

# **A Pilot Study: MHM Among Primary School Girls And Its Effect On School Attendance In Zambia**

Presented by:

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*On behalf of the National Technical Working Group on MHM*

# National Context: WASH in Schools

- \* WASH infrastructure in schools is inadequate.
- \* In 2008, 29% of schools met recommended pupil-toilet ratio of 40 boys/toilet. Only 9% met the recommended ratio of 25 girls/toilet.
- \* 80% of schools have inadequate sanitation facilities.
- \* Water supply coverage at schools is reported to be at 97%, but 35% of water points are not functional.

# National Context: MHM

- \* Girls' attendance typically drops from 5<sup>th</sup> grade on. Poor MHM contributes to girls' poor attendance.
- \* Most girls are not able to safely and hygienically manage menstruation at school.
- \* MHM Technical Working Group (TWG) formed in 2012.
- \* Initiated this pilot study to explore MHM challenges school girls face and their effect on school attendance and performance.

# The Problem

- \* 2.71% of girls (grades 1-9) versus 1.88% of boys drop out of school
- \* Secondary school completion rate is higher for boys than girls
- \* Most girls find it difficult to manage their menstruation without adequate water supply and sanitation facilities
- \* Menstrual hygiene and puberty are rarely discussed

# Study Objectives

To conduct a pilot study on the challenges school girls face to hygienically manage menstruation at school and at home and identify the effect of those challenges on school attendance and learning.

Through the pilot study:

1. Pilot and check methods and tools and identify issues that will inform a full study in 2014.
2. Identify socio-cultural, physical and material issues that need to be addressed by strategies, policies and procedures to improve the situation for MHM

# Methods & Tools

## **Individual interviews with girls**

- \* Questionnaire assessing MHM knowledge, attitudes, and practices and the influence of social and cultural factors
- \* Questionnaire encrypted on tablets (mobile phones)

## **Focus group discussions with girls**

- \* Collected in-depth stories and experiences about menstruation at school (guided by a checklist of questions)

## **Field observations**

- \* Observation of WASH facilities at schools with attention to facility designs, their friendliness to girls, disposal points for used sanitary wear (facilitated by “observation forms”)

# Methods & Tools (con't)

## Key informant interviews

- \* **Teachers:** Focused on teaching hygiene, availability of education materials, teaching methods, and teaching experiences with girls.
- \* **Parents:** Focused on how they communicated about sexuality and reproduction with their adolescent daughters, how often, barriers and enabling factors.
- \* **District staff:** Focused on planning and budgeting for WASH in schools, monitoring, and inspections.

# Methods & Tools (con't)

## **Coverage:**

- \* Schools from urban, peri-urban and rural locations
- \* Schools from different provinces and districts
- \* Study conducted only with girls who were in school

# Methods & Tools (con't)

## **Practicalities of the research:**

- \* Agree on the design and composition of the tools with TWG stakeholders
- \* To address concerns that girls would not participate or share data the enumerators selected were all women
- \* Local staff from the District Education Board and Local Authorities hired and trained as Research Assistants
- \* Ethical approval obtained

# Lessons Learned

- \* Need to factor in the time taken to agree on the tools with multiple stakeholders and for ethical approval to be obtained
- \* The use of female enumerators ensured girls opened up to discussion
- \* The distinction between urban , peri-urban and rural schools was not sufficiently defined – schools in cities and in remote areas should have been included

# Lessons Learned (con't)

- \* Sourcing Research Assistants (RA) increased access and built capacity, but requires a lot of investment up front
- \* Selecting RAs from the local authority has implications for access to office and ICT facilities needed to enter and process data
- \* Inclusion of only girls in schools in the study is a limitation. The inclusion of school-aged students not attending school would also be of value.

# School girls examine reusable sanitary pads:



# Lessons Learned (con't)

- \* Research needs to include triangulation with secondary data on school attendance from registers and on performance from class records
- \* Research tools need to include a deeper analysis of the influence of opportunities, enablers and barriers on girls' school attendance.
- \* Research methods should enable engagement of adolescent girls and women in identifying the materials they prefer for managing menses and the types of facilities that would be most appropriate to their context.