A formative research and baseline survey was conducted in 2013 by UNICEF and its partners with the objective of determining the existing knowledge levels, attitudes and practices and norms related to menstrual hygiene behaviours among adolescent girls, women and other stakeholders in the two districts (Nalanda and Vaishali). Over 4,500 interviews were carried out with various respondents. Primary audience of the study were adolescent girls—pre-menarche and post menarche. Mothers and fathers were also interviewed. Influencers such as community leaders, female schoolteachers and frontline health workers were also interviewed for a holistic understanding.
96% used old cloth as menstrual absorbent
92% girls considered socio-religious restrictions imposed as “fair”
83% girls were completely unprepared for first menarche
81% expressed low self-confidence in attending religious functions during menstruation
75% unaware of the importance of washing menstrual cloth
61% felt embarrassed and humiliated over restrictions
59% missed school on account of menstruation
56% no discussion on why menstruation happens
47 %
felt scared
28% Never washed cloth before using first time
15% had never heard of sanitary napkins
Adolescent girls knew nothing about menstruation before its onset. With no preparation or information, the first menstrual cycle was a horrific experience for most girls. Majority of them reported that they were not prepared in any way for their first menstruation.

Surprisingly, 90% of the mothers expected their daughters to know about menstruation, even though they had not prepared or informed them in any way.
Base: Post menarche: 1200, Teachers: 300, FLWs: 300
Reasons for washing menstrual cloth with soap and water

- To remove stains: 86
- To remove bad smell: 61
- To kill germs: 25

Base: Post menarche: 1200, Teachers: 300, FLWs: 300
The space of menstruation is currently marked by an absence of any information on the physiology of menstruation, a lack of clear health and hygiene guidelines as well as a culture of silence, which leads to limited opportunities for education and communication.

It is clear that there is a need for education for adolescents as well as their female family members on menstruation. Key influencers – teachers and frontline health workers – also need to be educated.

The scope of the communication will need to cover the physiology of menstruation, the lack of transferable impurity, and ideal hygiene practices.

There is also a need to have a conversation pre-menarche, so that girls are equipped with knowledge and practice when they begin menstruating, which will help lead to less fear and confusion but also enable them to internalize less of the myth and taboo that may be passed down to them.
In most cases there is **no clear channel** through which the communication can be directed. It seems clear that there is a **need for a peer**, rather than a figure of authority, to deliver this information – particularly to adolescents.

These peer educators can inspire confidence and belief if she is **equipped with greater exposure and education** – leading her to be a figure that is admired.

Currently, there do not seem to be too many barriers to communication – prevailing norms and myths seem to be more self-enforced than kept in place by external enforcers.

There is an **urgent need to frame menstruation as a part of discussion on health and hygiene rather than an abstract ‘process’ of the feminine experience**. Doing so will allow for a framework of ideal practice, which in turn will provide a point of reference for women to make choices that allow for greater comfort and better health with regard to menstruation.
There is a pressing need to educate adolescents as well as older women on the physiology of menstruation.

This initiative needs to reframe menstruation as a health and hygiene related process.

The best and most effective communication source for any intervention is likely to be a peer educator, who can create a safe and casual atmosphere that can promote the sharing of such intimate details.

The myths and taboo that surround menstruation have their roots in social norm, but are largely self-enforced.

Therefore do not seem to be many stakeholders who will act as strong barriers to social and behavioural change.