



# Including Menstrual Hygiene in Vanuatu Schools Emergency Response

## SUMMARY

During recent emergency responses in Vanuatu, menstrual hygiene management (MHM) has been neglected or addressed only with the provision of sanitary pads as part of hygiene kits. Recognizing that delivering supplies alone is not enough, MHM education was incorporated into the distribution of WASH in School Kits during the Ambae volcano evacuation response in Vanuatu in 2018. UNICEF partnered with the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) and a local enterprise, Mamma's Laef, to educate displaced host students (boys and girls) and teachers living in tents and temporary learning spaces. Surveys during the education and awareness sessions revealed that girls on average miss 1.44 days of school during their period, and that reusable pads were the preferred sanitary supplies, mainly due to long-term cost savings, washability, reusability and longevity. Overall, approximately 1,000 girls and female teachers received menstrual hygiene supplies, and a total 4,468 students received kit supplies. While the WASH in school kits and the menstrual hygiene reusable pads were valuable, more time was needed to explain reusable pads and reproductive health than was available during the emergency distribution.

## Introduction

Vanuatu is the most at-risk country for natural hazards globally<sup>1</sup>. While there are multiple active volcanos in Vanuatu, the level of eruption generally remains stable. However, in late 2017, a volcano on the island of Ambae increased activity with flying rocks and heavy ash. As a result, the island's 11,000 inhabitants evacuated. While some returned for part of 2018, further instability resulted in another complete evacuation of the island in mid-2018. The evacuations included 796 secondary students from 8 schools; 2,090 primary students from 28 schools; and approximately 900

early child care education students from over 40 centers. Early child care education and primary students relocated with their families to Maewo or Santo islands to establish a temporary or permanent "second home". Meanwhile, most secondary school students evacuated with their boarding schools, often staying in tents and temporary learning spaces next to or in host schools on nearby islands. Displaced school bank accounts were suspended by the national government to avoid financial tampering, with additional funding allocated to host schools.

<sup>1</sup> World Risk Report. (2018). Bündnis Entwicklung Hilft and Ruhr University Bochum – Institute for International Law of Peace and Armed Conflict (IFHV) Retrieved From:

[https://weltrisikobericht.de/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/190318\\_WRR\\_2018\\_EN\\_RZonline\\_1.pdf](https://weltrisikobericht.de/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/190318_WRR_2018_EN_RZonline_1.pdf).

However, it took many months to transfer these funds, leaving displaced students and schools without funds for essential supplies, including those for WASH.

## Description of Intervention

During the emergency, MoET worked with education cluster partners such as UNICEF and Save the Children to support the continuity of education services throughout evacuation, repatriation and resettlement activities. UNICEF supported MoET with internal funding as well as grants from New Zealand and the Republic of Korea. In addition, a partnership was established between Ministry of (MoH) and Colgate-Palmolive foundation for the provision of oral hygiene items to be included in the WASH in schools (WinS) kits.

**Table 1: WinS Kit Contents**

Item	Recipient	Quantity
Reusable water bottle	Students & teachers	1 each
Reusable sanitary pad	Adolescent girls & female teachers	1 set
Soap bar	Students & teachers	1 each
	School	# students
Bucket with tap & lid (for handwashing)	Class	1 each
	School	2 each
Toothpaste & toothbrush	Students & teachers	1 each
Handwashing poster (MoH)	Class	2 each
2019 WASH Calendar	Class	1 each
Storage container 50L	School	1 per 50 students

Many items in the WinS kit were available in Vanuatu's capital, Port Vila, however, supplies were limited, and prices high. For example, a locally sewn reusable menstrual hygiene set cost

US\$15 – 20 in Vanuatu, whereas sets produced overseas cost US\$4 - 6 including shipping. Ultimately, while less expensive overseas, it took 6 months for some materials to arrive due to long supplier and shipping lead times, and lengthy customs clearances. After all items arrived in country, individual kits were packed for each school based on the number of classes and students. To address the needs of girls and women, one set of reusable sanitary pads was included for each adolescent female student and teacher.

The decision to include reusable pads was in part based on research by CARE International in 2016<sup>2</sup>. With support from UNICEF during the recovery after Cyclone Pam, CARE provided MHM solutions and education to adolescent girls and women in communities on the island of Tanna. The kits they provided included reusable pads fabricated in Vanuatu by a local gender-focused microenterprise, Mamma's Laef<sup>3</sup>. Research suggests a complete set of menstrual supplies could include individual buckets, underwear, flashlight, laundry detergent, clothespins, storage bag, toilet paper and instructions<sup>4</sup>. However, due to funding, the need for equity, and a desire to provide basic services for all, only a single set of reusable sanitary pads was distributed. The set included 5 pads and 2 inserts, both washable and reusable. A CARE survey performed revealed 94% of adolescent female students continued to regularly use the reusable kits with 78% finding them easy to wash and 84% finding them sufficiently thick.

Mamma's Laef team found 92% of adolescent girls expressed preference for reusable sanitary pads over other materials, even though only 15% regularly used them prior to the distributions. – 62% of girls stated they normally used disposable

<sup>2</sup> Nomo Fraet – short film by CARE International: <https://www.sista.com.vu/nomo-fraet-short-film-by-care-international/>

<sup>3</sup> See video at: <https://www.sista.com.vu/nomo-fraet-short-film-by-care-international/>

<sup>4</sup> Sommer, M., Schmitt, M., Clatworthy, D. (2017). A toolkit for integrating Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) into

humanitarian response. (First edit). New York: Columbia University, Mailman School of Public Health and International Rescue Committee. Retrieved from: <https://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/document/2113/them-hminemergenciestoolkitfullguide.pdf>

pads and 23% used a piece of cloth or napkin. Girls stated they preferred reusable pads due to washability, longevity and long-term money savings. This preference is similar to findings found in some other emergency settings<sup>5</sup>.

## Outcomes

While it is recognized that distribution alone is not enough and that awareness raising is needed<sup>6</sup>, this seldom happens in complex emergencies due to limited resource availability among rapidly unfolding of events. Therefore, MoET used the distribution as an opportunity to ensure everyone understood the use of all items in the kits, including the menstruation items. This was done in partnership with Mamma's Laef, the same organization that had fabricated pads and conducted awareness for CARE during the Cyclone Pam recovery period. Mamma's Laef comprises a small group of women and men from a village outside Port Vila. They make and sell reusable sanitary kits and were trained by Days for Girls International<sup>7</sup> to deliver MHM education for both girls ("Ambassador for Women's Health") and boys ("Men Who Know").

The team of 5 Mamma's Laef staff, 4 women and 1 man, led MHM and reproductive health awareness and education discussions with female teachers and girls. They discussed how to use the reusable pads that were included in the kits, along with structured discussions with both boys and girls on MHM and reproductive health. The only male Mamma's Laef team member delivered "Men Who Know" sessions to adolescent boys in Santo and Maewo. One male Provincial Education Officer liked the program so much he continued the "Men Who Know" sessions in Santo

during distributions after Mamma's Laef completed their work.

Ultimately, Mamma's Laef spoke with 337 girls and 336 boys on Santo and Maewo islands whilst supporting the distribution of reusable sanitary sets to approximately 1,000 adolescent girls and female teachers. The team also trained MoET provincial staff to deliver the sessions to girls.

The distributions also included interactive games and activities to encourage the habit of handwashing and use improved methods to keep drinking water safe. For example, Glo Germ<sup>8</sup> handwashing kits were used with many early childhood and primary school students to aid in visualizing germs. To encourage equity, WinS kit items were distributed to displaced as well as host schools.

<sup>5</sup> Robinson. A., with Obrecht, A. (2016) 'Improving menstrual hygiene management in emergencies: IFRC's MHM kit' HIF/ALNAP Case Study. London: ODI/ALNAP. Retrieved from: <https://www.alnap.org/system/files/content/resource/files/main/alnap-ifrc-menstrual-hygiene-case-study-2016.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Crystal VanLeeuwen, Belen Torondel  
Exploring menstrual practices and potential acceptability of reusable menstrual underwear among a Middle Eastern population living in a refugee setting

Int J Womens Health. 2018; 10: 349–360. Published online 2018 Jul 12. doi: 10.2147/IJWH.S152483 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5901152/>

<sup>7</sup> Days for Girls are an agency dedicated to providing quality menstrual care solutions, health education, and income generation opportunities

<sup>8</sup> See: <http://www.glogerm.com/handwashing.html>

## Lessons Learned

MoET, teachers and students were grateful for the WASH in school kits. It increased student's ability to use water and sanitation services properly at school (whether in temporary learning spaces, such as tents, or host schools). Including menstrual materials in the kits was important for women and girls. Having a local organization with experience talking about menstrual hygiene assist with distribution was beneficial, but not without its challenges. Discussions with students, teachers and Mamma's Laef staff during and after the distributions revealed some benefits and challenges.

First, the WASH in school kits were well received. Students found the items helpful and asked for multiple distributions of the items. Of all items distributed the buckets, reusable sanitary pads, and reusable drinking water bottles were most liked.

Second, in a distribution situation, even several months into a prolonged emergency response, there is limited time for proper consultations with affected people. The setting might also not be conducive to discussions as the logistics of distribution can take over as the priority.

Third, menstrual hygiene is a sensitive topic and adequate time must be spent on the topic. Groups typically had many questions, and there never seemed enough time to even start meaningful discussions.

## Next steps

More work will need to be done to determine appropriate education to go with menstrual material distribution in Vanuatu, especially in emergency situations or with displaced people. This work will continue as part of MoET and UNICEF's work to create 3-star schools with improved WASH in Vanuatu.

## KEY POINTS

- *WASH in school kits can help ensure students have access to the supplies needed to use water and sanitation services*
- *Menstrual hygiene reusable pads are a valuable part of WASH in school kits for female students and teachers*
- *While it is recognized that MHM distribution alone is not sufficient and that additional education is needed it is challenging to ensure the required time needed to explain reusable pads and reproductive health is allocated during an emergency distribution.*

**Table 1: Key Data\***

<b>4,468</b>	Students received WinS kit supplies. 1,146 and 1,107 displaced girls and boys, and 1,084 and 1,131 host girls and boys, respectively
<b>1,000</b>	Adolescent girls and female teachers received MHM supplies as part of the Ambae WinS response
<b>337</b>	Girls participated in MHM education and awareness discussions with Mamma's Laef
<b>336</b>	Boys participated in the "Men Who Know" MHM and reproductive health discussions led by Mamma's Laef male facilitator
<b>92%</b>	Of girls surveyed preferred reusable sanitary pads over other materials, mainly due to long-term cost savings, washability/reusability and longevity
<b>54%</b>	Of survey respondents stated soap and washing bucket and spare underwear were the most common MHM support supplies needed
<b>69%</b>	Of recipients claimed that soap was difficult to access under normal circumstances, and 54% claimed it was even more difficult to access during the emergency
<b>1.44</b>	School days on average missed during surveyed girls' last period, normally the 1st day and sometimes the 2nd
<b>55%</b>	Of surveyed girls claimed to normally stay home (or at the dorm) for at least 1 day during their period

*Data obtained by Mamma's Laef and MoET distribution teams during WinS kit distributions in 2018.*

**Figure 1: Marise from Mamma's Laef running an MHM session with evacuee girls at Bombua school in Santo**



*Source: Olul 2018*

**Figure 2: Unloading WinS kits in Maewo**



*Source: Shanks 2018*

**Figure 3: Handwashing demonstrations with students in Santo**



*Source: Olul 2018*

**Figure 4: Roselyne & Sabrina from Mamma's Laef, packing WinS kits with North Maewo Mobile ECCE Officer (MEO), Melrid**



Source: Mamma's Laef 2018

**Figure 5: Mamma's Laef MHM sessions with displaced girls in Maewo**



Source: Mamma's Laef 2018

**Figure 6: Jack from Mamma's Laef and displaced students at BanBan, Santo, after a "Men Who Know" discussion about menstruation and reproductive health**



Source: Mamma's Laef 2018

## References

Sommer, M., Schmitt, M., Clatworthy, D. (2017). A toolkit for integrating Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) into humanitarian response. (First edit). New York: Columbia University, Mailman School of Public Health and International Rescue Committee.

## Photo Credits

Mamma's Laef

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## About the Authors

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UNICEF's water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) country teams work inclusively with governments, civil society partners and donors, to improve WASH services for children and adolescents, and the families and caregivers who support them. UNICEF works in over 100 countries worldwide to improve water and sanitation services, as well as basic hygiene practices. This publication is part of the UNICEF WASH Learning Series, designed to contribute to knowledge of good practice across UNICEF's WASH programming. In this series:

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