



#UnlockAccessInCrisis Campaign

The Survey by Menstrual Health Alliance of India and WaterAid India, found that **84%** of women in India either have very restricted access to menstrual hygiene products under the Covid-19 lockdown, or have absolutely no access at all. The lockdown had severely impacted access to menstrual hygiene products for women in India, and the need to address menstruator's rights to access menstrual health products was extremely urgent. People living in extreme socio economic crisis settings have almost no access to sexual and reproductive health services and information.

We saw the need of providing subsidised pads during the lockdown and started a petition to request the West Bengal Government, and to bring to their attention to, the need to make commercial sanitary napkins available in West Bengal at a subsidised rate during the lockdown period, and for a few days after the lockdown has been lifted.

Given the financial hit that daily wage workers and other low-income groups are facing, buying food items takes precedence over accessing menstrual products. We urged the Government of West Bengal to facilitate the immediate subsidisation of sanitary napkins produced by commercial brands like Whisper, Stayfree, Sofy, and more and ensure a seamless supply of the same at all pharmacies, general grocery stores, local ICDS centres and/or Public Distribution System (Fair Price Shops) at the earliest. We also sent individual letters to the Department of Health and Family Welfare, the finance department, the State Ministry of Women and Child Development and the State Home Secretary, West Bengal.

While we were waiting for some responses, we could not sit through the ongoing crisis. It pushed us to start a crowdfunding campaign and we urged our friends and families to donate to us and we launched our campaign **#UnlockAccessInCrisis**, keeping in mind the importance of the flow of basic information about menstrual health and hygiene and to be able to provide subsidised menstrual products to women in and around West Bengal.



Through this campaign, we ensured to try and make disposable and reusable sanitary napkins accessible to as many menstruator as possible, so that in the time of crisis they did not have to choose between their menstrual health needs and other immediate needs. We were approached by multiple partners who recognised the need to distribute sanitary napkins as part of their relief kits as well and through this campaign we were able to reach more than 28000 menstruators with 3,30,608 Sanitary napkins across multiple locations to make safe periods accessible.

We partnered with 35 organizations and were able to reach multiple groups and communities across urban, semi-urban and rural areas (multiple districts including Sundarbans area). We were able to reach out to various groups of the society such as adolescent girls, young women, adult women, sex workers (largest sex workers community in Kolkata, named, Sonagachhi), persons with disabilities, persons with psychosocial challenges, individuals who were impacted by super cyclones in West Bengal and other communities living in abject poverty. We also reached out to Government Shelter Homes, local communities, urban and rural population through partners such as the West Bengal Police and other civil body organisations.



Covid-19 threatened the rights and menstrual health of vulnerable communities and intervention in these spaces are of absolute necessity. As we emerge from a global pandemic and develop long-term solutions to the crisis, it is crucial for us to prioritize the provision of safe and accessible menstrual practices.