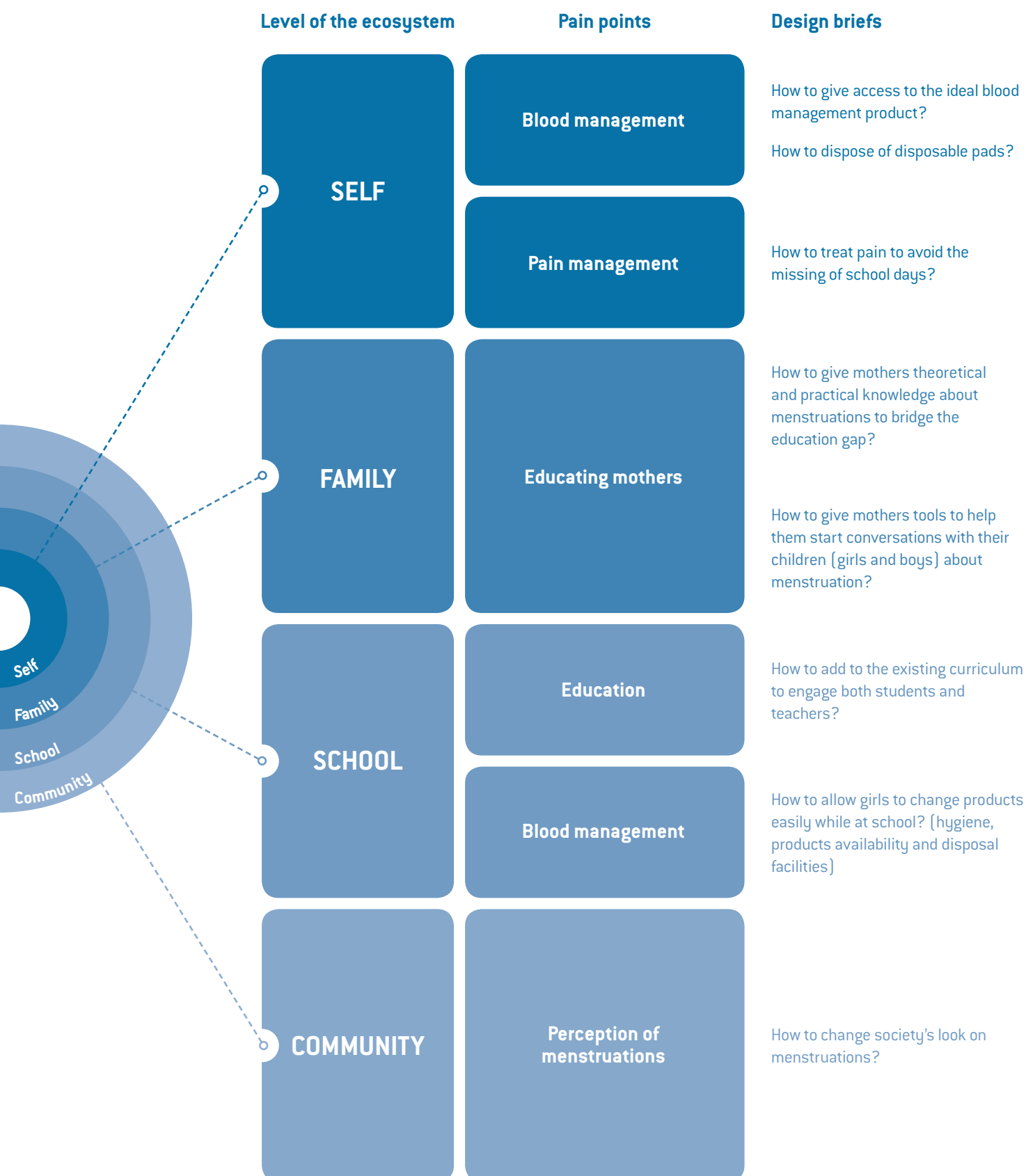




KUSUM, Bhaktapur





KUSUM

17 years old

Lives in Bhaktapur

peri-urban area of Kathmandu valley, Bhaktapur. About 13 km from the capital.



Cloths are annoying to wash and I don't want people to see them drying."

Kusum



CONTEXT

She is studying in class 11 in a private school located near her home. She lives with her grandparents, parents and brother. Both of her parents are working.



MENARCHE

Kusum had her **menarche** when she was **14 years old**. She was aware that girls will menstruate once they reach adolescence but didn't know exactly what would happen to her. **She was worried and scared** and wondered why women go through this. Now, she feels that menstruation is a **natural process**.

When Kusum had her first menstruation she **confided in her mother** who taught her how to use cloth



MANAGING MENSTRUATION

Kusum was first **taught by her mother to use cloth pads** to manage her menstrual flow but **now she is using disposable sanitary pads** which, she feels, are very comfortable and convenient. She says pads are easy to use, do not cause leakage, stick to the underpants and do not shift. She considers them as the best option. However, **disposal is an issue**, she was told by her mother to properly and secretly dispose the used sanitary napkin and she does the same.

In her community **disposable sanitary pads are easily available** in any kind of grocery, pharmacy and cosmetics shops. She thinks girls who cannot afford to buy disposable sanitary pads can use cloth pads to manage menstrual flow but it has to be properly washed and dried in sun.

Kusum usually asks her mother to buy pads for her. She feels **very embarrassed to talk and ask for money to buy pads to her father** and pretends that she needs stationaries. Her father does not participate in any conversation that involves menstruation which

pads. She told her that **there are certain restrictions and rules** that she has to follow at home during menstruation: not to enter the kitchen, the worship room (Puja Kotha), and not to attend religious functions. **She found these restrictions quite awkward but is mostly fine with it**. Some of Kusum's friends who follow Christianity are not restricted to enter the kitchen, cook food and pray during menstruation.

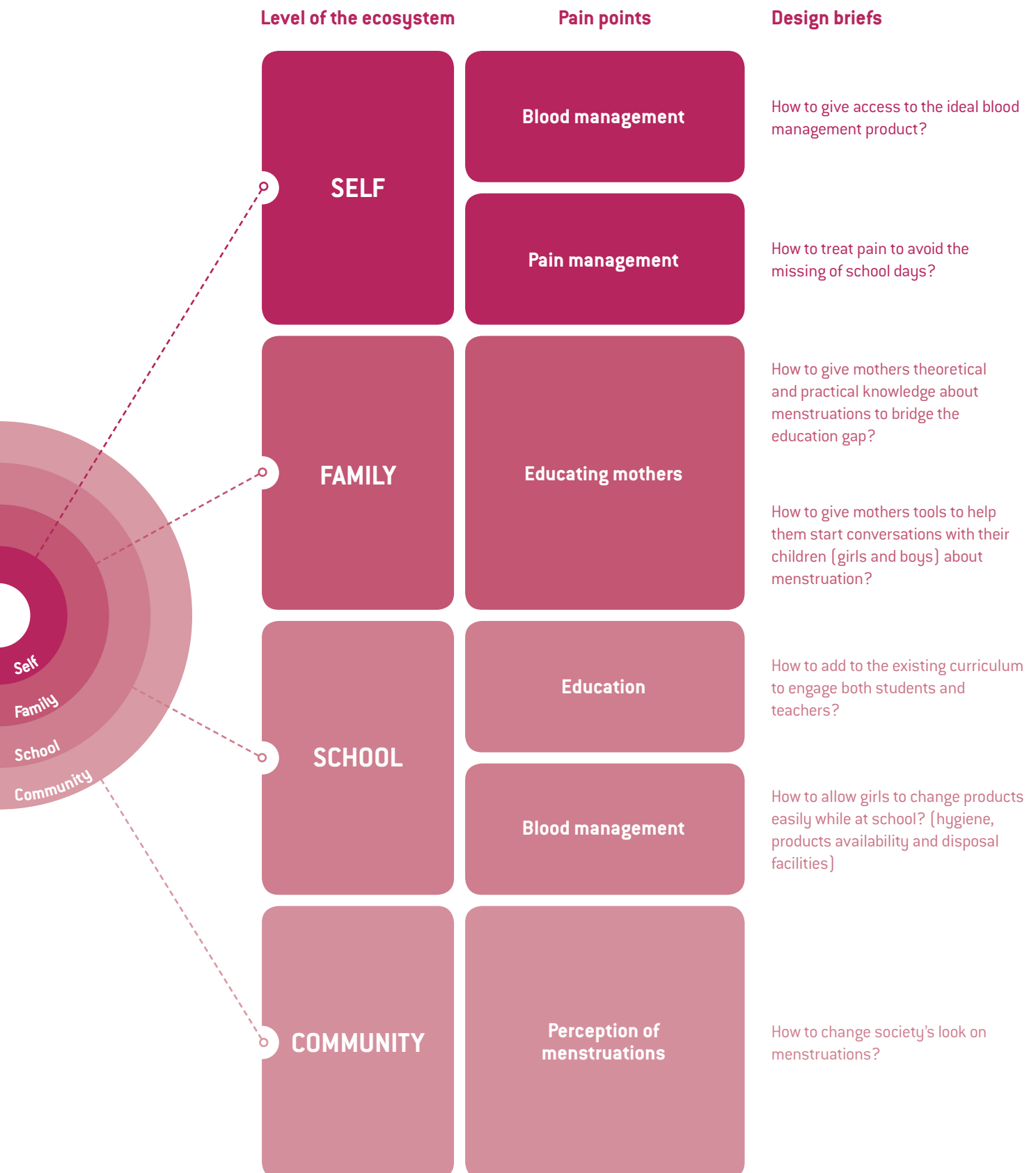
she finds very odd as **she believes male members in the family should be able to openly talk about it**.

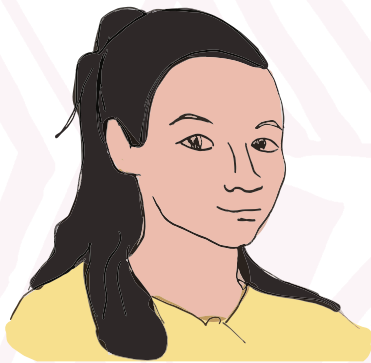
If Kusum starts to menstruate in school, she first asks her friends if they have pads, her next option is to ask her female teachers. She would go to a nearby shop to purchase pads if neither her friends or teachers have them. Kusum is concerned that there is **no proper bin for disposal of used pads and a lack of water facility to manage menstruation in school**. She would like her school to make provision of sanitary pads for emergency use and to provide bins for the disposal of used pads during the school time.

Kusum often gets abdominal cramps, feels weak and dizzy during this period. She manages the pain by consuming hot water or soup and taking plenty of rest. In case of extreme pain, she sometimes takes pain killers. However, her friends have told her that **consuming excessive pain killers can harm her health and may lead to infertility**. Kusum also believes that taking pain killers can lead to addictive and dependence on such drugs.



MANMAYA, Sindhupalchowk





MANMAYA

16 years old

Lives in Sindhupalchowk

Tamang community, in Bhotenamlang, a remote village of the district; hilly region of Nepal.



Unlike educated mothers, uneducated mothers don't know what to teach us."

Manmaya



CONTEXT

Manmaya lives with her father and mother along with an elder sister and a younger brother. She feels more comfortable sharing her problem with her sister than other family members. She supports her family in kitchen and agricultural works. She studies in the 10th grade in a co-ed public school and spends most of her time at school with her friends with whom she can share her feelings comfortably.



MENARCHE

Manmaya is conscious about her health and usually talks about that with her sister and friends. She **had menarche when she just turned 14**. She did not know much about menstruation and when it happened, she **told her older sister** who had already

menstruated. She suggested Manmaya to **use soft old clothes (talo)**. When she **discussed her menarche with her friends**, Manmaya was relieved to know that it is natural phenomenon that happens to every girl.



MANAGING MENSTRUATION

Manmaya understands menstruation happens when an adolescent girl reaches her reproductive phase and that blood flows from the vagina. She **thinks menstrual blood is impure**, if it was pure, it would remain inside. Once the menstruation stops, she takes bath to purify herself. Sometimes **she has abdominal pain, backache and dizziness** during her menstruation. Once she had a severe abdominal pain and went to health post to get some medicines. She would rather take a rest to relieve her pain but when she has to get help, she **prefers to visit the health post while some of her friends and family members still go to traditional healers**. She would like to have a radio or television program that would provide more information on health, menstruation, hygiene and sanitation.

Her mother taught her about the practices that she should follow during menstruation. She is not allowed to touch seeds and chilly plants. She doesn't enter the Puja room. Sometimes, Manmaya cooks food during menstruation but her mother scolds her if she enters the kitchen.

She uses soft clothes to manage her menstrual flow. Sometimes she uses **disposable sanitary pads that she finds comfortable**. She gets them from her

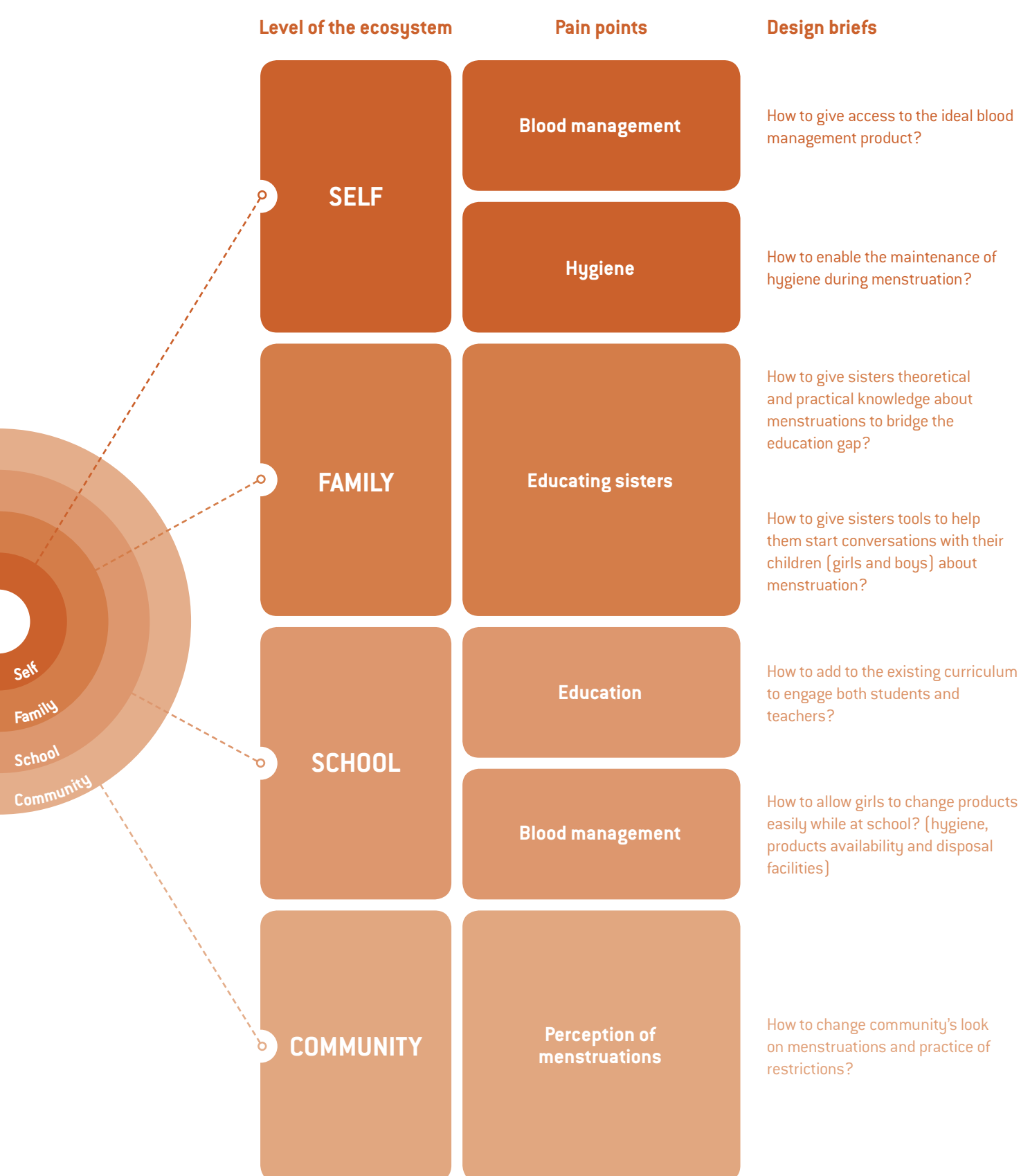
sister and uses them when she has to go to school or travel somewhere far. She has never bought sanitary pads herself because **she can't afford them**.

When she uses clothes, she has to wash them with soap and water and dry them in the sunlight. She learned this from her teacher and friends. **She changes clothes two to three times a day during menstruation** and uses a tap nearby her house for washing and bathing. She takes a bath daily. Once she sees that the cloth is too old, she throws them in a trench near her house.

She goes to school regularly during menstruation. Sometimes, she has abdominal pain and asks her teacher for a leave permit. There is a separate toilet for boys and girls in school which she prefers. There is water availability in toilets but no soap and sanitary pads. **She would like to have access to soap, water, dustbin and sanitary pads in the school toilets.** She feels **shy to discuss menstruation issues with her male health teacher and doesn't feel comfortable to participate in sport activities during menstruation**. She fears blood stains that would cause teasing by boys.



MAYA, Achham





MAYA

16 years old

Lives in Achham

Basti village which is a remote village of the western region of Nepal.

“

We are not afraid of ghosts or gods, we are afraid of bad people while staying in chhaupadi.”

Maya



CONTEXT

Maya studies in 10th grade in a government school located near her village. She lives in a joint family where the eldest male members are the head of the household. She follows the norms and values stated by her family. The markets are afar. Her community doesn't have adequate water for everyone and is strongly influenced by the beliefs of the religious leader, faith healers and priests. The radio is a popular means of information in her community. She needs to depend on her family for purchasing of even small things. She doesn't own a cell phone, but most of the people in her community use them. She has plenty of friends and they play an important role in her life.



MENARCHE

Maya had her **menarche at 14 years old**. She was not prepared for it. **She was shocked, worried and cried**. She talked to her friend about her condition and was told to stay in separate place (cowshed) nearby her house. She was not comfortable to share with her mother and **asked her friend to talk to her mother instead**. Maya was given **a piece of cloth** to manage her menstrual flow.

She **had to spend night alone at chau-goth and follow all restrictions**. She felt humiliated, angered and frustrated. **She cried all night alone** in the confined space, feeling scared of insects and snakes. She has heard of incidents of girls getting raped in chau so **she was very concerned about her safety**.



MANAGING MENSTRUATION

Maya was given separate utensils to eat food and forbidden milk and other dairies. She was **treated like an untouchable** and felt humiliated when being scolded while taking a bath at a public tap. Sometimes she has to go to the riverside to bathe which is far away from her home and usually crowded. She feels ashamed to bathe in front of people. She is only allowed to enter her house and perform normal activities after being **purified by sprinkling cow's urine on herself** and her clothes in the 5th day of her period.

She heard from her parents and spiritual leaders that **if she doesn't follow these restrictions and rituals, she might face the rage of god, bringing misfortune to her family**, family income and to the community. She has also seen her sisters and friends following all the restrictions. She has **heard that some females became infertile after they had touched temples** and spiritual healers during menstruation.

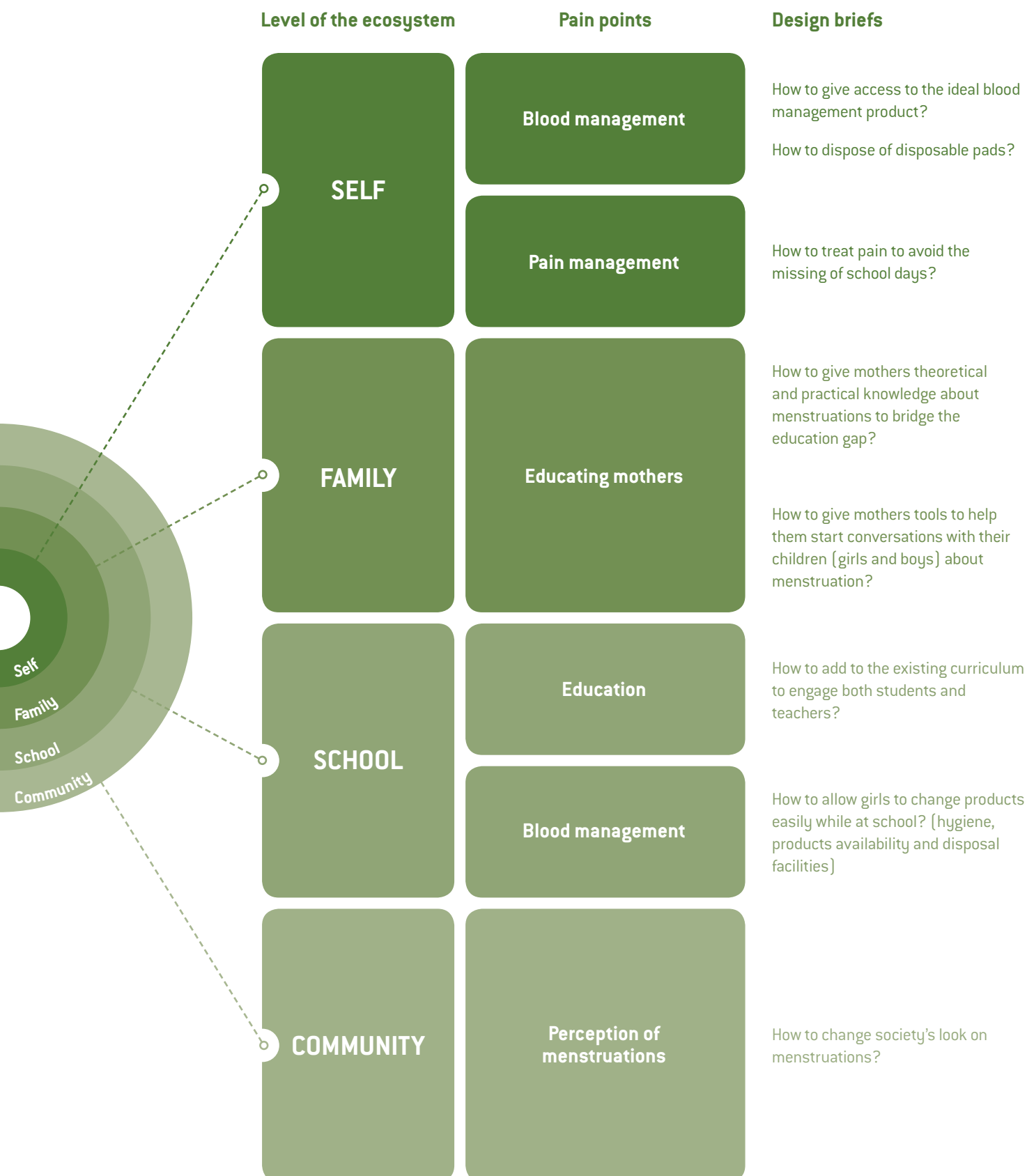
Maya understands menstruation as **a normal physiological process however, sees menstrual blood as dirty blood** since it produces a foul smell. **She uses old, clean, dry, soft cotton cloths** most of the time to

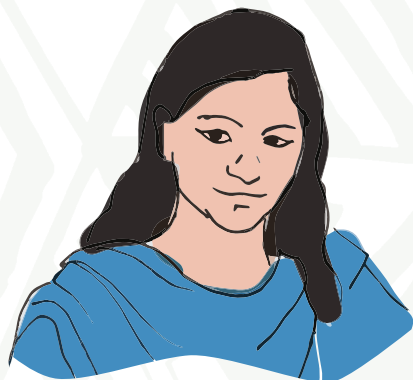
manage her menstrual flow. These material are readily available at home, absorbs blood and are reusable. She had an **opportunity to use disposable sanitary pad**, she preferred them over home cloth pad but can't afford it every time and they are **not easily available in the village**. She finds washing cloth pads troublesome and complicated with **water scarcity**. While using cotton pads, she has experienced frictions and felt burning pain for several days. **She mostly hides her problem related to menstruation** and uses home remedies like hot water compression and wrapping clothes around her waist to relieve her from back pain. If the pain is severe, she knows she can go to hospital, but **her mother does not allow her to take medicine because of possible side effects**. She understands that it is blind faith but **still she continues to follow these restrictions**.

She hopes that there are separate toilets and adequate water supply with soap at school, as well as a provision of free sanitary pads. Besides changes in school, she wishes for awareness raising programs. **She hopes that conservative practices are abolished from her society**.



POONAM, Rautahat





POONAM

17 years old

Lives in Rautahat

in Dharampur, a remote village of Rautahat district; Terai region of Nepal.

“

We have heard that there are pads in school but we don't ask. We feel shy.”

Poonam



CONTEXT

Poonam studies in class 11 in a government college located nearby her village. Poonam lives with her grandparents, parents and a brother. Her grandfather and father are the decision makers in the house. Her community strongly believes in superstition and have mis-conception surrounding menstruation. She has accessibility to buy market products but uses cloth pads because of the superstition and also believes cloths are more hygienic than market products.



MENARCHE

Poonam had her **menarche when she was 14 years old**. She felt curious, **was worried and started to cry**. Poonam told her mother about her bleeding and she gave her **a cloth to manage her blood flow**. Some of Poonam's friends were aware before their menarche that they would bleed and have to use cloth to

manage the blood. Poonam has seen her friends following practices like not cooking food and entering the kitchen during menstruation, but she doesn't practice the same at her home which she is happy about.



MANAGING MENSTRUATION

Poonam understands menstruation as a **normal physiological process and thinks menstruation is gift of god to women**. It's a matter of pride. She says menstruation is necessary for women when they reach certain age and thinks woman will be infertile if they don't menstruate. She says that it is a monthly bleeding of bad blood from the vagina and that it is a sign of maturity and fertility that signals the girl's entry to womanhood. Poonam asks for help from female family members and friends when she feels uncomfortable to manage and gets health problems (abdominal pain, dizziness) during her menstruation.

Currently, Poonam **uses disposable sanitary pads available** in the market to manage her menstruation. She feels they are **hygienic and prevent infections and allergy, are comfortable and prevents leakage**. Poonam's mother and aunt buy pads for her when they visit market, they cost Rs 25 to 50. Earlier **she used old, clean, dry soft cotton clothes**.

Many of Poonam's friend currently **use cotton cloths** to manage their menstruation as they don't know about pads and have never used any. They use the cloth, wash them and dry in sun and reuse. They feel that **disposable pads are expensive**. After multiple

use of the cloths, they wash them, dig a pit and dispose of them. Her friends think that **if they throw the used cloths without washing then they will have to face sin**.

Poonam changes her sanitary pads 2-3 times as required. She sometimes throws the used pads in the garbage and sometimes bury them. Poonam believes that other might cast an evil eye on menstruating girls if they throw used pads and cloths haphazardly. Poonam's friends change the cloth they use 3-4 times as clothes get wet sooner.

Poonam doesn't miss school even if she is menstruating. Poonam is not happy as **school lacks pads in case of emergency, separate toilets with water, soaps, changing room, and dustbin for disposal of used pads**. Poonam and her friends usually go back to their home if they suddenly menstruate in school or get menstrual cramps.

Poonam gets abdominal cramps, headache and irritation when she is menstruating. **She doesn't take any medicine to relieve herself as she thinks taking pain medication may cause heavy bleeding, clots in the uterus or infertility**.