

100 Stories of Change..  
by Goonj..

## The Journey from cloth to 'MY Pad'..



The first story in this series talked about why cloth is more important to a woman for her menstruation and how women suffer in the absence of a piece of cloth...

This was a big insight in Goonj's journey of understanding the relevance of cloth in the lives of the poor. It connected to our core values of dignity and matching material to the needs of the poor. We found that it was easy to reach a market napkin used in the cities to the women in the far flung villages of India, the big question was - does it work for them? Would it solve all aspects of the problem? Could we or any entity in the world provide a woman in the far flung village, a sanitary napkin for her entire menstrual life starting age 13 to around 50 years? Would it be good for the village ecosystem, given the plastic sheet in the napkin and the outer cover? Was there adequate infrastructure pan India to ensure proper disposal? What was the role we could play in this massive age old issue? A lot of questions; some ethical, some practical, some simply about setting our priorities..



**The initial phase of making sanitary napkins - A scene from Tamil Nadu in 2005**



**Initial packing of sanitary napkins when they were named "Easy"**

The clarity around these questions was critical before stepping into something which connected deeply with a woman's social, physical and psychological health. To be honest it was a bit overwhelming at first.. We needed to find our own strengths, capacities and roles.

What we knew clearly was that the problem has three critical dimensions – The Triple A's of menstruation; Access, affordability and Awareness to deal with.



**Undergarments made from hosiery cloth is an integral part of the hygiene kit..**



**A scene from napkin manufacturing unit of Goonj's processing center at Delhi**

So we started with the simple - addressing a woman's need for adequate clean cloth.. We could do this given our pan India network and processes around cloth collection... It started when we had at hand more than 100 trucks of clothes as a leftover of the Tsunami disaster wastage. Our first research on what the cloth should be like came from those 40 women who came from nearby slums to work on sorting this mammoth volume. The women started by personally using the various samples.. the length, width, thickness etc. thus evolved from this small lab of personal use... You and I might have different ideas about what a sanitary pad should be like but we were thinking of the women who couldn't even afford enough cloth to cover themselves.

The MY Pad we have today may be called very basic but that's precisely what its meant to be.. There were some experiments around practical usage like putting loops etc but we found that practices were different at different places. It also highlighted a connected yet ignored need of undergarments. We figured the best hosiery material (for the undergarments) in the world from the best branded T shirts which came to us. Starting with a paper packaging we soon moved to a more environment friendly cloth pack..

Here's a simple 5 step process of making MY Pads; 1. Sorted cotton cloth is soaked overnight and washed in washing machines two times. 2. Cloth dried in sunlight is cut into specific sizes. 3. Cloth pieces are ironed to ensure there is no moisture 4. Smaller cloth shreds are inserted into the bigger cloth piece and folded to make a hand made cloth sanitary pad 5. a set of 15 MY Pads are inserted into a cloth pack together with a small pictorial leaflet highlighting some simple do's and don't around washing, drying, storing and disposal.

## The Process Of Making MY Pad

### माई पैड बनाने की प्रक्रिया



<p>Separating the cotton &amp; semi cotton cloth कॉटन व सेमी कॉटन कपड़ा अलग करना</p> 	<p>Removing buttons, zip, elastics etc. बटन, बेल, इलास्टिक आदि को काटकर अलग करना</p> 	<p>In the pieces of 16x 10.5 inches &amp; cutting 16 x 10.5 इंच के आकार में काटना</p> 	<p>Washing धोना</p> 	<p>Drying धूप में सुखाना</p> 
<p>Ironing to make it moisture free नमी हटाने के लिए प्रेस करना</p> 	<p>Folding मोड़ना</p> 	<p>Checking with the magnet &amp; packing चुम्बक से लोहे की जांच करना</p> 	<p>Final Product अंतिम उत्पाद</p> 	



### The induction of loops in napkins - An experiment !!



Pixby Goonj..

It's really the awareness building about health and hygiene aspects of menstruation that we found the most challenging. In some ways it was similar to our work with cloth. We first had to establish that it was an ignored basic need.. The bigger challenge with menstruation was an all pervasive culture of shame and silence around it, marred by social, cultural and religious myths, taboos and practices. Many of our grassroots partner groups expressed resistance on working on this highly sensitive issue. The ray of hope came from the women themselves.. While we went apprehensively into all women's village meetings, women all across, despite their initial hesitation came out to speak vociferously about their challenges around menstruation. It made us realize that no one had ever spoken to these women about this monthly disaster and they were desperate to share countless confusions and questions boggling in their minds. We figured that the Goonj's MY Pads, (as they came to be branded sometime ago) could act as a trigger to get these women to talk about this closed up issue.

What happened over the years can best be imagined with this little story.

"I was selling the packets of sanitary pads we make at Goonj at an exhibition. A man came across and said he liked the 'pillows' on sale. I told him to buy a couple, rest his head on them and then pass them on to his mother/sister/wife at home," said Sheila, one of Goonj's processing team members. When Sheila explained the real use for the cloth pads, the man was first embarrassed, then impressed. He said it was the first time he'd talked about this 'taboo' topic with a lady." she shares with a laugh. It's not common for women like Sheila, who migrate to cities like Delhi from conservative village backgrounds, to speak so candidly about menses or sanitary pads to a stranger, that too to a man. Sheila is part of the strong team of empowered and aware women who not only make 'MY Pads' in Goonj but also engage actively with the masses.. men and women alike.. in breaking the taboo of shame and silence around this issue.



The evolution of Sanitary Napkins over the years now known as 'My Pads'



Active participation of boys in 'Chuppi Todo Baithak' being held in a city college

But why are we sharing this story with people like you and me who can obviously buy a market sanitary napkin and may never use a Goonj MY Pad? The answer lies in why we still get sanitary pads in a black plastic bag or why women in educated households are still forbidden from doing many things during menses. See if you can truthfully tell your male colleague/friend/brother about your menstrual cramps and you will know this isn't just about the product or women or villages.

In April 2014 Goonj launched NJPC – A Million Voices campaign ([www.njpc.goonj.org](http://www.njpc.goonj.org)) asking people in the cities and villages across the world to share their thoughts, opinions and challenges around menses. We hope that when a million people talk about this issue, it will multiply into a culture of normalcy around menses.. That opening up of the issue will be the beginning of the world's accurate understanding of the various aspects of the issue.

Join us to make a difference in those 60 days of the year.. A contribution of Rs. 1200 or \$24 will reach a dignity pack to 4 women. (Each pack contains 60'My Pad' – clean cloth sanitary pads and 3 undergarments, along with lot of information & awareness.)

Some action points to connect with the cause..



# 60 Dignified days

Millions of women use sand, ash and rags as sanitary pads during menses..

GOONJ's NJPC (Not Just a Piece of Cloth) is changing this scenario..  
Join us to make a difference in those 60 days of the year..



- ❁ A contribution of Rs. 1200 or \$24 will reach a dignity pack to 4 women. (Each pack contains 60 'MY Pad'- clean cloth sanitary pads & 3 undergarments, along with lot of information and awareness.)
- ❁ To contribute, please refer [http://goonj.org/?page\\_id=55](http://goonj.org/?page_id=55) or send a cheque/draft in the name of GOONJ to J-93, Sarita Vihar, New Delhi-76, with your name, address & contact details.  
(All donations to GOONJ.. are exempted u/s 80G of IT act)
- ❁ Also, do share your VOICE at [www.njpc.goonj.org](http://www.njpc.goonj.org)

Cloth is a basic need of a woman as is her self-respect and dignity.. It's this symbiotic relationship between the two that made us call our work 'Not just a piece of cloth..'

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