

Pre- Event Press Meet for Menstrual Hygiene Day 2024



Date: May 25, 2024

Venue: Alfa House, New Baneshwor

Introduction

The pre-event press conference was organized as a platform to engage media professionals, raise widespread awareness, and generate extensive coverage about Menstrual Hygiene Day and its significance. By involving members of the media, MHMPA aimed to amplify the reach and impact of the campaign, challenging societal norms and breaking down barriers related to menstrual health and hygiene issues. Additionally, the program facilitated the establishment of a MHH Singer's Alliance.

Methodology

The press meet started with Mr. Gunaraj Shrestha, the National Convener of the Menstrual Health and Hygiene Partners' Alliance (MHMPA), extending a warm welcome and expressing gratitude toward the sponsors, journalists, artists, and all participants present. The program was conducted under the chairpersonship of Ms. Krishna Kumari Waiba, Chairperson of Beyond Beijing Committee (BBC) Nepal.



The program officially commenced with the opening remarks delivered by Mr. Rajendra Maharjan, the Country Coordinator of Right Here Right Now (RHRN). In his speech, Mr. Maharjan provided an overview of the RHRN initiative, highlighting its coalition of six partner organizations working to strengthen and scale up the delivery of quality comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) and services in the field of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR).

Mr. Maharjan emphasized the importance of menstruation health and hygiene and RHRN's involvement in this crucial cause. His speech set the tone for the event, underscoring the significance of addressing menstrual health and hygiene issues. He concluded his speech by sharing his personal experiences of traveling to the Far Western region of Nepal. In 2013, he had conducted a baseline survey in the area, and upon revisiting the same location recently, he observed that the discrimination faced by the menstruating population remained unchanged over the past 11 years. He said that despite the absence of the traditional "Chaupadi" practice, negative perceptions and stigma surrounding menstruation persisted. Lastly, Mr. Maharjan expressed his gratitude towards all attendees for their presence and support.



Following the opening remarks, Mr. Guna Raj Shrestha, the National Convener of the Menstrual Health and Hygiene Partners' Alliance (MHMPA), shared a comprehensive overview of Menstrual Hygiene Day. He delved into the history, objectives, and other pertinent information related to the

occasion. Mr. Shrestha delivered a detailed presentation covering various crucial topics concerning menstruation and the Menstrual Hygiene Day celebration.

Key Points of the Presentation:

1. The Menstrual Health/Hygiene Management Partners' Alliance (MHM PA) aimed to generate awareness, eliminate taboos and stigma, promote dignified menstruation, and advocate for policies and facilities related to menstrual health and hygiene.
2. The presentation highlighted various restrictions, taboos, and challenges faced by menstruating individuals, including lack of gender-friendly WASH facilities, lack of affordable and safe menstrual products, and health, educational, social, and economic impacts.
3. It discussed the achievements made in the past 10 years, including increased awareness, access to disposable pads, and privacy for changing menstrual hygiene materials.
4. The presentation analyzed the gaps in media coverage of menstruation-related issues, such as lack of focus on policies, plans, menopause, inclusivity, and intersectionality with human rights and harmful practices.
5. MHM PA's priorities included collaborating with the government, promoting musical campaigns, engaging goodwill ambassadors, improving media coverage, addressing quality and affordability of menstrual products, ensuring gender-friendly WASH facilities, ending harmful practices, and promoting good practices.

Future Direction:

1. Advocate for comprehensive menstrual health and hygiene policies and plans at all levels of government.
2. Collaborate with the National Planning Commission (NPC) on ongoing policy initiatives.
3. Launch the Singer Alliance for musical campaigning and mass awareness.
4. Engage MHH Goodwill Ambassadors to raise awareness and promote inclusivity.
5. Work with media for wider and more inclusive coverage of menstruation-related issues.
6. Address the quality, affordability, and environmental impact of menstrual products, promoting local, safe, and eco-friendly options with informed choices.
7. Ensure gender-friendly, disability-friendly, and LGBTQI+ friendly WASH facilities in schools, institutions, and public spaces.
8. End harmful practices and gender-based violence related to menstruation.
9. Promote and share good practices in menstrual health and hygiene management.

Group Discussion

During the interactive session, participants raised several pertinent suggestions and concerns. One participant recommended providing free sanitary pads not only in public schools but also in private educational institutions. Mr. Guna Raj Shrestha responded by explaining that while they had initially focused on public schools, they are also planning to collaborate with PABSON (Private and Boarding Schools' Organization of Nepal) and NPABSON (National Private and Boarding Schools' Organization Nepal) to facilitate the provision of free sanitary pads in private schools as well.

Another participant highlighted the need for a greater provision of female toilets compared to male toilets in schools, as menstruating individuals require more time. Mr. Shrestha revealed that he had designed the toilets for the Ministry of Education in 2009 and had followed the requirements at that time, but he was unaware of the current practices.

A crucial question was raised regarding the existence of laws addressing discrimination against menstruating individuals. Mr. Shrestha clarified that such discriminatory acts fall under the purview of Gender-Based Violence and are subject to legal punishment accordingly.

To further enrich the discussion, a participant suggested that the media should highlight the preferences of students regarding menstrual products. The participant noted that due to low quality, many students do not utilize the provided sanitary pads. Offering students a choice in selecting their preferred menstrual products could potentially enhance the effectiveness of the campaign. Acknowledging the concern, Mr. Shrestha explained that issues arise during the procurement process, where the lowest bid wins, leading municipalities to bulk purchase sanitary pads - a matter discussed in 2020. However, he assured that if the media brings attention to this problem, the Menstrual Health and Hygiene Partners' Alliance (MHMPA) will undoubtedly advocate for addressing these issues and ensuring that students have access to quality menstrual products of their choice.

Aligning with the slogan "Together for #PeriodFriendlyWorld" for Menstrual Hygiene Day 2024, a participant from the eastern part of the country expressed concerns about the lack of such programs in the Eastern region of Nepal. Mr. Shrestha acknowledged that while some programs had been organized in the Eastern region, their frequency and scale is very less compared to the initiatives undertaken in the western parts of the country. He assured to expand the reach of programs to the Eastern region to ensure comprehensive coverage across Nepal.



Moreover, Mr. Shrestha highlighted that Mr. Prakash Saput, a renowned Nepali celebrity, has committed to include the topic of menstruation in his upcoming movie, which can be considered a significant step towards raising awareness on the subject. Additionally, a representative from Bhaktapur FM mentioned that the radio station is airing a program every Friday for 4 weeks from 6:00 pm to 6:30 pm, in collaboration with Days for Girls, focusing on the celebration of Menstrual Hygiene Day 2024.

Lastly, Mr. Rajendra Maharjan, the country coordinator of RHRN, suggested involving male artists in the newly formed Singer's Alliance to enhance its effectiveness. Furthermore, he recommended expanding the alliance to include artists from various disciplines, not limited to singers alone, to broaden its reach and impact.

Closing Remarks

The event concluded with closing remarks from the chief guest. She expressed gratitude to RHRN and MHMPA Nepal for organizing such a fruitful event. Highlighting BBC Nepal's role as the secretariat office of MHMPA, she commended their efforts in working towards reducing taboos, stigma, and discrimination associated with menstruation. The chief guest emphasized that menstruation is a natural biological process and a beautiful blessing, rather than a sin. However, she acknowledged the challenges faced by the menstruating population.

Sharing her personal experience of her first menstruation, she poignantly stated that menstruation is a blessing as it enables reproduction, underscoring the importance of initiating change within oneself to drive societal transformation. She recommended conducting programs involving religious leaders to address the deep-rooted negative perceptions surrounding menstruation.



She concluded her speech by thanking all attendees for their active participation and urging journalists to extensively cover the news of the Menstrual Hygiene Day Celebration.

Following the formal program's conclusion, MHH singer alliance was formed with 15 members, aiming to raise awareness, challenge societal norms, and inspire social change through music and artistic expression. By harnessing the universal language of these mediums, the alliance will effectively normalize conversations around menstruation, break long-standing taboos, and advocate for better menstrual health and hygiene policies and practices.

Media Coverage

Various media covered the news regarding the event which can be browsed through the link below:

- <https://maitrinews.com/2024/05/26/116732>
- <https://thahakhabar.com/news/203704/>
- https://ekantipur.com/health/2024/05/26/menstruation-is-taking-away-self-esteem-and-nutrition-44-33.html?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAR2j3jIHeUuiQzU6RAV-4sPWp8utf9g9E4EXC902Nb2sJQ_vRRe8IotRM_aem_AbJPss8Vt6R83npy18EeoalUAaVhN0UzvyHZERfU-1sL7h-8hkU2V-BYOb9IW5Rv5gQzzGar-UAJSdNjBLoF7mnJ
- <https://sevenstartv.com/2024/05/26/75582.html>