Menstrual Hygiene in Schools in 2 Countries of Francophone West Africa: Burkina Faso and Niger 2013 Case Studies

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Context for Research

- Study organized by the WASH and Education sections of UNICEF West and Central Africa (WCA) Regional Office
- Research tools, data collection and report of the study carried out by consultant
- Data collection in Burkina Faso & Niger in May-June in collaboration with excellent local female government officials
Objectives of the Study

- Improve understanding of MHM in the WCA region in order to sharpen the WASH and Education strategies and programming.
- Field-test an MHM guide translated into French by Consultant
Hygiène menstruelle
Petit guide pour lesfilles
Study examined issues including:

- Girls’ understanding and knowledge of menstruation
- Socio-cultural beliefs and taboos surrounding menstruation
- WASH infrastructure in schools
- Current menstrual hygiene practices in schools
- Puberty and MHM education in schools
- Interpersonal relationships and psycho-social support relevant to MHM
Scope

- 60 girls (30 in Burkina Faso and 30 in Niger)
- 12 government supported urban and rural schools (6 per country) which already have WASH facilities
Research Tools

• IDIs (one-on-one) and FGDs with school girls
• Interviews with head teachers and female teachers
• Onsite observations of the infrastructure
• Key informant interviews with ministry officials.
Key Findings

There are serious challenges that need to be addressed before appropriate menstrual hygiene management can become a reality in schools.

1. School WASH facilities are currently inadequate for girls to safely manage their menses.

2. School children lack knowledge and information on menstruation.

3. Menstruation affects girls’ participation and performance at school.
“I didn’t know what was happening and I was scared.”
(girl in Burkina Faso)
Chart 2: Girls able to change sanitary protection at school

“We have to go home to change and therefore we are missing lessons.” (girl in Niger)
“I don’t want go to the blackboard. I’m ashamed. I’m afraid to have stains.” (girl in Burkina Faso)
Some Quotes

- Menstruation remains a taboo here. Even mothers do not talk about it with their daughters. (Male education official, Niger)
- It is sometimes difficult to get even pieces of cloth and they are old and dirty. Even our mothers do not always have enough of them. (Girls’ FGD in Burkina Faso)
- My hijab helps to protect me, nobody can see any stains. (Girl in Niger)
- This is the first time we talk about this issue openly. It’s good. Now we know what to do. We are not ashamed now. (Girls FGD in Burkina Faso)
FGD with school girls in Zorgho, Niger
Challenges

- Qualitative study with a limited sample size
- Difference in the samples: primary schools in Burkina, secondary schools in Niger
- Two schools in Burkina had to be changed due to lack of adolescent/menstruating girls.
- Only 10 female teachers were interviewed in total since some schools did not have any.
- Long distances between the schools and limited time: not possible to conduct FDG in each school.
Lessons Learnt for Future Studies

- Use similar age sampling.
- Choose the participating girls discreetly and assure all the participants of their confidentiality.
- Take time to explain the purpose of the study and to “break the ice”.
- Collaborate with local females.
- Reserve more time & several data collectors to observe the actual hygiene practices and behavior in schools.
- Take into consideration local cultural beliefs and sensibilities.
- Include communities, also boys and men.
- Do not conduct data collection at the end of the school year…
UNICEF Niger is going to:
1. Include analgesics and sanitary pads in the current school hygiene kits
2. Assure that there is a place to dispose used sanitary pads in girls' latrines
3. Provide a simple guide with basic information on menstruation and its management + at least one female focal point per school (a woman)
Further information:

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