

# Study on menstrual management in Uganda

The Netherlands Development Organization (SNV)/IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre

## Main report on the study results



with funding from

 Austrian  
Development Cooperation



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## Executive Summary

Menstruation is an integral and normal part of human life, indeed of human existence. Menstrual hygiene is fundamental to the dignity and wellbeing of women and girls and an important part of the basic hygiene, sanitation and reproductive health services to which every woman and girl has a right. Globally, approximately 52% of the female population (26% of the total population) is of reproductive age<sup>1</sup>. Most of these women and girls will menstruate each month for between two and seven days.

The subject of menstruation, however, is too often taboo, and has many negative cultural attitudes associated with it, including the idea that menstruating women and girls are 'contaminated', 'dirty' and 'impure'. Women and girls in rural settings and in particular girls in schools suffer most from stigma and lack of services and facilities to help them cope with the physical and psychological pains they undergo during their menstrual periods. Some of the problems they face are: inadequate preparations for young girls not yet experiencing menstrual hygiene, lack of or inadequate water to clean and wash the body, lack of materials for managing menstrual hygiene, no private space and wash rooms and inappropriate facilities for disposal of materials for those who have used pads. In spite of these issues, menstrual hygiene has been routinely ignored by professionals in the water, health and education sectors.

This pilot research study on the impact of menstrual hygiene on girls in school is primarily aimed at the Ministry of Education and Sports and the National Sanitation Working Group. Within the context of Uganda, the results of this study will be used to provide evidence-based advocacy on the role of upper primary girls, from the ages of 13-18, whom have started menstruating, with a specific emphasis placed on the issues and challenges that they face at school.

The main objective of this study was therefore to focus on (a) the impact of menstrual management on girls in school; (b) the analysis of the role of primary schools in menstrual management; and (c) on possible ways forward around menstrual management that could be implemented from national to primary school level. The focus of this study was the impact of menstrual management on school girls in selected primary schools in seven districts in which SNV works.

The study was carried out in seven districts (Arua, Adjumai, Budibugyo, Kasese, Kyenjojo, Lira, and Sorti) used random samplings of SNV primary schools. This study was financially supported by Austrian Development Organization. This short study was carried out in July-August 2012 within the selected schools in the seven SNV districts. A total of 20 primary schools per district were selected, which translates into 140 schools in all the seven districts. The sample size per district was aimed at 280 questionnaires in total, out of which: 200 questionnaires for the girl pupils, 20 questionnaires for senior women teachers, 20 questionnaires for senior head teachers, and 40 questionnaires for focus group discussions. Based on the study, menstruating school girls are shown to be missing 10% of all school days.

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<sup>1</sup> UN. 2010. The world's women 2010. Trends & statistics. Series. No. 19. UN statistics division. N.Y.

Within the context of this study, the following points have been brought to light, namely:

- I. Missing school: About half of the girl pupils in the study report missing 1-3 days of primary school per month. This translates into a loss of 8 to 24 school days per year. This means per term a girl pupil may miss up to 8 days of study. On average, there are 220 learning days in a year and missing 24 days a year translates into 11% of the time a girl pupil will miss learning due to menstrual periods;
- II. Impact of menstruation on girls: Over 60% of the girl pupils absent themselves from school during their menstruation while the senior head teachers note that around 40% absent themselves;
- III. Inadequate menstrual facilities around schools: A total of 70% of the head teachers and 80% of the senior head teachers stated that they are not satisfied with menstrual facilities at their schools;
- IV. Menstrual pads: Over 50% of the senior women teachers confirmed that there is no provision for menstrual pads to school girls; and
- V. Keeping girls in school: Over 60% of the girl pupils stated that they need better facilities (hardware aspects). In addition, issues around sensitization of boy pupils, and the role of the senior woman teacher were also cited.

Currently the means of coping for girl pupils is the use of old cloth, dirty napkins and other un-hygienic materials. Some schools have provided sanitary pads ranging from sophisticated imported pads to locally manufactured pads by AfriPads and/or Makapads. In some cases, parents provide the pads to the girls. Within the context of SNV, an initial start has been made with the training of girl pupils to make re-usable menstrual pads (RUMPS). At the time of the study however, this initiative had just started and could not be integrated in the results.

The results of the study reflect that one key means of keeping girls in primary school is the provision of better menstrual management materials and facilities. This study has revealed a lack of sustainable menstrual hygiene management support for the girls, from basics such as suitable facilities to psychological support for girls dealing with menstruation. Many of the girls who took part in the survey preferred to stay at home during their period. If not addressed properly menstrual hygiene management will not only lead to more girls missing school, but can potentially cause an increase in the number of girls dropping out of school altogether.

Past work by other organisations and their results has also been an integral part of taking this study a step further into coming up with a number of practical recommendations at national, local and school levels. It also provides practical solutions for primary schools on how to address menstrual hygiene issues at school so as to reduce absenteeism.

## Introduction

Around 3000 days of menstruation occurs in an average woman's lifetime<sup>2</sup>. During menstruation girls and women face both practical and strategic gender problems. These have negative impacts for their personal lives and development opportunities: restrictions on work and mobility, increased fears and tensions, early marriage, early and premature childbirth and higher infant mortality, and potential vaginal infections resulting in the worst case in infertility<sup>3</sup>. In many cultures, the onset of menstruation means coming of age and therefore has big consequences for young girls. Apart from that there is the hygiene side which if not properly addressed can have horrific consequences.

One of the impacts is the lower class attendance of girls during menstruation days and school drop-out at the onset of menstruation. Based on the literature review, surveys show 33%-61% increase in absence due to lack of menstrual hygiene provisions. However, intervention studies show both insignificant and significant differences in class attendance. The reason behind this may be due to different means of recording intervening factors such as water, sanitation and privacy conditions in primary schools and at home, distance to school and attitudes of teachers and parents. The best study available from the Ugandan context used both self-recording and teachers' attendance records as well as data on possible intervening factors and did find some significant impacts<sup>4</sup>. There is clearly a need for further action research to validate this data.

Between 1986 and 1996, primary school<sup>5</sup> enrolment in Uganda rose modestly, from 2.2 million to 3.1 million. But with the introduction of Universal Primary Education in 1997, it jumped to 5.3 million, an increase of 70 per cent in just one year. As of June, 2012, the total enrolment in 16,684 primary schools was 8,098,177 students<sup>6</sup>. This inevitably has placed a real stress on various aspects around education including the actual physical conditions of sanitation facilities in the primary schools<sup>7</sup>.

In terms of budget allocation for sanitation facilities in schools, the joint sector reports reflect an increased budget allocation for "software" over the period 2007-2009 from an average of 6% to 10%,

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<sup>2</sup> McVeigh E & Guillebaud J, 2008 Oxford Handbook of Reproductive Medicine and Family Planning.

<sup>3</sup> Biran, A. et al. 2012. Background Paper for USAID on Measuring WASH and Food Hygiene Practices – Definition of Goals to be Tackled Post 2015 by the Joint Monitoring Programme. London, UK: London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and The Hague, the Netherlands: IRC International Water Supply and Sanitation Centre.

<http://www.washdoc.info/docsearch/title/178673>

<sup>4</sup> Biran et al., 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Primary school includes children from the ages of 7-13 yrs. They spend around seven years in primary school.

<sup>6</sup> MOES. 2012. Education sector report. Kampala.

<sup>7</sup> Primary education in Uganda is supposed to last 7 years and divided into lower level (P.1 – P2), Mid classes (P.3 – P4) and upper primary (P.5 – P7). The recommended age for P1 is 7 years but in the rural areas they take more than 7 years in primary and even then some start at an age older than 7 years.

compared to the country average from 7% to 9%<sup>8</sup>. However, the amount of the overall budget spent on WASH in primary schools is not available.

For many years now, the global education community, ranging from UNICEF, World Bank to local organisations, have noted the challenges of puberty for adolescent girls, and specifically the need for girl-friendly water and sanitation facilities in primary schools. Although anecdotal stories, from field projects, and articles in newsletters from local women's groups express concern over the issue of schoolgirls and sanitation, still too little empirical data exists that captures girls' actual experiences and concerns. Understanding the reality of girls' experiences of sanitation and schooling is critical to addressing the continuing challenge to meet their specific needs in an effective and resource-feasible manner. A deeper understanding of girls' daily struggles, and rationale behind proposed solutions, is essential to engaging policy makers who can enact legislation and make resources available at school level.

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<sup>8</sup> Source: Joint Sector Reports 2007-2008-2009. Uganda.

### **Why should we focus on menstrual management?**

- Very few professionals have actively engaged with the issue although it has crossed many a mind in passing.
- Professionals from the Health or Water & Sanitation sector alike were astonished at the absence of this issue from both technical and rights based discourses, but unable in most cases to point us in the direction of substantive work on these issues.
- The literature on Gender mainstreaming in the Water & Sanitation sector, is silent on Menstrual Management adequacy of water for washing and bathing, availability of hygienic materials and solid waste management of disposables. Initiatives in this area are restricted to very small pilots, with extremely minimal follow-up and limited dissemination of results.
- Although poor sanitation is correlated with absenteeism and dropping-out of school of girls in developing countries, efforts in school sanitation to address this issue have ignored menstrual management in latrine design and construction. Wider aspects of the issue such as privacy, water availability and awareness-raising amongst boys and men remain largely unexplored by development initiatives.
- Hygiene promotion efforts have recently started focusing on this area but mainly on the software aspects i.e. telling girls and women about correct practices. These efforts do not currently target men and adolescent boys, nor do they systematically inform infrastructure design.
- Minimal effort has gone into production and social marketing of low-cost napkins, reusable materials, research into bio-degradable napkins, etc. Research and development efforts have been limited to commercial ventures that even today are unable to market products that are affordable for the poorest of the poor.
- The issue of washing of soiled materials and environmentally friendly disposal of napkins is absent from waste management training, infrastructure design and impact evaluation.
- In short, Menstrual Management is missing from the literature whether it be manuals to sensitize engineers to gender needs or technical manuals on latrine design, sanitation for secondary schools, solid waste issues, composting, bio-degradable materials or even simple training modules for health and sanitary workers.
- Need to have menstrual management as a priority in wash in schools. This seems to be relegated at the expense of water and toilets.

Source: Bharadwaj and Patkar, 2004<sup>9</sup>.

### **Objective of the study**

The main objective of this study was to focus on (a) the impact of menstrual management on girls in school; (b) the analysis of the role of primary schools in menstrual management; and (c) on some possible solutions that could be implemented from national to school level. This pilot research study on the impact of menstrual hygiene management on girls in school is primarily aimed at the Ministry of

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<sup>9</sup> Bharadwaj, Sowmyaa and Patkar, Archana. 2004. Menstrual Hygiene and Management in Developing Countries: Taking Stock, November.

Education and Sports and the National Sanitation Working Group. Within the context of Uganda, the results of this study will be used to provide evidence-based advocacy<sup>10</sup>.

Based on the pilot results at country level, the project's outcomes will help the authorities of the ministries concerned, namely the Ugandan Ministry of Education and Sport, and Ministry of Education and Ministry of Water to adopt improved menstrual hygiene management in the national education and WASH policy, strategy and programmes. The study results can help provide insight into understanding how to improve menstrual management for primary education of girls in Uganda.

The key results/outcomes of the study are:

- Key School WASH stakeholders in Uganda are aware of the impact of menstruation on girls and that it is linked to class attendance and potential school drop-out.
- Empirical data which can assist in the development of recommendations at all levels to further promote effective menstrual management. The research has produced findings which can give guidance to the Ugandan education and water sectors on school standards.

## **Study sample size and locations**

The study was carried out in seven districts (Arua, Adjumai, Budibugyo, Kasese, Kyenjojo, Lira, and Sorti) used random samplings of SNV primary schools. This short study was carried out in July-August 2012 within the selected schools in the seven SNV districts. A total of 20 primary schools per district were selected<sup>11</sup>, which translates into 140 schools in all the seven districts. This represents around 60% of the total number of SNV supported primary schools. The sample size per district was aimed at 280 questionnaires in total, out of which: 200 questionnaires for the girl pupils, 20 questionnaires for senior women teachers, 20 questionnaires for senior head teachers, and 40 questionnaires for focus group discussions.

The sample size of the study is based on the number of primary schools that SNV is working with within each of the districts. The girl pupils interviewed within the primary schools are based on a randomized selection from adolescent pupils in the upper primary classes, most of whom have experienced with periods. The senior women teachers and senior head teachers whom responded were those available at the time of surveying at the school.

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<sup>10</sup> As a means of creating ultimate ownership a focus has been placed on a number of phases in this brief study which include: Preliminary discussions on the development of the questionnaire- July 2012; Preliminary data findings discussed at annual SNV/IRC WASH in schools meeting- November 27-28<sup>th</sup>; Preliminary data findings discussed at MOES meeting- March 14<sup>th</sup>; Final data findings presented at the National sanitation workshop group- June 4<sup>th</sup> and the Final national dialogue on menstrual hygiene management workshop- June 18<sup>th</sup> 2013.

<sup>11</sup> This included the experimental and control group. The initial study design was to focus on schools with WASH facilities and those without facilities. However as most schools in Uganda have some form of WASH facilities the data focused simply on schools with facilities.

The questionnaires focused on the following key areas:

- Effect of menstruation while at school
- Length of time you miss school if menstruating
- Impact of menstruation on girls
- Provision of menstrual materials
- Facilities available at primary schools
- Keeping pupils in school

Below is an overview of the data analysis with the accumulative overview of the results from the districts involved in the study. The results from the study are also placed in the global context with others studies that have been undertaken on menstrual management as a means of providing further information.

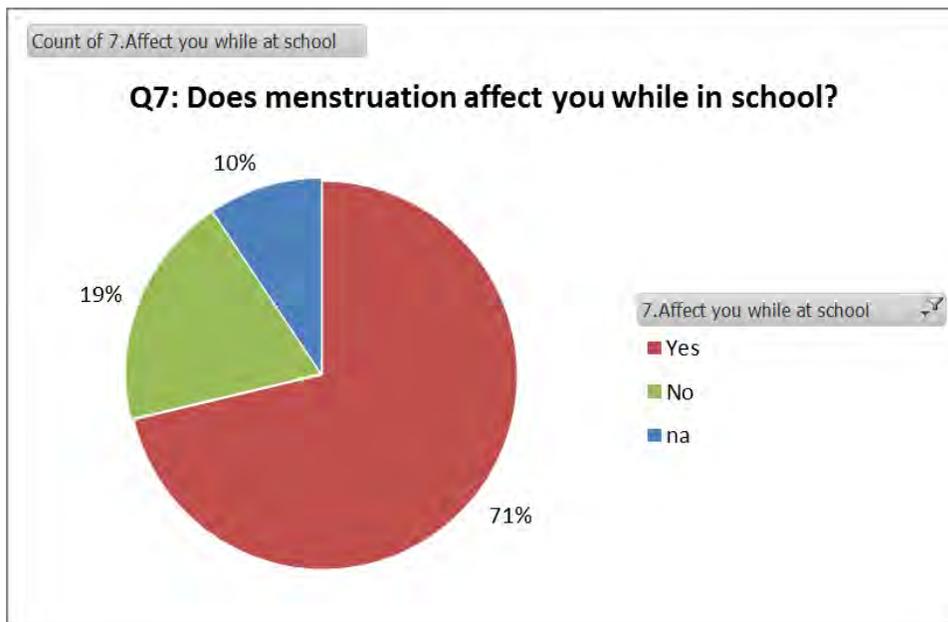
## Accumulative study result findings

The accumulative study is based on questions and interviews with girl pupils, senior women teachers, and head teachers<sup>12</sup>.

### 1. Effect of menstruation while at school

The first set of questions focused on potential effects of menstruation on the girl pupil. The accumulative results from girl pupils reflect that overall around 70% of the adolescent girls are affected by menstruation while in school.

**Graph 1: Menstruation affects you while in school (girl pupils)**



The implication of these findings is that menstrual hygiene affects the majority of adolescent girl pupils in school and this can potentially reflect that their ultimate educational performance will not be optimal. Based on the above graph overview it is interesting to reflect on other global literature focusing on the effect of menstruation while at school. One study based on school girls in rural Kenya<sup>13</sup>, for example, found that girls express fear, shame, distraction and confusion, besides physical discomfort, as feelings associated with menstruation. These feelings are largely linked to a sense of embarrassment, concerns about being stigmatized by fellow pupils and as teachers explained, a perception that the onset of menstruation signals the advent of girl's sexual status.

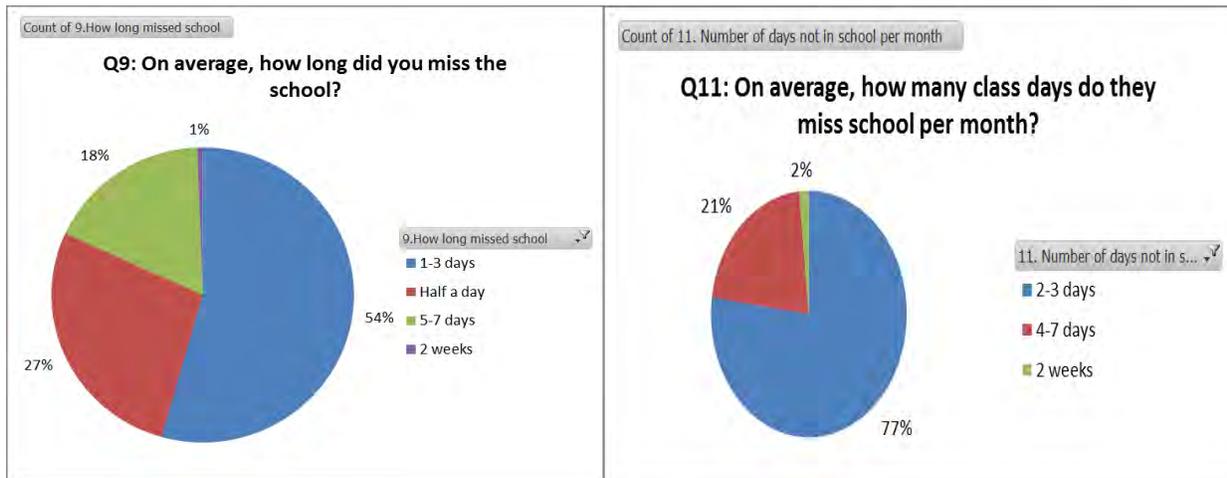
<sup>12</sup> For those interested, a supplement paper is available which gives all of the data for each of the questions that were raised to the different target groups. In Annex 1, the key questions from each of the different target group can be found.

<sup>13</sup> McMahon, S.A. et al. 2011. The girl with her period is the one to hang her head: Reflections on menstrual management among school girls in rural Kenya. BMC International Health and Human Rights. Vol. 11., No. 7.

## 2. Length of time you miss primary school when menstruating

This was to establish the number of learning days that girl pupils miss while having their menstrual periods. Both the girl pupils and the senior women teachers responded. About half of the girl pupils in the study report missing 1-3 days of primary school per month. This translates into a loss of 8 to 24 school days per year. This means per term a girl pupil may miss up to 8 days of study. On average, there are 220 learning days in a year and missing 24 days a year translates into 11% of the time a girl pupil will miss learning due to menstrual periods. The two graphs below show the number of days that senior women teachers and girl pupils have indicated in the survey as missing school due to menstruation.

**Graph 2: Number of days' girls miss school during menstruation (Girl pupil and senior woman teacher)**



It is important to note that a majority of the girl pupils who experience menstrual periods are in upper primary, and a higher majority of them in P7 (Candidate class)<sup>14</sup>. If each girl misses a minim of 8 days of school in a term, the implication is that she may be missing a lot in terms of learning and there is a likelihood of losing interest in their education. Falling behind and not having the possibility to catch up with the help of a teacher may eventually led to drop out. This could be a contributing factor to the low completion rates.

As a result of missing days at school, they are missing lessons and fall behind. This may cause shame, loss of interest and dropping out altogether. Other qualitative research indicates that girl pupils were missing school as many as five days each month due to inadequate menstrual care and cramping. In addition, the girls refrained from other activities, such as work, chores, and playing with other children<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> P.7 is the top most class in the primary education system in Uganda. At the end of the academic year, the P.7 pupils sit national examinations called Primary leaving Examinations (PLE), examined by an autonomous body. Their performance at this level determines if they move for the next level of education.

<sup>15</sup> Linda Scott, L, Dopson, S., Montgomery, P., C. Dolan, C., and Ryus, C. 2009. Impact of providing sanitary pads to poor girls in Africa. University of Oxford. Oxford.

Another study specifically on Uganda found that more than half of Ugandan girls who enrol in grade one drop out before sitting for their primary school-leaving examinations<sup>16</sup>. The fact that girls are dropping out between the ages of 11 and 13 has potentially been linked to the beginning of the menstruation cycle and its associated challenges<sup>17</sup>.

### Girl pupils

Based on the focus group discussions, girls have cited their discomfort around the time of menstruating. “I am embarrassed to come to school in case I spoil myself”, says one girl from Gayobyoo school in Kyenjojo district. If this happens, I have nowhere to change my clothes, so instead I do not come to school for a few days”.

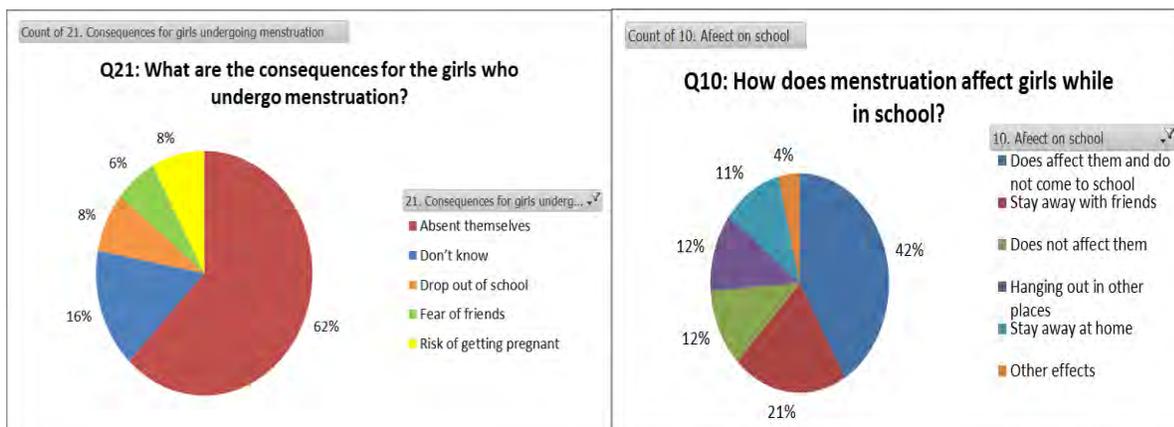
As also cited in focus group discussion for the case study by SNV on menstrual hygiene challenges, most of the girls said they used old cloth called a *kitenge* which they would get from their mothers, while others stole used nappies from their younger siblings. With this they seemed to be happy as the *kitenge* or nappies don’t soil easily, and as such they changed them twice: at break time and lunch time.

In case of emergencies, the girls opted for hankies or dry leaves until they could get home where they would find other means. The younger girls also found the older ones very helpful as they always carried an extra old cloth which they would willingly share in such a situation when a friend was in need.

### 3. Impact of menstruation on girls

One of the fundamental question in the study focuses on impact of menstrual management including potential drop out. The two graphs below reflect the responses from the head teachers and the senior women teachers on the consequences of menstruation for school girls.

**Graph 3: Consequence of menstruation for girls (Head teacher and senior head teachers)**



<sup>16</sup> There is a perceived increase of school absenteeism when girls in schools start to menstruate (Bendera, 1999; Menche et al, 1998; UNFPA, 2003) and specifically statistics for Sub-Saharan Africa (UNDP, 2006; UNESCO, 2005) although their reliability is still a bit uncertain.

<sup>17</sup> There is a perceived increase of school absenteeism when girls in schools start to menstruate (Bendera, 1999; Menche et al, 1998; UNFPA, 2003) and specifically statistics for Sub-Saharan Africa (UNDP, 2006; UNESCO, 2005) although their reliability is still a bit uncertain.

In order to get a better impression of what the head teachers and senior head teachers thought, this particular survey question was written slightly differently for each group, as a means of getting different responses. When reflecting on the question in relation to the potential consequences for the girls who undergo menstruation, the head teachers state that over 60% of the girl pupils absent themselves from school during their menstruation while the senior head teachers note that around 40% absent themselves.

From the above data, an average of over 57% of the girl pupils absent themselves due to menstrual periods a year. Building from the previous data (11% of learning days missed), one can correctly say that 57% of the girl pupils in upper primary miss a minimum 11% of the learning time as a result of menstrual periods alone.

A study in Ghana reflected that post-pubescent girls were missing school as much as five days each month due to inadequate menstrual care at school and physical discomfort such as cramps<sup>18</sup>. Another programme entitled the SWASH+ project<sup>19</sup>, a five-year applied research project to identify, develop, and test innovative approaches to school-based water, sanitation and hygiene in Nyanza, Province, Kenya revealed that there are several methods reported by pupils for managing one's period and avoiding embarrassing situations. A common remedy is to stay at home, leave school or drop out all together from school.

A number of studies have focused on a linkage between girls who menstruate and potentially drop out of school. Girls' absence from school has both physical and psychological reasons which range from lack of menstrual hygiene management provision to menstrual pain. Once they are at home they often do not want to go back for fear of being scolded or found out<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> Montgomery P, Ryus CR, Dolan CS, Dopson S, Scott LM . 2012. Sanitary Pad Interventions for Girls' Education in Ghana: A Pilot Study. PLoS ONE- Vol. 7, No. 10.  
<http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0048274>

<sup>19</sup> See <http://www.washinschools.info/swashplus>

<sup>20</sup> Kumar, R. 2012. Plan India- WASH learning fund, Menstrual hygiene management posting. January 13.

**Graph 5: Are girls dropping out of school due to menstruation (senior woman teacher)**



In the context of this study, when asking the senior women teachers if they thought there was a potential correlation between girls menstruating and staying away from school, it was clear that over half felt this to be the case. About 24% of the senior women teachers said that pupils drop out due to menstrual management issues.

#### **4. Provision of menstrual material<sup>21</sup>**

This section sought the views of the senior women teachers and head teachers on the kind of materials provided by the school to the girl pupils during their menstrual periods. A total of 50% of the senior women teachers confirmed that there are no menstrual pads available for girls in school. Approximately 30% of both the head teachers and senior head teachers reported not receiving any materials at school during their period. Pain killers are also needed in the schools although only 4% of the senior women teachers said they are provided. This data shows that 50% of the schools don't have sanitary pads available for emergencies.

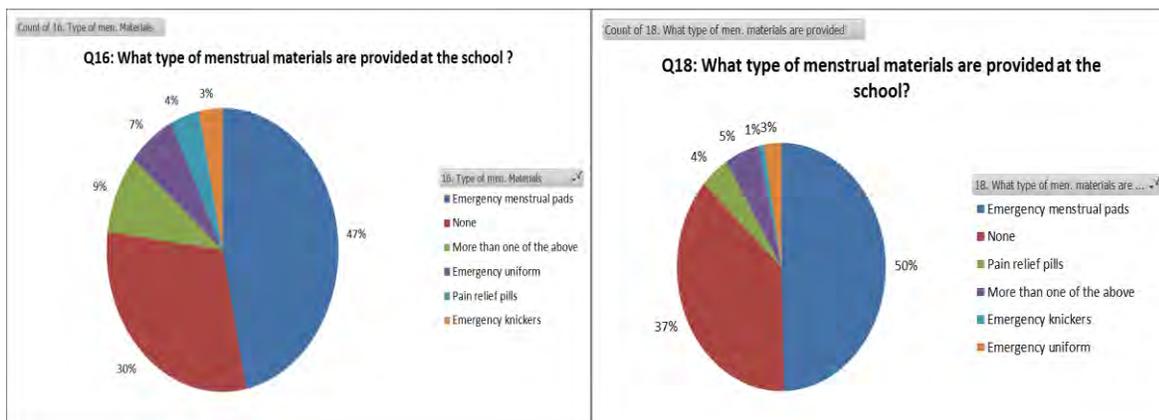
Research conducted by a non-government organisation, the *Forum of African Women Educationalists (FAWE)*<sup>22</sup>, reveals that the lack of sanitary pads, coupled with other factors like the absence of water or separate toilet facilities for girls in many primary schools, is responsible for the drop-out rate<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> Menstrual materials refer specifically to menstrual pads, tampons, tissues and/or clean underwear.

<sup>22</sup> Fawe. 2009. Lifting silence on menstruation to keep girls in school. [www.fawe.org](http://www.fawe.org)

<sup>23</sup> FAWE, Uganda conducted a campaign to dispel the silence around sexual maturation (SM), and to advocate for affordable sanitary towels to be available at the local market menstruation periods which include lack of menstrual materials.

**Graph 6: Type of menstrual materials provided at school (Head teachers and senior woman teachers)**



The implication of this data shows the lack of support in terms of physical materials to help the girl cope with their period while in school. There must be a concerted effort by both the parents and the schools administration to have emergency pads and pain killers for the school girl.

Studies from Nigerian school girls who did self-reporting cited that between 31% and 56% of them use toilet tissue or cloth use<sup>24</sup>. Another study on school girls in rural Kenya reveal that among the many methods for managing their periods, girls most frequently said they folded, bunched up or sewed cloth, including cloth from shirts or dresses, scraps of old cloth, or strips of an old blanket. Cloth was reported to frequently leak and cause chafing, which made school attendance difficult particularly as the day progressed<sup>25</sup>.

Availability of menstrual absorbents, whether home produced or mass manufactured, are limited in many areas of the world. It may also be a low priority for lower income households to purchase absorbents even where they are available. Studies report reusing of cloth and inadequate washing and drying. Studies in India, for example, have found between 43% and 88% of girls washing and reusing cloth. Cleaning of cloths is often done without soap or with unclean water and drying may be done indoors rather than in sunlight or open air due to social restrictions and taboos. Across these studies, problems are found to be particularly acute in rural areas or amongst girls in lower socio-economic groups<sup>26</sup>. Another study which focused on adolescent school girls in Bayelsa State, Nigeria showed that

<sup>24</sup> Adinma, E.D. and J.I. Adinma, *Perceptions and practices on menstruation amongst Nigerian secondary school girls*. African Journal of Reproductive Health, 2008. **12**(1): p. 74-83. & Aniebue, U.U., P.N. Aniebue, and T.O. Nwankwo, *The impact of pre-menarcheal training on menstrual practices and hygiene of Nigerian school girls*. Pan Afr Med J, 2009. **2**: p. 9;

Dasgupta, A. and M. Sarkar, *Menstrual hygiene: how hygienic is the adolescent girl?* Indian Journal of Community Medicine, 2008. **33**(2): p. 77-80. & Narayan, K., et al., *Puberty Rituals, Reproductive Knowledge and Health of Adolescent Schoolgirls in South India*. Asia-Pacific Population Journal, 2001. **16**(2): p. 225 - 238.

<sup>25</sup> McMahon, et al. 2011.

<sup>26</sup> Dasgupta, A. and M. Sarkar, *Menstrual hygiene: how hygienic is the adolescent girl?* Indian Journal of Community Medicine, 2008. **33**(2): p. 77-80. & Narayan, K., et al., *Puberty Rituals, Reproductive Knowledge and Health of Adolescent Schoolgirls in South India*. Asia-Pacific Population Journal, 2001. **16**(2): p. 225 - 238.

there is a behavioural change on the use of sanitary pads with 66.4% of the girls, as well as feeling positive about themselves, this enabled a majority (52.1%) to attend classes normally<sup>27</sup>. Finally, another study in Uganda revealed that school girls indicated that they preferred commercially produced, disposal sanitary pads<sup>28</sup>.

According to WIN-SA research, 60% of women and girls in South Africa do not have access to traditional sanitary ware (pads and tampons)<sup>29</sup>. And as an "alternative" to pads and tampons, they have no option but to use rags, toilet paper, newspaper, leaves, "recycled" tampons / pads and disposable nappies. These unhygienic materials can cause serious health problems for girls. Bad health has consequences for them in terms of productivity, dignity and confidence in being an active member of society. Apart from social, health and productivity problems therefore, the issue of menstrual hygiene management is also an economic one. Unemployment and poverty prevent girls from buying hygienic materials for good menstrual management. This can affect their health and so prevent them from going to school and work, and therefore keeps them in the poverty cycle.

## **5. Availability of sanitary facilities at the school for the girl child**

Within the context of this study, sanitary facilities refer to toilets, urinals, wash facilities, changing rooms for girls and hand washing facilities. The senior women teachers and head teachers were specifically asked to respond to this set of questions.

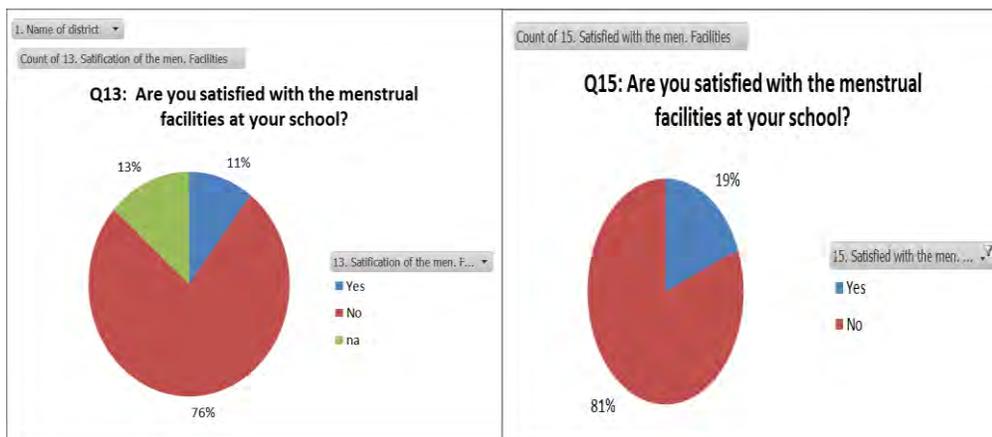
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<sup>27</sup> Adika, V.O. , Yabga, J., Apiyanteide, F.A. Ologidi, P.W., and Ekpo, K.E. 2011. Perception and behavior on use of sanitary pads during menstruation among adolescent school girls in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. *Advances in Applied Science Research*. Vol. 2, no. 6, p. 9-15.

<sup>28</sup> Crofts, T., and Fischer, 2011. Menstrual hygiene in Uganda schools: An investigation of low-cost sanitary pads. Loughborough. 35<sup>th</sup> WEDC conference. UK.

<sup>29</sup> WIN-SA. 2012. Dialogue on menstrual hygiene management. Water Research Commission. Pretoria. Research undertaken in South Africa showed that striking 30% of girls do not attend school during menstruation. These girls are mainly from poorer communities where access to sanitary resources is difficult. For many of these poverty stricken families, the purchase of sanitary pads are simply too expensive, and thus receives less priority when compared to other household needs such as food. The resultant absenteeism during menstruation leads to a critical loss of learning time. On average, about 4 days per month can be lost, which can add up to 528 days of schooling across the years that a girl should be in school.

**Graph 8: Satisfaction with menstrual facilities in school (head teachers and senior women teachers)**



Within this context it is interesting to cite that both the senior women teachers and head teachers agree that the facilities provided in primary schools are not sufficient. More than 70% of the head teachers agree that the facilities are not adequate. Similarly, a total of 81% of senior women teachers state the facilities are not satisfactory. This implies a clear need for more investment into the hardware aspects around WASH in schools.

By implication, it means there is need for hardware investment in schools for menstrual hygiene management in order to make the schools attractive and friendly for the girl pupil. Numerous studies have reflected the importance of well-designed sanitary facilities in schools. These new designs include washing and drying facilities of rags and the provision of cupboards to keep rags or sanitary napkins. A WEDC study revealed that improving facilities at school does not require large increases in investment costs on top of those already being made for proper WASH facilities in primary schools. This WEDC study found that an extra 3% will make latrines inclusive for all, although there was no split in specific costs for menstrual management hygiene facilities.

Another study reflects that girls who have reached puberty and are menstruating need gender-related privacy. Without privacy, absenteeism rates may reach 10-20% resulting to potential drop out<sup>30</sup>. A WASH in schools evaluation in Kenya indicated that girls were less absent or likely to drop out in primary schools when there were satisfactory facilities including hand washing facilities<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>30</sup> IRC. 2005. Adolescent girls and school hygiene, sanitation and water. School sanitation and hygiene education Notes and News. IRC, Delft. May. pp. 1-8.

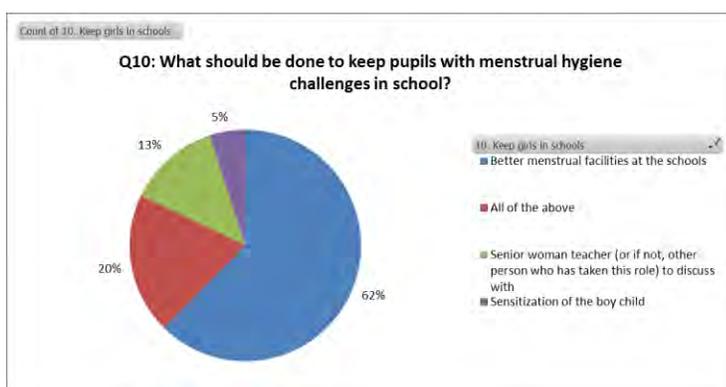
<sup>31</sup> Njunguna, V., et al. 2009. The sustainability and impact of school sanitation, water and hygiene education in Kenya. Waterlines. October. p. 3.

## 6. Keeping pupils in school

The results of the study reflect that one key means of keeping girls in primary schools is both the provision of better menstrual management materials and facilities. Providing adequate menstrual facilities for the girl pupils is of key importance to provide privacy and a place to them to clean themselves. In addition, senior women teachers are able to help girls with questions around menstrual management. Apart from giving guidance on hygienic measures, they can also provide menstrual materials when necessary. They often hold the key to the cupboard in which menstrual materials are stored.

Within the context of the study, a total of 62% of the girl pupils cited the importance of having better menstrual facilities in school. In addition, issues around sensitization of boy pupils, and the role of the senior woman teachers were also mentioned in the focus group discussions.

**Graph 9: Keeping pupils at school (girl pupil)**



One practical way forward has been the development of a menstrual management booklet, one of the first was published in Zimbabwe and describes the problems girls face when they are menstruating and how to deal with them in a practical way<sup>32</sup>. In a similar fashion, based on the menstrual management project, a booklet on menstrual management for school girls for Uganda has been published in 2013 by NETWAS Uganda in collaboration with SNV Uganda<sup>33</sup>.

A study in Bangladesh undertaken by WaterAid reflects that the improvement of existing water and sanitation facilities to address the girls' specific needs, including menstrual management, enhances their school attendance. A study by Plan India revealed that installing good menstrual hygiene facilities in primary schools is key to keeping girls in primary school. Their study mentioned that adolescent girls said during their menstrual period they would often leave school half way through the day, at lunchtime or before because there were no facilities. A study in Malawi undertaken by WaterAid cited that providing school latrines which are built to accommodate menstruating girls' specific needs for privacy,

<sup>32</sup> Kanyemba, 2011. A. Growing up at school - A guide to menstrual management for school girls. Water Information Network South Africa.

<sup>33</sup> NETWAS Uganda. Menstrual management booklet. NETWAS. Kampala.

space, washing facilities and correct disposal and/or cleaning of menstrual pads have led to dignity and better attendance and thus improving girls' education.

Finally, a study undertaken in the BRAC WASH programme states that each school in the programme is encouraged to organize a school fund to keep the WASH facilities operational and clean. To ensure a smooth supply of sanitary napkins to school, BRAC WASH staff help establish a link between the school and the local BRAC health volunteers who sell sanitary napkins<sup>34</sup>. Within the context of the Uganda, the primary schools supported by SNV, there has been some training of re-usable menstrual pads (RUMPS) which target girl pupils, senior women, teachers and mothers. This has, however, not been fully integrated in all the primary schools supported by SNV, and as it has just started<sup>35</sup>, could not be included in this data analysis.

## **Innovative solutions around menstrual management**

Within the context of Uganda, modern sanitary pads are available but really only affordable<sup>36</sup> for the middle and upper class. As a result, a number of innovative low-cost solutions around the supply of menstrual pads in Uganda have been developed. They are the AFRIPads<sup>37</sup> and the Makapads. Afripads were developed in 2009 and are made from soft poly-cotton fabric and impermeable material sewn together that are designed to be washed and re-used. An AFRIPads menstrual kit is designed to provide protection for a year. Makapads<sup>38</sup> are disposable pads that are used once and then disposed of. They came on the market in 2003. They are made from layers of waste paper pulp and softened papyrus reed stem fibres, sealed between a permeable layer on top and an impermeable layer underneath, both layers are made from imported materials<sup>39</sup>. In addition, some other organisations like SNV, ASB, Plan Uganda are currently starting to train girls to make reusable menstrual pads using locally available materials.

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<sup>34</sup> Kabir, B.M.K., Barua., and Ahmed, M. 2012. Improving menstrual hygiene facilities in secondary schools: Initiative from BRAC-WASH program. Paper presented at the Third Asia Regional Sanitation and Hygiene Practitioners workshop, Dhaka- Bangladesh. January 31-February 2, 2012.

<sup>35</sup> The RUMPS initiative started in June 2012 whilst the bulk of the data collection took place in July 2012.

<sup>36</sup> Menstrual pads packages, which include 10 pads, cost Ks. 2500 per pack.

<sup>37</sup> AFRIPads provide savings of more than 75% when compared to the cost of an annual supply of disposable sanitary pads.

<sup>38</sup> Musaaazi Moses of Makere University is the lead innovator behind Makapads a locally sourced sanitary napkin manufacturing concern. The price of imported sanitary pads is around US\$1.50 for a pack of ten which puts them beyond the reach of Uganda's poorest families. Makapads cost around US\$0.27 per pack. The cost can be kept down by using locally sourced materials - papyrus and paper - and manufacturing the pads on a cottage industry basis.

<sup>39</sup> Crofts, T. and J. Fisher, 2012. Menstrual hygiene in Ugandan schools: an investigation of low-cost sanitary pads. *Journal of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for Development* Vol 2 No 1 pp 50–58.

**Table 3 Examples of low-cost sanitary pad producers in Sub-Saharan Africa**

Production	Organisa- tion	Washable disposables	Raw mater- ial	Country	Website
Locally- Produced Sanitary Pads	AFRIpad	Washable Re-usable		Uganda	<a href="http://www.afripads.com">www.afripads.com</a>
Locally- Produced Sanitary Pads	Makapads	Disposable		Uganda	<a href="http://cedat.mak.ac.ug/research/makapads.html">http://cedat.mak.ac.ug/research/makapads.html</a>
Locally- Produced Sanitary Pads	RUMPS	Disposable		Uganda	<a href="http://www.thecultureist.com/2013/03/08/rumps-reusable-menstrual-pads">www.thecultureist.com/2013/03/08/rumps-reusable-menstrual-pads</a>
SHE 28 Campaign	Sustainable Health Enterprises (SHE)	Disposable	Banana stem fibres	Kigali, Rwanda	<a href="http://www.sheinnovates.com">www.sheinnovates.com</a>

Within the context of this study, the use of RUMPS, as stated, has only just started in primary schools. Based on the case study on alternative options to cope with menstrual management, this is one of the ways forward. Alternatively, the role of working with either AFRIpad or Makapads through the use of school health clubs and/or girl-education movement (GEM) clubs with the support of Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) clubs based on a revolving fund.

## Further resolutions/recommendations

There is clearly a need to have a further call of action for creating more awareness on hygienic menstrual management in Uganda. This study could also help to contribute in bridging some of the existing gap.

The following key elements need to be focused on to bring attention to proper menstrual management in primary schools, namely:

### At national level:

- There is a need to understand the broader societal responsibility for addressing MHM, as well as to consider ways in which girl pupils can be assisted. This entails that there should be an inclusion of reproductive health education and life skills in the school curriculum targeting both girls and boys.
- There is a need for more standardized girl friendly designs that offer convenience and privacy. For example, the sanitary facility for girls should include a wash room and changing room. There should also be a place to safely dispose of used pads.

- Menstrual hygiene should be captured in the national education sector performance report. This entails that the Ministry of Education and Sports needs to incorporate menstrual management indicators in monitoring and evaluation systems for primary schools.

**At district level:**

- Health inspectors should make menstrual hygiene management part of their periodic inspection and report to the District Water and Sanitation Coordination Committee on a quarterly basis.
- Districts should ensure that all primary schools have established and functional school health clubs and girl-education movement (GEM) clubs
- More efforts should be made to recruit motivated senior female teachers to work in the hard to reach schools.
- Each school should have a trained and well-motivated senior woman teacher to support and advise school girls reaching puberty.

**At sub-district level**

- More focus is needed to include menstrual hygiene management as one of the assessable areas in the performance agreements signed by senior head teachers with sub county chiefs.

**At School level:**

There is a need for support mechanisms in primary schools, for example, that:

- a % budget from the UPE grant is allocated specifically to menstrual hygiene management
- the primary schools should ensure the availability of water, soap, a basin, emergency material (e.g. menstrual pads), facilities for disposal of used pads and medication (e.g. pain killers)
- Girls as well as boys should be motivated to participate in school health clubs. The school health clubs and/or girl-education movement (GEM) clubs should in turn also focus the issues around menstrual hygiene management.
- Boys should become aware and sensitized to support girl pupils to cope with the challenges that they face during their period.

**At the girl pupil level:**

- The girl pupils should actively participate in school health clubs and GEM clubs and ensure that issues on menstrual hygiene are attended to by the school.
- Peer support should be available for the girls to help them understand menstrual hygiene management.

**NGO and civic society level:**

- There is a need to promote advocacy campaigns on the effects and coping mechanisms around MHM to policy makers.
- Building in budgets to support MHM at school level is of key importance.

- Involve cultural leaders and break the silence around MHM needs to get more attention.
- Advocate for further research around specific areas linked to menstrual hygiene management.
- Conduct further studies on the suitability of RUMPS.

**Private sector level:**

- Explore further possibilities of manufacturing and marketing innovative low-cost sanitary towels e.g. working with village saving schemes and credit associations.
- Improving the standards of the RUMPS and up-scaling them in rural schools and communities.

## **Recommendation for further research**

Given the short time frame for this brief study, it was not possible to cross-check results with class attendance records in schools over a longer period of time, or to include other aspects around the potential correlation between girls menstruating and school dropout.

Within the context of possible further study, it would be interesting to monitor class attendance over a one year period and provide consistent short questionnaires to girl pupils who are missing a number of days from school over the academic year. Other aspects that would be of interest include reflecting on the costs of menstrual management facilities, both in the form of hardware (e.g. changing rooms) and software (e.g. life skills training classes). Within this given context, more focus could be paid on the importance of keeping girl pupils in school.

# **Annex 1: Questionnaires to the girl pupils, senior head teachers, head teachers and focus groups**

## **ACTION RESEARCH FOR MENSTRUAL HYGIENE MANAGEMENT**

### **QUESTIONNAIRES FOR GIRL PUPIL**

Questionnaire serial number: \_\_\_\_\_

Experimental group or Control group (Circle one)

1. Name of district:

1. Arua
2. Adjumani
3. Bundibugyo
4. Kasese
5. Kyenjojo
6. Lira
7. Soroti

2. Name of school: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Name of sub-county: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Age of respondent:

1. 5-7 years
2. 8-10 years
3. 11-13 years
4. 14- 17 years
5. 18 years or older

5. Class of respondent: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Have you experienced menstruation before?

1. Yes

2. No
7. If yes, does it affect you while at school?
  1. Yes
  2. No
8. If yes, how does it affect you while at school? (only circle one response)
  1. cannot concentrate
  2. feel physical sick and weak
  3. feel psychologically affected
  4. Keeps me out of school
  5. all of the above
9. If you have stated 4 above, keep me out of school, for how long do you miss school per month?
  1. Half a day
  2. 1-3 days
  3. 5-7 days
  4. 2 weeks
10. What should be done to keep pupils with menstrual hygiene challenges in school? (only circle one response)
  1. better menstrual facilities at the schools
  2. sensitization of the boy child
  3. senior woman teacher (or if not, other person who has taken this role) to discuss with
  4. all of the above
11. What type of sanitary towels do you use? (circle only one of the most commonly used options)
  1. old cloth
  2. nickers
  3. disposal sanitary pads
  4. reusable menstrual pads
  5. cotton
  6. toilet tissue
  7. all of the above

12. Does your school have a separate wash room with water and soap for when you are menstruating?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

13. What type of menstrual materials are provided at your school?

- 1. Emergency menstrual pads
- 2. emergency uniform
- 3. Emergency knickers
- 4. Pain relief pills
- 5. More than one of the above
- 6. None

14. Are you satisfied with the menstrual facilities at your school?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

15. If no, what other alternatives do girls use?

- 1. Remain at home
- 2. Bush
- 3. Staff quarters
- 4. Latrines

**Any other comments/recommendations:** .....

**Name of Interviewer:** .....

**Name of Organization:** .....

**Signature:**.....

**Date:** .....

## ACTION RESEARCH FOR MENSTRUAL HYGIENE MANAGEMENT

### QUESTIONNAIRE FOR SENIOR WOMAN TEACHER (if not there the person acting for this role)

Questionnaire serial number: \_\_\_\_\_

Experimental group or Control group (Circle one)

**1. Name of district:**

- 8. Arua
- 9. Adjumani
- 10. Bundibugyo
- 11. Kasese
- 12. Kyenjojo
- 13. Lira
- 14. Soroti

**2. Name of school:** \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Name of sub-county where school is located:** \_\_\_\_\_

**4. Age of respondent:**

- 1. 17-25 years
- 2. 26-35 years
- 3. 36-45 years
- 4. 46-55 years
- 5. 56 years or older

5. Number of pupils in school: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Number of boys in school: \_\_\_\_\_

7. Number of girls in school: \_\_\_\_\_

8. Estimation number of girls that are menstruating: \_\_\_\_\_

9. What are the problems faced by girls at school during their menstruation period? (circle only one answer)

- 1. Cannot concentrate
- 2. Feel physically sick at school
- 3. Psychological effects
- 4. Keep them out of schools
- 5. All of the above

10. How does menstruation affect girls while in school?
  1. Does not affect them
  2. Does affect them and do not come to school
  3. Hanging out in other places
  4. Stay away with friends
  5. Stay away at home
  6. Other effects
  
11. If some girls do not come to school, on average, how many class days do they miss school per month?
  1. 2-3 days
  2. 4-7 days
  3. 2 weeks
  4. other
  
12. How do girls manage menstrual cycle?
  1. Use of old cloth
  2. Use of disposal sanitary pads
  3. Both old cloth and disposal sanitary pads/cotton
  4. Use of knickers
  5. Use of reusable menstrual pads
  6. All of the above
  
13. Who provides menstrual materials?
  1. School
  2. Parents/family
  3. Both school and parents/family
  4. Self
  5. Peers
  6. Others
  
14. How do girls dispose off the used menstrual pads?
  1. Throw in latrine
  2. Burning
  3. Throw in rubbish pit
  4. Wash and re-use
  5. Other (specify)
  
15. Are you satisfied with the menstrual facilities at your school?
  1. Yes
  
  2. No

16. If no, what other alternatives do girls use?
1. Remain at home
  2. Bush
  3. Staff quarters
  4. Latrines
17. Does the school have a separate wash room with water and soap for the girl pupils who are menstruating?
3. Yes
  4. No
18. What type of menstrual materials are provided at the school (circle only one of the most commonly used options)
1. Emergency menstrual pads
  2. emergency uniform
  3. Emergency knickers
  4. Pain relief pills
  5. More than one of the above
  6. None
19. In your school have you had girls who have dropped out of school due to menstruation management?
1. Yes
  2. No
  3. Don't know
20. If yes, how many do you think are affected?
1. Between 1-10
  2. Between 11-20
  3. Between 21-30
  4. Between 31-40
  5. Between 41-50
  5. 50 and above

**Any other comments:** .....

**Name of Interviewer:** .....

**Name of Organization:** .....

**Signature:**.....

**Date:** .....

## ACTION RESEARCH FOR MENSTRUAL HYGIENE MANAGEMENT

### QUESTIONNAIRES FOR HEADTEACHERS

Questionnaire serial number: \_\_\_\_\_

Experimental group or Control group (circle one)

1. Name of district:

1. Arua
2. Adjumani
3. Bundibugyo
4. Kasese
5. Kyenjojo
6. Lira
7. Soroti

2. Name of school: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Name of sub-county where school is located: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Name of parish where school is located: .....

5. Name of village where school is located: .....

6. School enrolment in 2012: Total: .....

7. School enrolment in 2012: Boys: .....

8. School enrolment in 2012: Girls: .....

9. It is anticipated that there are girls of menstruation age in your school?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know

10. If yes, approximately how many girls are currently experiencing menstruation in your school?

1. 10-50 girls
2. 50-100 girls
3. Above 100

11. Are there counseling and awareness services in your school to help the girls manage menstrual hygiene?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know

12. If yes, what services are available in your school?

1. Counseling by fellow pupils
2. Counseling by Senior woman teachers
3. Counseling by others (please specify)

13. Are you satisfied with the menstrual facilities at your school?

1. Yes
2. No

14. If no, what other alternatives do girls use?

1. Remain at home
2. Bush
3. Staff quarters
4. Latrines

15. Does the school have a separate wash room with water and soap for the girl pupils who are menstruating?

5. Yes
6. No

16. What type of menstrual facilities and materials are provided at the school (circle only one of the most commonly used options)

1. Emergency menstrual pads
2. emergency uniform
3. Emergency knickers
4. Pain relief pills
5. More than one of the above
6. Nothing

17. What menstrual materials do the girls use for menstruation while at school?

1. Use of old cloth
2. Use of nickers
3. Use of disposal sanitary pads
4. Use of reusable menstrual pads

5. All of the above

18. Is there an arrangement for girls to access menstrual pads in case of an emergency while at school?

If no, go to question 11.

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know

19. If no, please skip to question 20. If yes, who provides?

1. the school
2. the parents
3. By both school and parents/family
4. Self
5. Peers
6. NGOs
7. Health center
8. others (please specify)

20. If no, how do they manage?

1. Don't know
2. Parents provide
3. Self
4. Peers
5. Girls run back home
6. Others (specify)

21. What are the consequences for the girls who undergo menstruation?

1. Don't know
2. Absent themselves
3. Drop out of school
4. Risk of getting pregnant
5. Fear of friends
6. Contracting HIV

22. If the girls absent themselves, how does the school know it?

1. From attendance registrar
2. From teachers
3. Fellow pupils
4. Others (specify)

23. If absent from school on average, how long do they absent themselves?

1. Don't know
2. 1 day
3. Between 2 – 3 days
4. Between 4 – 5 days
5. More than 5 days

24. Does poor menstrual hygiene lead to drop out of girls in schools?

1. Yes
2. No (if no, skip to question 23)
3. Don't know

25. If yes, how many have dropped out of school in the last academic year?

1. Don't know
2. 1- 10 girls
3. 11- 20 girls
4. Above 20

**Any other comments:**

**Name of Interviewer:** .....

**Name of Organization:** .....

**Signature:**.....

**Date:** .....

## ACTION RESEARCH FOR MENSTRUAL HYGIENE MANAGEMENT

### FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

Questionnaire serial number: \_\_\_\_\_

Experimental group or Control group (circle one)

1. Name of district :

1. Arua
2. Adjumani
3. Bundibugyo
4. Kasese
5. Kyenjojo
6. Lira
7. Soroti

2. Name of school: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Name of sub-county: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Age group of respondents:

1. 8-10 years
2. 11-13 years
3. 14- 17 years
4. 18 years or older

5. Range of class respondents:

1. Lower (P1-P2)
2. Middle (P3-P4)
3. Upper primary (P5-P7)
4. Other (for community members and other category targeted for FGD)

6. What is the role of the senior woman teacher in the management of menstrual hygiene?

7. What are the challenges that you face in accessing support in the management of menstrual hygiene in school?
  
8. What do you think the role of parents should be in the management of menstrual hygiene?
  
9. What do you think the role of school should be in the management of menstrual hygiene?
  
10. In case you need menstrual hygiene materials, where do you get them outside the school?
  
11. What challenges do you face in accessing menstrual hygiene materials outside the school?
  
12. What do you think is the sustainable way of managing menstrual hygiene for girl child?
  
13. Any other comments?

**Name of Interviewer:** .....

**Name of Organization:** .....

**Signature:** .....

**Date:** .....