GIRLS' MENSTRUAL HYGIENE MANAGEMENT IN SCHOOLS: CASE STUDY IN THE NORD AND EST REGIONS OF BURKINA FASO, WEST AFRICA

This report has been written by Tidiani Ouedraogo, UNICEF consultant, with the support of Victoria Trinies, international UNICEF consultant, and research assistants Traoré Alimata, Yago Iphigénie, Pacmogda Pascaline and Sissao Inoussa. It has been prepared in close collaboration with the multisectoral working group in place, coordinated by the Directorates for Girls' Education and Gender Equality of the *Ministère de l'Education Nationale et de l'Alphabétisation* [Ministry of National Education and Literacy] (MENA).

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Research Team

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research into menstrual hygiene management (MHM) was launched as part of a wider project for water, sanitation and hygiene in schools for girls (abbreviated as WinS for Girls or WinS4Girls), coordinated by the WASH team, in conjunction with the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI), the education team and the gender team at UNICEF headquarters in New York. The project provides capacity-building and advocates for the incorporation of gender-sensitive issues such as MHM into WASH in Schools (WinS) programmes. A key aspect of the research under this project is the participation and involvement of managers of educational institutions and the Government to support completion of the research, drafting of the guidance documents and use of the results. The intention is therefore to build local capacity for research into girls' MHM in schools.

With this aim, MENA coordinated the administrative process for the research. Other ministries, such as the Ministry of Water through the General Directorate for Sanitation, and other development partners (WaterAid, IRC, SNV, WA-WASH, UNICEF, etc.) contributed to the technical process as members of the WinS4Girls monitoring committee or working group. The research team, led by a sociology consultant, comprised four research assistants (three women and one man)) and 10 interviewers (eight women and two men).

Emory University provided scientific guidance for the research, through online training and support for the field team in developing field data-collection tools.

Objectives

The main objective of this research is to investigate and establish the extent of the challenges facing girls in relation to MHM in schools. Specifically, the aim is to identify the challenges facing girls in terms of MHM in schools, analyse the causes and determinants, and develop appropriate recommendations to meet the girls' needs.

Methodology

The research aims to improve understanding of girls' MHM and the challenges they face in two UNICEF intervention regions: the Nord and Est regions of Burkina Faso.

The theoretical framework for the research encompasses a number of influential factors: social and cultural norms, physical environment, interpersonal relationships, individual beliefs and perceptions

and biological factors. A qualitative research method was used to collect and analyse data on the various factors mentioned. Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research seeks to understand the reasons for the behaviour and experiences of the research participants. It enables free discussion and encourages participants to answer questions from their point of view. It also allows us to understand the importance of the social, physical and institutional context by using specific research methods such as individual interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), direct observation and case histories. This is an appropriate approach for analysing the habits, beliefs, attitudes and viewpoints of the participants in relation to girls' MHM in schools. The data-collection tools used were developed in close collaboration with Emory University and were modified and approved by the field research teams.

The various field activities undertaken included face-to-face interviews with girls who had started menstruation and with resource persons, and focus groups with schoolgirls, boys and mothers. A total of fifty-two (52) activities were conducted in the eight schools of the two regions covered by the study. The regional directorates for national education in the Est and Nord regions helped to select the institutions and individuals to be interviewed.

One of the limitations of this purely qualitative research is the lack of quantitative data enabling us to estimate trends and generalize conclusions.

Main conclusions

This action research into MHM in schools is part of a drive to improve girls' living and learning conditions in Burkina Faso. As qualitative research, it does not claim to provide exhaustive analysis of MHM issues in Burkina Faso. It does, however, serve to outline the issue in the Est and Nord regions of the country, in order to find appropriate solutions.

The research enabled us to identify the challenges facing girls in terms of MHM in schools, as well as the causes and determinants, which are primarily cultural, biological, personal, interpersonal and environmental. It confirmed the conclusions of the study conducted in Burkina Faso and Niger in 2013.

In terms of knowledge, girls do not have sufficient information or know-how to manage their menstruation hygienically, as they did not receive sufficient information from their mothers before their first period. Neither has any education on MHM been provided in schools to address this knowledge gap.

The taboo surrounding menstruation is the main reason for the lack of information given to girls by their mothers. This is shown by the euphemisms used for periods, such as *atokabourga min* in Mooré ("her water jug is broken") or "she is not free".

In terms of knowledge about menstruation and its management, it was found that the mothers' knowledge was based on personal experience supported by taboos linked to religion and customs. This anecdotal knowledge is passed on to girls only once they have experienced their first period.

Girls find out about menstruation unexpectedly, as their mothers do not inform them and prepare them for the arrival of menstruation, because the subject is taboo. The information provided at this stage is insufficient and does not prepare girls for the experience of menstruation.

At the first period, most girls tell their mothers or female friends because they expect them to provide help and advice and tell them how to protect themselves and how to behave; however, the information received at this stage is still insufficient.

Girls also receive information about managing menstruation from their female friends, aunts, female cousins and, occasionally, from female teachers at school.

Male teachers in secondary schools provide some information on menstruation, but this is still insufficient. The teachers are not really qualified themselves to give pupils this type of information.

Pupils at secondary school do, therefore, know a little more than those at primary. Meanwhile, boys hold stigmatizing attitudes towards girls who are menstruating.

It has also been found that interpersonal relationships are very restricted for girls when they are menstruating. Their actions are subject to restrictions and constraints. When a girl is more silent, female teachers generally show some tolerance towards her, which is not always the case with male teachers.

In terms of materials to manage menstruation at school, it was clear that in both regions, girls generally use pieces of cloth produced locally or sanitary towels purchased at the local market. Drying the pieces of cloth used as sanitary protection poses a problem, as according to local traditions no one must see evidence of a woman's menses.

In fact, in both regions, the taboo against exposing sanitary protection to others is widespread. This causes problems for the common method of protecting girls during menstruation by drying the pieces of cloth in the open air.

Girls also have a problem accessing sanitary towels, due to the relatively high cost of these supplies.

In addition, negative religious and traditional beliefs result in girls experiencing isolation, reduced mobility, food restrictions, stigma and exclusion from school. These beliefs reinforce gender inequalities and therefore have a negative impact on girls' dignity and education.

Discussions with the girls also showed that pain and fear of bloodstains prevent their active participation in class, as well as in sporting activities.

In terms of WASH infrastructure, it was found that:

On the whole, water sources are located quite far away from classrooms and there are no facilities to store water close to classrooms.

In terms of sanitation, the condition of the latrines in the visited educational institutions was not satisfactory. In fact, only 46.15 per cent of the visited latrines were operational, resulting in a ratio of 121 pupils to one latrine. According to the girls, even where toilets are available in the schools visited, most of the time the segregation between girls and boys is not respected, and the toilets do not have adequate water or personal hygiene supplies. Most of the pupil latrines are poorly maintained, badly lit and not secure (lack of/defective door or interior lock), and as a consequence they do not allow girls to properly attend to their personal hygiene.

In terms of hygienic waste disposal, none of the educational institutions observed had any facilities for drainage or waste disposal. The same applies to waste bins for appropriate disposal of sanitary towels.

As regards to hygiene, handwashing devices and materials for anal cleansing were underdeveloped in the educational institutions visited.

From general observation of WASH infrastructure, it was noted that there was a lack of security and of guaranteed privacy for girls. All these challenges present a barrier to better MHM for girls in schools. This barrier has a negative impact on the participation of girls in schools.

In addition, it should be noted that this research met several objectives, from the stage of making contact with the managers of institutions and training research assistants and interviewers, through pre-testing, to data collection. Making contact with the managers of the institutions represented a turning point for these stakeholders in terms of becoming aware of the issue of menstruation for girls in schools. Many managers of institutions claimed never to have thought about the issue but, from now on, they have committed to pay attention to it in their school environment.

Finally, in terms of capacity-building in qualitative research methods and the application of these tools in the field, it should be noted that a total of 19 people in the country became qualified in these areas. As they reported on the last day of the fieldwork phase: "We have become champions for WinS4Girls and are ready to advocate and to use the knowledge we have acquired to improve the situation for women and girls in our environment" (participants in the fieldwork phase, Est region).

Key recommendations

To address these challenges, recommendations have been made which incorporate solutions suggested by the stakeholders. They revolve around information, training, advocacy and providing educational institutions with adequate infrastructure and facilities. These recommendations are addressed to the Ministry of Education, development partners such as NGOs, technical and financial partners (TFPs), communities and local stakeholders involved in education, water and sanitation in Burkina Faso. They can be summarized as follows.

At the social level

- Break the taboo surrounding menstruation, by informing and raising the awareness of the community about a woman's menstrual cycle and its role in the healthy functioning of the human body.
- Disseminate knowledge about menstruation and its hygienic management, through training for teachers, mothers and girls.

At the interpersonal level

- Raise boys' awareness of the implications of their behaviour towards girls for the latter's school performance.
- Build pupils' knowledge and skills in relation to menstruation and its hygienic management.
- Use existing pupil organizations to run awareness-raising activities on MHM (e.g. Deen Kan school clubs).

At the personal and biological level

Civil society organizations (CSOs), NGOs, Parents' Associations (APEs) and villages can help by:

- running hygiene promotion activities in schools and institutions (clean school or odourless latrine competitions)
- holding chat sessions about MHM with girls in lower secondary school (ages 11-15)
- providing schools with kits of basic necessities (medication, sanitary towels, etc.) for use in emergencies.

At the environmental level

- In schools without latrines, and taking into account the regulations in force, build latrines with financial support from resource persons, TFPs and community organizations.
- Provide all schools and educational institutions with segregated latrines.
- Encourage girls and boys to make proper use of the latrines and to keep them clean.
- Provide all schools and institutions with waterpoints.
- Overhaul non-operational toilets and make them secure, in partnership with school management committees (COGES), Parents' Associations (APEs) and Associations of Mother Educators (AMEs).
- Work with COGES, APEs and AMEs to equip schools with materials for cleaning latrines and for storing water.
- Provide awareness-raising for teachers and school partner organizations (COGES, APEs and AMEs) on promoting cleanliness, hygiene and MHM, and in the need to make latrines secure and to maintain them.

Specifically, the Ministry of National Education must:

- ensure that reproduction is taught systematically from class CM1 (age 9), with content enabling girls to manage their menstruation well and to avoid early pregnancy
- develop and disseminate informative materials about MHM to pupils aged 9 to 16 years
- incorporate MHM content into SVT (earth and life sciences) courses for classes in the first cycle of secondary school
- establish periodic awareness-raising activities on hygiene and MHM in schools
- develop a synergy of actions with CSOs and NGOs addressing hygiene and MHM
- lead discussions on ideal latrines for girls in schools
- develop an implementation action plan, using a participatory approach, and translate this into concrete action.

Finally, in terms of local capacity-building in MHM research , we should remember that, by the end of the research project, a total of three people had completed online training with Emory University, and 19 people trained locally in qualitative research methods had applied the associated tools in the field. In addition, four research assistants were actively involved in analysing the data and producing the report. This research helped to raise awareness among the one hundred and thirty (130) people interviewed of the problems of MHM for girls in schools.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ADAP	Adolescent Development and Participation
AME	Association of Mother Educators
APE	Parents' Association
CE	Primary school
CERFODES	Centre of Studies, Research and Training for Social and Economic Development
CM	Penultimate year of primary school
CM2	Final year of primary school
COGES	School Management Committee
CSO	Civil society organization
DEFPG	Directorate for Girls' Education and Gender Equality
DGESS	Directorate-General for Sector-Wide Studies and Statistics
DPEF	Directorate for the Promotion of Girls' Education
DPEFG	Directorate for the Promotion of Girls' Education and Gender Equality
FASAF	*Famille et Scolarisation en Afrique* ["Family and Schooling in Africa"]
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
IDI	In-depth Interview
MENA	Ministry of National Education and Literacy
MESS	Ministry of Secondary and Higher Education
MHM	Menstrual Hygiene Management
NGOs	Non-governmental organizations
ONEA	National Office for Water and Sanitation
SNAEF	National Strategy for the Acceleration of Girls' Education

SVT	Earth and life sciences
UNGEI	United Nations Girls' Education Initiative
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VDC	Village Development Committee
VIP	Ventilated Improved Pit
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WinS	WASH in schools

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INTRODUCTION

This study was action research initiated by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), in collaboration with the Ministry of Secondary and Higher Education (MESS) and the Ministry of National Education and Literacy (MENA). It was conducted with the aim of improving understanding of the issue of menstrual hygiene management (MHM) in schools, to complement the study carried out in six rural schools in 2013 by the regional UNICEF office. The new research received technical support in New York from Emory University.

The research was carried out by a team comprising a consultant, four research assistants and a number of interviewers. It was supported by a monitoring committee, two members of which completed an online course with Emory University.

The research was carried out in the context of increased effort by the UNICEF WASH programme to improve health and hygiene in schools, while also helping promote girls' education.

The research was conducted in the Est and Nord regions and involved four primary schools and four secondary schools and colleges, i.e. two primary and two secondary in each region.

This report is structured as follows:

Chapter I introduces the theoretical framework for the research;

Chapter II presents the findings of the research;

Chapter III outlines the solution pathways suggested by the various stakeholders.

The report finishes with an overall conclusion and some recommendations.

CHAPTER I: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This will focus on introducing the context and rationale for the study, the study area and the research methodology.

I. CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

Girls' education is essential to attain the objectives of Education for All. Promotion of girls' education is a priority policy in Burkina Faso, as demonstrated by the country's commitment to many global frameworks for action on education.[1]

Girls' education and training helps to improve the quality of human resources. It enables the elimination of sociocultural practices that disadvantage women, makes girls more receptive to behaviour change and increases their commitment to development goals (National Strategy for the Acceleration of Girls' Education — SNAEF, 2012).

Conscious of the role played by women in the nation's education, the ministries in charge of education decided to implement a number of actions to facilitate girls' access to quality education. Numerous initiatives were thus developed to promote education in general and in particular to increase girls' access to, and retention and success in, primary, lower secondary and upper secondary schools. For example, in 1989 a Unit for the Promotion of Girls' Schooling was created, which evolved into a Directorate for the Promotion of Girls' Education and Gender Equality (DPEFG) at primary level and a Directorate for Girls' Education and Gender Equality (DEFPG) at secondary level.

Incentive measures, including the drafting of a National Strategy for the Acceleration of Girls' Education (SNAEF), social mobilization for the schooling of girls, institutional and human capacity-building for behaviour change in communities, and action research, have resulted in 48.4 per cent of the total national number of primary school pupils being girls (education statistical yearbook 2013-2014). However, there are still a number of bottlenecks impeding the attendance and retention of girls at school.

According to the National Strategy for the Acceleration of Girls' Education, girls have to retake courses less often than boys in the first stages of primary education (CP and CE), but more often than them in the final two years (CM).

[1] Education for All (EFA); Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); Jomtien Declaration (1990) and Dakar Framework for Action (2000); Education for All - Fast Track Initiative (EFA-FTI).

The dropout rate for girls is still higher than that for boys at lower and upper secondary levels. In addition, the completion rate for primary school in the priority communes is 29.8 per cent for girls, compared with 32 per cent for boys (education statistical yearbook 2013-2014). At the national level, this rate is 22.3 per cent for girls, compared with 26.4 per cent for boys, at lower secondary level (MESS statistics 2013-2014). This means that, out of 100 girls who start secondary school, only 22 complete the first four years.

There is therefore a clear need for investigation into this particular difference between girls and boys, in order to encourage fair and equitable access to educational services.

According to MESS statistics, in 2012/13, 9.3 per cent of institutions had no latrines, 23.3 per cent had no drinking water, 46.2 per cent had no electricity and 63.9 per cent were unfenced.

The statistics show that private educational institutions provide better amenities: 15.1 per cent of private, compared with 31.7 per cent of public institutions, had no drinking water; 4.4 per cent of private, compared with 14.3 per cent of public institutions, had no latrines; 37.7 per cent of private, compared with 90.5 per cent of public institutions, were unfenced (although the current situation in the public sector appears to have improved by 1.6 percentage points since 2011/2012).

The number of institutions without latrines went from 8 to 6 in vocational education and from 105 to 136 in general education, between 2011/2012 and 2012/2013.

This situation impedes teaching and causes problems with hygiene, sanitation and security.

The factors quoted above are directly linked to the problems with girls' MHM. A girl who does not have access to dedicated facilities allowing healthy development and proper management of her menstruation is tempted to abandon her schooling (UNICEF, 2013).

Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) means that women and adolescent girls use clean materials to absorb or collect menstrual blood, are able to change in privacy and as often as necessary throughout their menstrual cycle, have soap and water to wash as required, and have access to adequate and secure facilities. They understand the basic facts relating to the menstrual cycle and how to manage it with dignity and without feeling embarrassed or fearful.

In this respect, the study[2] into the management of menstruation, carried out by the UNICEF regional office in 2013 in six rural schools in Burkina Faso, showed that:

[2]Laura Keihas, *Menstrual Hygiene in Schools in 2 countries of Francophone West Africa, Burkina Faso and Niger, Case Studies in 2013* (2013).

i. Pupils in school lack knowledge and information about menstruation: Menstrual hygiene management is generally taught too late.

ii. Menstruation affects girls' participation and performance at school. The majority of girls feel shy or stressed at school during menstruation and participate less due to shame, fatigue or pain. This study resulted in the following recommendations:

- ✓ Analyse current hygiene practices and behaviours at school, such as WASH practices, participation in class and girls' interaction with their peers and teachers during menstruation.
- ✓ Encourage the integration and mainstreaming of MHM into national education, health and WASH programming, strategies, guidelines and monitoring.
- ✓ Develop an MHM checklist for integration into school WASH programmes.
- ✓ Allocate more resources to increase the number of schools.
- ✓ Find suitable methods to ensure girls are adequately informed, through developing information packages (manuals and communication tools) adapted for girls.
- ✓ Take into consideration different sociocultural contexts and beliefs.
- ✓ Advocate cross-sectoral approaches, involving the education, gender, health, protection, WASH, community development, Adolescent Development and Participation (ADAP) and communication for development sectors.

In order to begin implementing these recommendations, the research needed to be repeated in different sociocultural areas, in order to understand the barriers facing girls and to propose and test effective solutions to mitigate the problem of MHM, involving all school stakeholders, with a view to scaling up an optimum intervention package.

The objectives chosen for the current research were therefore:

1. Identify the MHM challenges facing girls at school.
2. Analyse the causes and determinants of girls' MHM at school.
3. Make appropriate recommendations to meet girls' MHM needs in schools.

II. RESEARCH AREA

Located in West Africa, Burkina Faso has 13 regions, 45 provinces, 351 communes and 8,103 villages. It is a landlocked country with a surface area of 274,000 km². The current population of Burkina Faso is around 17 million; the main cities are Ouagadougou (the capital, with 2 million inhabitants), Bobo-Dioulasso, Koudougou, Ouahigouya and Banfora. The fourth General Census of Population and Housing in Burkina Faso was carried out on the ground in December 2006. It recorded that 60.5 per cent of the population are Muslim, 23.2 per cent Christian (19 per cent Catholic and 4.2 per cent Protestant), 15.3 per cent animist, 0.6 per cent other religions and 0.4 per cent have no religion.

The population of Burkina Faso is made up of about 60 ethnic groups, each with their own culture. To borrow the wording of Sanchez and Desjeux (1994: 1), we can say that culture represents "the predominant set of values, aspirations, beliefs, behaviours and interpersonal relationships in a given social group".
Each ethnic group has a distinctive language, although some languages are widely spoken:

French (the official language); Mooré (language of the majority ethnic group, the Mossi); Dioula (akin to Bambara and widely used in the west and all along the border with Mali and northern Côte d'Ivoire); Fulfulde (language of the Fula people in northern Burkina Faso); and Gourmantché (spoken in the Fada N'gourma Diapaga-Pama region in eastern Burkina Faso).

Each of the other ethnic groups has its own language. However, as populations do not adhere to strict geographical borders, major ethnic groups are represented to some extent in each region (Rene Otaya et al, 1996).

Two regions were selected from among the UNICEF intervention areas in Burkina Faso, both of which have an ethnic group using a distinctive language, to provide a testing environment for the research. These were the Nord and Est regions, home respectively to the Mossi and the Gourmantché people. In line with tradition and their socioeconomic and political structure, these two ethnic groups (Mossi and Gourmantché) are centred on a village leader (Guison, 2004).

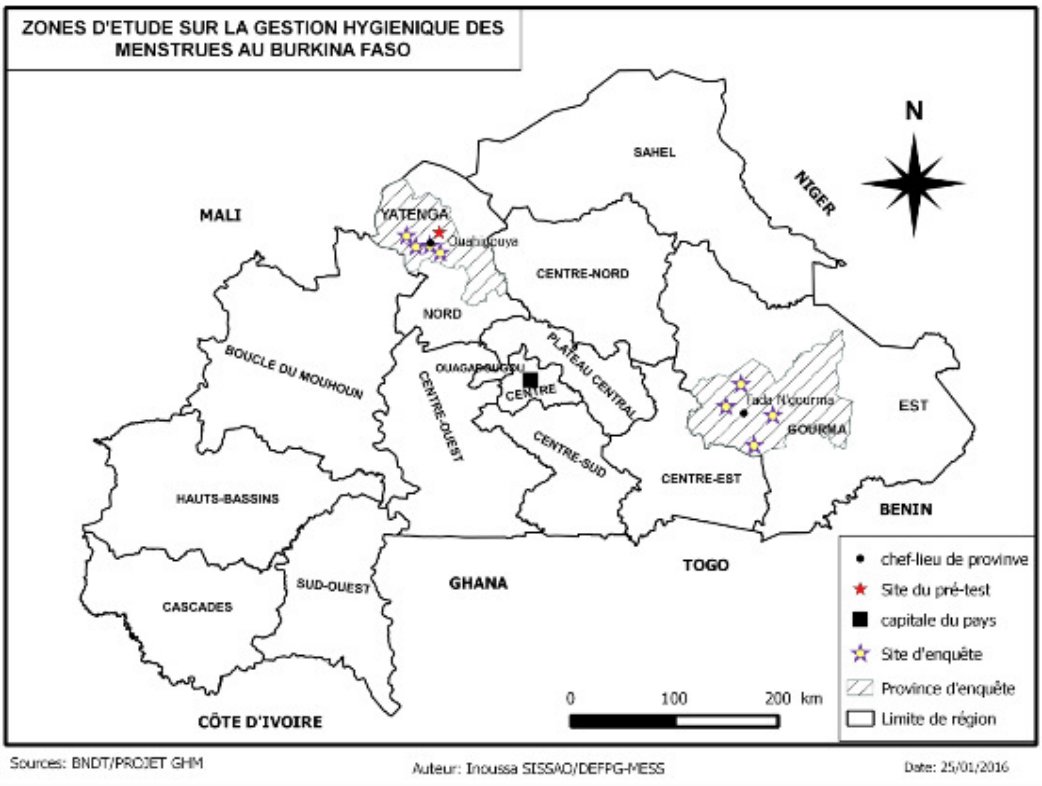
Initiation rites are still observed in both regions, with most rituals taking place within enclosures declared sacred and therefore barred to certain groups of people, such as women, children and the uninitiated. Societies are hierarchical in both regions.

The Mossi include followers of all the belief systems present in Burkina Faso. Believers are shared among Islam, Catholicism, fetishism and a whole range of "Christian" sects. Certain families and territories are predominantly Muslim, such as the environs of Ouahigouya (study area) and Tenkodogo.

The key difference between these two ethnic groups hinges on language.

The areas covered by this research are the villages of Tangaye, Touya, Somyaga and Oula in Yatenga Province, Nord region, and Diapangou, Yamba, Namoungou and Natiaboini in Gourma Province, Est region (Maps 2 and 3).

<u>Map 1</u>: MHM research regions



The Burkina Faso Government and those in charge of education are aware of the importance of girls' education and the factors affecting the full achievement of this objective.

These contributing factors include the creation of a DEFPG and a DPEF and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) interventions in schools, which are improving the quality of education and achieving significant results, especially in MHM.

Major efforts have been carried out in Burkina Faso to promote WinS, through projects by NGOs and state technical partners. The United Nations agency UNICEF is one of the key technical and financial partners of the Burkina Faso Government. Its interventions in this role focus on several areas alongside

its central mission, which is to improve the well-being of populations, particularly women and children. The WASH sector is one of UNICEF's fields of activity.

The WASH programme is therefore a key component of UNICEF's presence in Burkina Faso. The focus areas for the WASH programme, in line with government priorities, are access for communities and schools to safe water and sanitation, and the promotion of hygiene in schools and communities. Recognizing the importance of access to water, sanitation and hygiene in addressing equity issues such as MHM for girls, UNICEF is implementing WASH programmes in schools and communities.

It must, however, be recognized that there are problems with achieving sustainable outcomes. The status of access to boreholes and functioning latrines in schools, nationally and in the two regions covered by the study, is shown in Table 1 and Figure I.

Table 1: **Status of access to boreholes and functioning latrines at primary school, and completion rates for primary, lower secondary and upper secondary school**

Area	Percentage of schools with a water point Primary	Percentage of schools with a functioning latrine Primary	Completion rate, primary		Completion rate, lower secondary (age 11-15)		Completion rate, upper secondary (age 15-18)	
			Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Rural Nord region	37.1	45.8	68.6	75.3	27.8	19.8	10.3	3.8
Rural Est region	47.7	68.7	38.7	40.8	21.7	14.7	6.0	2.0
National	50.6	68.9	55.7	59.7	26.4	22.3	11.0	6.8

Source: MENA-MESS statistical yearbook 2013/2014

The figures show that the level of access to water and sanitation, and the completion rate for girls, in the intervention regions are generally below the national average. Although the completion rate is high for primary school, it drops off for lower secondary, which is the critical time for menstruation

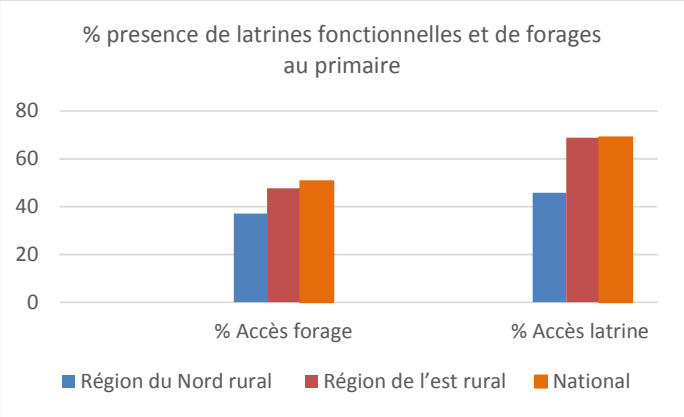
starting. Indeed, studies have shown that girls miss school during menstruation, especially where the school lacks adequate WASH facilities to ensure hygiene.

For example, in Ethiopia, in a study where only 10 per cent of girls reported having somewhere to manage their menstruation at school, more than 40 per cent of girls said they had missed school because of menstruation (Sommer, M., 2009; Fehr, 2010).

The lack of WASH facilities in schools can drive girls to leave school altogether, as many of them are particularly reluctant to continue schooling once they begin menstruating. According to a study conducted in India in 2010, inadequate protection during menstruation meant that an adolescent girl would miss five days of school a month (50 days a year) and that 23 per cent of girls dropped out of school once they started menstruation (Nielsen, 2010).

Figure I shows the status of access to boreholes and latrines in the two regions, compared to the national average.

<u>Figure I:</u> Status of operational latrines and boreholes at primary schools in the Nord and Est regions and nationally



Source: MHM research, 2015

Overall, we can see that boreholes are less well developed than latrines in both regions and nationally (MENA statistical yearbook 2013/2014). Figure I also highlights uneven distribution between the two regions: Nord is far more disadvantaged than Est in terms of access to boreholes and latrines. Finally, in terms of access to latrines, the percentage for Est region (68.7 per cent) is very similar to that recorded nationally (68.9 per cent).

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To meet the research objectives, the qualitative research method recorded in the research protocol and validated by the ethics committee was used.

Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research seeks to understand the reasons for the behaviour and experiences of the research participants. It enables free discussion and allows participants to answer from their point of view. It also allows us to understand the importance of the social, physical and organizational context, using specific research methods such as individual interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), direct observation and case histories. This is an appropriate approach for analysing participants' habits, beliefs, attitudes and viewpoints in relation to girls' MHM in schools.

It is based on a local adaptation of the research carried out by Emory University in four countries (Bolivia, Sierra Leone, Rwanda and the Philippines) in 2012.

Emory University provided technical support to the team carrying out the research, in particular through online training in the qualitative research method and in developing field data-collection tools.

Unlike quantitative research, this research will not provide data in the form of figures. There were several stages to conducting the research.

3.1 Identifying the research population

The primary research group comprised girls aged 12 to 18 years who had already started menstruation. We also interviewed boys of the same age, pupils' mothers, teachers and managers (headteachers of secondary schools and principals of primary schools) at the selected schools. There were several reasons behind the choice of target groups to interview:

- **Girls**: they are primarily affected. Their evidence (experiences, feelings, difficulties, needs, etc.) and their reports of certain situations relating to MHM are crucial to this research.
- **Boys**: Their connection to MHM is indirect but they have witnessed situations experienced by girls during menstruation at school or at home. Attention is increasingly paid to the inclusion of men in managing the challenges facing women. They are also among those who may make girls feel uncomfortable, etc. Their attitudes to girls and their reports and perceptions of MHM are therefore very important.
- **Mothers:** They have primary responsibility for girls' education; the support they give them before and during menstruation, and their personal experiences, enhance the research.

- **Male and female teachers**: they are in classes with pupils on a daily basis and experience situations relating to MHM with them. Their strategic position warrants them giving their opinions on the issue of MHM.
- **Resource persons:** They have primary responsibility for the various institutions and, as such, their views on MHM are needed.

3.2 Choice of schools

We studied a sample of two primary schools and two secondary schools in each of the provinces in the two regions; eight educational institutions in total. These institutions are rural schools that were chosen on the basis of their geographical proximity to the capital town of the province, in order to analyse the effect of proximity to urban areas on girls' and communities' level of information, knowledge and management practices. The analysis will focus mainly on the differences between primary and secondary levels and between regions.

Table 2: Institutions selected for field surveys

Region	Educational institutions	
	Primary	Secondary
Est	Natiaboini State Primary School	Namoungou General Education School
	Natiaboini State Primary School	Diapangou County Secondary School
Nord	Touyo State Primary School	Tangaye County Secondary School
	Somyaga State Primary School	Oula County Secondary School

Source: Field study planning for MHM research, 2015.

3.3 Preliminary visits to the selected schools

Two initial contact and fact-finding visits by the ministries in charge of education, UNICEF and the consultant were organized in the two regions, to hold discussions with those with primary responsibility for the institutions involved and to obtain their consent.

The latter responded favourably to the visits; in the words of the manager of one institution, "If this research had not been launched, it would have needed to be scheduled soon".

During these visits, the managers of the institutions were given consent forms to complete.

3.4 Recruitment and training of research assistants

Four research assistants, including three women, were recruited following a process that included assessing their application and testing their skill levels in information technology and qualitative research.

The research assistants and interviewers received capacity-building through a training session over seven days. The interviewers were the focal points for the directorates in charge of girls' primary and secondary education, as well as for stakeholders from public bodies working in the water and sanitation sector.

The training was run by the main consultant, assisted by two members of the committee who had completed the online course with Emory University. It covered qualitative research, research ethics, gender perspective, data-collection tools and human rights.

Following the training, all the tools were tested in the rural commune of Aorema in the Nord region, more specifically in the county college and in a primary school. The tools were adjusted once more before embarking on the actual survey stage, firstly in the Nord region and subsequently in Est. The manual for FGDs with mothers was translated into Mooré and Gourmantché by interviewers who spoke these two local languages.

3.5 Data collection

3.5.1 Activities

The field survey took place in two stages. It was carried out firstly in the Nord region, in the departments of Oula, Tangaye, Somyaga and Touya, then in the Est region in the villages of Diapangou, Natiaboini, Namoungou and Yamba.

In each region, a task force was set up prior to the launch at each site (see Annexes for schedule). At the end of each day, all the participants met for a debriefing session led by the consultant, which summarized the data collected and identified strengths and weaknesses of the tools and the interviewers.

The information from each session is recorded on a summary form. These debriefing sessions highlighted everything that had or had not worked in the interviews, including making recordings and taking photographs.

A total of fifty-two (52) activities were conducted in the eight schools in the two regions. Verbal and written consent was received, especially from the teachers and managers, before the activities commenced.

Under the supervision of the consultant in charge of the research, the activities were carried out in the field by four research assistants (three women and one man), supported by 10 interviewers (eight women and two men) from the regional and provincial education directorates, and by four resource persons who were members of the country monitoring committee, making a total of 19 people. The interviewers were selected based on their experience in the field and their knowledge of local languages. The role of the interviewers was limited to collecting data, while the research assistants processed the data together with the consultant. Table 3 summarizes the activities carried out in the two target regions.

Table 3: Summary of activities conducted in the two regions

Methods/Activities	Number
Face-to-face interviews with girls	16
Focus group discussions with girls	8
Interviews with resource persons (teachers, heads of institutions)	10
Focus group discussions with boys	3
Focus group discussions with mothers	4
Direct observations of schools	8
TOTAL	**52**

Source: Field survey data, November-December 2015

A total of one hundred and thirty (130) people were interviewed during these activities, as shown in Table 4.

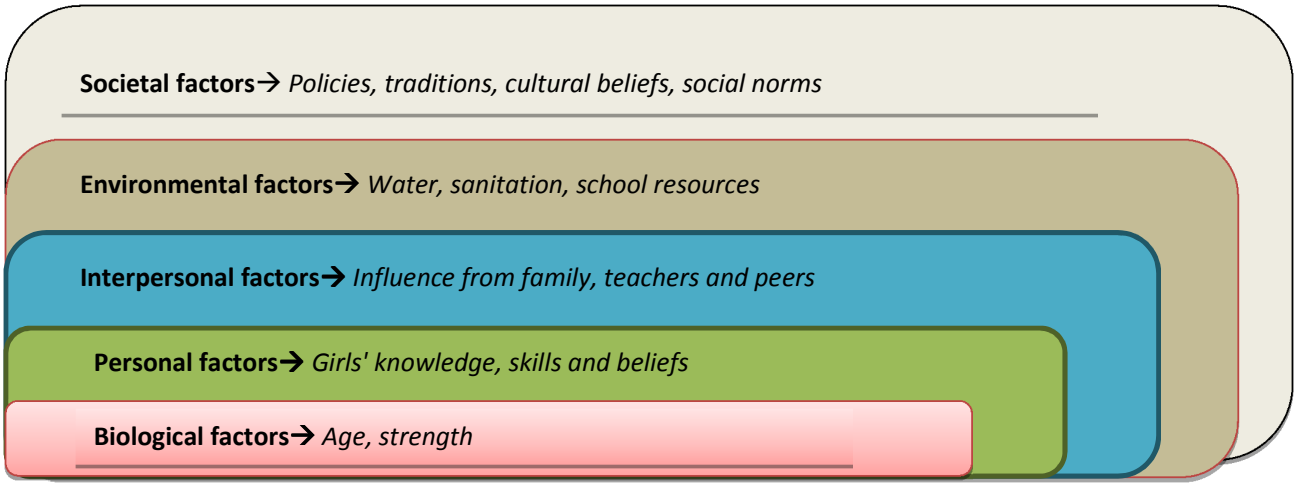
Table 4: Number of people interviewed in the regions

Tools	Nord	Est	Total
Face-to-face interviews with girls	8	8	**16**
Focus group discussions with girls	35	32	**67**
Focus group discussions with mothers	16	21	**37**
Interviews with resource persons (teachers, heads of institutions)	5	5	**10**
Total	**64**	**66**	**130**

Source: Field survey data, November-December 2015

The socio-ecological model, whereby an individual's behaviour is influenced by five key factors (societal, environmental, interpersonal, personal and biological) was used as the analytical framework (Figure II).

Figure II: Socio-ecological analytical framework



Source: online course, Emory University

It should be noted that the participatory approach used by the main consultant throughout the process resulted in a good working atmosphere, improved ownership of the methodology and successful collaboration between the various participants, thereby facilitating the work.

In evaluating the project, the members of the field data-collection teams reported on the knowledge gained and the working methodology. Some of their comments are provided below:

> *"I really appreciated the participatory approach, which enabled us to work intensively (under gentle pressure) without realizing it"*
> *"It's the first time I've taken part in qualitative research and I am now well-equipped after the training and using the tools in the field... I am now ready and committed to raising the issues surrounding menstruation with my target working group..." (Female interviewer, Fada area, Est region).*

Findings

This research into menstrual hygiene management was conducted under the scientific supervision of Emory University in the United States, and the institutional supervision of the ministries in charge of education. It involved two sociologically and agroecologically different regions. It was qualitative research using tools adapted to the situation in Burkina Faso. The research was carried out in the following stages:

- Online courses with Emory University
- Training of interviewers and research assistants
- Pre-testing of tools in two schools
- Data collection in the two regions
- Data processing and preparation of report

In terms of immediate outcomes, it should be noted that a total of three out of nine people completed the online training with Emory University and that nineteen (19) people who were trained locally in qualitative research methods applied the associated tools in the field. In addition, four research assistants were actively involved in analysing the data and producing the report. The objective of increasing local capacity for qualitative research into MHM was achieved through the group of Burkina Faso WinS4Girls Champions (see Photo 1). In addition, the research helped to raise awareness of the issue of MHM for girls in schools among the 130 people interviewed.

Photo 1: Burkina Faso WinS4Girls Champions

CHAPTER II: RESEARCH FINDINGS

Chapter II presents the findings of the research. It begins with an assessment of stakeholders' knowledge and perceptions of menstruation, which is followed by a description of personal experiences of menstrual management and an analysis of individual and societal attitudes to girls' experiences during menstruation. It finishes with a report on the WASH situation and school facilities in the areas involved.

I. Stakeholders' knowledge and perceptions of menstruation

This section will provide an analysis of knowledge and perceptions about menstruation among mothers, girls and boys. Knowledge and perceptions about menstruation differ between stakeholder groups.

1.1 Knowledge and perceptions among mothers

Women's knowledge is based on observation and personal factual experience, not on established theory. This anecdotal knowledge can be glimpsed through the various expressions used to refer to periods. As these are based on their own experience, they vary depending on geographical area. For example, in the Nord region the following expressions are found in the local language, Mooré:

Atokabourga min ("Her water jug is broken")

Kiugou ("the Moon" in Mooré)

Pêkré ("to wash" in Mooré)

"She has soiled clothes"

"She is not free"

In the Est region, in addition to the two expressions *pêkré* and *kiugou* also used in the Nord region, the following expressions in Gourmantché are used:

Gmaalo ("the month")

O Wouuda ("nappies")

O posiénou ("more like a woman")

Miiya ("I am not free")

Wouuli ("to wash", "laundry")

Posiénou ("necessary stage")

Yégnisogou ("to be in the shower all the time")

Noudaaya ("her hands are not free" - she does not take part in rituals)

The different expressions are therefore taken from the language of the area. We can see that *wouuli* ("to wash" in Gourmantché) is simply the translation of *pêkré* ("to wash" in Mooré). It should be pointed out that the existence of the two expressions *pêkré* and *kiugou* in the Est region is due to the Mooré language also being used in this area.

These various expressions give us a small insight into the perception of periods among women. It shows that they have only a vague mastery and understanding of the menstrual cycle. The following statements tell us more about their understanding of the menstrual cycle:

"... in any case, it flows every month unless you are pregnant" (Mothers' focus group discussion [FGD], Tangaye, Nord)

"... it can come twice in the same month" (Mothers' FGD, Somyaga, Nord)

"... it comes out of the vagina" (Mothers' FGD, Somyaga, Nord)

"... our friend said that if it is coming, her toes go red; she sees her periods in terms of her toes" (Mothers' FGD, Tangaye, Nord)

"... for some, if it is going to happen tomorrow, it hurts today. For some it is even like an illness and they just go to bed. Others don't feel anything." (Mothers' FGD, Tangaye, Nord)

"... others have periods but cannot have children" (Mothers' FGD, Tangaye, Nord)

So for women in the Nord region, their understanding of the menstrual cycle is limited to the periodic nature of menstruation and the associated pain. It is also surrounded by myths. This level of understanding of the menstrual cycle is not very different to that of women in Est. Some educated women were among the group of respondents in Est, which explains some of the answers.

"Periods contribute to the creation of the foetus." (Mothers' FGD, Yamba, Est)

"It depends on the child; some girls start at 14, others at 15, and there are even some girls who don't start until 17." (Mothers' FGD, Namoungou, Est)

"With some girls, as soon as they see their friend has started, it can happen to them." (Mothers' FGD, Namoungou, Est)

For women in both Nord and Est, periods are associated with ideas of motherhood and marriage. Periods are the sign that the girl has become a woman and that she must be married if she is not in school.

"... it means she has become a woman." (Mothers' FGD, Yamba, Est)

"... it's a sign of childbirth - but if she has relations with a man, she will get pregnant." (Mothers' FGD, Namoungou, Est)

"If she is not attending school and she has a fiancé, now she has started her periods, her marriage needs to be arranged quickly so that her fiancé can come to get her." (Mothers' FGD, Namoungou, Est)

These statements demonstrate the importance of periods in women's lives. However, despite the great importance women attach to them, they find it hard to raise the subject with their daughters. Most of them claim not to have talked to their children about it before they started their periods. Telling them about periods before they started would encourage them to discover sexuality, i.e. to have sexual relations with boys before marriage.

And after their daughters first experience periods, mothers tell themselves that the school and/or their female friends will talk to them about it. Some do, however, raise the subject with their daughters when they notice that they have started their periods.

"... Ah! You can't not show them what to do." (Mothers' FGD, Tangaye, Nord)

"... If, in the meantime, you see that she has it, you try to show her." (Mothers' FGD, Tangaye, Nord)

"... girls today, you don't even need to show them, they know what periods are even before they start... they learn that at school, they know what it is before they experience it. So when they do experience it, sometimes their mothers don't even know." (Mothers' FGD, Yamba, Est)

"... beforehand, you don't even dare tell the girl about that until she has experienced it." (Mothers' FGD, Namoungou, Nord)

Although some women say they may not know that girls have their periods, it is worth noting that they are familiar with all the aspects that accompany the start of periods.

Some women referred to the physiological and emotional aspects that accompany periods. These aspects are sources of anxiety for mothers, who associate the arrival of periods with pregnancy.

"She could get pregnant at any moment, it's a problem." (Mothers' FGD, Tangaye, Nord)

Pregnancy would harm the girl's future and cause many problems for her parents. The boy, however, would be less affected by the pregnancy. The risk of the girl getting pregnant explains her parents' haste regarding her marriage.

"If my daughter started her periods, if she was attending school, I really wouldn't be happy because if she didn't accept our advice, I would expect to be disgraced one day." (Mothers' FGD, Namoungou, Est)

"If she's not attending school, then when she starts her periods, she will already have somewhere to go, she will already have a fiancé, so she will go to live with her husband; but if she is attending school, she cannot go to live with her husband." (Mothers' FGD, Namoungou, Est)

In view of the dread of pregnancy among girls' parents, one might expect parents to talk to their daughters about periods; however this is not the case. On the contrary, mothers give their daughters information that makes them fearful.

"When you start and you cry, she comforts you and tells you not to be scared, that it's an illness that happens to all women and that you must avoid messing about with boys." (Mothers' FGD, Namoungou, Est)

Regardless of the region, women's silence around menstruation explains why the subject remains taboo and also explains their anecdotal knowledge. The very fact that the subject is only brought up in a closed group limits their development of in-depth knowledge about menstruation and, by extension, the support they are able to give to their daughters.

In addition, the 2013 study showed that nearly all (86 per cent) headteachers and teachers said that menstruation was still taboo: a forbidden, secret and shameful subject. Nearly all the women and girls questioned stated that women only talk about the subject with other women. In some communities, women do not speak openly about the subject even with other women. Some mothers have received no information about menstruation themselves and, as a result, are unable to advise their daughters.

1.2 Knowledge and perceptions among girls

Girls at all levels of schooling have a good knowledge of the signs of puberty. However, those at secondary school have a better knowledge of the signs of puberty than those at primary. The gap between primary and secondary is however less than the gap between Nord and Est. In fact, it can be

seen that girls in Est have a very good knowledge of the signs of puberty that herald the arrival of periods in girls. They express this as shown in Table 5, in a comparison with boys.

Table 5: Girls' knowledge about puberty, by region

Region	Knowledge about puberty at primary school		Knowledge about puberty at secondary school	
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
Nord	her breasts grow, her periods start	beard appears	breasts appear, voice gets higher	voice gets deeper, muscles develop
Est	pelvis widens, breasts appear, soft voice; will notice that the girl has a womb and the boy a penis	hairs grow on the pubis, deep voice, beard appears	pelvis widens and voice gets higher, periods start	voice gets deeper, shoulders widen, hairs around the penis and chest, ejaculation

In terms of the level of knowledge about menstruation among the girls interviewed, we can say that they have general knowledge and understand how to manage it with the means available, but they do not know the details of the menstrual cycle.

> *"Periods are the regular flow of blood through the vagina at the age of puberty."*
> *(Girls' FGD, secondary school, Diapangou)*

All the girls stated that periods are the monthly flow of blood through the vagina. In the Nord region, the secondary school girls stated that the starting age for periods was 15; those at primary school placed it between 13 and 14.

The secondary school girls in the Est region, however, estimated the starting age for periods as 15-17, while those at primary school referred to the 14-17 age bracket.

It therefore appears that periods start between the ages of 13 and 15 in the Nord region, and slightly later, between the ages of 14 and 17, in Est. Regarding the date of their next period, only the secondary school girls in both regions were able to pinpoint it. Because the primary school girls do not know the date of their next period, they are likely to protect themselves several days in advance.

However, none of the girls could pinpoint the time of ovulation and some of them did not even know what this was. The menstrual cycle is taught briefly at primary school, in the final two years.

In primary school, it is integrated into reproduction. There are no formal curricula that cover MHM.

In secondary education, a girl has to attend the fourth year and the C (maths and physics) and D (biology) final year courses to receive information on menstruation. The instruction is usually provided by SVT teachers. However, the syllabus does not include MHM.

In short, girls receive basic information on periods at primary school and learn about them through scientific subjects at secondary school, but MHM is still a problem throughout the education system.

The girls have received information on menstruation, including materials and methods for protection, through their female friends, classmates, teachers and close relatives (mothers, sisters, aunts or female cousins). The information source depends on the girls' level of familiarity and confidence with the aforementioned people. Generally, female friends and mothers are a girl's first points of reference after her first period, to find out more about managing her menstruation. The mothers also take an advisory role.

> *"Our families threaten us by telling us when we want to go out: 'If you go there and give yourself away and you get pregnant, we will kick you out with your bags.'" (Girls' FGD, secondary school, Diapangou, Est)*

Next, it is classmates, cousins, sisters and aunts who provide information on the materials to manage menstruation and the precautions to take. Female teachers are mainly approached when periods start unexpectedly at school, or sometimes during lessons on reproduction in the fourth year of secondary school, when the girls take the opportunity to ask questions.

Girls therefore receive a fair amount of information on menstruation from these various sources, but they still have insufficient knowledge about MHM.

1.3. Knowledge and perception among boys

Boys identify the development of muscles, the growth of chest and armpit hair, the development of the scrotum and the breaking of the voice as signs of puberty in boys.

In girls, they identify the development of breasts, the widening of the pelvis and the onset of periods as signs of puberty. The concept of menstruation is also well understood in all of the surveys.

"Periods are a liquid that comes out of girls' genitals every month." (Boys' FGD, primary school, Somyaga, Nord);

"Periods are the destruction of an egg that is ready to be fertilized but is not fertilized." (Boys' FGD, secondary, Yamba, Est)

So knowledge of periods is quite accurate, and is the same in all regions and across all levels of schooling. Some secondary school pupils even have some idea about what ovulation is.

"…On the date of ovulation, you mustn't have sex; otherwise, after the egg is destroyed, you can have sex up until the time when ovulation occurs." (Boys' FGD, secondary, Yamba, Est)

The main source of the various pieces of information that boys say they know about periods is their teachers in the final year of primary school and the fourth year of secondary school.

Schools are the only source of information for boys in the Est region. This information is provided by teachers in class and through boys' questions about periods. In addition, a civil society organization sometimes comes to talk to them about sexual health and periods. Boys in the Nord region say that their classmates are a source of information for them in addition to their teachers.

In response to the question about whether it is important to teach boys about menstruation, the reply given by the majority of boys in primary schools is unambiguous:

"It's women who should know about that." (Boys' FGD, primary school, Somyaga, Nord)

"Boys talk about periods even though they won't have any periods. It's a women's thing." (Boys' FGD, primary school, Somyaga, Nord)

In contrast, boys in secondary schools believe it is important. They all say that they would talk about periods with their daughters if they were to have children. Boys in primary schools say that if they had anything to say about their daughters' periods, they would talk to their wives (the girls' mothers).
Boys' knowledge of periods is most often acquired at school. The fact that this topic is taboo piques the curiosity of many boys, even if they are not ready to talk about it. Although the eldest say that they are ready to talk to their child daughters about periods, they stress that it would be inconceivable for them to broach the subject with their own parents.

Girls' reluctance to talk about periods is not solely due to the fact that menstruation is a taboo subject in society; it is also linked to boys' stigmatizing perceptions.

1.4. Knowledge and perception among female and male teachers

In both the Nord and Est regions, male and female teachers have good knowledge of puberty and menstruation in girls. However, female teachers, who – as women – have gone through menstruation

themselves are more able and quicker to react when girls menstruate at school and to give them the support and advice they need.

Girls find it easier to discuss the issue of periods with female teachers than with male teachers. The latter rarely spot the signs that a girl is menstruating in class through their behaviour, such as refusing to go over to the blackboard or do physical exercise. Female teachers, however, can imagine or understand the hidden meaning of such behaviour and respond to it appropriately.

The taboo that surrounds menstruation and makes it an entirely female issue partly explains this low level of awareness of this topic among men. Several of the male teachers who were interviewed said that they had never come across cases of girls menstruating at school. Female teachers, on the other hand, said that they had had to deal with cases in different schools.

It should be noted, however, that SVT teachers in secondary schools address the topics of puberty and sexuality in classes but do not give in-depth information about MHM. Some male teachers say that they do not have enough information about MHM and generally ask health workers, particularly midwives, to come to discuss these issues during their classes.

The initial training for primary-level teachers does not include the teaching of MHM. Only teachers who are sensitive to girls' concerns develop ways of enabling them to gain knowledge of it in order to address the topic with pupils in class.

Findings

In terms of knowledge, this research shows that girls' knowledge of periods in the different types of school is not very good (acceptable) on the whole, and is primarily gained after girls' first periods. In terms of menstrual hygiene management, knowledge is vague or even frequently inaccurate. This is due to the fact that before their first period, girls do not have accurate and complete information about MHM as periods are still a taboo subject in Burkina Faso society, as is in many other societies. After their first period, girls discuss the subject with their friends or mothers. The latter merely show them how to look after themselves and protect themselves from boys so that they do not become pregnant. So within the family environment, the information that is given is still brief and inadequate.

The situation is no better in schools, as periods are not covered in the primary school curriculum. The topic is addressed from the fourth year of secondary school onwards, which is quite late. As a result of the lack of information, neither families nor schools prepare girls psychologically for the onset of menstruation.

2.1. Circumstances in which girls find out about periods

Girls can find out about periods through hearing classmates talk about their first periods, sometimes during childcare classes which are taught during the final year of primary school.

Information concerning periods is also acquired through radio broadcasts, but most commonly it is passed on by family members such as mothers, grandmothers, aunts and elder sisters when girls notice sanitary protection or see blood on their elder sisters' clothes.

The information that is currently given to girls is very limited, as they are told that periods are a discharge of blood from the vagina and that they will experience it when they grow up. The following words illustrate the circumstances in which girls learn about periods.

> *"I first heard about periods from a classmate; we chatted all the time, she told me about them. She had gone to the market, and when she got up, the people there told her. It was her first time." (IDI with a girl, 15 years old, first year of college, Tangaye, Nord)*
>
> *"The first time I heard about them was with my elder sisters, the ones who are married. I had seen something that she had put down and she picked it up to put it in her bag. I asked her what it was used for. I even asked what it was called; she told me it was called 'vania'.*
>
> *I asked what it was used for. She said she wouldn't tell me. Then when we went out, she simply told me that people use it to protect themselves when they have their period. I asked: what does 'period' mean? She told me it is a discharge of blood." (IDI with a girl, 16 years old, first year of college, Diapangou, Est)*

Girls find out about periods by chance, because none of the interviews indicated that mothers, grandmothers or aunts explicitly addressed the subject in order to inform girls and prepare them for the onset of periods.

The information that is given is inadequate and does not prepare young girls to experience menstruation. This is why several of them feel scared, and some even wonder whether the bleeding will stop or whether they will die during their first period.

In both the Nord and Est regions, the circumstances in which girls find out about periods are similar.

2.2. First experiences

In the Nord and Est regions, most girls experience menstruation for the first time between the ages of 11 and 14. Others have their first experience a little later, at the age of 15-16.

Periods start either at night at home or during the day at school.

When periods occur at night, young girls ask their mothers after waking up, and their mothers explain to them what periods are and then tell them how they need to protect themselves. Several girls used pieces of cloth (*zegre* in the Mooré language) when they had their first period.

This was true of this young girl at a primary school in the Nord region:

> *"I was in my bedroom one night. When I went to bed, my clothes were soaking wet, I got up and I saw that they were stained with blood. I washed my clothes and looked for a used piece of cloth. When my mother gave birth, she used it as bedding for the baby. I told my mother the next day." (IDI with a girl, 15 years old, final year of primary school, Somyaga, Nord)*

Those who have their first period at school wait until the end of lessons to put on a piece of cloth or a scarf borrowed from a classmate so that they can go home. Once home, they tell their mother or grandmother, who first tells them to attend to their personal hygiene and then shows them how to wear a piece of cloth. Girls are then taught other information, such as how to clean pieces of cloth and what they will need to do in future.

However, those who found out information from classmates go directly to attend to their personal hygiene and apply a piece of cloth or cotton without telling their mothers.

This is the account given by a young girl at a college in the Nord region of her first period, which she had in class:

> *"I looked for a piece of cloth so that the others wouldn't see. I asked the other girls about it. My classmate said that my skirt was ruined; she told me that I should protect myself so that people wouldn't see; she told me to look for a piece of cloth. She explained it to me, that's why I didn't ask. If she hadn't explained it to me, when I went home, I would have gone to a woman and asked her…" (IDI with a girl, 19 years old, final year of college, Oula, Nord).*

When they have their first period, girls usually tell their mothers, because it is their mothers who can offer help and advice and tell them how to protect themselves and behave. Other girls prefer to seek help from their classmates. This applies to this 14-year-old girl who had her first period at night in her final year of primary education in the Est region.

When she woke up in the morning, she did not tell her mother. She put on three skirts so that she could go to school, where she told her friend, who suggested that she go and buy some cotton. When she got home, she asked her mother for some money so that she could buy some cotton and protect herself.

Other than their mothers and classmates, girls do not talk about their periods with anyone else. They absolutely do not want boys, men, fathers or male teachers to know that they are menstruating, much less discuss the subject with them.

III. Management of menstruation in schools

This section deals with how girls manage their menstruation at school in both regions and its implications for girls.

3.1. How girls manage their menstruation at school

In day-to-day life, girls change their sanitary towels two or three times a day; however, the majority do not do so at school. They attend to their personal hygiene at home in the morning before going to school, then again at midday and in the evening.

Some go to relatives' houses near their school to change their sanitary towel when they find that they are wet, as this girl at a college in the Nord region told us.

> *"My aunt lives near there, I go to her because there's no water or soap at school." (IDI with a girl, 16 years old, fourth year of secondary school, Tangaye, Nord)*

If girls find themselves menstruating at school, they feel that they have to leave class or wait until the end of the lesson to get a piece of cloth or a scarf from a friend or classmate so that they can apply it before going home, as mentioned above.

"A classmate got her period unexpectedly, so she waited until everyone had left the classroom before telling us. We gave her a piece of cloth to use." (IDI with a girl, 16 years old, primary, Somyaga, Nord)

In general, schoolgirls employ different strategies to manage their menstruation. They use pieces of cloth and sanitary towels. Sanitary towels can be home-made or modern. Home-made sanitary towels are used in particular at a college in the Nord region, where they were introduced through the activities of DEFPG and US Peace Corps volunteers.

They are made by girls themselves. Modern sanitary towels are made of hygienic cotton bought from vendors.

In their day-to-day lives, in both the Est and Nord regions, both at home and at school, girls use pieces of cloth and sanitary towels, but pieces of cloth are used much more commonly by girls in primary schools than by those at college. They are readily available and are used in two different ways: they are either folded several times and placed at the bottom of a girl's underwear or attached in the form of a *kadba* (a method of attaching a piece of fabric to serve as underwear). In addition to these materials, girls in secondary schools in the Est region use a towel (a small piece of cloth made in the same way as those that are used after attending to their personal hygiene), or a piece of cloth and cotton at the same time.

After use, pieces of cloth are washed and then dried in a hidden place in the home and reused. Sanitary towels are thrown down the toilet or disposed of far away in the bush so that no one else sees them.

Sanitary towels are bought in shops or from the market for approximately 500 CFA francs. It emerged from the interviews that girls cannot always obtain hygienic cotton pads because they cannot afford them. Instead, they use pieces of cloth.

Some girls said that they wear cotton or pieces of cloth a few days before their period occurs to prevent any surprises.

"When my period is heavy, I have to wear a sanitary protection, underwear, knickers and then two skirts." (Girls' FGD, primary, Namoungou, Est)

Even when periods are known about because they occur regularly, the onset of periods has implications for the lives of young girls.

3.2. Implications for girls

The onset of periods has huge implications for girls' educational activities at school. Girls say that periods prevent them from participating actively in class. The fear of other pupils seeing them with blood stains in lessons induces girls to say no when their teacher asks them to go up to the blackboard to mark exercises. In addition, girls who are menstruating generally avoid sporting activities for fear that boys will make fun of them. In some cases, they even abandon their classes.

> *"If I have a period, I go home, I tell myself I am ill, I don't want people to see. If you stay, it can make your clothes dirty." (IDI with a girl, 15 years old, second year of secondary school, Oula, Nord)*

If their period begins while they are at school, most girls ask to be excused without giving the main reason, to go home and attend to their personal hygiene before coming back.

So menstruation at school causes girls – unlike boys – to be late or absent, which can have an impact on their education.

> *"When I have my period, I sometimes kneel down to write so that I can stop my sanitary towel from moving and so that my clothes don't get stained with blood.*
>
> *When the girl next to me asks me why I'm writing in this position, I tell her that I have a spot on my bottom… Of course this position is tiring." (IDI with a girl, final year of secondary school, Est)*

Findings

In both the Nord and Est regions, young girls use pieces of cloth, hygienic cotton and sometimes homemade sanitary towels to manage their menstruation. Regardless of the method of protection that they use for this, girls attend to their personal hygiene two or three times a day and prefer to do so at home, because school latrines are not suited to their needs.

Due to ignorance and hence their failure to manage their menstrual cycles, girls wear too many underclothes and outer clothes in order to avoid soiling themselves at school. This method of managing menstruation affects girls' participation in school activities, unlike boys, who do not face these constraints. However, if they find themselves menstruating at school, girls find ways of helping each other by giving each other pieces of cloth or scarves that enable them to hide their bloodstained clothes and go home discreetly.

So the onset of periods is a sensitive and difficult time for young girls. The difficulties that they have at school at this time are personal, societal and environmental in nature.

This section describes and analyses individual, societal and environmental attitudes to girls' experiences of menstruation. These attitudes often vary according to local culture, status and sex. The attitudes of pupils (girls and boys), the attitudes of parents (mothers and fathers) and the attitudes of teachers and people in authority (such as headmasters and headmistresses) and other members of the community will be analysed here.

4.1. Factors associated with individuals

The interviews revealed that girls adopt different attitudes when they are menstruating. Girls keep their interaction with other people to a minimum during menstruation. They abandon almost all play and keep themselves to themselves. At this time, they avoid staying with other people and seeing boys. In general, they avoid all contact, even with other girls. This was revealed to us by the following few statements:

> *"If I'm menstruating, I don't want to go near anyone, I don't even move…" (IDI with a girl, 15 years old, secondary school, Oula, Nord).*

Girls also comment on how good life used to be before they started having periods.

> *"In the past, we talked in a carefree way, now we don't do that any more; in the past, I insulted adults, but now I don't do that any more; in the past, we didn't do any tiresome things, but now we do…" (Girls' FGD, primary school, Natiaboini, Est)*

> *"Before periods started, girls and boys from the concession [residential compound] played in the moonlight without any problems." (Girls' FGD, primary school, Namoungou, Est)*

> *"Before we started our periods, we were relaxed; when we walked, we weren't embarrassed; we felt proud of ourselves; we walked freely. Life was simple. If you went to sit down, when you got up again, you didn't need to check your skirt before getting up..." (Girls' FGD, secondary school, Diapangou, Est).*

But after they began menstruating, their lives changed completely. Now they pay a great deal of attention to their behaviour and how they speak. Life after periods is a sign of maturity, and hence greater responsibility.

"When you start menstruating, you can't have fun like you want to any more; now I don't have fun any more, we are told not to go inside men's huts. Girls who menstruate are now wary of a lot of things, decision-making and boys..." (Girls' FGD, primary, Natiaboini, Est)

"But since then, we've had to check our skirts all the time, especially when our periods are irregular. We often pretend to scratch our backs, and at the same time we check that there aren't any stains on our skirts… Sometimes in primary school, we go to school because there is food, but once you get to secondary school, when you start having periods, you know why you're at school." (Girls' FGD, secondary, Diapangou, Est)

Their behaviour, which is beset with restrictions and constraints, is regulated in such a way that boys in particular do not know that they have had their period. They do this to stop boys making fun of them.

Girls also say that they avoid moving or travelling while they are menstruating. In general, they do not want to move from their school bench because they are afraid that their skirt will be stained or that their sanitary protection will be seen.

"Often, when you're told to hand in your work, you don't even want to get up and you ask the person sitting next to you to go and hand it in for you." (Girls' FGD, secondary school, Yamba, Nord);

"…to go to the blackboard, you have to get ready first so that no one knows that you're menstruating." (Girls' FGD, secondary school, Oula, Nord);

"…when I'm menstruating, I don't go out at break-time to see my classmates." (IDI with a girl, secondary school, Diapangou, Est);

They also participate much less in class, most often due to the pain that they experience.

"I don't participate in lessons any more when I'm menstruating in class, I don't participate in lessons very much when I'm menstruating." (IDI with a girl, secondary school, Yamba, Est);

"…Often, you don't even want to go to class any more. There are other girls who cry because their abdomen hurts and they say that they are ill and people come looking for them." (Girls' FGD, secondary, Diapangou, Est)

Since periods are a taboo subject, in most situations, girls feel embarrassed or ashamed to say openly that they are menstruating. In class, in general, when they want to ask for permission to go to the toilet or go home to get changed because they find themselves menstruating unexpectedly, they claim that they have a headache or stomach ache. When they see health workers, they stick to this story, meaning that they are prescribed something that does not alleviate their pain.

Finally, female solidarity prevails among girls. At home, at the market or at school, girls adopt several strategies and give each other the information that they need to avoid feeling ashamed around boys because of the myth surrounding periods. When a girl's skirt is stained with blood, other girls are quick to tell her and find a piece of cloth for her so that she can hide it. Girls who are caught out by their first period receive several forms of support from their classmates. This support is mentioned in statements such as these:

"I go and give a piece of cloth to my classmate if her skirt is stained and I help her." (IDI with a girl, primary school, 12 years old, Nord);

"Poko's friend goes and gives her some cotton if she finds she is menstruating at school." (Girls' FGD, primary school, Touya, Nord);

"My classmate explained to me what it is and what you have to do, be careful around men." (IDI with a girl, secondary school, 18 years old, Oula, Nord)

Girls at secondary schools in the Est region add that life stops being easy when they begin menstruating. They describe their lives when they have periods as if they had been struck down by an incurable disease everyone avoids because, in their opinion, periods give off an unpleasant smell. These girls even go so far as to avoid a classmate who is menstruating on the pretext that she is dirty, and therefore to be avoided.

"… Abandoned by some classmates who say that if they find out that you're menstruating, they don't want to be around you; they say to each other that maybe you don't wash yourself properly. People don't even want to eat with you

or let you cook for them. They say to each other that you are dirty." (Girls' FGD, secondary school, Diapangou, Est)

4.2. Social factors

4.2.1. Boys' attitudes

In the interviews that were conducted in both regions, we observe that boys want to avoid girls. The youngest among them, in primary schools, explain this attitude as follows:

"When a girl is menstruating, boys avoid her because she's pathetic." (Boys' FGD, primary, Somyaga, Nord)

Older boys think that girls become withdrawn when they have periods, so they avoid playing with them, especially rough games. They also believe that girls give off a foul smell when they are menstruating; they believe that this smell, which they dislike, is a reason to keep their distance from girls.

The majority of boys, both young boys and older boys, make fun of girls when they are menstruating. They tease a girl whose skirt is stained. However, teasing does not happen in all cases. The following two accounts illustrate this clearly.

Account 1: "In my case it happened in our sports class. I showed another girl, she only needs to take off her piece of cloth to give it, she will put it on... I told the girl to go and sit beside me. And I told the teacher that the girl was ill... and then I looked for another girl who went to fetch a piece of cloth for her… there were others who laughed a lot as they had never seen it happen before… boys. Even some girls were laughing too." (Boys' FGD, secondary, Yamba, Est);

Account 2: "In my case, it was in class… at that time, there was a lot of blood and then she got a dress to cover it up... and her dress didn't even stay in place… and it got soaked too... people started laughing... the boys. The girls didn't laugh.

It was only the boys who laughed... she stayed in the classroom while the others went out, she left too. But when the boys saw and started laughing, she went home... even though I laugh, that day, I didn't laugh... I think the boys who laughed don't know what it is." (Boys' FGD, secondary, Yamba, Est)

In these accounts, we notice that some boys sympathize with girls' humiliation by finding ways of preventing them from feeling ashamed. Ignorance is often a source of teasing.

4.2.2. Attitudes of teachers and people in authority

As for the attitudes that are taken by teachers and people in authority at primary and secondary schools, we note a certain degree of tolerance on the part of women towards girls who are menstruating.

In most cases, girls' behaviour makes it obvious that they are menstruating. They complain of pain and cramp, they move to the back of the classroom, ask to be excused on several occasions, and wear a piece of cloth above their clothes. Teachers therefore avoid questioning them or forcing them to go to the blackboard, while others even try to reassure some girls.

Sometimes it is girls themselves who approach teachers, especially women, to explain their situation.

While playing sport, for example, they do not openly say that they are menstruating; only when a teacher insists do they eventually say, "It's women's problems".

There can also be situations where a girl's clothes are stained with blood and the teacher allows her to go home and change her clothing.

4.2.3. Attitudes of parents

In general, it is mothers who are concerned about girls' education, so it is they who intervene when girls begin menstruation.

These are scary and anxious times for mothers, who fear that their daughters may become pregnant. Mothers usually find out about their daughters' periods when girls run out of money to pay for hygienic cotton or when they are in severe pain. Mothers then start to act as counsellors. Unfortunately, as we have mentioned above, mothers do not give their daughters enough information about periods. The advice that they give can be summed up as follows: you've become a woman, from now on you have to be careful with boys, otherwise you might become pregnant.

Fathers very rarely intervene in girls' management of their menstruation.

One point of disagreement between women in the Nord region and those in the Est region is that the former say that they find it easy to talk to their daughters about periods, whereas women in the Est region do not. This can easily be explained by the fact that the population of the Nord region is characterized by its candour, and this liberty develops very early in young people and women too.

4.2.4. Attitudes of other community members

In both of the regions covered by this research, the attitudes of other community members are more or less the same. When a girl starts menstruating, she is believed to have reached maturity.

Several myths, traditional prohibitions and religious and customary beliefs undermine the lives of young girls and women who are menstruating in these two regions. They are:

- "Sex during periods is strictly forbidden, otherwise, if your husband has an accident, he will die immediately, or the blood can remain coagulated inside you. Periods are a sign of impurity."
- "According to the Islamic faith, a woman who is menstruating cannot pray or go to the mosque because she is unclean. If she does so, her prayers will not be answered."
- "In some localities, women who are menstruating are forbidden to go to the well. It's a totem associated with certain water sources. If a woman does this, microbes will develop and the water will become dirty."
- "Some women from certain families are forbidden to cook. There are some family heads, those who have "consumed *wak [sorcery]*" or "mystical products", who must not eat or drink water given to them by a woman who is menstruating. Worse still, there are men who must not see a woman who is menstruating. If that happened, their "*wak*" or "mystical products" would be destroyed and ill fate could befall either him or the menstruating woman."

Specifically, in the Est region, the following beliefs are prevalent:

- "When a menstruating woman puts her hand in another person's *dolo* [beer], the yeast, which is normally white, turns red."
- "Some Catholic women do not take communion while they are menstruating because they feel that they are impure."
- "A woman who is menstruating must not go to the livestock pen very early in the morning, otherwise she could make the cows ill."
- "A woman who is menstruating should not cross a "chick peas" otherwise it could rot. To mitigate this problem, pea fields are surrounded with sorrel."
- "Animistic beliefs forbid menstruating women and women who had sex the day before to cross the line of ash in front of the door to a residential compound where someone is ill; this ban serves to maintain the effectiveness of tisanes or food used to treat people who are ill."

Findings

The onset of periods is an upheaval for girls, who have to change their habits. They can no longer relax as they have to check themselves constantly. Every time they are menstruating, it is difficult for them to pay attention in lessons and their relationships with other people –male and female classmates – change for the worse. However, there is solidarity among girls in that some girls receive various kinds of help to manage their menstruation.

Boys want to avoid girls as girls' behaviour changes when they are menstruating, and especially since they give off an unpleasant smell. Out of ignorance, some make fun of girls who fail to manage their menstruation.

4.3. Environmental factors

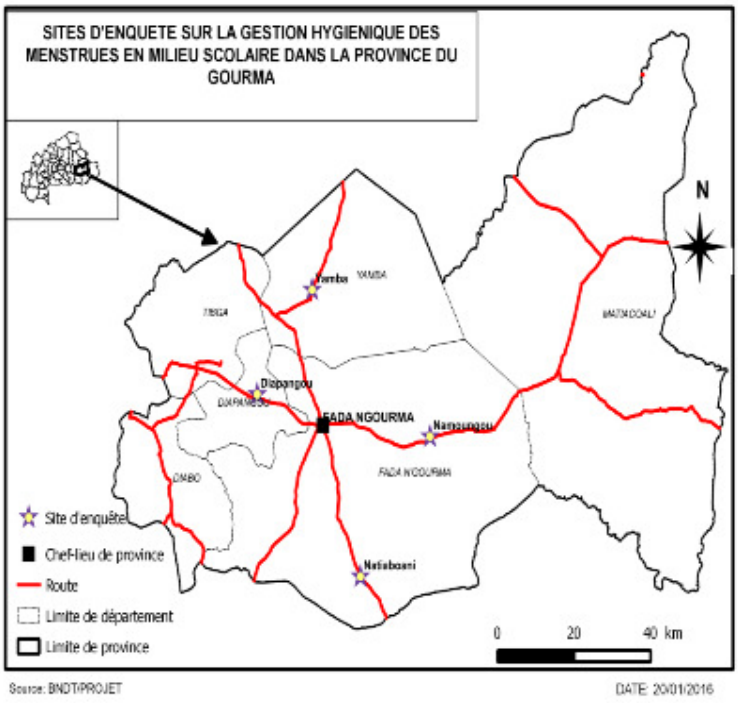
This section identifies, for each province, the schools that were visited during the course of the formative research. It is a brief description which summarizes the details of the school's history (such as date founded), pupil and teacher numbers, and its infrastructures, including those associated with the school's WASH facilities.

This section ends with an overall analysis of the schools that were visited, based on the strengths and weaknesses of their WASH situation. This analysis of facilities covers drinking water, sanitation and waste disposal facilities, removal of wastewater and hygiene.

4.3.1. Schools visited

- **In the Est region**

<u>Map 2</u>: MHM survey sites in Gourma Province, Est region



Namoungou Primary School "A" is a secular public school located approximately 30 km from the administrative centre of the commune, Fada N'gourma. It has 395 pupils, 52 per cent (205) of whom are girls in the 2015/2016 academic year, and nine (9) teachers, six (6) of whom are women.

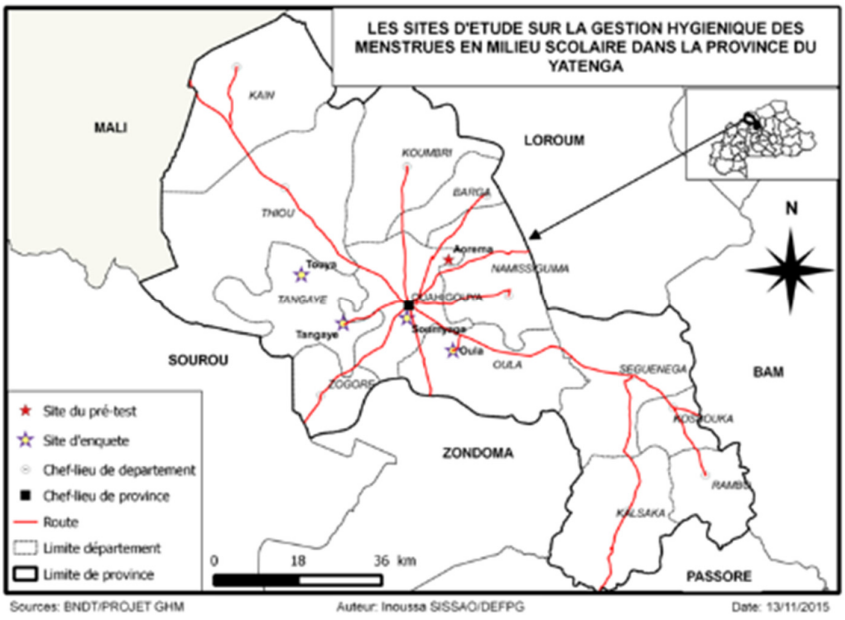
Natiaboani Primary School "A" is a secular public primary school located in Fada N'gourma commune. It has 393 pupils, 44.8 per cent of whom are girls, who are taught by eight (8) teachers, five (5) of whom are women.

Diapangou County Secondary School is a secular public secondary school located in the rural commune of Diapangou. It has 839 pupils, 60 per cent of whom are girls, and twenty (20) teachers, five (5) of whom are women.

Yamba County Secondary School is a secular public secondary school located in the rural commune of Yamba. It has 441 pupils, 49 per cent of whom are girls, and eleven (11) teachers, four (4) of whom are women.

- **In the Nord region**

Map 3: MHM survey sites in Yatenga Province, Nord region



Somyaga Public Primary School "A" is a secular public primary school located in Ouahigouya commune. It has 353 pupils, 54.67 per cent of whom are girls.

Touya Public Primary School is a secular public primary school located in Tangaye commune. It has 393 pupils, 45 per cent of whom are girls.

Oula County Secondary School is a secular public secondary school located in the rural commune of Oula. It has 718 pupils, 52.79 per cent of whom are girls, and nineteen (19) teachers, nine (9) of whom are women.

Tangaye County Secondary School is a secular public secondary school located in the rural commune of Tangaye. It has 451 pupils, 39.69 per cent of whom are girls.

4.3.2. Analysis of strengths of WASH facilities in schools

WASH facilities are having an impact on MHM. A list of the WASH facilities in the various schools that were visited is set out below.

- **Water facilities:** Water sources are available in all of the schools that were covered by the research. They are essential in building a school. There are boreholes with hand pumps (7) and one ONEA [National Office for Water and Sanitation] branch pipe.

All of the facilities in schools are owned by the school, with the exception of the Natiaboani facility, which is community-owned and operational.

- **Sanitation:** The schools have a range of different types of latrines. Four (4) types were identified. They are ventilated improved pit latrines (with or without a roof), pit/slab/open sky latrines, pit latrines with a simple/traditional slab and a roof, and latrines with a shower sump. The most common type is ventilated improved pit latrines, with or without a roof (76.14 per cent), followed by pit/slab/open sky latrines (19.32 per cent), pit latrines with a simple/traditional slab and a roof (3.40 per cent) and, lastly, latrines with a shower sump (1.14 per cent). At the provincial level, the number of schools that have latrines is higher in Gourma (64) than in Yatenga (24). The proportion of primary schools that have latrines is higher (59 per cent) than the proportion of secondary schools (40 per cent) that have them.

Photo 2: VIP latrine which does not have separate latrines for girls and boys and which has no handwashing facilities.

- **Waste:** Almost all of the schools have a container to collect refuse. Waste collected is burned at least once a week.
- **Hygiene:** Hygiene is taught through hygiene lessons and/or educational materials that encourage pupils to adopt and share good hygiene practices at home. It is also promoted through awareness-raising events.

  Efforts are being made to promote hygiene in primary schools. Approximately 75 per cent of the primary schools that were visited have handwashing facilities, compared with just

25 per cent of secondary schools. Facilities are generally provided by development partners who have a presence in Burkina Faso.

4.3.3. Analysis of the weaknesses of WASH facilities

- **Drinking water:** Water facilities are generally relatively far away from classrooms, hence the need to store water close to classrooms. However, most pupils draw water directly from the pump if they need it. Only 25 per cent (1/4) of the schools have drinking water storage equipment in classrooms. These are the two primary schools in Gourma, one of which reports a fault in its system. In Yatenga, however, no schools have any water storage equipment in classrooms or their playgrounds. It is not the responsibility of the State to ensure that there is a system for storing drinking water in classrooms or in the playground. This is done voluntarily by social partners and bilateral or multilateral cooperation partners that help to meet basic needs in relation to children's rights. However, at all of the schools, water sources are not accessible to the youngest pupils or disabled pupils. Furthermore, water is difficult to access at certain times of the year (April-June), i.e. during the driest season, when water reserves are running low.
- **Sanitation:** The situation with regard to latrines in schools is not very encouraging (Table 6). Only 46.15 per cent of the latrines that were visited are operational, resulting in a pupil/latrine ratio of 121 pupils (of both sexes) to every latrine. However, there are huge disparities between schools and even sexes. In this regard, the indicators for primary schools are better than those for secondary schools. For example, in Gourma, the ratio of pupils to latrines is estimated at 420 to one at Diapangou Secondary School, compared with 39 to one at Namoungou Primary School.

  The situation is still very bad in Yatenga Province, where three (3) in four (4) schools have no operational latrines for pupils (Table 8). However, school regulations say that there should be ten (10) latrines, including six (6) for girls, in a secondary school with six (6) classrooms (DGESS [Directorate-General for Sector-Wide Studies and Statistics]/MESS).

  Furthermore, approximately 65.48 per cent of latrines are used by both sexes, versus 29.76 per cent 'used solely by girls' (Table 7). With regard to separate latrines, more efforts are being made in primary schools than in secondary schools. For example, the county secondary schools of Oula and Tangaye do not have separate latrines for girls and boys. In addition, the

majority of latrines for pupils are dirty and poorly maintained (Photo 3), are poorly lit (especially VIP latrines) and are not secure (Photo 4). The job of cleaning latrines is neglected and none of the stakeholders are doing their job.

This situation highlights the problem of organizing latrine maintenance in schools. Lastly, there is a general shortage of latrines that are adapted for disabled pupils.

Photo 3: Cleanliness of latrines

Photo 4: Unsecured latrines

- **Waste disposal facilities:** None of the schools that were visited had any bins for sanitary towels or waste disposal or drainage systems.
- **Hygiene:** Although hygiene is taught in official curricula, it remains a theoretical concept. There are no handwashing facilities or facilities for anal washing in the schools. The lack of these practical facilities is not conducive to developing a culture of hygiene in schools.

Table 6: WASH characteristics of the schools and secondary schools that were inspected in the Nord and Est regions

Feature	Nord		Est		Total (n=8)
	Primary (n=2)	Secondary (n=2)	Primary (n=2)	Secondary (n=2)	
Sanitation					
No. of schools with a latrine	2	2	2	2	8 (100%)
No. of schools with at least one latrine specifically for girls	2	1	2	0	5 (63%)
No. of schools with at least one clean latrine for girls	1	0	1	0	2 (25%)
No. of schools with at least one latrine for girls that has lighting	0	0	1	0	1 (13%)
No. of schools with at least one secure latrine for girls	1	1	1	0	3 (38%)
No. of schools with bins	2	2	2	2	8 (100%)
No. of schools with waste incineration	2	2	1	2	7 (88%)
Water facilities					
No. of schools with an operational water point in the school playground	2	2	2	2	8 (100%)
Hygiene					
No. of schools with handwashing basins available	2	1	1	0	4 (50%)
No. of schools with handwashing basins with water	1	0	1	0	2 (25%)
No. of schools with handwashing basins with soap	1	0	1	0	2 (25%)

No. of schools with handwashing basins with water and soap	1	0	1	0	2 (25%)

Source: Field investigation data, November-December 2015

Table 7: Characteristics of latrines broken down by users in the two provinces

Users	Functional			Cleanliness			Lighting			Interior lock			External lock			Accessible		Not visited
	Yes	Partially	No	Yes	Relatively	No	Good	Relatively well	No	Yes	Not working	No	Yes	Not working	No	Yes	No	
Boys only	9	4	0	1	4	5	0	10	0	7	2	1	7	2	1	10	0	4
Girls only	6	6	0	0	4	6	0	10	0	5	1	4	5	1	4	9	1	4
Boys and girls	9	5	0	0	5	9	0	12	2	10	2	2	11	2	1	14	0	0
Male teachers and staff	1	3	0	0	3	1	2	2	0	1	0	3	1	0	3	4	0	1
Female teachers and staff	1	0	1	0	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	2	0	0

Teachers (M/W)	11	3	0	5	8	1	4	10	0	5	2	6	8	1	4	12	2	6
All people present at the school	0	13	0	0	0	13	1	12	0	0	0	13	0	0	13	13	0	0
Not assigned	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
Overall total	**37**	**34**	**1**	**6**	**25**	**36**	**9**	**56**	**2**	**28**	**7**	**31**	**32**	**6**	**28**	**64**	**3**	**21**

Source: Field investigation data, November-December 2015

Table 8: Numbers of pupils and ratio of pupils to latrines in schools in the two regions

Province	School	Number of pupils			Ratio of pupils to operational latrines		
		Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
Est	Namoungou Primary School "A"	190	205	395	63	103	39
	Natiaboani Primary School "A"	217	176	393	72	88	79
	Diapangou County Secondary School	403	436	839	403	436	420
	Yamba County Secondary School	225	216	441	NE*	NE*	110
Total for Est		**1,035**	**1,033**	**2,068**			
Nord	Somyaga Primary School	160	193	353	NE*	NE*	NE*
	Touya Primary School	217	176	393	109	176	131
	Oula County Secondary School	339	379	718	NE*	NE*	NE*
	Tangaye County Secondary School	272	179	451	NE*	NE*	NE*
Total for Nord		**988**	**927**	**1,915**			

Source: Study data

*NE: Not established. This means that there are no operational latrines

Findings

- Water sources/points are far from classrooms;
- Where they exist, storage facilities are contributed by development partners;
- Many latrines have been built, but they are poorly maintained;
- There are very few sex-segregated latrines;
- Latrines are not made very secure for girls;
- There are no curricula for teaching pupils about menstruation in schools;
- There are no facilities for collecting sanitary towels or cleaning up menstrual material in latrines;
- There are very few measures in place to cater for disabled pupils in latrines;
- There is a need to train male and female teachers about menstruation management;
- There is a need for emergency kits to manage menstruation in schools.

V. CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH MHM IN SCHOOLS

There are four types of challenges associated with MHM in schools: biological, psychological, cultural and those relating to the school environment.

5.1. Biological challenges

Certain biological factors have an impact on girls' lives in schools. They are:

- **Blood:** Blood is upsetting for girls. It distances girls from their classmates as girls believe they are dirty and smelly.
- **Duration of menstruation:** This study showed that periods last for 4-5 days or even 10 days. During this time, girls are limited in their activities.
- **Heavy discharge:** Heavy discharge is a problem for girls. It prevents them from proper physical exercise and sports, which can actually be the cause of this heavy bleeding.

  During this time, girls do not feel comfortable in their sports kit (shorts); they do not like running or simply moving at all for fear that people will see their sanitary protection through their shorts or that it will fall down, or that they will get dirty.

  Heavy discharge also makes girls want to change their sanitary towels regularly, otherwise they risk getting dirty.
- **Pain:** Periods are painful for girls, as several of them mentioned during the interviews.

This pain can be abdominal pain, pain in the hips and joints, headaches or illness due to fever, nausea, vomiting and loss of appetite. This pain prevents girls from participating actively in class and sporting activities, unlike boys, who are not affected by these constraints and can go about these activities with peace of mind.

- **Menstrual cycle:** Girls do not know the precise date of their next period, so they are always stressed when their next period is close as it could arrive at any time. When their periods are approaching, several girls pile on underwear and clothing, and others put on sanitary towels before coming to school, or wear heavy or dark-coloured clothes.

5.2. Psychological challenges

Periods are a time of embarrassment, shame, fear and stress for girls as they have to be careful at all times not to get dirty.

They also become quiet during this period as they do not want their classmates, and especially not boys, to know that they are menstruating. They do not go near their classmates or even play with them, so they do not thrive at this time. Shame stops girls talking about the subject.

"If I'm menstruating, I don't want to go near anyone, I don't even move, I can tell people to leave me alone, I'm menstruating." (IDI with a girl, secondary, Oula, Nord)

5.3. Challenges associated with culture and beliefs

In the two areas that were studied, periods are a taboo subject which is surrounded by myths, beliefs and bans. The main ones can be summed up as follows:

- Sanitary towels must not be left out in view of everyone, otherwise people could use them to "wak" (cast an evil spell on) you and make you sterile
- Muslim women who are menstruating cannot pray
- If a boy finds out that a girl is menstruating, her period can last longer
- Pieces of cloth are dried in a hidden location at home, out of sight from others and covered with cloth
- Drinking *dolo* [beer] during menstruation increases bleeding.

5.4. Challenges associated with the school environment

Although the schools that were visited have toilets, they are not sex-segregated in most cases. The majority of them are poorly maintained and therefore they do not allow girls to attend to their personal hygiene. All of the girls acknowledge that the toilets are very dirty; some have no doors, while others have no locks and are very smelly.

Toilets have no water, soap, buckets or kettles to enable girls to take a bath or attend to their personal hygiene in the least.

In addition, there are no sanitary towels in the schools. All of these factors spur girls to go home to attend to their personal hygiene.

At present, girls are not relaxed in class, they cannot pay full attention to their lessons and they are scared of teachers calling them to the blackboard to answer questions.

Menstruation management is not, therefore, easy for girls at school because the material conditions that are necessary for healthy management are not in place.

The factors listed above summarize the challenges that girls face in improving their MHM at school.

Findings

Periods are a time of disruption and constant anxiety for girls due to the shame, stress and pain that they feel and the lack of appropriate environmental conveniences. This situation gives rise to several challenges that girls have to deal with. These challenges reduce their participation in class and sporting activities and cause them to be late for, or absent from, class.

CHAPTER III: POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS PROPOSED BY THE VARIOUS STAKEHOLDER GROUPS

This chapter presents the solutions proposed by the various stakeholder groups.

I. SUGGESTIONS MADE BY MALE AND FEMALE STAKEHOLDERS

The various male and female stakeholders who were interviewed suggested solutions to address the challenges faced by girls in relation to MHM in schools.

1.1. Suggestions made by girls

Girls suggest the following to improve MHM:

- Educate schoolgirls about MHM
- Provide schools with buckets, water, kettles, soap, wash towels and sanitary towels
- Provide schools with medicines for abdominal pain which can be used for period pain
- Teach boys about the menstrual cycle
- Provide girls with pieces of cloth and dark clothing (skirts) for emergencies in schools
- Provide schools with underwear (knickers) for girls
- Provide schools with clean and separate latrines with locks, products to eliminate smells, bleach and cleaning materials
- Give bicycles to girls who live far away from their school

1.2. Suggestions made by mothers

To improve MHM, schoolgirls' mothers recommend the following:

- Provide schools with separate latrines for girls and boys
- Educate pupils about MHM
- Educate mothers about MHM

- Provide schools with buckets, soap and sanitary towels
- Hold more meetings with mothers to discuss girls' MHM in schools

1.3. Suggestions made by boys

To improve MHM, boys suggest the following:

- Set up health centres in schools or post a health worker to every school
- Provide schools with soap, buckets, water, cotton (sanitary towels) and pieces of cloth

1.4. Suggestions made by staff

To improve MHM, male and female teachers and headteachers recommend the following:

- Increase parents' and teachers' knowledge of the difficulties experienced by girls in relation to MHM in schools and the impact of MHM on girls' academic performance.
- Strengthen the leadership of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health for good MHM in schools.
- Incorporate MHM into primary school curricula and bolster MHM in secondary school curricula.
- Implement a water collection and storage strategy in schools.
- Build separate latrines, taking the needs of girls and disabled pupils into account.
- Devise an integrated latrine management strategy.
- Develop curricula for MHM.
- Build teachers' MHM capacities.
- Provide schools with an educational kit about menstruation.
- Raise pupils' awareness so that they know that the topic is not taboo and that they can talk to teachers about it. In turn, teachers should make their colleagues aware so that they will understand why girls say that they are ill and refuse to go to the blackboard, for example.
- With assistance from development partners, designate a special area for girls where they can get changed quickly and discreetly.
- Create a sick room at each school where girls can go and obtain painkillers.
- Raise awareness among the Association of Mother Educators.
- Make toilet paper, cotton and tampons available for girls to use.
- Make handwashing facilities and bins available in latrines in order to foster a culture of hygiene.

1.5. Proposals made by all of the different groups

These recommendations are made by all of the groups concerned.

- Ensure that schools have separate latrines for girls and boys
- Provide schools with emergency medication for period pain
- Teach girls MHM
- Provide schools with sanitary towels and changes of clothing for emergencies
- Ensure that toilets have water, soap, a bucket, a kettle, a brush and detergent

If these proposals were acted upon, this would, in the opinion of the people concerned, eliminate the constraints faced by girls in relation to MHM.

OVERALL CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section sets out the conclusion drawn from the research and the necessary recommendations.

CONCLUSION

From our analysis of the data collected in the two regions, it can be concluded that MHM in schools is a major problem for girls. The findings of this research tally with those of the study that was carried out in Burkina Faso and Niger in 2013. The 2013 study showed that:

- Social and cultural beliefs can lead to social exclusion and stigmatization. Women are still regarded as "impure" or "dirty" in many communities: 55 per cent of the girls in Niger and 45 per cent of the girls in Burkina Faso said that there are activities that they are not allowed to pursue when they are menstruating. Furthermore, 68 per cent of the girls in Niger and 38 per cent of those in Burkina Faso said that there are places that they are not allowed to go to while they are menstruating.

- The majority of the girls – 90 per cent in Burkina Faso and 61 per cent in Niger – did not know what was happening when they experienced menstruation for the first time. The majority of the girls – 79 per cent in Burkina Faso and 81 per cent in Niger – said that they were scared when they had their first period.

- Only 14 per cent of the girls in Burkina Faso and 48 per cent of the girls in Niger received some information about menstruation before experiencing it for the first time, as shown in Periods were discussed with them only afterwards. Half of the girls received this information from their mothers. Other girls received information from friends, grandmothers, sisters, aunts, neighbours (one) or female teachers (one).

- The majority of the girls (83 per cent in Burkina Faso and 77 per cent in Niger) said that they preferred to go home to get changed, e.g. during breaks. This means that girls sometimes miss certain lessons. In addition, if they live far from their school, girls stay at home while they are menstruating instead of going to school.

This more in-depth study shows that girls face several social, interpersonal, personal, biological and environmental challenges in relation to MHM in schools.

With regard to social challenges, it may be noted that:

- Due to tradition, menstruation is still a taboo in both of the regions that were studied, as it is in all regions of the country; this prevents girls from receiving comprehensive information before they reach maturity so that they are ready to manage their menstruation properly at school.

- The knowledge that is passed on by mothers does not enable girls to manage their menstruation hygienically.
- Ignorance, myths, bans and various constraints cause male teachers, boys, parents and school administrators to adopt generally negative attitudes towards girls.

With regard to interpersonal challenges, it may be noted that:

- Men, boys and even girls have a negative perception of menstruation.
- Boys avoid girls when they are menstruating due to the negative perceptions that boys have of girls at this time.
- Male teachers may not understand girls' behaviour in class when they are menstruating, and this can be to girls' disadvantage.
- Due to their understanding of menstruation, female teachers, on the other hand, understand girls better and sometimes help them to manage their menstruation.
- The onset of periods restricts girls' freedom of movement (handing in work to teachers), so girls have to avoid certain places or certain disciplines such as sport at school.
- Boys make fun of girls when their clothes are stained with menstrual blood.

With regard to personal challenges, it may be noted that:

- Girls lack the knowledge and skills they need to manage their menstruation hygienically.
- Menstruation is a time of anxiety, stress and fear for girls, who must do everything possible to cope with this situation discreetly.
- Admitting that they are menstruating is shameful for girls, so they give excuses to teachers or nurses so that they can leave class, which results in punishment or unsuitable medical prescriptions;.

With regard to biological challenges, it appears that:

- 11-17 years old is the approximate age at which girls start menstruating in both regions, according to the people who were interviewed.
- During menstruation, girls are limited in their school and social activities.
- If girls experience heavy periods, they cannot do physical exercise or sport.

- When they are menstruating, girls may experience pain in the abdomen, hips and joints, headaches or fever-related illnesses, nausea, vomiting and loss of appetite, which impede their active participation in school activities.

With regard to environmental factors, it may be noted that:

- Most toilets are not separated into male and female toilets.
- Toilets are usually poorly maintained and foul-smelling, and are therefore unsuitable as toilets where girls can attend to their personal hygiene.
- Some toilets lack doors, and others lack keys with which they can be properly locked in order to protect girls' safety and privacy.
- There are virtually no water, soap, buckets or kettles in toilets which would allow girls to take a bath or attend to their personal hygiene in the least.
- There are no sanitary towels in schools.

These constraints experienced by girls in relation to MHM in schools have huge implications for girls' school performance and success.

Unlike boys, girls have to deal with fear, stress, pain and repeated absences when they are menstruating. The exam system does not take these constraints faced by girls into account, thus placing them at a disadvantage.

Given the aforementioned challenges, the following recommendations must be implemented.

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations from the research team also take the stakeholders' suggestions into account.

At the social level

- Break the taboo surrounding menstruation, by informing and raising the awareness of the community about a woman's menstrual cycle and its role in the healthy functioning of the human body.
- Disseminate knowledge about menstruation and its hygienic management, through training for teachers, mothers and girls.

At the interpersonal level

- Raise boys' awareness of the implications of their behaviour towards girls for the latter's school performance.
- Build pupils' knowledge and skills in relation to menstruation and its hygienic management.
- Use existing pupil organizations to run awareness-raising activities on MHM (e.g. Deen Kan school clubs).

At the personal and biological level

Civil society organizations (CSOs), NGOs, Parents' Associations (APEs) and villages can help by:

- running hygiene promotion activities in schools and institutions (clean school or odourless latrine competitions)
- holding chat sessions about MHM with girls in lower secondary school (ages 11-15)
- providing schools with kits of basic necessities (medication, sanitary towels, etc.) for use in emergencies

At the environmental level

- In schools without latrines, and taking into account the regulations in force, build latrines with financial support from resource persons, TFPs and community organizations.
- Provide all schools and educational institutions with segregated latrines.
- Encourage girls and boys to make proper use of the latrines and to keep them clean.
- Provide all schools and institutions with waterpoints.
- Overhaul non-operational toilets and make them secure, in partnership with school management committees (COGES), Parents' Associations (APEs) and Associations of Mother Educators (AMEs).
- Work with COGES, APEs and AMEs to equip schools with materials for cleaning latrines and for storing water.
- Provide awareness-raising for teachers and school partner organizations (COGES, APEs and AMEs) on promoting cleanliness, hygiene and MHM, and in the need to make latrines secure and to maintain them.

Specifically, the Ministry of National Education must:

- ensure that reproduction is taught systematically from class CM1 (age 9), with content enabling girls to manage their menstruation well and to avoid early pregnancy

- develop and disseminate informative materials about MHM to pupils aged 9 to 16 years
- incorporate MHM content into SVT (earth and life sciences) courses for classes in the first cycle of secondary school
- establish periodic awareness-raising activities on hygiene and MHM in schools
- develop a synergy of actions with CSOs and NGOs addressing hygiene and MHM
- lead discussions on ideal latrines for girls in schools

Sharing and understanding the results of this research is a first step towards male and female stakeholders using these results. It would firstly serve to make the stakeholders/people concerned aware of the issue of MHM, which has hitherto been almost ignored.

Secondly, it would enable participants, who are potential users of the results, to discuss and prioritize the recommendations and translate them into specific actions to be implemented. Finally, it would enable an Annual Implementation Action Plan to be drawn up with key male and female stakeholders. This action plan should highlight the activities in each field, the implementation window, the people responsible for implementation, the partners and the financial, material and human resources that are necessary. This action plan will use all girls' MHM champions in Burkina Faso in order to facilitate equitable access to education for girls and boys.

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