

Would you believe it if we were to tell you that in a large number of Indian homes women are not allowed to leave the house during their menstrual cycle? Would you not laugh on hearing this? Especially in the times when your television airs sanitary napkin advertisements that suggest not only are you 'capable' to climb a mountain, attend a board meeting or walk a runway during the menstrual cycle but also that there is no reason for you to miss out on life because of something as natural. But then television, education and hygiene are for the 'privileged'. Why would it even cross the mind of the 'privileged' that there is a section of society that thinks/behaves otherwise? So, when we heard of the Women on Wing's (WoW) work on creating a sustainable model for the production, marketing and distribution of sanitary napkins, not only were we filled with pride but also we decided to be a part of it. To begin with, we spoke to our help at home, both to educate her and provide for her. We have made a small beginning and we're hoping you'd join us too. Excerpts from our interaction with

the Women on Wing's team on this noble, basic and essential project.

**Why did WoW decide to get associated with a project like this?**

In India, millions of girls stay home during their menstrual period. This means they miss school one week, per month and get behind and then drop out from school permanently. Through this project millions of girls will be able to go to school for the whole month. Plus, many jobs would be created in small scale units in villages. It's actually a triple profit situation: we break the taboo, girls go to school and jobs are created for women.

**Who are the people/organisations involved in this project?**

Aakar provides the necessary machinery and raw materials, and trains women to operate the machines. SSP/Sakhi Retail is responsible for the production, awareness, marketing and sales; it draws on its network of 1,000 female entrepreneurs in rural India. We are in the pilot phase in two districts in Maharashtra, which provides us with all the do's and don'ts to scale up the project over more districts. Our dream is to locally set up production and distribution units all over India. Locally being the key. Jobs will only be sustainable in the long run as long as ownership is felt and taken by the local entrepreneurs and women. We'll soon make further plans in cooperation with Aakar and Sakhi Retail. It really is all about co-creation. We combine the local knowledge of Sakhi Retail, the technical knowledge of Aakar and our knowledge on business development to create the best local solutions.

**What is the current situation in villages/ small towns of India when it comes to the awareness and stigma attached to menstruation?**

It's devastating. It is so sad to be banned from public life because something so feminine and natural is happening to you. Menstruation is what makes the gift of life possible. We feel privileged to help and give women and girls a better position. We believe that providing an economical independence (through a job) also helps in reaching this goal. A job means an income for women, a chance for economic independence. If we create suitable jobs for women in rural India, we help break through the cycle of poverty in these areas. Experience shows that women spend their money on their families so children attend school, and have the chance of a better future as a result.

**How are you educating the girls/women about it?**

We have developed a brand concept with storytelling, which means that we educate women to tell the story about menstrual hygiene and then we also distribute samples of the product.

Yes, this project is not just about menstrual hygiene. In fact, it is one about sustainable, economical independence for women that will ultimately break the cycle of poverty.

# break the taboo

WOMEN ON WINGS, AN ORGANISATION WITH A MISSION TO CREATE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN IN RURAL INDIA, IS CURRENTLY WORKING ON A SUSTAINABLE MODEL FOR THE PRODUCTION, MARKETING AND DISTRIBUTION OF SANITARY NAPKINS IN RURAL INDIA. THIS PROJECT (JUST ONE OF THEIR MANY) IS WHAT THEY CALL THE 'TRIPLE PROFIT' PROJECT FOR IT IS HELPING THEM IN BREAKING THE TABOO, ENSURING THE GIRLS ATTEND SCHOOL AND CREATING JOBS FOR WOMEN.

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## About Women on Wings (WoW)

Impressed by the strength and the energy of rural Indian women, Ellen Tacoma and Maria van der Heijden developed job-creating business models to encourage women's economic activities. That is how Women on Wings came about in 2007.

Women on Wings works with Indian companies that have the same objective. They aspire to create one million jobs for women in rural India by 2015 and have already created 95,200 jobs in six years. The project talked about in this piece is just one of the many projects that WoW is involved in. To know more, [womenonwings.com](http://womenonwings.com)

(Top to bottom) School girls sing a song & share their experience. Women study the components of the sanitary pad. Inauguration of the machine used to produce sanitary napkins. A woman working on the machine & making napkins.

