

## Case Study: Supporting Girls' Education Through Girl-Centered Advocacy for Menstrual Hygiene Supplies in Nagpur Schools

### BACKGROUND

In India, 23 million adolescent girls drop out of school each year due to lack of menstrual hygiene supplies and awareness of menstruation. Nasreen Ansari, a project coordinator at Amhi Amchya Arogyasathi, had observed how a lack of menstrual health and hygiene supplies and information greatly impacted adolescent girls in her community. When she became a Rise Up Leader in 2019, Nasreen developed a strategy to ensure that girls have access to menstrual hygiene education, sanitary pads, and proper disposal facilities in schools in order to reduce drop-out rates.

Nasreen's organization, Amhi Amchya Arogyasathi, has worked to improve health in tribal, rural, and urban areas of Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh for three decades. After Nasreen participated in Rise Up's Accelerator and applied for competitive seed funding, Rise Up provided Nasreen and her organization a grant to implement her strategy.

Before launching the full strategy, Nasreen and Amhi Amchya Arogyasathi set out to better identify the needs of girls in their community and develop effective solutions with them. They conducted a study of over 800 girls from 28 schools in Nagpur City to identify and assess the needs and issues girls face around menstruation hygiene and health.

### Nasreen's Story: Keeping Girls in School in Maharashtra, India



*"I was brought up in a society where misconceptions, cultural practices, and social taboos around menstruation were imposed quite strongly and restricted my mobility. When I experienced my menstrual period for the very first time, I was at school and I was terrified. I thought of menstruation as a burden. Now, when I hear the same story from young women and girls, I very easily relate to them because of my experience. Girls continue to be discriminated against and excluded, especially during menstruation. Due to stigma and lack of sexual education, knowledge about menstruation remains limited, leaving many girls with negative and ambivalent feelings and experiencing psychosocial stress, which also impacts their ability to learn."*

### The survey found:

- More than **50%** of adolescent girls reported that stigma about menstruation restricts their mobility during their periods
- **40%** of girls do not attend schools during their menstruation
- **82%** of girls are not satisfied with the school facilities for menstruation
- **43%** of girls said that lack of facilities in school create hurdles in their education

### GIRL-CENTERED ADVOCACY STRATEGY

With support from Rise Up, Nasreen and Amhi Amchya Arogyasathi strategically engaged adolescent girls in their community to



Nasreen (center, second from right) in a group activity during the Rise Up Accelerator in 2019.

*“When I became a Rise Up Leader, the Leadership and Advocacy Accelerator helped me to become more focused and see the larger picture of the issues affecting girls and women. I learned a lot from the other leaders in my cohort and honed my skills in doing girl-centered advocacy.*

*The workshop also helped me steer my strategic direction and decide on the advocacy approaches needed to address issues facing girls in my community. I implemented the learnings from the workshop in my organization’s day-to-day work and that gave us the courage to shift and strengthen our work to go beyond what we had done before.*

*Previously, my community work with my organization Amhi Amchya Arogyasathi was at the grassroots level. This work is important, but after the Accelerator, we also understood that there are other critical steps needed to fully address the issues facing girls, like communicating with the media, forming networks with other stakeholders, and educating decision-makers. We also realized that we should strive to create new leaders who can sustain and carry on our work.*



Nasreen (left) receiving her diploma at the end of the Rise Up Accelerator.

advocate for their rights to menstrual hygiene products and disposal facilities. They selected 56 adolescent girl leaders, two leaders from each Nagpur Municipal Corporation school, and held workshops with this core group of leaders as well as nearly 2,000 other girls to enhance their knowledge around menstrual hygiene and enable them to advocate for their rights and create municipal level change. Additionally, they facilitated meetings where the girl leaders shared their demands with school management committee members.

Together, the girl leaders and school management committee members wrote a letter to the Commissioner of Nagpur Municipal Corporation (NMC) sharing the findings from the baseline survey and the girls' demands. They also requested a meeting with all the key stakeholders, including the education officer, chairman of the

*"My organization and I are now working closely with girl leaders and our local schools to make menstruation supplies and related disposal facilities available. Thanks to the learnings and support from Rise Up, we have been successful in this process. As one of the girls said, 'Now, menstruation is not creating any hindrances to our studies. Now, we are not forced to use a single pad throughout the day during school time, and we are very happy.' Looking at the happiness on their faces and spark in their eyes, I feel as if I have conquered the world!"*

*My goal for the future is for all schools to have menstruation supplies and disposal facilities available very soon. I also want to see teachers connect with girls to help them understand the natural phenomenon of menstruation and not see it as such a burden. Furthermore, I want menstruation management facilities to be available in all government, private schools, orphanages, and public places in Nagpur and throughout Maharashtra."*

**— Nasreen Ansari, Program Coordinator at Amhi Amchya Arogyasathi and Rise Up Leader since 2019**

Education Committee, chairman of Women and Child Welfare, and the chairman of NMC's Health Committee.

During the meeting, Nasreen and Amhi Amchya Arogyasathi raised the issues related to menstruation, hygiene, and sanitation in schools. The girl leaders shared their experiences, including how the societal norms and myths around menstruation create stigma for them and how the lack of access to sanitary napkins and disposal facilities in school restricts their mobility and can cause them to miss classes. They demanded funding for necessary supplies and appropriate facilities in school.

### ADVOCACY SUCCESS

Just six months after Nasreen launched her strategy in August 2019, the Commissioner of Nagpur Municipal Corporation responded to the demands of the girl leaders by issuing an order for the provision of sanitary napkins across all 28 schools for one year as well as the installation of bins for their disposal. The Social Welfare Officer has also ordered the installation of disposal machines in 10 schools in the next financial year, 2020-21. School officials have drafted and proposed a budget to implement the provision to the Education Department. Additionally, teachers in these schools will conduct regular sessions to spread awareness on menstruation, hygiene, and sanitation.

Rise Up is providing ongoing support and technical assistance to Nasreen and Amhi Amchya Arogyasathi, as they continue to advocate with the Education Department and Department of Women and Child Development to ensure the disposal bins and



*Nasreen (right) with the girl leaders who successfully advocated for menstrual hygiene supplies in Nagpur schools.*

other hygiene facilities are installed in all 28 schools with proper funding to sustain them over time. This access to menstrual hygiene and feminine facilities will ensure that 2,000 girls can meet their basic needs, stay in school, and reach their full potential. Nasreen's girl-centered advocacy strategy will serve as a model that can be scaled up at the state level to benefit 10 million school-age girls in Maharashtra and replicated in school districts across the country. Additionally, as a Rise Up Leader, Nasreen will have continued opportunities to benefit from Rise Up's comprehensive support — including sharing her story on global platforms, applying for continued funding to expand her important work, receiving ongoing technical assistance and support for her work, and learning from other Rise Up Leaders.