



Menstrual hygiene management in schools in South Asia



Overview

Nepal has a good track record of improving menstrual hygiene management (MHM) facilities, increasing access to affordable and hygienic sanitary materials, delivering creative awareness campaigns and policy advocacy, and developing the capacity of local stakeholders to promote MHM. Nevertheless, Operations and maintenance (O&M) of water, sanitation and hygiene in schools (WinS) remains challenging.

MHM and WinS approaches in project schools are being used by Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) to help develop a programmatic approach that works at scale. The Government is finalising a Dignified Menstruation Policy. An MHM Practitioners' Alliance provides cross-sector coordination. Improving the curriculum and teacher capacity, as well as further learning and engagement opportunities for older generations of women, is needed.

Key take-aways

A more coordinated approach to MHM, across sectors, has been developed through initiatives such as MH Day.

NGOs and others have a track-record of creative campaigns to challenge myths and shame around menstruation.

Going beyond the girl to support mothers, other relatives, teachers and school staff on positive social norms for MHM is essential to addressing girls' needs.

Recent innovations have been tested to improve accountability for MHM through monitoring gender-friendly WinS services using Community Score Cards.

Girls prefer to learn about MHM from females, but remote schools have few female teachers or staff. Teachers often lack confidence and training on MHM.

WinS overview

Water availability

78% of schools have water supply facilities (Department of Education (DoE), Education Management Information System (EMIS), 2015/16).

Sanitation availability

82% Access to toilet facilities in schools is 82%. Only 69% schools have separate toilets for girls (EMIS 2015/16).

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

1:69 (EMIS 2014/15). The Government committed to every school having one gender-separated toilet for every 50 girls by 2017. WaterAid (2016) found that the ratio was 1:115 in Sindhuli, 1:170 in Udaypur and 1:74 in Siraha.

Other key issues

The Government provides resources for the construction of WinS ; and School Management Committees (SMCs) are responsible for O&M. Few schools have regularly maintained, clean, private, gender and age- segregated toilet facilities with a consistent water supply.

O&M are poor and adequate waste disposal solutions are rare. Replacement of consumables is a challenge.

MHM overview

Current evidence and key findings

On average, 15% of female adolescents and youths aged 10-24 in Nepal use a sanitary pad and 84% use a cloth (MoH, 2012; MoH et al 2011). Menstruation is associated with disease, bacteria, decay and dirt.

Most girls get information and support on menstruation from their mothers, who often perpetuate taboos (WaterAid 2009, 2015; USAID and NFCC, 2015).

In many areas menstruating women (particularly those from certain castes) cannot/ do not use toilets; visit temples or worship; bathe; touch cows; consume milk products; look in mirrors; touch plants. Chhaupadi (isolation outside the home during menstruation) persists in the mid and far west region of Nepal, despite an official ban.

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2016) found that 15% of girls in WinS programme schools and 22% in non-WinS programme schools had missed a whole day of school. Reasons include pain, fear of leakage, and need to change materials.

UNICEF (2013) found that 53% of girls changed their sanitary pad/cloths at school and took waste home in plastic bags. 47% threw dirty pads into rivers or bushes. Girls did not use toilets for urination during menstruation due to fear of leaving blood marks.

Incinerators are available in some schools under the DoE programme, or supplied by NGOs (WaterAid, UNICEF, Red Cross, ENPHO, KIRDARC and others).

Supply of disposable pads is unreliable, and the cost is prohibitive for many. Reusable pads and cloths are not dried in sunlight due to shame.

MHM overview *continued*

Educational materials

Girls receive education on menstruation through hygiene education. Classes 6-9 receive MHM and sexual and reproductive health (SRH) classes. Girls may not receive age-appropriate information before reaching menarche. Textbooks offer no advice on menstrual hygiene, preparing sanitary pads or disposal of used pads.

A new MHM curriculum and training package has been developed under DoE and Department of Health and piloted (NFCC, WaterAid, USAID, VSO, in districts: *Integrating Menstrual Hygiene Management into School Health Program in 201*).

Policies Standards Guidelines Legal frameworks

The *Water Supply and Sanitation Ministry Development Plan* and the *National Master Plan for Hygiene and Sanitation* prioritise toilet construction rather than MHM WASH facilities. However, the master plan refers to WinS services that are child, disabled and gender friendly.

The draft *National Strategy on Adolescent SRH* (2015) calls for MHM components to be integrated with SRH and education on menstrual health (MH), and increased access to hygiene products.

The *School Sector Development Plan* (2016-2023) aims to improve girls' attendance by fulfilling MHM-related needs.

The *Total Sanitation Guideline 2017* recognizes menstruation as a natural process and includes MHM-friendly WASH services in community, schools and institutions.

The *School Sector Development Plan* (2016-2023) aims to improve girls' attendance by fulfilling MHM-related needs.

DoE prepared forthcoming WinS Guidelines which focus on MHM indicators.

A Dignified Menstruation Policy is under development.

MHM in schools practice

WaterAid and partners have demonstrated MHM-adapted changing rooms and gender-segregated WASH facilities, where toilets are gender-separated and girls' toilets have a locking door, nearby handwashing station, and access to an incinerator for MHM material disposal. Sanitary pads are supplied and an O&M regime established.

NGOs teach women and girls to make reusable cloth pads, which can then be made available in schools.

Federation of Drinking Water and Sanitation Users Nepal (FED-WASUN) is working with district authorities to monitor gender-appropriate WinS services using Community Score Cards, so SMCs can make evidence-based demands for more funds.

MHM in EMIS

EMIS has data on WASH in schools (e.g. separate toilets for girls) but no MHM data.

Coordination platforms/mechanisms

MHM Practitioners' Alliance is a network of 40 organisations, established in 2017. UNICEF, World Food Programme, WaterAid Nepal and others are members of the WASH in Schools Task Force to integrate the WASH agenda into the education sector.

MHM journey in Nepal

- 2000** School Sanitation and Hygiene Education Guideline (GON, UNICEF and CODEF).
- 2005** Government bans the practice of Chhaupadi.
- 2008** WaterAid launches *Breaking the Silence* campaign to challenge myths and shame around menstruation.
- 2009** WaterAid report on absenteeism of schoolgirls during menstruation.
- 2010** National Sanitation and Hygiene Master Plan requires all schools to have Child, gender and disability (CGD)-friendly WASH facilities. National framework of child friendly school standards published.
- 2011** At the South Asian Conference on Sanitation (SACOSAN), the Government commits to ensuring every school will have functioning, child-friendly, gender-separated toilets, with facilities for MHM.
Alternate Design Option of Child, Gender, Differently-abled Friendly School Toilet, DOE/GON, UNICEF, CODEF
- 2015** Draft national strategy on adolescent SRH, with attention to MHM.
The '4 Days of Fun' campaign promotes good MHM, reaching more than 10,000 girls.
- 2016** School Sector Development Plan 2016-2023 emphasises the importance of MHM in schools.
- 2017** Chhaupadi is criminalised.
Government departments coordinate to agree MHM training package that integrates MHM into the school health programme.

Coming up

Endorsement of the Dignified Menstruation Policy and other draft policies relating to adolescents' health and wellbeing.

Opportunities to hold MHM Practitioners' Alliance meetings outside Kathmandu to share learning inside Nepal and across the region.

References

- British Nepal Medical Trust (2015) *A Report on Menstrual Hygiene Management Project in Morang, Nepal*
- Krishna Galli, Pulchowk Lalitpur (2017) *Scoping Review and Preliminary Mapping Menstrual Health and Hygiene Management in Nepal* Population Services International Nepal and Maverick Collective
- Government of Nepal, UNICEF and CODEF (2000) *School Sanitation and Hygiene Education Guideline*. MoH (2012) *Nepal Adolescents and Youth Survey 2010/11*
- MoH, New ERA and ICF International Inc. (2012) *Nepal Demographic and Health Survey 2011*
- NFCC, WaterAid, USAID, VSO (2015), *Integrating menstrual hygiene management into school health programme 2015*
- Sapkota D., Sharma D., Budhathoki, S.S., Khanal, V.K., and H.P. Pokharel. (2013) *Knowledge and Practices Regarding Menstruation among School Going Adolescents of Rural Nepal*, Journal of Kathmandu Medical College. 2(3):122-8
- UNICEF (2016) *Research on Analysis of Menstrual Hygiene Practices in Nepal: The Role of WASH in Schools Programme for Girls Education*
- UNICEF and Columbia University (2013) *Menstrual hygiene management among adolescent schoolgirls. WASH in Schools Empowers Girls' Education: Menstrual Hygiene Management in Schools Virtual Conference*
- USAID, NFCC and Beyond Nepal (2015) *Menstrual Knowledge, Belief and Practice of Adolescent School Girls in Kathmandu Valley*
- WaterAid (2009) *Is Menstrual Hygiene And Management An Issue For Adolescent School Girls? A Comparative Study of Four Schools in Different Settings of Nepal*
- WaterAid (2015a) *Formative Research on Menstrual Hygiene Management in Udaypur and Sindhuli Districts of Nepal: Final Report*
- WaterAid (2015b) *Ensuring Girls Rights through School based WASH and Improved Menstrual Hygiene Management in Nepal, Baseline Survey Report*
- WaterAid, USAID and NFCC (2015) *Assessment Study on Chhaupadi in Nepal: Towards a Harm Reduction Strategy*



This material has been funded by UK aid from the Department for International Development (DFID). However, the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the Department's official policies.