

## Women Entrepreneurs Lead on Menstrual Health in Bangladesh



Rita Majumder speaking to women about sanitary pads, Feni city, Bangladesh.

**Photo credit: World Bank**

What if talking about menstrual health wasn't a taboo— but a path to purpose, profit, and public health?

In rural communities across Bangladesh, dedicated champions like Rita Majumder are quietly driving change. A mother and teacher from Shilua, Rita is now also a menstrual hygiene entrepreneur. With limited household income, she needed a way to support her family. But her decision to sell sanitary napkins wasn't only about earning money.

After attending an entrepreneurship training offered by a local partner under [a World Bank-financed project](#), Rita was inspired by what she learned about menstrual health—and determined to make a difference for women who feel too shy or ashamed to purchase these products publicly.

Using her skills as a teacher and her new knowledge, Rita began organizing school sessions, community meetings, and home visits to educate women and girls. She now sells up to 150 packets per month, carefully selecting brands that balance affordability and quality based on community needs. *"Despite having the money, many women still don't use sanitary napkins because they lack information,"* Rita explains.

**Despite having the money, many women still don't use sanitary napkins because they lack information.**



**Rita Majumder**  
*Entrepreneur*



*Baby Akhter in her house, Chattogram, Bangladesh.*

**Photo credit: World Bank**

Far to the southeast in Boilchhari village in Chattogram, 21-year-old **Baby Akter** took on a similar challenge. After her father fell ill, Baby stepped up to help support her family. With the help of the project, she launched her own sanitary napkin business, now selling more than 200 packets a month. *“The demand is more than I can meet,”* she says, recently recruiting her niece to help manage and expand the enterprise. But her impact goes beyond business—she conducts awareness sessions, helping girls and women understand menstrual hygiene and break long-standing taboos.

### **Menstrual Hygiene: A Persistent Gap**

Despite progress in health and gender equality, menstrual hygiene remains shrouded in stigma in many countries around the world, including Bangladesh. Deep-rooted taboos, the high cost of products, and inadequate sanitation facilities continue to undermine the dignity, mobility, and well-being of millions of women and girls.

In Bangladesh, according to a recent study, only 23% of women use suitable menstrual materials. Many still rely on cloths that are not properly washed or dried—posing serious health risks, including urinary and reproductive tract infections. Over 70% of Bangladeshi youth believe menstruating girls should avoid daily activities like going out, cooking, or eating certain foods. As a result, one in four girls misses school during their period, yet only 6% of schools provide menstrual hygiene education.

### **Breaking Silence through Women Entrepreneurship**

To tackle these challenges, the [Bangladesh Rural Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for Human Capital Development Project](#) is improving access to safe water supply, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) in 98 subdistricts (upazilas) across Bangladesh. Beyond reaching 3.6



million people with improved sanitation and 600,000 with clean water, the project includes a focused component on menstrual health management.

*The Bangladesh Rural Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for Human Capital Development Project financed by IDA and AIIB will reach 3.6 million people with improved sanitation and 600,000 with clean water.*

Recognizing the gap in female-led distribution networks, the project partnered with local organizations to train women in entrepreneurship and offer small loans to start sanitary product businesses. A survey revealed that almost 90% of women prefer to buy menstrual products at their doorstep, and over 60% prefer purchasing from other women. This insight proved critical: when female entrepreneurs bring products directly to homes, both access and usage improve.



*Baby Akhter leads a discussion on menstrual hygiene with women and girls in her community.*

**Photo credit: World Bank**

This approach is transformative because it builds women-led, peer-to-peer networks that deliver both products and information— making menstrual health more accessible, acceptable, and sustainable in rural communities.

To date, more than 350 women have been trained. Bangladesh’s sanitary napkin market is growing by 20% annually, highlighting strong business potential for both reusable and disposable products. Starting with sanitary napkins, many of these women entrepreneurs have since expanded their product lines and increased their incomes. However, these women are more than entrepreneurs—they are health advocates, educators, and leaders in their communities.

## **A Comprehensive Approach to Menstrual Health**

The stories of these entrepreneurs reflect the [World Bank’s broader commitment to integrating menstrual health](#) into its WASH investments. The Bank’s [Gender Data](#)

[Portal](#) now tracks national menstrual health indicators, and nearly half of the Bank-financed WASH operations approved last year included menstrual health components. Much of the World Bank's work on menstrual hygiene health and education has been made possible through the support of the [Global Water Security and Sanitation Partnership](#) (GWSP), which helps drive innovation, strengthen capacity, and pilot new, transformative approaches.

Effective menstrual hygiene management requires more than infrastructure or education—it needs a comprehensive approach that includes stigma reduction and behavior change, supportive policies, and market-based solutions.



*Students wash their hands after using the toilets at Lideta Limat school in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.*

**Photo copyright: World Bank**

For example, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, [World Bank-financed projects](#) are combining menstrual-friendly school facilities with culturally appropriate curricula and entrepreneurship support to improve access to hygienic pads. In [Tanzania](#) and [Ethiopia](#) upgraded facilities in primary schools – alongside dedicated menstrual hygiene counselors and girls' clubs - have helped reduce absenteeism and make education more inclusive. In Ghana, collaboration with local community and religious leaders, along with the integration of menstrual hygiene management into the school curriculum, is helping overcome cultural taboos and stigma.

What sets Bangladesh apart is its grassroots entrepreneurship model – a powerful, community driven approach, piloted and consistently improved with [GWSP](#) support, that offers valuable lessons for other countries. By scaling up entrepreneurship, integrating menstrual health indicators into national WASH and health monitoring systems, and strengthening links with adolescent-friendly services, menstrual health can become a sustained public priority rather than a one-off intervention.

*What sets Bangladesh apart is its grassroots entrepreneurship model – a powerful, community driven approach that offers valuable lessons for other countries.*

*As we mark Menstrual Hygiene Day on May 28, it's a timely reminder that enabling women and girls to manage their periods safely and with dignity is not only a public health necessity—but also essential for inclusive economic growth. By embedding menstrual hygiene management across water, education, and health systems, countries can ensure that no girl misses school because of her period—and that women live with dignity, confidence, and good health.*