

Breaking the Silence:- Menstrual health, dignity, Social justice, gender equality and empowering women.

Pinky Deka

Abstract

This article describes the theme of International Women's Day 2026, "Give To Gain," through the lens of menstrual health, hygiene, and gender equality. Despite being a natural biological process, menstruation remains stigmatized in many societies, leading to social exclusion, educational disruption, and workplace discrimination especially in Assam. This study highlights how social taboos, structural inequalities, and inadequate institutional support hinder women's full participation in public and professional life. By addressing menstrual health as a matter of dignity and human rights, societies can promote inclusive development. This article emphasizes that investing in awareness, infrastructure, and gender-sensitive policies reflects the essence of "Give To Gain," as empowering women ultimately strengthens communities and economies.

Keywords: Menstrual Health, Gender Equality, Social Taboos, Workplace Inequality, Educational Disparity, Women's Empowerment

Introduction

International Women's Day, observed annually on 8 March, embraces the celebration of women's achievements, the promotion of gender equality, and the call for social, economic, cultural, and political empowerment of women across the world. This year international women's day depict the theme "Give To Gain." This theme underscores a fundamental principle of social progress: when societies invest in the rights, dignity, and well-being of women and girls, the entire community benefits. Among the many issues that require urgent attention within this framework, menstrual health and hygiene remain both critical and inadequately important.

Menstruation is a natural biological process experienced by millions of women and girls worldwide. However, despite its universality, it continues to be surrounded by silence, stigma, and misinformation. The persistence of social taboos has contributed significantly to discrimination, restricted participation, and systemic inequality.

Social Taboos and Cultural Restrictions

In numerous societies, menstruation is treated as a subject of secrecy and shame. Girls are often discouraged from discussing it openly and may even be excluded from religious ceremonies, social

gatherings, or household responsibilities during their menstrual cycle. Such practices reinforce the notion of impurity and maintain harmful stereotypes.

These taboos have long-term psychological and social consequences. When young girls internalize feelings of embarrassment or inferiority related to their natural bodily functions, it diminishes their confidence and self-worth. In the context of the theme “Give To Gain,” providing accurate education, open dialogue, and cultural sensitivity can dismantle these barriers. By giving awareness and acceptance, societies gain empowered individuals who participate confidently in public and private life.

Educational and Social Inequality

A lack of access to affordable menstrual products, safe sanitation facilities, and comprehensive reproductive health education significantly affects girls' educational attainment. In many regions, students miss school during menstruation due to inadequate facilities or fear of humiliation. This repeated absenteeism contributes to lower academic performance and, in some cases, early dropout rates.

Such inequality is not merely a health concern; it is a matter of social justice. Ensuring access to menstrual hygiene resources is an essential step toward achieving gender parity in education. By investing in infrastructure and awareness programs, communities give girls the opportunity to pursue uninterrupted education, thereby gaining a more skilled and capable generation.

Workplace Injustice and Structural Inequality

Menstrual health is frequently overlooked in professional environments. Women are often expected to maintain productivity despite experiencing discomfort or health challenges, without the availability of supportive workplace policies. In some cases, dismissive attitudes or discriminatory remarks further marginalize them. A gender-sensitive workplace that acknowledges biological realities without prejudice reflects true equality. Flexible policies, hygienic facilities, and respectful discourse contribute to employee well-being and institutional efficiency. By giving empathy and structural support, organizations gain commitment, morals, and sustainable productivity.

Participation in Public and Social Functions

Women's full participation in social, cultural, political, and economic spheres must not be hindered by menstrual stigma. Exclusion from community functions or leadership roles based on misconceptions enforces systemic discrimination. Inclusion, on the other hand, strengthens democratic values and social cohesion.

The principle of “Give To Gain” becomes particularly relevant when societies grant women equal opportunity and dignity in all functions of life. Through this they gain diversity, innovation, and balanced decision-making.

The True Meaning of “Give To Gain”

To truly live the theme of 2026, we must----

- Give education about menstrual health in schools.
- Give affordable and accessible hygiene products.
- Give respectful conversations at home and in society.
- Give supportive policies in workplaces.
- Give young girls confidence instead of fear.

Because when we give dignity, we gain equality. When we give awareness, we gain empowerment. When we give support, we gain a stronger nation.

A Call for Change

Empowerment does not start with grand speeches—it starts with simple acts of understanding. It starts with mothers educating daughters and sons equally. It starts with teachers speaking openly. It starts with leaders creating fair policies.

Menstrual health is not a “women’s issue”; it is a human rights issue. Let this International Women’s Day 2026 be more than a celebration. Let it be a commitment — to give courage, give respect, and give opportunity. Because when women rise without barriers, society rises with them.

Relevant Statistics

- ❖ According to UNICEF, millions of girls globally lack access to adequate menstrual hygiene facilities, affecting their school attendance and well-being.
- ❖ UNESCO reports that 1 in 10 girls in some regions of the world miss school during menstruation, which can contribute to higher dropout rates.
- ❖ A joint report by World Health Organization and UNICEF emphasizes that inadequate water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities directly impact menstrual health management and gender equality.
- ❖ Studies indicate that workplace productivity can be affected when menstrual health is not acknowledged through supportive policies, highlighting the need for gender-sensitive institutional frameworks.

Conclusions

Menstrual health is not solely a private or individual matter; it is intrinsically linked to human rights, gender equality, and sustainable development. Addressing social taboos, social injustice, workplace inequality, and restricted participation requires coordinated efforts from families, educational institutions, policymakers, and civil society.

The theme “Give To Gain” serves as a reminder that meaningful progress depends on collective action. By giving knowledge, resources, respect, and equitable opportunities to women and girls, societies gain resilience, productivity and moral advancement.

On this International Women's Day 2026, the objective is clear: to foster an environment where menstruation is understood without stigma, where women participate without barriers, and where equality is practiced rather than merely proclaimed. Only then can the promise of genuine empowerment be realized.

Works cited:

UNESCO. Puberty education and menstrual hygiene management. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Paris, 2014.

UNICEF. Guidance on menstrual health and hygiene. United Nations Children's Fund. New York, 2019

World Health Organization & UNICEF. Progress on drinking water, sanitation and hygiene in schools.

WHO Press. Geneva, 2020

UN Women. Gender equality and women's empowerment strategy. United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. New York, 2023.

