



CASE STUDY

PROJECT BAALA

A holistic approach to sustainable menstrual health

Project Baala

www.projectbaala.com

Project Baala is a social enterprise that champions sustainable menstrual health solutions while empowering women in underserved communities. In the confluence of patriarchy, gender, culture, religion, and capitalism, menstruation continues to be a subject of taboo and misinformation in India. A staggering 71% of adolescent girls are unaware of menstruation until they experience their first period¹. As per a survey conducted by the Ministry of Health, roughly 120 million menstruating adolescents in India experience menstrual dysfunctions, affecting their normal daily chores². Project Baala aims to address these challenges head-on by creating a period-positive society, eradicating myths and taboos surrounding menstruation, while providing sustainable solutions and generating long-term employment opportunities.



Poor menstrual hygiene contributes to 40,000 annual deaths in India

PROBLEM - SOLUTION

The pressing issues surrounding menstrual health in India are multifaceted, including a lack of awareness, poor hygiene practices, and deeply rooted taboos. Project Baala introduces a three-pronged solution to tackle these issues comprehensively. Founded and led

by women, the organisation operates with a holistic approach that encompasses the development of sustainable menstrual products, awareness programs, and livelihood opportunities for women entrepreneurs.

1- <https://www.unicef.org/india/stories/changing-future-lessons-past#:~:text=A%20UNICEF%20report%20had%20found,lives%20during%20the%20menstrual%20cycle>.

2- <https://swachhindia.ndtv.com/23-million-women-drop-out-of-school-every-year-when-they-start-menstruating-in-india-17838/#:~:text=Roughly%20120%20million%20menstruating%20adolescents,du%20to%20poor%20menstrual%20hygiene>

BUSINESS MODEL

Project Baala's target customer group consists of economically marginalised menstruators who lack the resources necessary for proper menstrual hygiene. The organisation's approach has demonstrated a remarkable social return on investment, where every \$1 invested in the Baala solution translates to a social impact equivalent to \$10.43. This impact is measured in terms of better health, increased income, environmental waste reduction, and decreased spending on alternative menstrual absorbents. Through building ecosystems based on gender sensitivity, sympathy, and empathy, menstruation as a topic and process is normalised.

The organisation operates with two primary revenue streams: 90% of the revenue comes in from Business-to-Business (B2B) sales to corporate clients, aid organisations, and governments who fund rural communities, and 10% is Direct-to-Consumer (D2C) segment, responding to organic demand generated within communities impacted by B2B partnerships.

CIRCULAR ECONOMY IN ACTION

Project Baala actively puts circular economy principles into action by combining thoughtful processes and products. The organisation's key initiatives include:

Sustainable Absorbents: Baala pads are reusable, hygienic, and cost-effective, with a design that combines the comfort of cloth pads with the technology of disposable ones. These pads reduce waste, last up to two years, and mitigate the stress of disposal.

Awareness Modules: Project Baala goes beyond awareness by creating modules tailored to diverse menstruator demographics, including athletes, rural communities, and urban settings. These modules debunk myths and taboos, nurturing period-positive communities.

Livelihood Model: To break the cycle of poverty, Project Baala trains women to become entrepreneurs. This model is self-sustaining, enabling women to earn supplementary income, gain confidence, and take control of their financial decisions.

WOMEN IN SUSTAINABILITY

Project Baala is resolute in its mission to destigmatize menstruation while prioritizing sustainability. With a women-led approach, they ensure that women play a pivotal role in manufacturing, education, and creating local access points for menstrual products. This approach empowers women at every stage of their operations, providing employment and skill development opportunities while ensuring inclusivity & inspiring change, even in the most remote areas. It's a model that champions gender equity & equality while addressing critical issues related to menstrual health and hygiene.

"Girls, women, and individuals who menstruate are at the forefront of all the work we do. The interventions are not just formulated for them but by them as well."

MEASURING IMPACT

Project Baala's initiatives have a significant influence across three vital segments. Under the 'Sustainable Absorbents,' they make a substantial environmental impact by preventing the creation of over **200 pieces of non-biodegradable menstrual waste** for each Baala pads kit. These reusable sanitary napkins, known for their affordability, hygiene, and user-friendliness, continually evolve through community-driven innovation. The 'Awareness Module' confronts deeply ingrained **myths and taboos** surrounding menstruation, progressively empowering women to assert greater control over their health. Engaging directly with over **7,50,000 beneficiaries**, Project Baala has successfully crafted a comprehensive and informative awareness curriculum that resonates with communities. Their distinct engagement techniques, encompassing storytelling, poetry, and theater, effectively disseminate knowledge and captivate a diverse audience. The 'Livelihood Model' further reinforces the organization's commitment to sustainable solutions. By empowering village-level women entrepreneurs as spokespeople and salespeople for Baala, the organization ensures enduring awareness and product access while creating opportunities for women to secure livelihoods, nurturing self-reliance within the community.

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AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

- World Bank Youth Competition Finalist in 2021
- Global Good Fund Fellow 2021
- Acumen Fellow in 2022
- Regional finalist for 2023 Commonwealth Youth Awards

GROWTH PLANS

Project Baala's unique triple-bottom-line approach positively impacts people, the planet, and profitability. To continue making a difference, the organisation plans to expand its product portfolio, create more intersectional awareness modules, and reach 2 million girls and women while training 5,000 women entrepreneurs by 2026. Collaboration with government bodies, corporations, and NGOs is essential to achieve these goals.

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WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

Soumya Dabriwal, Co-founder Project Baala



Project Baala's commitment to empowering women is exemplified by its founder, Soumya. Her personal journey reflects her dedication to creating a more equitable and sustainable world.

Soumya's story serves as an inspiration for many and emphasises the importance of women taking leadership roles in the circular economy and sustainability sectors.

When Soumya embarked on her journey to address menstrual health challenges, she was deeply impacted by the situation in Ghana, where girls would miss school due to inadequate menstrual hygiene. Her volunteer work and experiences in various countries, including Ghana, South Africa, and Haryana, made her acutely aware of the need for sustainable solutions that encompassed both the social and environmental aspects.

"I secured my first funding for Project Baala as a 21-year-old college student, and I have not looked back ever since."

Soumya believes that society benefits greatly when more women assume leadership roles in the circular economy and sustainability sectors. Women bring unique perspectives and approaches that promote productivity, collaboration, and dedication. They can inspire others to follow suit, ultimately helping build a safer, more inclusive world.

"I am proud of championing sustainability - internally within Baala and externally with the Baala ecosystem."

Soumya's dedication to championing the 3 Rs - reduce, recycle, and reuse - reflects the values she inherited from her mother and grandmother, who practised these principles as a necessity. Soumya believes that women have a unique perspective on sustainability and its importance in daily life. Soumya's experiences and her focus on sustainability drive Project Baala's mission to empower women in underserved communities and address global challenges related to menstrual health.



ABOUT CIRCLEAD

CircuLead is designed to empower women entrepreneurs building innovative solutions in the Resource Efficiency and Circular Economy. The programme aims to support women leaders to strengthen their business models, deepen their leadership skills and learn from peers through a hybrid, immersive learning experience. The EU-Resource Efficiency Initiative (EU-REI) is implementing this capacity building programme with support from [Nüshu Network](#), powered by [Unlock Impact](#).

ABOUT EU-RESOURCE EFFICIENCY INITIATIVE

European Union's Resource Efficiency Initiative (EU-REI) (2017-2023) for India and aims to support India in the implementation of the United Nations global Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) agenda by way of adapting international standards and best practices in business on resource efficiency and circular economy and fostering the efficient and sustainable use of natural resources. The EU-REI aims to facilitate partnerships between Indian and European businesses and stakeholders on Resource Efficiency (RE) and Circular Economy economy in sectors of interest.

EU-REI acts as an important vehicle for the India-EU Resource Efficiency and Circular Economy Partnership.

It is implemented on behalf of the European Union by a consortium led by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH with The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), Confederation of the Indian Industry (CII) and adelphi.

ABOUT UNLOCK IMPACT AND NÜSHU NETWORK

[Unlock Impact](#) is a gender-smart women-led firm dedicated to help purpose-driven enterprises succeed across South and Southeast Asia. Powered by Unlock Impact, the [Nüshu Network](#) offers community, coaching and capital for women entrepreneurs in Asia who are looking to build and grow sustainable enterprises. Since its inception, the network has delivered 2000+ hours of learning, 1000+ hours of mentoring at 50+ community events to over 500+ women entrepreneurs.

ABOUT adelphi

[adelphi](#) is Europe's leading independent think-and-do tank for climate, environment and development. We are some 350 strategists, thought leaders and practitioners working at the local and global levels to find solutions to the most urgent political, economic and social challenges of our time. As a policy consultancy, we support a just transition towards carbon neutrality and sustainable, liveable societies. Our work is grounded in transdisciplinary research, evidence-based consulting and stakeholder dialogues. With these tools we shape policy agendas, facilitate political communication, inform policy processes and support decision-makers.

