



# Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene and Menstrual Hygiene Management: A Resource Guide



Water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) play a large role in the lives of adolescent girls and women, both biologically and culturally. Gender equity becomes an issue when women and girls lack access to WASH facilities and appropriate hygiene education, affecting a girl's education, sexual and reproductive health, and dignity. Lack of adequate facilities and materials for menstrual hygiene has been linked to absenteeism of girls from school during their periods.<sup>1</sup> Many may permanently drop out of school with the onset of puberty if the toilet facilities are not clean or do not provide privacy to girls while they are menstruating.<sup>2</sup> Menstruation is a taboo subject in many cultures and can create stigma, shame, and silence among young girls, which often continues into adulthood and perpetuates the cycle of gender inequality.

Around the world, girls try to keep their menstruation a secret while they are in school. Without adequate sanitation facilities, girls are unable to manage their menstruation safely, hygienically, and with dignity and will be unlikely to use the facilities if there is no guarantee of privacy. Due to social and WASH-related issues, many girls choose to stay home during their menstruation instead of having to manage their period at school.<sup>3</sup> Other times, girls do attend school but face challenges such as leakage, odor, discomfort, or difficulty concentrating.

When child-friendly educational programs that raise awareness about menstrual hygiene management (MHM) are coupled with safe, private, and single-gender sanitation facilities; an accessible water supply; and a means for safe disposal of menstrual waste, they can help alleviate the burden girls face at school during menstruation.<sup>4</sup> Access to these facilities at home and at health clinics is also important to allow women and girls a safe means to manage their menstruation at all times. MHM is a multi-sectoral issue. Integrating efforts between WASH, education, gender equality, and reproductive health sectors will contribute to improving MHM.

This resource guide includes reports, academic studies, manuals and guidelines, toolkits, and organizations working on WASH and MHM. The guide can serve as a tool for implementers and advocates in the WASH and MHM sectors looking to pursue and promote integrated programming.

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Photo credits: 1) UNICEF 2012; 2) Pads4Girls 2012; 3) UNICEF 2013; 4) UNICEF 2008; 5) UNICEF 2013; 6) Afri-Pads 2010

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<sup>1</sup> Tegegne, T. & Sisay, M. (2014). Menstrual hygiene management and school absenteeism among female adolescent students in Northeast Ethiopia. *BMC Public Health* 14:1118. Retrieved from <http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2458/14/1118>.

<sup>2</sup> Adams, J., Bartram, J., Chartier, Y., & Sims, J. (2009). *Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Standards for Schools in Low-Cost Settings*. WHO, Geneva. Retrieved from [http://www.unicef.org/wash/schools/files/wash\\_who\\_standards\\_low\\_cost\\_settings\\_2010.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/wash/schools/files/wash_who_standards_low_cost_settings_2010.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> WaterAid (2013). *Post-2015 Toolkit: WASH And Gender Equality*. Retrieved from <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/getWSDoc.php?id=2428>

<sup>4</sup> Sommer, M., Vasquez, E., Worthington, N., & Sahin, M. (2013). *WASH in Schools Empowers Girls' Education: Proceedings of the Menstrual Hygiene Management in Schools Virtual Conference 2012*. United Nations Children's Fund and Columbia University. New York. Retrieved from [http://www.unicef.org/wash/schools/files/WASH\\_in\\_Schools\\_Empowers\\_Girls\\_Education\\_Proceedings\\_of\\_Virtual\\_MHM\\_conference%282%29.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/wash/schools/files/WASH_in_Schools_Empowers_Girls_Education_Proceedings_of_Virtual_MHM_conference%282%29.pdf)

## WASH and MHM: Reports

### **'MHM in Ten': Advancing the MHM Agenda in WASH in Schools** *(Columbia University & UNICEF, 2014)*

In October 2014, representatives of academia, NGOs, donors, and UN agencies came together to map out an agenda to improve MHM in schools over the next ten years through concentrated, multi-stakeholder, multi-sector coordination. This meeting report includes a common vision and five key priorities for MHM over a ten-year period.

### **WASH in Schools Empowers Girls' Education: Proceedings of the Menstrual Hygiene Management in Schools Virtual Conference 2014** *(UNICEF & Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health, 2014)*

This report brings together the key elements of the 16 web-based presentations made at the third annual MHM in Schools Virtual Conference. The conference focused on new research and programming efforts that are being undertaken in low- and middle- income countries, addressing insufficient menstrual knowledge in relation to inadequate WASH facilities and the availability and accessibility of absorbent materials.

### **Menstrual Hygiene in Schools in 2 countries of Francophone West Africa: Burkina Faso and Niger Case Studies in 2013** *(UNICEF, 2013)*

This report provides information on MHM practices in schools in Burkina Faso and Niger as regionally representative case studies. The studies found that there are serious challenges that need to be addressed before good MHM becomes a reality in schools in these two countries.

### **WASH in Schools Empowers Girls' Education: Proceedings of the Menstrual Hygiene Management in Schools Virtual Conference 2013** *(UNICEF & Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health, 2013)*

This report brings together the key elements of the 16 presentations made at the 2013 MHM in Schools Virtual Conference. The presentations focused on tools and resources used to explore MHM requirements of schoolgirls and for monitoring MHM interventions integrated into WASH in Schools programs.

### **WASH in Schools Empowers Girls' Education: An Assessment of Menstrual Hygiene Management in Schools** *(Emory University & UNICEF, 2013)*

- **Freetown, Sierra Leone**
- **Rural Cochabamba, Bolivia**
- **Masbate Province and Manila, Philippines**

These reports review the results of qualitative research that investigates the MHM challenges faced by female students in Bolivia, the Philippines, and Sierra Leone. Assessment activities conducted and themes explored include societal, environmental, interpersonal, personal, and biological factors.

### **WASH in Schools Empowers Girls' Education: Proceedings of the Menstrual Hygiene Management in Schools Virtual Conference 2012** *(UNICEF & Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health, 2012)*

This document highlights the 2012 virtual conference presentations including three overarching themes: (1) exploring the MHM barriers faced by girls; (2) approaches to addressing MHM for girls; and (3) MHM in humanitarian emergencies.

### **Improving Menstrual Hygiene Facilities In Secondary Schools Initiatives From BRAC-WASH Program** *(IRC, BRAC, WaterAid, 2012)*

This report discusses the collaboration between BRAC-WASH and school authorities in Bangladesh to construct separate sanitary latrines for girls with menstrual hygiene facilities in secondary schools and the formation of School WASH Committees to manage and maintain these facilities.

### **Menstrual Hygiene in South Asia** (*WaterAid, 2010*)

This report emphasizes the importance of MHM in leading a healthy, productive life, and that appropriate WASH services are required to fulfill that need. It also notes how practical needs for menstrual hygiene are often not incorporated into community programs for WASH.

### **Menstrual Hygiene: A Neglected Condition for the Achievement of Several Millennium Development Goals** (*European External Policy Advisors, 2007*)

This report draws attention to the relationship between MHM and girls' school drop-out rates from primary and secondary education, shows that MHM is necessary for achieving several of the Millennium Development Goals, and highlights the importance of WASH for safe and hygienic menstrual hygiene management.

### **Menstruation and Body Awareness: Linking Girls' Health with Girls' Education** (*Royal Tropical Institute, 2006*)

This report examines the relationship between adolescent girls' health and well-being and education with an emphasis on MHM. It examines poor sanitary facilities and the provision of sanitary supplies and suggests school programs should address MHM.

## **WASH and MHM: Studies**

### **Waterlines – Menstrual Hygiene Management Issue** (*Waterlines, 2015*)

The January 2015 issue of *Waterlines* has 10 articles that cover the MHM in schools policy landscape; overcoming menstruation-related stigma and gender marginalization through WASH in schools; and country case studies of school menstrual hygiene management.

### **A Comparison of the Menstruation and Education Experiences of Girls in Tanzania, Ghana, Cambodia, and Ethiopia** (*Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education, 2014*)

This paper describes studies in four countries that explored schoolgirls' experiences of menarche in order to inform adaptation of a menstruation training book that was developed for the Tanzania context. The studies found that, across all countries, insufficient latrines at schools were a barrier to adequate MHM, including high student-to-toilet ratios, unclean latrines, and lack of doors and locks.

### **Girls' and Women's Unmet Needs for Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM): The Interactions between MHM and Sanitation Systems in Low-Income Countries** (*Journal of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for Development, 2013*)

This study discusses current sanitary behaviors among menstruating women in low-income countries, the lack of resources available for proper disposal, and the barriers to proper MHM. It mentions that a lack of privacy and space and an insufficient supply of water are the most notable challenges to meet the needs of personal hygiene in terms of changing, cleaning, and disposal of waste.

### **Improving Quality of Life with New Menstrual Hygiene Practices Among Adolescent Tribal Girls in Rural Gujarat, India** (*Reproductive Health Matters, 2013*)

This study seeks to understand menstrual hygiene knowledge and practices among rural girls in India. It compares girls' hygiene and quality of life when using old cloths versus introducing sanitary pads and falalin (soft cloth) pads. The findings indicate managing menstrual hygiene with proper sanitary pads can significantly improve the quality of life.



### **India Moves Towards Menstrual Hygiene: Subsidized Sanitary Napkins for Rural Adolescent Girls - Issues and Challenges** (*Maternal Child Health Journal, 2012*)

This article addresses the many challenges that exist in the MHM sector. It discusses the distribution of subsidized sanitary napkins as a potential solution for rural adolescent girls in India, but also acknowledges that the problem is complex and includes issues across sectors such as access to privacy and a regular water supply, reproductive health education, and family support.

### **A Community Based Study on Menstrual Hygiene Among Adolescent Girls** (*Indian Journal of Maternal and Child Health, 2011*)

This is a community based cross-sectional study on MHM practices among adolescent girls in India. This study provides information on how girls learn about menstruation, their menstrual sanitary customs, and their obligations during the course of menstruation.

### **Where the Education System and Women's Bodies Collide: The Social and Health Impact of Girls' Experiences of Menstruation and Schooling in Tanzania** (*Journal of Adolescence, 2010*)

This study explored schoolgirls' experiences with menstruation at school in northern Tanzania. The study captured recommendations to improve school environments with regard to MHM, including WASH facilities. The girls developed a definition of the "perfect girls' toilet," which includes a water supply inside the latrine, locks, cleaning supplies, and adequate menstrual waste disposal mechanisms.

## **WASH and MHM: Manuals**

### **WASH in Schools E-Course** (*Emory University & UNICEF, 2015*)

The course is part of the Canadian government's WinS4Girls Project, focused on rigorous MHM in Schools research in 14 countries. The course aims to strengthen the capacity of WASH practitioners and policy makers to carry out this research to investigate local MHM practices and challenges.

### **MHM Toolkit** (*WASHplus, 2014*)

This toolkit was designed to help teachers, school health and nutrition coordinators, and other school personnel in Zambian primary schools carry out MHM programs or activities in their schools.

### **Puberty Education & Menstrual Hygiene Management** (*UNESCO, 2014*)

This book touches upon a range of issues to help the education sector address puberty education and menstrual hygiene management systematically and effectively. It describes good policies and practices around puberty education and MHM. The book encourages a holistic approach to health promotion – starting with education, creating healthy environments, and linkages to health services.

### **MHM Learning Materials and Manuals** (*WSSCC, 2014*)

The Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC) produced several manuals and learning resources available in English and Hindi, which link WASH and MHM.

### **Menstrual Hygiene Matters** (*WaterAid & SHARE, 2012*)

This resource is a comprehensive approach to MHM and synthesizes solutions and best practices under a wide range of contexts, focusing on menstrual hygiene. The resource is divided into modules and toolkits to help the user identify and provide the resources to support MHM interventions.

## WASH and MHM: Additional Resources

### **Menstrual Hygiene Day** (*WASH United, 2015*)

Celebrated every year on May 28, Menstrual Hygiene Day serves as a neutral platform to bring together individuals, organizations, social businesses and the media to create a united voice for women and girls around the world, helping break the silence around MHM. The website includes fact sheets and infographics on MHM.

### **Celebrating Womanhood: Menstrual Hygiene Management - Break the Silence** (*WSSCC, 2014*)

This fact sheet emphasizes MHM is an entry point to WASH and a way to make basic WASH services more meaningful to women and girls. This document outlines the WSSCC framework for menstrual hygiene management, including “ensuring adequate water, cleansing and washing materials, and private spaces”. The document also addresses menstrual waste disposal.

### **Growth and Changes** (*Grow and Know, 2014*)

These books aim to empower and teach 10-14 year old girls and boys about their changing bodies. Grow and Know has developed books for girls and boys in Tanzania, Ghana, Ethiopia, and Cambodia.

### **The Red Thread - Breaking the Silence in India Video** (*WSSCC, 2014*)

This short video follows the lives of several young Indian girls and the challenges they face to overcome the stigma and taboo associated with the natural biological process of menstruation. It highlights the use of sanitary facilities and initiatives that are taking place to improve the lives of young girls in India.

### **WASH in Schools Empowers Girls' Education: Tools for Assessing Menstrual Hygiene Management in Schools** (*Emory University & UNICEF, 2013*)

This compilation of tools provides an overview of MHM barriers faced by female students in Bolivia, the Philippines, Rwanda, and Sierra Leone. Through in-depth interviews with girls, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews with school administrators and teachers, these tools can be used and adapted for assessments around the world.

### **Help Girls Stay in School Bangladesh Video - UNICEF** (*UNICEF, 2013*)

This video shows a program where local officials worked with school authorities to take action towards improved MHM and sanitation in a high school in Bangladesh.

### **WASHplus Weekly: Focus on Menstrual Hygiene Management** (*WASHplus, 2013*)

This comprehensive online resource for MHM provides links to conferences, presentations, studies, and other menstrual hygiene specific resources.

### **Menstruation Hygiene Management For Schoolgirls In Low-Income Countries** (*WEDC, 2012*)

This fact sheet outlines the problems experienced by menstruating schoolgirls in low-income countries and suggests ways in which MHM can be included in water, sanitation, and hygiene programs.

## WASH and MHM: Organizations

### AFRIpads

AFRIpads' approach to MHM involves manufacturing an affordable sanitary product to reduce the gender-specific barrier to education and to contribute to improved girl attendance and retention rates in primary schools across East Africa.

### Be Girl

Be Girl is a social enterprise that helps women and girls overcome the barriers of embarrassing leaks and limited access to water by providing access to affordable, high-performance sanitary pads and other menstrual products.

### Days for Girls

Days for Girls aims to expand feasible access to quality sustainable feminine hygiene solutions for women around the globe by providing free kits that include soap, absorbent pads, a washcloth, and more.

### FHI360/WASHplus

FHI 360/WASHplus aims to integrate solutions to the challenges of water, sanitation, and hygiene and MHM in several countries, including Uganda and Zambia through job aids for making sanitary pads as well as integrating MHM into WASH in Schools activities.

### Grow and Know

Grow and Know develops culturally appropriate books to address menstruation. Current books from Tanzania, Ghana, Ethiopia, and Cambodia are available online and there are more to come.

### Human Rights Watch

An independent, international organization that works as part of a vibrant movement to uphold human dignity and advance the cause of human rights for all. Their work supports efforts with WASH and MHM through a human rights lens.

### International Medical Corps (IMC)

IMC supports community efforts to promote and provide safe drinking water and sanitation services. They have also launched a program that provides school-aged girls with reusable sanitary pads in Zimbabwe.

### Lunapads

The One4Her program supports local employment for women in Uganda along with MHM education for girls in addition to providing a girl in need with a Ugandan-made AFRIpad for every Lunapads product purchased.

### Millennium Water Alliance

MWA offers sustainable solutions through advocacy, knowledge sharing, and collaborative programming to reduce the proportion of people without access to safe and affordable drinking water and sanitation and recognizes the important linkages between WASH and MHM.

### Not Just A Piece Of Cloth Initiative

This initiative provides affordable cloth napkins, but also stresses changing practices, behavioral patterns, education, and replication in the long-term to spread awareness and promote MHM in India.

### **One Girl**

One Girl's program, LaunchPad, delivers affordable, biodegradable sanitary pads to women and girls in Sierra Leone, using a network of female entrepreneurs and school systems.

### **Plan International**

Plan aims to prepare young adults to be productive citizens and meaningfully contribute to societal growth, including through provision of MHM and WASH support.

### **Save the Children**

Save the Children invests in adolescent development programs and school health and nutrition. They strive to integrate MHM into its out-of-school as well as in-school programming. Save the Children implemented the Tampax *Protecting Futures* Keeping Girls in School program by providing 9,500 girls with puberty and menstrual hygiene education, sanitary pads and girl-friendly WASH facilities. They have developed MHM Operational Guidelines to provide a step-by-step framework for implementing and monitoring MHM in schools.

### **Sustainable Health Enterprises**

Active in Rwanda, SHE manufactures menstrual pads with banana trunk fiber; debunks myths and taboos about menstruation through health and hygiene education in schools and in the community; and works with Rwandan and global leaders on advocacy to waive value-added taxes on menstrual pads.

### **WaterAid**

WaterAid helps communities plan, build, and manage water supplies and toilets using simple, low-cost technologies and supports MHM-friendly WASH facilities. They also advocate to governments and other decision-makers to create political will to end the water and sanitation crisis.

### **WASH United**

Uses sports stars to raise attention to WASH in Africa and India, including MHM. WASH United is leading the global MHM advocacy movement, including the May Menstravaganza campaign and Menstrual Hygiene Day on May 28<sup>th</sup> each year.

### **World Vision**

World Vision works through a community development approach that empowers children and families to break the cycle of poverty and reach their potential, including WASH and MHM.

### **ZanaAfrica**

Active in Kenya, ZanaAfrica produces low-cost sanitary pads to support 3 million girls and women. Their goal is to win back 5 million school days lost due to menstruation related absenteeism and to provide a source of hygienic menstrual management.