awareness program will give clear concept of menstruation and better menstrual hygiene management to women and girls.
* Short Term (minimum 6 month): Also we will have a group of trained women (production and distribution) who are economically independent.
* Medium Term (minimum 1 year):Through Asani program low cost high quality sanitary pad will be easily available at door step by women in rural village. Thus rural women will start using sanitary napkin.

**Budget**

Asani is the ongoing project.

* **Phase I:** Initially Asani sanitary napkin (Qty: minimum 1000 pack of each size) will be provided from the nearest production unit to start distribution at based price (not include commission of women) on the credit basis. Distribution will be carried out by the previously identified and trained women in their villages under the supervision of partner organisation (local organization). As soon as the supplied quantity distributed, new order will be placed and payment of the previous lot will be done by partner organisation.
* **Phase I** Once the distribution team develop well and demand increase, the Desai foundation will installed dedicated machine and will give raw material( for 6 month production) to partner organization to runs this project. Partner organisation have to provide/to make arrangement for infra structure for manufacturing unit. Initially for 3 year DFT will look after whole project than it requires the support of your generous benefactors in order to move forward. In long term this project is self sustainable project. Check Annexure II for budget.

**Reviews of project:**

At regular interval of time period the desai foundation will review the progress and quality control of the project.

Depending on the periodic evaluation, observation, reports, data DFT will decide next schedules and phases of the program

At any point of time DFT can terminate and/or begin the next phase of project.

**Conclusion:**

We believe that Asani project is a worthy enough to support women empowerment as follows in your area.

* By educating women and girls about menstruation and hygiene practices during menstruation
* Gives employment to more than 50 rural women in production and sale team
* Make low cost and high quality sanitary napkin available at door step.

We are excited to partner with you to make this project a reality in your area, leading to substantial benefits in the short, medium, and long term.