Project Summary

The Period Project aims to create a safe space within the school setting for menstruating youth in remote areas of Nepal, where lack of access to menstrual products, coupled with menstrual taboos, hamper the day-to-day lives of young people. The focus is two-fold:

1. Conduct on-the-ground sensitization programs that meet the specific and particular needs of the community with the aim to address menstrual taboos and restrictions. (Region-specific taboos and practices will be addressed.)

2. Increase access to menstrual products on school premises through evidence-based, innovative sanitary napkin vending machines which have proven to help keep girls in school.

Period poverty refers to the inadequate and unequal access to menstrual products, education, hygiene facilities, and waste management, and is a continuous challenge faced by menstruating individuals on a global scale. In Nepal, menstruation itself has many titles, primarily due to traditional beliefs surrounding this natural biological process. Evidence shows that 83.1% of women in Nepal have undergone some form of taboo-laden restriction during their menstrual cycle.

Menstrual Taboos and Restrictions: An Unfortunate Reality of Nepal

A period should end a sentence, not a girl’s life. One of the gravest forms of menstrual restrictions is Chaupadi Pratha, an ancient Hindu practice that banishes women from their households during their menstruation days and forces them to live in unsanitary cow sheds. This practice was criminalized by the Nepali government in 2005. However, it is still practiced in certain parts of Nepal. The isolation of women in unsanitary sheds has led to several deaths; the last recorded death was in 2019. There are several other more common restrictions imposed on menstruating individuals, even within urban settings, which include prohibition from entering religious spaces and kitchens as well as limitations on gathering socially, partaking in cultural events, and even attending school. Overcoming such cultural taboos amidst financial struggles has made menstruation an uphill battle for women and other menstruating individuals in Nepali society.

I grew up listening to stories about how my grandmother and her sisters would have to seek shelter outside their homes and go by the river to bathe even in the coldest mornings during their menstruation days. After I started menstruating, I was told that I was “impure” during the days I bled and had to face certain restrictions within my own household. I started questioning these beliefs when I learnt about menstruation in school and was able to perceive it merely as a biological process. I believe battling and overcoming such taboos in society requires education, especially for the younger generations who are capable of bringing about change in society. When I learnt about the work done by Pad2Go Nepal, I was inspired to get involved but couldn’t do so as I was living abroad.

Project Partner and Execution

This project will be executed in collaboration with Pad2Go Nepal, an organization established in 2018 that pioneered introducing sanitary napkin vending machines in Nepal. Pad2Go’s primary focus is to ensure affordable access to period products for menstruating people, especially within school settings. With over 350 machines installed in all seven provinces of Nepal, Pad2Go has acquired a household name amongst the youth of Nepal. In 2020, they were featured in the Forbes 30 under 30 category for their groundbreaking, impact-based work. This project will have a two-pronged approach. With an aim to deconstruct taboos and help young girls access menstrual products, the two elements of this project are sensitization, and installation of sanitary napkin vending machines.
Concurrent to the installation of the vending machines, I will work with the Pad2Go team to conduct workshops on menstruation and the impact of taboos on the lives of young people. These will be held inclusively with all students to initiate conversations surrounding menstruation. The workshops will help students critically question existing taboos and barriers with the ultimate aim of limiting generationally inherited taboos. It will also focus on informing students about the correct way to use and dispose of or clean menstrual products. Beyond battling the stigma surrounding menstruation, the project also focuses on starting conversations about menopause within the community.

We will install sanitary napkin vending machines in six remote schools within Province 2 of Nepal. A 2017 study on menstrual health and hygiene in Nepal showed that 15% of the menstruating population used pads, while 83% relied on cloth and pieces of fabric—a practice which has led to several health issues. The girls in these six remote schools will have easy access to sanitary napkins and a part of the budget will go toward supplying all the installed machines with sanitary napkins for the following 36 months. Additionally, I will be distributing Dignity Kits in the schools, each consisting of reusable cloth pads, underwear, hand soaps, reusable masks and infographic pamphlets on safe menstrual practices, all of which will better help them manage their menstrual cycle.

The two-pronged approach of this project aims to address access to menstrual products in schools in the short term and eliminate menstrual restrictions in the long run. This would be a big start to encouraging the younger generations to change existing views on menstruation and for communities and families to provide proper care to women in their households. It would also help implement an existing law that criminalizes a harmful practice, and would make communities more cautious about illegal practices. The installation of sanitary napkin vending machines would encourage educational institutes to create safer spaces for girls and encourage girls to participate in school even during their menstruation days. The vending machines will be supplied with sanitary napkins for three years, which will prolong their access to sanitary napkins in school. After that, schools will be encouraged to continue the supply of sanitary napkins as Pad2Go provides pads at less-than-market-rate in order to ensure affordability.

Missing a week of classes every month due to lack of access to menstrual products in schools and facing restrictive taboos has resulted in increased school drop outs, unemployment, and more serious issues like child marriage and human trafficking among young girls. Such occurrences have created a vicious cycle of injustice for women in Nepal. With an aim to promote full participation of girls and menstruating individuals in schools, this project will help improve attendance and, in the long run, offer a chance for a better future for young girls. The project seeks to bring peace into these individual lives and communities through long-term security and equity.

I was born and raised in Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal. Having gotten an opportunity to attend a school that had community service integrated with its core curriculum, I grew up valuing community engagement and participated in service activities since primary school. My passion for global issues and problem solving was key in my participation in Model United Nations throughout my high school years. Attending UWC in China helped me gain a broader perspective of the world. I was able to see the world through a different lens as I was part of a very diverse community where I had an opportunity to meet people from all across the world and get a glimpse of their cultures. I was part of the TEDx and Model United Nations team in China and also got a chance to work with the students as a Peer Mentor and House Representative. As I enjoyed these roles in high school, I wanted to actively engage with the members of Whitman community and worked as a Student Academic Advisor, Learning Mentor for Chemistry and am currently working as a Student Career Advisor and Program Coordinator for Buddy Program. My involvement in all these roles have allowed me to interact with individuals within communities I have been or am part of and exchange ideas, information, experiences and service which aligns with my core community values.