

**Inputs for UN Special Rapporteur on the implications for human rights of the environmentally sound management and disposal of hazardous substances and wastes - “Gender and Toxics”**

**1. Sustainable living in harmony with Nature**

- One of the core tenets of India’s ancient civilization is sustainability and living in harmony with nature. Traditional cultural practices encourage organic living, respecting the forests, rivers, and other natural resources, consumption of widely available and affordable fresh and organic food, as well as routine exercise for the body and mind through yoga, pranayama, and daily physical labour. Women are often the torchbearers of this lifestyle. Women farmers, rural women, and women from tribal communities have been catalytic in practising organic consumption and cooking fresh food, that is raw or not overly processed, using manufacturing and packaging that is eco-friendly and sustainable, and mindful consumption of natural resources such as water, crops, forests, etc.
- The Government of India, encompassing these principles, introduced Mission Lifestyle for Environment (Mission LiFE) to the world at the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow.<sup>1</sup> Mission LiFE recognises that Indian culture and living traditions are inherently sustainable. Mission LiFE seeks to channel the efforts of individuals and communities into a global mass movement of positive behavioural change. LiFE is an India-led global mass movement. It aims to nudge individuals and communities to practise a lifestyle that is synchronous with nature and does not harm it.<sup>2</sup>

**2. Clean Cooking Fuel to reduce inhalation of harmful fumes**

- The fumes generated through firewood, coal, cow-dung cakes, during cooking by women, affects their health and wellbeing adversely. Recognizing this, the Government of India has provided clean cooking fuel to over 100 million households, thus mitigating

the potential detrimental impact on the health of rural women as well as on the environment.<sup>3</sup>

### **3. Menstrual Health Management**

- As also stated in the UN SR's background note, women, as consumers of menstrual hygiene products, are more likely to be routinely exposed to toxins in proximity to their bodies for prolonged durations. The inclusion of plastic coating in the sanitary pad's surface to prolong usage, and additional artificial fragrances, also contribute to toxic exposure for women and girls.
- The Government of India has proactively promoted community-based organizations, by supporting the manufacturing, brand development and sale of all natural, cotton sanitary pads manufactured by women-led Self Help Groups (SHGs).
- Moreover, the high and recurring costs of sanitary napkins may contribute to what is popularly known as the "pink tax." This may deter women, particularly those who are economically disadvantaged, from changing pads in a timely manner. Taking cognizance of this, the Government of India has made sanitary napkins 100% exempt from tax and to make it affordable and easily accessible, the price of sanitary napkins sold through government sponsored Jan Aushadhi Suvidha Sanitary Napkins is extremely affordable at Rupee 1 i.e. nearly one pence per pad. Over 500 million such napkins have been sold.

### **4. Women's Occupational Health**

- Women, particularly from marginalized sections, are more likely to work in the informal sector, such as in supply chains, construction, domestic work, or mines. The Government of India has a range of enabling provisions such the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2020, which mandate occupational safety and protection from occupational health hazards, including exposure to harmful pollutants, chemicals and toxins universal health coverage for all, with 141 packages especially for women's

health, and government sponsored pharmacies providing quality generic medicines at affordable prices.

## **5. Gender and Sanitation in urban and rural areas**

- The Swachh Bharat Mission (Clean India Mission) brings a paradigm shift in combating discriminatory and gendered social norms and practices through attitudinal change, by encouraging all to equitably contribute to cleanliness and sanitation. Further, the Government of India has implemented several programmes to provide access to safe and potable tap water connection for 140 million households, and access to sanitation through the construction of 130 million household toilets, and over 640,000 community toilets across the country. This has eliminated potential threats to women's health and safety, and reduced their time poverty and care burden.
- Further, the construction of community and public toilets has also helped address and mitigate the health impact on marginalized groups, such as sanitation workers, ragpickers, informal sector workers, street vendors and others.

## **6. Gender and Waste management**

- Women-led community-based organizations form the foundational drivers of social change in communities. The Government of India, recognizing this potential, has built capacities of Women Self Help Groups (SHGs) on waste management and promoting a circular economy. SHGs are provided training on waste segregation, including hazardous wastes, with proper protection. Many SHGs are also engaged in sanitation drives where they are earning money through waste segregation.
- This initiative has also generated dignified livelihood opportunities for several women-led SHGs (community based organizations), which have taken on the responsibility of operation & maintenance of community toilets, public toilets, and solid waste management in a sustainable and profitable manner.

- India also has piloted models of liquid waste management in rural areas for natural fertilizers, thus increasing crop production.

## **7. Mitigating exposure of Women to pesticides**

- As stated in the UN SR's background note, women in agriculture are at increased risk from a wide range of pesticides, which has myriad effects on the health of women. Within agricultural production, it is women, who are more likely to be engaged in microscopic and repetitive work such as spraying pesticides.
- The Government of India, recognizing the transformative power of technology in the hands of rural women, has recently launched an intervention, named "Drone Didi" to prevent women farmers and labourers' exposure to pesticide / insecticide by providing drones at subsidized costs to women members of Self Help Groups and offering training to help them to become drone pilots.

Besides these interventions, the Government of India is continuously taking proactive actions to ensure ease of living for the women and girls in the country, by creating a safe, secure and equitable ecosystem.

### **References:**

- 1 & 2. <https://missionlife-moefcc.nic.in/>
3. <https://www.pmuy.gov.in/about.html>
- <https://transformingindia.mygov.in/>