



Menstrual hygiene management in schools in South Asia



Overview

The Government officially supports the provision of: gender-appropriate water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities in both primary and secondary schools; menstrual hygiene management (MHM) guidance for students and teachers; and, facilities for the supply and disposal of MHM materials.

However, challenges remain: there are insufficient gender-separate school toilets as well as widespread poor toilet operations and maintenance (O&M). The Bangladesh National Hygiene Baseline Survey (BNHBS) has revealed limited knowledge among girls about menstruation and a lack of suitable facilities, which are having a combined impact on girls' education.

Encouragingly, MHM is being integrated into WASH in Schools (WinS), adolescent health, nutrition and education sector programmes. And an inter-sectoral approach is being promoted through the MHM Platform, coordinated by Simavi, to harmonise efforts, including the celebration of Menstrual Hygiene Day.

Key take-aways

Coordination is key

The MHM Platform is helping to coordinate non-governmental organisation (NGO) interventions to support implementation and scale up efforts. There is potential for a wider scope for the platform to include all the actors in the country including government.

From pilots to scale

The Government is improving WASH facilities for secondary schools and MHM education, supported by implementing agencies. School leadership, teachers and parents are providing resources for a MHM-supportive environment.

From substitution to backstopping

Many teachers still lack the confidence to teach MHM. NGOs have often filled that role and provided learning resources. Efforts are underway to improve the knowledge and capacity of teachers to deliver this information themselves.

40% of girls miss approximately three school-days during menstruation and one-third perceive that menstrual problems interfere with their school performance. (BNHBS, 2014)

WinS overview

Water availability

76% of primary schools and 94% of secondary schools have access. (BNHBS, 2014)

Sanitation availability

80% of primary schools and 98% of secondary schools have functional, improved toilet facilities, but of these, only 41% of primary and 57% of secondary school facilities were lockable. 22% of schools have functional but unlockable gender-separate toilets. (BNHBS, 2014)

Toilet to schoolgirl ratio (WHO standard = 1:25)

1:187

(Ritu Baseline study, Simavi, 2017)

Other key issues

Handwashing: only 30% of primary school and 42% of secondary school toilets had both water and soap available within nine metres. (BNHBS, 2014)

MHM overview

Current evidence and key findings

MHM was included in the first nationally representative BNHBS (2014), which found:

- 10% of girls use a disposable pad and 86% use old cloths.
- 6% received MHM education at school.
- 36% heard about MHM before menarche. Girls are often left to read biological information in textbooks by themselves.
- 86% do not change their sanitary protection while at school, mostly because of having no proper changing room.
- 44% of schools had waste disposal locations; but only 7% of pupils used them.

The Ritu Baseline Study (2017) found that:

- 76% of girls avoid physical exercise during menstruation; 68% avoid being near men and boys; 96% avoid religious activities; 59% avoid 'white' foods such as banana, egg, milk, and 53% avoid sour foods.
- 32% of menstruating girls do not use the toilet at school when on their period.

Educational materials

MHM is not adequately articulated in the national curriculum. Teaching and learning materials, developed by NGOs and other agencies, have been piloted in primary and secondary schools, health and youth clubs.

The MHM Platform and Ministry of Education (MoE) are liaising with teacher training institutes and NCTB to help teachers promote MHM in the classroom.

MHM overview *continued*

Policies Standards Guidelines Legal frameworks	<p>National Education Policy (2010) acknowledges that gender-separate school toilets can reduce dropout rates.</p> <hr/> <p>National Standard of WinS (DPHE, 2011) recognises the need for toilets and washstands for menstrual hygiene in promoting gender equality.</p> <hr/> <p>In 2015, MoE instructed secondary schools, madrassas and other educational institutions to provide gender-separate, improved toilets; soap, water and waste bins; and to appoint female teachers to educate girls on MHM.</p> <hr/> <p>The Government's Water and Sanitation Sector Development Plan (2011-25) sets out the need for gender-appropriate WASH facilities; MHM guidance for students and teachers; and the provision for the supply and disposal of MHM materials.</p> <hr/> <p>The Government's <i>Seventh Five-Year Plan</i> recognises the importance of inclusive and separate toilets for girls in schools with adequate facilities for sanitary pads and cleansing materials.</p>
MHM in schools practice	<p>WinS interventions aim to strengthen the capacity of Student Brigades/Councils and School Management Committees (SMCs) to promote MHM and general hygiene.</p> <hr/> <p>MHM in schools is a key component of United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Ending Child Marriage project.</p> <hr/> <p>Some schools have a hygiene corner with emergency sanitary supplies.</p> <hr/> <p>In a trial by WaterAid, selected schools deposit around 15-20% of the total cost of any WinS project, for O&M of those facilities.</p> <hr/> <p>Generation Breakthrough, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) adolescents and youth project, delivers MHM training to secondary school teachers.</p> <hr/> <p>Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) has produced biodegradable pads since 1999, which health volunteers sell at low cost door to door.</p> <hr/> <p>UNICEF, WaterAid and NGO partners have implemented WinS models that accommodate the needs of adolescent girls with a disability.</p> <hr/> <p>The Ritu Programme, led by Simavi, combines sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and WASH interventions in schools and communities for improved menstrual hygiene.</p>
MHM in EMIS	<p>Education Management Information System (EMIS) in primary and secondary schools track the availability of drinking water and number of toilets per school. MHM is not included.</p>
Coordination platforms/mechanisms	<p>The MHM Platform involves four sectors – SRHR, WASH, education and business – and aims to share information, harmonise efforts, practise collective advocacy and strengthen capacity building tools.</p> <hr/> <p>MHM is included in the Disbursement Linked Indicators for the 4th Adolescent Health, Nutrition and Education sector programme supported by the World Bank.</p>

MHM journey in Bangladesh: Key steps

- 2003** UNICEF pilots MHM in secondary schools under a UK Department for International Development-supported project.
- Primary Education Development Program (PEDP)-II is approved with WinS as a component.
- 2005** WaterAid and partners develop an MHM training package for urban and rural contexts.
- 2006** UNICEF established a 'SaniMart' in a Dhaka slum, with adolescent girls producing and selling sanitary products.
- 2012** School WASH National Standards approved.
- 2014** Menstrual Hygiene Day celebrated in Bangladesh for the first time.
- 2015** MoE instructs all secondary schools, madrassas and other educational institutions to address MHM.
- 2016** National and international organisations and private companies lobby the MoE to incorporate MHM in the National Curriculum and Text Book Board.
- 2016-17** The WASH component of the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education's PEDP incorporates elements of MHM.
- 2017** UNICEF, NGOs and others call on MoE to promote MHM as part of the 2017 Menstrual Hygiene Day celebrations. Sector consultations are being held on the Sustainable Development Goals baseline for WinS in Bangladesh.

Coming up

WaterAid Bangladesh and UNICEF, in collaboration with Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, will conduct BNHBS 2018, which will include MHM in schools.

A new tool developed by Bloomberg School of Public Health and icddr,b aims at measuring girls' self-efficacy for MHM.

Agencies including UNICEF, WaterAid, CARE, PLAN International and Practical Action are supporting the drafting of O&M Guidelines for Secondary School WASH Facilities in collaboration with Directorate of Primary Education, Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, Department of Public Health Engineering, SMCs and teachers.

The Government's School Learning Improvement Plan fund will be increased in 2018 with a dedicated budget for O&M of school WASH facilities in the 4th PEDP.

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