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## Global South Coalition for Dignified Menstruation

Update Date: 17 Nov, 2019

To,

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Dear Madam/Sir,

<sup>1</sup>Global South Coalition for Dignified Menstruation (GSCDM) is a global network for Dignified Menstruation emerged from and based in Nepal. GSCDM is going to organize the international Workshop on dignified menstruation in May 2020 in collaborations with actors-partners across globe (concept note attached herewith).

In this connection, we would like to request to join the hands whatever possible from your side. Your ownership/partnership (financial and program) would create a multiplier effects in Nepal and beyond for changing the conversation around menstruation including redefining the discourse of equality.

Please do let us know if you are interested or would like to know more.

Looking forward to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

**Radha Paudel (Nepal)**

Secretariat

**Global South Coalition on Dignified Menstruation**

[DignifiedMenstruation2019@gmail.com](mailto:DignifiedMenstruation2019@gmail.com)

[rpaudel456@gmail.com](mailto:rpaudel456@gmail.com)

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<sup>1</sup> Although, we dislike and disagree with the colonial term “ North” or “South” it is internationally recognized, thus we use it for easier recognition

*Menstrual Talk*  
*Dignity First*

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## Global South Coalition for Dignified Menstruation

### 1. Examine the Various Aspects of Menstruation

#### 1.1. Menstruation is multifaceted and complex phenomena:

Generally, the environment, society or context determine the practice during menstruation though there are taboos, stigma and restrictions has been existing across any country or culture. However, the visibility, severity, forms are varying. Due to such practices, the immediate and long terms consequences, there are ranges of impact can be seen as ecological frame, started from individual, family, societal, national/policy level. These impacts are interlinking and overlapping in many cases. For instance, the menstrual practice is contributing factor for child or early marriage. Historic and ongoing interventions focus solely on hygiene and sanitation though the stigma, taboos, restrictions related with menstruation are same from Solomon Island to Middle East, Afghanistan to Cambodia and everywhere. The stigma and restrictions during menstruation have huge adverse impact on GBV, mental health, disaster, disability, LGBTQI, Indigenous people, menstrual products, environment, infrastructure, water, religion etc. Likewise, menstruation has also value and impact on socio-cultural, economic, political, technology, environmental.



Figure 1 Menstrual Stigma/Taboo is Across the Globe

#### 1.2. Menstruation construct and shape the power:

Because of deep level of silence and ignorance about menstruation, we merely think and analyze the gravity and magnitude of menstruation. With the reference from Nepal, indeed, menstruation helps to construct and shape the power among girls and boys. Girls usually between the ages of 6-12, most pre-menses, become aware of menstruation through their mothers, relatives, and school and are taught that menstruation is an “impure” state of “impurity”, a state of “shame, humiliation” and a state of “powerlessness”. They are told this directly with words as well as see it visibly through watching their mothers, sisters, and menstruating individuals in their communities' practice menstrual restrictions. In other hand, around the same age, boys are also taught or aware through their family, school and community that their absence of menstruation means state of “purity”, “power” and “superiority”. They see that the men in their lives and the community were not bound to any restrictions, or limited in any way, that they instead have the power to limit and restrict the ones who did menstruate. As they grow up, girls are then socialized for tolerance, acceptance and docile tendencies, and discouraged to question where boys are encouraged and awarded for questioning, challenging, and privileged to use violent words and actions under the guise of “boys will be boys”. As children develop, they began to understand the power

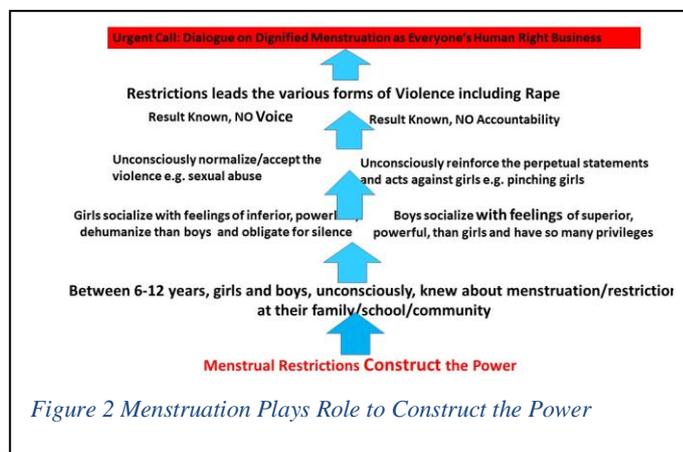


Figure 2 Menstruation Plays Role to Construct the Power

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dynamic and become aware of the cause and effect of power and privilege but are indoctrinated through society gender norms and values and thus act on their conditioning. Girls continue to replicate their learned and internalized docile behaviors while boys continue to hold and display power. Eventually, boys converted as perpetrator and girls converted as victim.

### 1.3. Menstruation play role for Gender Based violence (GBV):

GBV as defined by the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), "Violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately." More generally, GBV can be "any act of violence that results in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women and girls, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life". Additionally, it is globally recognized that GBV has no boundaries across nation borders, cultures, class, race, sexual orientation, or religion. Thus, it is evident that GBV is the consequence of power and privilege and the unjust distribution of power in society. Power is dynamic and there are many ways to construct/hold power, one of which ways is directly related to menstruation. Regardless of an individual's identity, approximately half of the earth's human population has/is going through menstruation. Therefore, keeping GBV's definition in mind, it is evidently clear that girls, women, individuals who menstruate regardless of caste, class, race, education, religion, nationality are subject to various forms of visible violence due to the invisible violence sustained by deep ignorance on menstruation, biases on menstruation as a "women's issue" or a "private issue", and global silence due to stigma and shame.

Therefore, keeping GBV's definition in mind, it is evidently clear that girls, women, individuals who menstruate regardless of caste, class, race, education, religion, nationality are subject to various forms of visible violence due to the invisible violence sustained by deep ignorance on menstruation, biases on menstruation as a "women's issue" or a "private issue", and global silence due to stigma and shame.

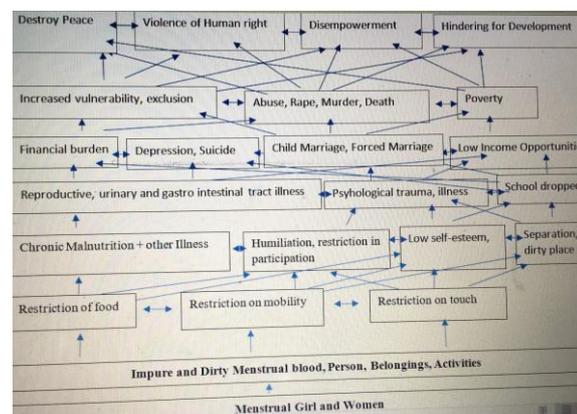


Figure 4 The complexity of impact of menstrual practice

### 1.4. Menstruation and its Impact on women's safety and health:

Though the restrictions regarding to food, touch, mobility also vary place to place, however, girls and women's menstrual health compromised because of such practices. restrictions.

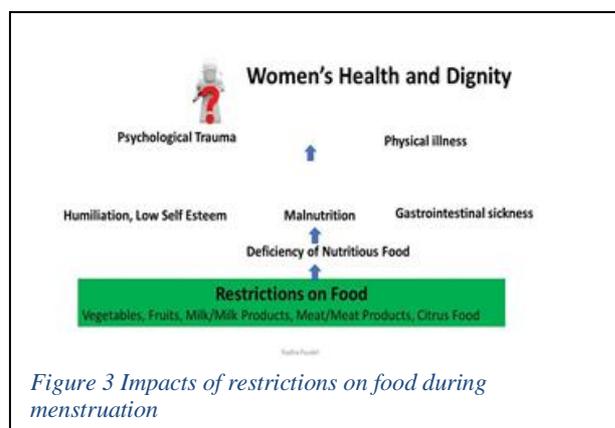


Figure 3 Impacts of restrictions on food during menstruation

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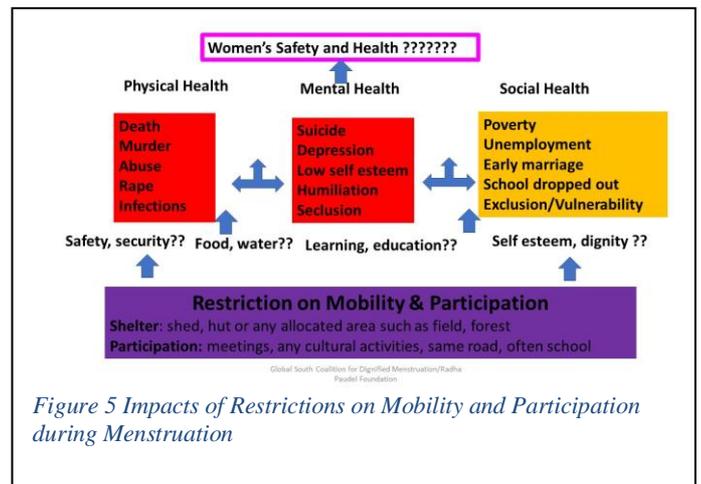
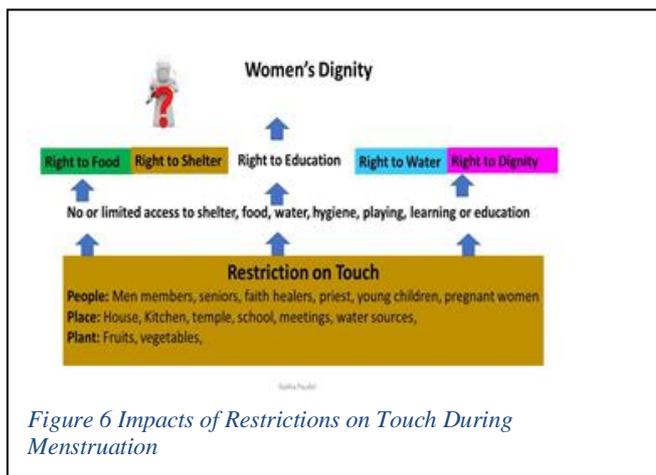
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But neither the girls nor the society acknowledge about these practices and impacts of menstruation



### 1.5. Menstruation and Education

There are many studies showed that the girl's education is compromised due to unhealthy and undignified menstrual practices. They are drop out from school, stress due to risk of leaking, teasing and unavailability of WASH facilities including emergency menstrual products. Simply, five days in a month seemed stressful for others but girls and women are in trouble throughout the life because of education's impact on employment, poverty and quality of life at her's life and rolling out next generations.

### 1.6. Menstruation and Peace:

Many scholars do not even imagine the impact of menstrual practice in peace. Indeed, due to stigma, taboo, restrictions associated with menstruation, the invisible conflict has been bubbling within the girl/women, family and society. Globally, the peace work more focused on visible or weapon-based conflict. The gravity of perpetual discrimination, abuses, violence since childhood among girls is never counted as counter area of intervention for peace. Why do women commit suicide, living with depression and other mental illness are interpreted differently?

### 1.7. Current Focus on Menstrual Activism:

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Menstruation is an inevitable biological process since the existence of the universe but it is heavily undermined and silenced till recently in 2014 through the development/human right discourse globally. In October 2, 2014, the UN resolution A/HRC/RES/27/7 did not only explicitly use the word “menstruation” associated with human right to safe drinking water and sanitation but also expressed concerns of menstrual hygiene management including stigma and its reversed impact on gender equality and human rights of girls and women. Then, organizations working for WASH started to take lead role for menstrual interventions. Meanwhile, few networks are formed at national and global level where the `hygiene' is focused either through sanitary products or toilets or dismantle of menstrual huts. The educational programs also promote hygiene as the ultimate solution instead of dignity. The current research also revealed that the menstrual movement is heavily controlled and

manipulated from the global north (Bobel C., 2018). Ms. Bobel also emphasized that the menstrual movement for global south, should be led by the people from the global south.

Currently, the menstrual movement focused on hygiene, products and recently about tax which are important too but not guarantee the dignity. Even Meghan Duchess of Sussex, Bollywood movie Padman, Oscar documentary Period. End the Sentence. are created the avenues for menstruation but focused on hygiene or products instead of dignity. The quality, standards are also hidden in current movement indeed. Let's assume, if a menstrual woman would get standard, qualified and best products but not eligible for equal treatment as man due to menstruation. Thus, dignity should be in center for all menstrual talk.

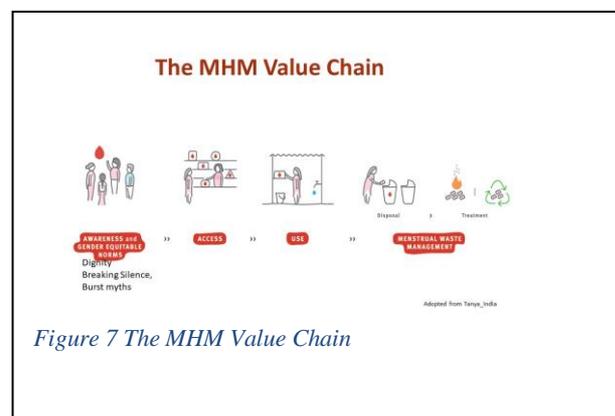


Figure 7 The MHM Value Chain

### 1.8. Menstruation on Human Rights Discourse

The word of dignity started to use as principle of human right since 1948. Likewise, there are few human rights instruments came in to actions: Alma Ata Declaration (1978), Conventions of Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979), International Conference on Population and Development (1994), Beijing Conference (1995), Sustainable Development Goals (2015). The words of human right, women's right, dignity, gender-based violence keep coming here and there but none of the documents explicitly talk about the menstruation and its impacts of above-mentioned aspects human rights. The complexity and multifaceted menstruation is assumed a part of reproductive health or women's health but no explicit intervention. However, in October 2, 2014, the UN resolution A/HRC/RES/27/7 did not only explicitly use the word “menstruation” associated with human right to safe drinking water and sanitation but also expressed concerns of menstrual hygiene management including stigma and its reversed impact on gender equality and human rights of girls and women. Then, organizations working for WASH started to take lead role for menstrual interventions. Meanwhile, few networks are formed at national and global level where the `hygiene' is focused either through sanitary products or toilets or dismantle of menstrual huts.

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### 1.9. No One Leaving Behind:

Since 2015, the entire global energy focus on SDGs. Again, the global community missed the menstruation. Indirectly, menstruation is discussed under target 6.2. Even in 21 century, the experts overlooked the complexity of the menstruation and practice associated with it. Menstruation is pre-condition to achieve total seven goals out of seventeen: Goal 1 -No Poverty, Goal 2-Zero Hunger, Goal 3-Good Health and Well-being, Goal 4-Quality Education, Goal 5-Gender Equality, Goal 6-Clean Water and Sanitation, Goal 8-Decent Work and Economic Growth. If the women are living in vulnerable conditions such as poverty, disaster, disability, transgender, religious fundamentalist etc. the more girls and women will be leaving behind by the end of 2030.

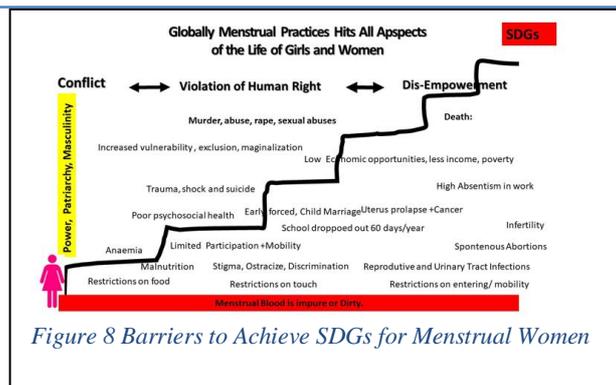


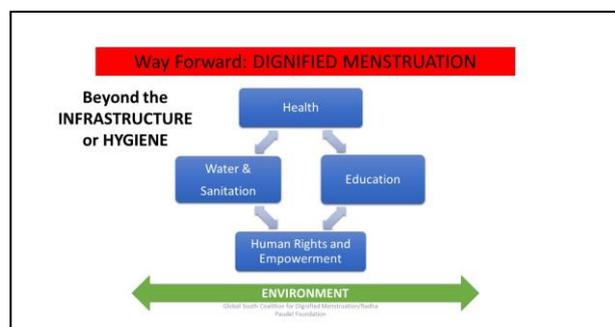
Figure 8 Barriers to Achieve SDGs for Menstrual Women

### 1.10. Concepts of Menstrual Activism:

In academia, menstruation is under discussion specially for socio-anthropological view and more technical in recent days. The reports and discussions related with academia often use the words menstrual rights. Specifically, the Menstrual Health Management (MHM) is used by UNICEF and WHO (2012). The Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) is used by the UNSECO (2014). Few adopted both words and used Menstrual Health and Hygiene Management. No matter, who used what there is heavily focus on one face of menstruation. The multifaceted nature of menstruation is acknowledged by Nepal government in 2017 and developed a policy on Dignified Menstruation 2017/2018.

### 2. Way Forward: Dignified Menstruation:

From above discussion, menstruation is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon of this universe and simple truth of human life. It is not simply the average 5 days of bleeding or approximately 7 years of bleeding. It is also not only one's reproductive years; it is the whole experience of human life. Thus, 'Dignified Menstruation' is simply a holistic approach or comprehensive approach to encompass menstruation and mitigate discrimination against menstruation and the subsequent consequence. This framework applies from the womb to the tomb and is not only limited to "women" but to all individuals who menstruate, including transgender men as well as individuals who do not menstruate, thus the whole planet. Therefore, 'Dignified Menstruation' is everyone's business. It is the way of perceiving menstruation as a human rights issue and holding all of us accountable to eliminate discrimination and assure dignity. Each individual deserve dignity during menstruation where there is no form of any discrimination, abuses, stigma, shame, restrictions or any form of harmful act during menstruation and inevitably outside of menstruating days too. Simply, it is a form of no differentiation between 25 days and 5 days in a month<sup>1</sup>. It is the concept beyond hygiene, menstrual products, and clean infrastructure where health, education, water, sanitation, human rights, empowerment and environment have to simultaneously intersect. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eZfdhBKEtsE>



<sup>1</sup> Those who have serious pre-menstrual or menstrual pain or disorders, they consider as illness and have right to seek health care.

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Few scholars confused, resist, disappointed, with the language of 'dignity'. Indeed, it is not issue of language at all. This is all about learning process. The either menstrual hygiene or health management confined the mindset of the actor or anyone or it addresses the partial needs and issues of menstrual practice. Sometimes, if the leader or an individual is more pro-human right, s/he may think or interpret or act towards dignity but no any mandatory to address multifaceted, complexity of menstruation. If we use dignity, simply hold accountable to all actors and address almost all kinds of issues associated with menstruation. It's not weapons to threaten anyone but essential tool to change the mindset. It is understandable that an organization or activist or anyone can not do everything about the dignified menstruation but it is possible and should be align with the dignity while doing any kinds of activities that is why we use the word 'Menstrual Talk, Dignity First'. Simply the pro-human right and holistic approach.

### 3. Menstrual Activism in Nepal:

In Nepal, since interventions around reproductive health started, has added a globally attractive feather that is Menstrual Restrictions or Chhaupadi<sup>2</sup>. Since 2005, it is more prominent and the entire discussion is focused on 'hygiene' including dismantle and beautification of sheds and distribution of free pads. In other side of the coin, there are very few people who dedicated themselves to raising the voice of 'Dignified Menstruation' even before menstruation was a topic from WHO-UNICEF 2012, Human Right Council-2014. But it took time due to accessibility with technology and others. The 2017 is become significant year in a history of Nepal where Nepal conducted two national level consultations in Dang and Nagarkot on menstruation where four ministers (Ministry of Water Supply, Education, Health, Women, Children and Elder) were together. April, 2017, government formed an inclusive policy drafting committee. Eventually, the policy on dignified menstruation (2017) started to share in many in/formal discussions since August 2017. It is yet to endorsed by the cabinet though there is something better than nothing. We are very hopeful that Nepalese government will put it in priority once internal political stability resumed. Gradually, other stakeholders also started to acknowledged dignified menstruation e.g. World Bank <https://www.facebook.com/WorldBankNepal/videos/387948978738169/>. The dignified menstruation is also compatible with the rights as Nepal's constitution where ten articles. In 2018, all four ministries also marked the historical take away on menstrual journey by celebrating first 'Dignified Menstrual Day 2018' (<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2066833423584052>.) In the same year, government also promulgated legislative law against menstruation related discrimination, and violence.

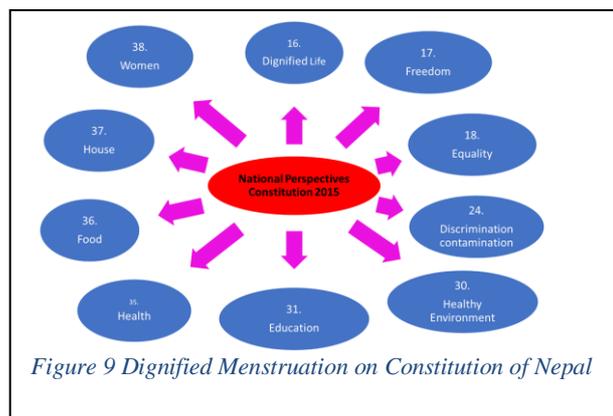


Figure 9 Dignified Menstruation on Constitution of Nepal

### 4. Global South Coalition for Dignified Menstruation

By considering the sense of urgency for coalition on 'dignified menstruation', RPF (Radha Paudel Foundation) has done rigorous consultations with friends, menstrual networks, who are working in menstrual issues globally. Eventually, a network *Global South Coalition for Dignified Menstruation* (GSCDM) was initiated for changing the global conversation from hygiene to dignity, from menstrual restriction/Chhaupadi country to 'Dignified Menstruation' nation across the globe to lead like leaders/survivors instead of victim.

<sup>2</sup> Do not like use the word of Chhaupadi indeed. It is misused and misinterpreted by the media.



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## Global South Coalition for Dignified Menstruation

In order to change the conversation on menstrual intervention across global south, it is critical to bring all actors on the same vision and strategy board; this is possible but extremely challenging. Simply, we inspired from Challenges. Fortunately, Africa has already organized a conference and developed a two-year plan in 2018 <https://acmhm.org>. GSCDM has opportunity to learn from Africa and other many networks from global north.

GSCDM's mission is to dismantle intuitional, structural, interpersonal, and social oppressive systems in place affecting menstruation, individuals who menstruation, and their ability to access basic inalienable human rights, critical resources to lead happy, and healthy lives, and obtain dignity. We strive to unite organizations, and individuals who share our vision of reclaiming dignity for each individual and aim to transform the menstruation to center dignity. By now, it has following specific objectives: i) build common understanding on dignified menstruation, ii) identified the major gaps, challenges and way forward regards to various aspects of dignified menstruation, iii) create a force/network for campaign on dignified menstruation, iii) build evidences for advocacy through researches around the status of menstrual practices globally and iv) leverage our collective global networks and resources to enact policy change and education around menstruation.

The secretariat will be in Nepal and the activities will operate anywhere globally according to the by-laws and strategy (the bylaws will form after the May 2020). RPF is currently working as secretariat office for GSCDM. It has called for application for steering committee and received huge numbers of application across the globe including global north. The evaluation team identified the five young people from different countries of steering committee (temporarily). They are 1. Uganda: Ms. Esther Kyazike, 2. Australia: Pifi Kingi, 3. Indonesia: Ms. Anna Soetomo, 4. USA: Mili Adhikari and 5. Nepal: Anupa Regmi

RPF ([www.radhapaudelfoundation.org](http://www.radhapaudelfoundation.org)) is officially founded in 2017 on the name of Radha Paudel, Author and Activist from Nepal. Possibly, she is the very first person in Nepal who rebelliously for dignity during menstruation since childhood (1980) in various capacity organizations as researcher, trainer, author and activist at all local, national and global level.

### 5. International Workshop, May 2020 at Kathmandu, Nepal

The conference is set for May because May 28 is recognized as the International Menstrual Hygiene Day since 2014. Therefore, it is the best day to host the conference to bring all stakeholders who are working on gender equality, human right, GBV, SDGs, WASH, products, LGBTQI, interfaith, disaster etc. and work collectively for dignified menstruation including celebrate the day.

The conference will organize for 26-28 May, 2020. The schedule is keep modifying in consultations of feedback of stakeholders including steering committee members, experts. local hosting committee, moderators. However, participants will work in various themes rigorously (reflection, Empowerment theory or Paulo Freire approach). The facilitator and co-facilitator will lead the themes. Followed by short presentation, they will examine the situation of dignity during menstruation against specific theme. They will explore the gaps, challenges and way forward. That outcome will present in plenary and endorse as outcome and scope of work GSCDM for at least next two years. The last day (May 28) will be a half-day where outcomes from the last two days will be presented as well as celebrate International Menstrual day with few cultural programs along with government dignitaries.

Thus, GSCDM humbly request to bring or send the influential personalities like mid-level policy makers from governments, UNs, I/NGOs, academia, activists, networks of faith, youth etc. who will can create a moment once they back to their respective country as well as committed to continuously working as partner/member with GSCDM.

### 6. Justification of International Workshop, May 2020 at Kathmandu, Nepal



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There are various crucial reasons for having conference in Nepal. The following are key prominent and urgent reasons:

At Global Level:

- I. It is high time to speak up on dignity in order to shift the understanding on menstrual activism towards dignity. *'Menstrual Talk, Dignity First'* will be the core of all developmental and humanitarian works.
- II. It is urgent to maximize the resources towards gender equality, peace, empowerment and justice.
- III. Dignified menstruation is pre-condition to achieve SDGs; 1,2,3,4,5,6 and 8 and an entry point to address all SRHR issues.

At National Level:

- I. As like victim or survived centered approach, change the identity of Nepal as a leading country for 'Dignified Menstruation' instead of Chhaupadi. It will inspire, empower, and hold accountable the girls, women and every individual to abolish the stigma, taboos, and restrictions around menstruation in Nepal and beyond.

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<sup>2</sup> Its metaphoric e.g. survivor center approach. Survivors are leaders and inspirations

<sup>3</sup> This is the country specific (Nepal) objective where Nepal will demonstrate the role model.

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## Global South Coalition for Dignified Menstruation

### Venue:

Kathmandu, (Hotel Radisson, Lajimpat Rd, Kathmandu, 44600)

### Who will be participating in the Conference?

Global South	100
Global North	20
Nepal	70
Media	10
Total	<b>200 (but not limited)</b>

### Proposed Themes<sup>4</sup>:

DRR, Disability, LGBTQI, Indigenous people, GBV, Health and Psychosocial wellbeing, Participation, Education, body literacy, Youth, Products, Academia, Water, Infrastructure, Engaging men/boys, Religion, Environment/waste

### Outcomes

#### Global Level:

1. Developed unified/common understanding on dignified menstruation
2. Formulated the strategies on various aspects of dignified menstruation for regions and global level.
3. Finalized the members of permanent steering committee and its ToR
4. Developed mechanism to follow up/monitor as well as policy advocacy at regional and global level.
5. Mobilized human and financial resources to address the issues associated with menstruation at global south.

#### National Level:

6. Endorsed as a priority concern of dignified menstruation by the authority of the Government of Nepal (GoN) by expressing its commitment in the forthcoming national strategies such as the fourth National Human Rights Action Plan to be prepared by 2020 and designate one of the National Human Rights Institution as the focal GoN institution for 'Dignified Menstruation'. The GoN is also expected to commit financial and technical resources to implement the plans and activities of the designated National entity<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> These themes seem ambitious but we can narrow down based on survey and discussion.

<sup>5</sup> The GSCDM is already in communications and dialogue with the GoN. The GSCDM is now holding continuous discussions with the GoN to secure the political, institutional and financial assurance to bring forward the issue of 'Dignified Menstruation'.

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### Tentative Schedule

It will finalize soon and share via website by local hosting committee in consultation with moderators, experts and steering committee.

### Tentative Budget:

In order to manage the 200 participants except travel and accommodation, about \$60,000 estimated. GSCDM is doing everything voluntarily or zero penny. Thus, we adopted the business model to raise fund. Based on financial contribution, partner will categorize like Key Supporters, Co-Supporters, Supporters, Solidarity partners. Everything will control by local hosting committee according to the policy of NGO/RPF management of government of Nepal.

### Visibility:

The pattern of visibility will go as following.

Owned or lead by: Government of Nepal (Ministries; ministry of Health, Education, Water and Supply, Women, Children and Senior citizen),

Initiated by: Global South Coalition for Dignified Menstruation  
Radha Paudel Foundation

Supported by: Supporters as based on contribution as mentioned below

<sup>3</sup>Key Supporters- Above \$ 10 000 - eligible for local hosting committee (ELC), website, report, banners, participants #2  
Co-Supporters- Up to \$ 10 000-ELC, listed in website, logo in report, main/side banner with alter size, participation #1  
Supporters- Up to \$ 5 000-listed in website, logo in report (back cover page), side banner size, participation #1  
Solidarity Partners- Up to \$ 1 000: logo side banner and listed in report

### Contact Detail:

Secretariat

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[rpaul456@gmail.com](mailto:rpaul456@gmail.com)

**Fourth Floor, HITACHI building, New Plaza, Kathmandu.**

<sup>3</sup> Its sound not justifiable but no way because GSCDM has not have single penny yet. Everything is moving from pain and passion. Local organizing committee can modify if they like.

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