Menstrual Hygiene Management in Schools: An Assessment for Applied Learning and Improved Practice in Gicumbi District, Rwanda

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Session 1: Exploring the MHM Barriers Faced by Girls

A joint Collaboration of Rwanda Ministry of Health, UNICEF, and Emory University
Outline

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Clubs in Schools: Environmental clubs and hygiene clubs

In the ESSP, issues related to hygiene, sanitation and availability of water supply have been underlined in the ESSP as key challenges to access, retention and equity at basic education.

Unit cost for construction of additional classrooms in every school also includes construction of additional toilets and water facilities.

The CFS standards for school construction also take into consideration construction of separate hygiene facilities for boys and girls.

The CFS construction standards have made provision for an inclusive set of hygiene facilities including separate toilets for boys and girls, but also including a toilet for children with disabilities.
In addition to contributing to the Emory University/UNICEF research project, this project in Rwanda is also supporting the vision of the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education to address MHM among school girls.

Gicumbi District was identified as a model site for the project, which can later be applied to other districts. We expect to visit at least eight schools in Gicumbi District for data collection. The schools are selected purposively, rather than randomly, to ensure that they are representative of the key characteristics of interest outlined below. The final number was also guided by the project timeline to allow the team to properly review data before moving to the next school.

**Day Schools:** The sample was limited to day schools as the national policy is to increase universal access to basic education, up to 12 years. All these 12 years basic education are day schools. Also, girls experience vary from day schools to boarding schools, as normally, the later have facilities and are equipped to host girls for a longer period.

**Age:** Schools were limited to nine-year basic education to ensure there are enough girls who have reached menarche (first menstruation). We are targeting girls between 12 and 17 years from Primary 6 through Secondary 3. In Gicumbi District there are 74 nine-year basic education (9 YBE) schools.

**Rural and Urban:** Schools were divided into rural and urban in order to capture impact on menstrual hygiene management of any differences in resource availability or socioeconomic status of girls’ families.

**Facilities and Infrastructure:** Although schools may not necessarily be selected based on the quality of their physical WASH infrastructure, the observation tool will allow us to capture the information on those facilities and therefore make comparisons, between schools with and without sanitation facilities.

These criteria balance diversity in the sample, while also maintaining enough consistency to allow us to make comparisons and validate data from each school. The team worked with the District officials to determine the specific schools, which meet the criteria outlined above.
The information on current practices here comes from a survey done by an organization in Rwanda called Sustainable Health Enterprises in 2008.
There is commitment by the Rwandan government to scale up designs that are proven to be effective into national standards. This was demonstrated by the CFS design, which was adopted as the national standard. If an MHM design can be developed and proven effective, then there is commitment by the government to integrate it into national standards as well.

Education Section at UNICEF:
- Integrating the new design into the standards
- Have an evidence based policy
- Develop MHM Package for use in schools
- Information for communication – tuseme clubs training of school management and teachers
- Basically a software package
In both schools girls reported having basic knowledge about menstruation. They reported learning about menstruation at school in their regular curriculum and from clubs and teachers who offered special time to discuss menstruation. At home, they learned about menstruation mostly from their mothers. Girls wanted to know more about why some girls have their period longer than others and how to track their cycle so they can be prepared for their period each month. Boys in the pilot school also had accurate knowledge around menstruation. They reported that boys who know about menstruation are more understanding around menstruating girls and do not tease them.
Girls in the rural and urban school reported that reusable cloth pads are often used as well as sanitary pads. They said that they get the disposable napkins at school, but only if they have an emergency. In the rural school, girls reported that poorer families could not afford to buy sanitary pads. Girls prefer to stay home from school on their period especially those who use re-usable cloths as there is nowhere at school where they can properly wash them. Girls and boys reported that girls modify their behavior in the classroom because they fear to go to the blackboard since they may have a stain on their dress.

“I normally seat on the front desk, but when I have my menses, I wish to seat behind so that I can control myself before standing up” said one girl during an in-depth interview.
Girls reported getting support from their friends, mothers, and teachers and through clubs in school, especially one related to the prevention of HIV/AIDS, and Tuseme clubs. In the urban school they are able to talk to their fathers and ask them to buy pads for them. This was not the same in the rural school where the girls said that they never want their fathers to know when they are having their period.
Girls reported needing proper facilities at school to manage their period including a place to change, wash re-usable cloths, rest, and a place to bathe with sufficient water. They said this is important because one reason they fear attending school when menstruating is that they may have a bad smell which can be noticed by others. They also reported needing sanitary materials and preferred disposable pads. The issue of privacy was emphasized in both in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Girls don’t want to be noticed when washing their reusable cloths, using the girls’ room or washing themselves to change. Girls recommended having an appropriate bathroom that is not close to the latrines where they can wash during their period. Although they appreciated the girls’ room, they recommended for it to be cemented and the key should be held by one of the girls or a teacher they nominate. According to a teacher at one school, very few girls use the girls room provided partly because it is in a separate classroom block so some girls fear to be seen going to the girls room. Girls requested the school to provide disposable pads for them so that all girls are able to attend school during their menstruation. Finally, they recommended that the schools bring in medical professionals to educate them more about their periods and help answer some of their remaining questions about managing their periods and the reproductive health in general.

Key Preliminary Findings

General recommendations from girls:

Schools should provide:

- Proper **PRIVATE** facilities at schools to bathe, wash re-usable cloths, and dispose of sanitary pads
- Disposable sanitary pads

School should bring medical professionals to educate girls in detail about menstruation
Only some schools have “girls rooms” that are in use. These recommendations come from girls at schools where these rooms exist. As you can see in the picture, the girls’ room contains a bed for resting, water and basins for bathing, soap, and disposable sanitary pads. Girls appreciated the room, but made some suggestions for improvements that would make them more comfortable for the girls.

1.) Private location – Girls say that they are less likely to use the rooms at schools where the entrance is visible from other classrooms. They worried that other students would see them going to the girls room therefore making their “private issues” public.

2.) Key – Girls felt uncomfortable asking for the key from some teachers, and suggested they nominate the person to hold the key themselves.

3.) In order to bathe properly in the girls room, the floor should be cemented so that dirty bath water can be easily drained. This was echoed by teachers who were concerned that dirty bath water would be soaked up by the soil floor.
### Next Steps

- Complete data collection

- Preliminary analysis → Develop MHM package for schools (hardware and software) → Validate with stakeholders

- **Phase 2:** Implement MHM Package & Conduct Follow up study

- Integrate findings into school standards

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Preliminary analysis will involve summarizing the challenges voiced by girls, boys, teachers, and parents, understanding their impact and developing recommendations. These recommendations will be used to draft a package of hardware and software interventions for schools. The draft will then be shared with stakeholders including schools, MOH, MOE, and UNICEF for input then finalized. This package of interventions can then be integrated into the national school standards which are currently being revised.
UNICEF is supporting five of the Child Friendly Schools in Gicumbi District to upgrade latrines to a new girl-friendly design. The design was developed and approved jointly by the Ministry of Education and UNICEF. The purpose of the upgrade is to improve the existing physical latrine structure by adding rooms where girls can privately bathe and wash soiled clothes and menstrual cloths, as well as an incinerator for disposable sanitary pads.

Girl-Friendly design developed by Ministry of Education and UNICEF has 3 components:
1. Separate latrine blocks for boys and girls with handwashing facilities and water supply
2. Room for bathing and washing sanitary cloths
3. Incinerator for disposable sanitary pads

This is an upgrade of the existing CFS latrine design.
This is the existing design for upgraded latrines, but it is still preliminary. Findings from this study on the hardware recommendations made by participants may also help to inform the final design.

Girl-Friendly design developed by Ministry of Education and UNICEF has 3 components:
1. Separate latrine blocks for boys and girls with hand washing facilities and water supply (this is the standard CFS latrine design)
2. Room for bathing and washing sanitary cloths
3. Incinerator for disposable sanitary pads

This is an upgrade of the existing CFS latrine design
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MURAKOZE CYANE!
Questions?

* All photos courtesy of UNICEF and Emory University staff