Menstrual Hygiene for Rural Women

What is the issue?

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- Urban India is debating the topic of menstruation and the associated stigma.
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- But breaking the mould in rural areas is far more challenging, which calls for an integrated approach.
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What does NFHS data show?

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- Government data suggest positive developments in the use of hygienic methods of managing menstrual periods.
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- As per NFHS-4 (National Family Health Survey), 42% women in the 15-24 age group uses sanitary napkins.
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- Of this, 16% use locally-prepared napkins, while 62% use cloth.
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- In all, at least 58% are estimated to be using a hygienic method of menstruation.
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- The data says that nearly 48% rural women in this age group are using hygienic methods.
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- However, menstrual age of women goes up to 40-45 years, and a large section of women has still been left out of the survey.
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- The ground reality is a lot different, with several challenges to bring about change in rural areas.
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What are the limitations?

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- **Mindset** - In rural India, the outdated value system related to periods, sexuality, etc, are much ingrained.
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- The resistance is severe, and much is kept literally under wraps.
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- **Social structure** - The social structure is largely patriarchal; women individuality and needs mostly come second.
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- There is even lesser sensitivity with respect to women's sexuality and physiology.
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- **Taboo subject** - Menstruation remains one of the biggest taboo subjects, and breaking the notions on such matters are truly challenging.
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- **Financial viability** - Making sanitary pads affordable for money-starved rural families is a limitation for promoting its use.
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- **Media** - Till date, sanitary pads' advertisements use blue as the colour to prove the effectiveness of pads.
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- It is essential that platforms as these turn mature enough to show the liquid and gel with what it should be, the colour red.
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What are the notable initiatives?

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- Chuppi Todo-Sayani Bano (roughly translated as 'break the silence and grow up') is an on-ground menstrual hygiene awareness initiative in parts of Rajasthan.
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- It is a private rural healthcare delivery enterprise for sanitary pads dispensation.
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- A key effort includes **disassociating morality from menstruation**.
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- It aims at replacing the 'right or wrong' debate with that on health,

education, and development viewpoints.
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- Approaching topics such as menstruation with sensitivity, internal workshops are conducted.
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- They sensitise the field workers along with the network of Anganwadi workers from the villages.
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- To gain trust, influential people from village neighbourhood are identified and entrusted with implementation.
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- Student groups are also involved, making the efforts of sensitisation more effective.
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What lies ahead?

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- Poor menstrual hygiene practices have serious health challenges.
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- They range from urogenital or non-sexually transmitted infections, to yeast, fungal and urinary tract infections, to even cervical cancer.
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- Thus, the cost of following hygienic practices is far less than bearing the cost for treatment of diseases.
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- Initiatives as discussed above should be financed appropriately to be scaled to multiple states and remote regions.
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- For further progress, the discourse on menstruation needs to change in both urban and rural spaces.
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- A multi-layered approach focusing on awareness, accessibility, behavioural change, and identifying the target groups is essential.
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- Knowing which group is more approachable helps in drawing out strategies to initiate discourse, educate and trigger behaviour change.
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- E.g. Schoolgirls, literate and educated women are more willing to listen and contribute. Men who are socially-involved and less politically-invested are easier to convince and engage.
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Source: Financial Express

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