



## **LAUNCHING THE FEMININE HYGIENE PROJECT**

Menstrual hygiene continues to be one of the most challenging development issues today in India. Many women and girls lack access to hygienic sanitary materials and basic facilities necessary for good menstrual hygiene management. In addition, there are deep-rooted taboos, myths and misinformation which create the illusion that menstruation is inherently shameful and unpleasant.

The Toronto-Calcutta Foundation (TCF), a Canadian based registered charity, launched a new feminine hygiene program in January 2020 with the aim to provide hygienic sanitary pads as well as education to women and girls about menstrual hygiene management in effort to break taboos and myths and decrease school absenteeism. The beneficiaries will be women and adolescent girls from a low socio-economic status in rural West Bengal, India.

The project was launched at 3 locations where TCF supports ongoing programs at Habra, North 24 Parganas district, Hotar, South 24 Parganas and Boral, Kolkata. Three Board Directors of TCF attended the launch- Mr. Tapan Mazumdar, Mrs. Chitra Ghosh and Dr. Teesta Basu Soman. Dr. Teesta Soman, a medical doctor in Toronto, Canada, led the programs at each location.

At Habra and Hotar, 58 and 28 girls respectively in classes 9-11, who attend coaching classes sponsored by TCF, attended the sessions. At project launch girls were provided with knowledge about menstruation, diet and healthy practices with use of interactive audio-visuals and print materials. They were given free sanitary napkins and will continue to be provided with these every month. Female teachers were identified who attended the sessions and will continue to be the contact person for the girls and distribute sanitary napkins at the beginning of each month. In Boral a similar program was delivered to slightly older girls and women (ages 17-35) enrolled in a vocation training school for sewing funded by TCF. Twenty-eight women will receive sanitary napkins monthly.

The main message provided was that menstrual cycles are a normal part of a girl's life and she should not have to miss out on school or other key activities during this time. Healthy practices were encouraged. Advice was also provided under which circumstances they should seek medical care. A total of 104 girls are expected to benefit from this program currently. TCF is looking to enlarge the scope of this program to benefit more girls of school-age.