

## ***Story of Anjali, A Beneficiary of Heeals's Sanitation, Safe Drinking Water and Girl Child Education Awareness Project.***

**Name:** Anjali

**Age:** 18 years old

**Area:** Uttar Pradesh



Anjali is an 18 year old girl living in a rural village in one of India's poorest states, Uttar Pradesh. She spends her days helping with cooking and cleaning in the house having been forced by her father to leave education early. For Anjali and her family life is hard. Her father is very poor, she tells us. He cannot afford to build them a toilet and cannot provide the money for sanitary napkins, although she would not ask as menstruation is not discussed with men in this community.

Without access to a toilet Anjali must manage her monthly menstruation in a field. If she is to clean herself, then water must be collected in a bucket from the village pump and carried with her. Learning from the actions of her sister, this field is also the location for the disposal of her used cloths. She sees no other option in an area where there are no bin facilities. Anxiously shifting from foot to foot Anjali describes how she feels embarrassed when she is on her period, exaggerated by the fact that she is prevented from entering the kitchen or worshipping during this time as she is considered unclean.

Taboos around menstruation result in misinformation, stigma, fear and exclusion. They prevent women from reaching out for support and lead to poor menstrual hygiene practices. In a culture where silence around menstruation pervades it is most often these taboos and restrictions that are observed by children and passed on through generations rather than good hygienic practices and biological facts, many of which the mothers themselves may not be aware.

HEEALS is working to educate girls and women like Anjali about good menstrual hygiene practices through workshops and consistent monitoring and evaluation to understand the unique circumstances and challenges of each community. Workshops include education on how to manage menstruation in a way that promotes good health and enables girls to continue with their studies. It also encourages girls to speak openly with each other about their experiences and for mothers to educate their daughters on the topic.

Tackling social stigma, cultural norms and lack of awareness is an important first step in empowering women to manage their menstruation hygienically and with dignity. However economic barriers remain a significant obstacle preventing women such as Anjali from acting on information about menstrual health, affecting accessibility to sanitary products and

appropriate facilities for maintaining hygiene, changing pads in privacy and disposing of them in an environmentally safe and dignified manner. Bringing men into the menstrual hygiene management conversation, as the primary decision makers on where money is spent, will be an important first step in prioritising expenditure on accessibility to products and infrastructure - a difficult task in a culture where there is an aversion to dialogue about 'intimate' subjects.