



Civil Society
WASH
Learning Fund

Menstrual Hygiene Management



Australian Government
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These documents were compiled by Naomi Carrard of the Institute for Sustainable Futures, UTS with the assistance of Kajute O’Riordan from WaterAid in Australia. The three learning workshops were an Australian Government AusAID initiative, managed by WaterAid in Australia.



WaterAid/ Anna Kari

Menstrual Hygiene Management

A number of CSOs supported by the AusAID Civil Society WASH Fund are supporting girls and women to manage menstrual hygiene.

Highlights

Menstrual hygiene management has long been taboo in many countries. During the learning events, participants talked about their efforts to break the silence, working with women and girls to ensure menstrual hygiene management needs are addressed through WASH programs.

Lack of facilities for managing menstrual hygiene was identified by participants as a key barrier for adolescent girls

attending school. Girls either miss school for a few days each month or drop out of school completely to avoid the difficulties of managing menstrual hygiene without adequate facilities.

Participants shared experiences of working with adolescent girls in schools and discussed how best to design facilities to meet menstrual hygiene management needs. They also talked about opportunities to support community members to establish small businesses manufacturing low cost sanitary pads, generating income within the community while providing essential services for women.

‘Girls either miss school for a few days each month or drop out of school completely to avoid the difficulties of managing menstrual hygiene without adequate facilities.’



Participant Stories

Plan International Supporting Facilities For Girls In Schools In India And Uganda

Ranjan Rout and R.K Srinivasan from Plan India presented a poster focused on opportunities for sustainable WASH. As part of the project, they are supporting the development of sanitation facilities in schools so adolescent girls can better manage menstrual hygiene.

Ranjan Kumar
Rout Plan India

“In India, there is a significant dropout rate for girl students at secondary school level due to lack of proper sanitation facilities. This is often because there are no separate male and female toilet facilities in many schools. When we did school WASH self assessments in 556 schools in 3 rural districts, we found that the lack of menstrual hygiene facilities in schools was a key issue. We undertook separate consultation with girl students and they talked about problems they faced, for example having a private place to change sanitary napkins. Adolescent girls said during their menstrual period they would often leave school half way through the day, at lunchtime or before because there were no facilities. Further, some girl students are reluctant to return to school after being absent for a number of days during their menstrual period. So

in our planning we've included separate facilities for girls, particularly for adolescent girls. We have provision for a changing room where during their menstrual period girls can change their napkins and where sanitary napkins are available. We've also developed a disposal system for safe disposal of used napkins using an incinerator. Currently we are developing model WASH infrastructure in 75 schools and simultaneously lobbying with the block (municipality) and district administration to develop long term plans to address WASH issues in schools and create adequate infrastructure which caters for girls' menstrual needs.”

John Nelson Opio, Environmental Health Officer at the Lira district government office is partnering with Plan in Uganda. He attended the Maputo learning event with Plan Project Coordinator Jane Nyaketcho. Lessons from prior projects implemented by Plan indicate an increase in retention of girls in schools due to better sanitation facilities. Now Plan is also working with girls on making pads from simple affordable materials. John and Jane spoke about the importance of ensuring girls have access to facilities and affordable

sanitary pads to overcome the psychological and physical difficulties associated with menstrual hygiene.

John Nelson Opio and Jan Nyaketcho
John Nelson Opio, Environmental Health Officer Lira District Government, Uganda and Jane Nyaketcho, Project Coordinator Plan International Uganda

“One of the reasons girls drop out of school at the upper primary level (besides socio-cultural reasons) is when they see the biological changes in their body. When they get their menstrual period they get a lot of psychological torture from the male students and along with difficulty in managing menstrual hygiene this can lead to dropping out of school. One thing that is being done is to develop affordable sanitary pads made from local materials because they can't afford to buy the sanitary pads that are available. Training took place in schools to help girls learn how to make pads using local materials such as cotton, and there is a video available to spread the lessons more widely. Some of the girls have taken initiative to make the local pads at home. Slowly, Plan Uganda is starting to document testimonies of girls staying at school during their menstrual period, feeling able to share their concerns with senior women teachers and asking for assistance. The girls are no longer getting embarrassed due to soiling of their dresses which used to happen before. Pad-making skills are also being transferred to other girls outside of school by the students that have been trained.”

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Starting The Conversation About Menstrual Hygiene Management: WaterAid In Timor Leste

WaterAid Program Officer and Hygiene and Disability Focal Point Novi Mau, spoke about her work with adolescent girls in schools and efforts to take the message about menstrual hygiene management to national level sanitation policy discussions.



Novi Mau
WaterAid Timor Leste

“We focus on menstrual hygiene in our project. Last year I conducted a focus group with girls in a village and also in two schools. They face a common problem because the toilet is not accessible and there is no water available in the school. So often they stay home from school during their menstrual period, missing out on school for three or four days. Also, in their community, if they are menstruating they can’t move around, can’t go anywhere or participate in community activities.

When I spoke to the girls and teachers in schools, absence during menstrual periods was raised as a common problem. They were keen for WaterAid to work with the schools, to advocate and support developing better facilities so that girls no longer miss school. The girls said they prefer separate toilet for girls and boys in the school. I talked to them about what they do during their menstrual periods, whether they use cloths or pads and they said if using cloths the lack of water in the



school was a big problem. They choose to use disposable pads so they can change them anytime with just a small amount of water for washing.

So, we are planning a process to create awareness for women and also men about menstrual hygiene issues. We are planning to make an accessible bathroom facility for women to wash their cloths and also providing a bin for disposable pads. Around 70% of women in Timor Leste use disposable pads.

We are also talking to government about menstrual hygiene as part of discussions about sanitation policy at the national level. We talked about making pads available in public toilets, for example in market areas, to make it easier for women to manage menstrual hygiene.”

‘We are planning to make an accessible bathroom facility for women to wash their cloths and also providing a bin for disposable pads. Around 70% of women in Timor Leste use disposable pads.’



Menstrual Hygiene Management For Urban Slum Communities: WaterAid In Bangladesh

WaterAid Bangladesh is partnering with local NGOs Dustha Shastha Kendra (DSK) and Population Services and Training Centre (PSTC) to promote WASH services for urban slum communities in Dhaka and Chittagong. Within their programs, they are providing facilities and building capacity to improve menstrual hygiene management. Community and school toilet blocks include facilities with extra space for washing and drying cloths.

In one community in Dhaka, DSK supported the establishment of a sanitary pad manufacturing centre within the community that is able to produce pads and sell them at a price below that currently available. This meets the need for low cost pads for women in the community, and has also provided a business opportunity for one woman responsible for managing the facility.

As part of their program in Chittagong, DSK arranged for two Community Based Organisation representatives to visit the Dhaka production centre to learn about their operations. They provided training, equipment and materials to establish a pad production centre in Chittagong. Initially, very few women purchased the products, but after distributing free samples to adolescent girls and the community's menstrual hygiene group demand has grown and the manufacturing business is going well. The two women who established the centre are seeking to expand their business. They recently requested that DSK support them in communicating with officials from a local garment factory, seeking permission to conduct menstrual hygiene management sessions and market their products to the mostly female garment workers.

In a Dalit community in Dhaka, PSTC are working with the community to broaden representation on Community

Based Organisations responsible for managing WASH, so that youth and women have a voice and are able to raise their needs around privacy and menstrual hygiene management. Milon Bikash Paul, Executive Director of PSTC shared his experience.

Milon Bikash Paul
PSTC working with WaterAid Bangladesh

"Instead of forming a new Community Based Organisation (CBO) which could create conflict, we use existing groups but undertake advocacy within the groups to add personnel, especially youth, extremely poor people and other excluded groups. Previously the CBOs were dominated by older men who were generally already community leaders. Now through working with these groups, women, youth leaders, adolescent people and children are also represented. So adolescents can now voice their needs about their menstrual situation or privacy in latrine or bathroom facilities. The women also have direct access as they are in the committee. So they can say what they need separately for their own dignity and privacy. So within the existing system we are gradually trying to incorporate people who were not included previously. Through an evolutionary process this changes the community leadership also. So now there are new leaders working with old leaders, working together."



Facilities in school with extra space and washing equipment. Also a hook to hang clothes and/or bags from to keep them dry while washing.



Pad manufacturing centre, the woman in the picture earns income manufacturing and selling pads. She can make and sell the pads at a much lower price than those previously available.

'Now through working with these groups, women, youth leaders, adolescent people and children are also represented. So adolescents can now voice their needs about their menstrual situation or privacy in latrine or bathroom facilities.'





Messages For WASH Sustainability

Menstrual hygiene management is a critical aspect of WASH service provision and needs to be considered and discussed in a sensitive manner with communities and partners during project planning.

Talking directly with adolescent girls and female teachers to understand their needs and preferences is essential when designing facilities for schools.

Every school requires separate toilets for girls and boys with facilities and space for managing menstrual hygiene in the girls' toilets.

There are opportunities to support small enterprise providing affordable locally made menstrual hygiene management products, generating income while providing essential services for women.

CSOs can play a role taking the message about menstrual hygiene management to government, advocating for menstrual hygiene management to be included in national sanitation policies and programs, and for every school to have separate toilets for girls and for boys with facilities for managing menstrual hygiene in the girls' toilets.