

Symposium on Menstrual Health and Hygiene in West and Central Africa

May 24-27, 2021

Concept note

BACKGROUND

Menstrual health and hygiene (MHH) are integral to the realization of girls' and women's rights. In order to manage their menstrual experiences safely and with dignity, it is imperative that girls and women have access to reliable, accurate and comprehensive information, adequate sanitation facilities, menstrual products of their choice, and school and family environments that are emotionally and physically supportive.

In this context, and to kick start systematic collaboration on MHH in the region, UNICEF and UNFPA are organizing a series of events on MHH. These events are organized in the framework of the Muskoka French Funds, and in partnership with UNESCO and WSSCC. The cross-cutting nature of this issue calls for the mobilization of all actors in West and Central Africa to unite and intensify their work in the field of MHH by designing, implementing and evaluating holistic and multisectoral interventions.

A first virtual meeting was organized on the occasion of International Girls' Day (11 October) with the objective of highlighting the MHH-related barriers faced by adolescent girls and women in the region and to share programming experiences amongst countries where MHH interventions are being implemented. The meeting brought together more than 100 participants from different organizations (United Nations agencies, NGOs, Universities, governmental cooperation and development agencies). The exchanges allowed for an initial assessment of the main issues of regional advocacy as well as the themes to be explored during the symposium. Among the main advocacy themes that emerged were the recognition of MHH as a public health issue; access to affordable/free sanitary protection; the integration of MHH in school programmes; and finally, the importance of MHH as a means of promoting the rights and empowerment of girls and women. The event also marked the start of a regional digital communication campaign to address MHH-related taboos and encourage discussions on MHH in the whole region, building up to a virtual symposium that will be held in May 2021.

This virtual symposium will bring together for 4 half-days with the participation of different actors working on MHH at the regional level and will build on the discussions and key messages that emerged from the meeting on October 11, as well as on the regional digital communication campaign in order to collectively identify ways to strengthen MHH in the region.

OBJECTIVES

- Create a space for strategic reflection and sharing of knowledge and experiences among various stakeholders (governments, donors, private sector, CSOs, etc.) on MHH in West and Central Africa;
- Facilitate partnerships and synergies at different levels and between different sectors; and
- Agree on common guiding principles and priorities for advancing MHH in West and Central Africa.

EXPECTED RESULTS

- Strengthened commitment and leadership of governments in the region on MHH;
- Creation of a network of partners working together on MHH in the region;
- Formulation of a joint statement of advocacy and/or commitment by different stakeholders

GUIDING PRINCIPLES



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- Ensure strong involvement of national governments and actors;
- Promote a gender-transformative approach in MHH interventions and actions and programs;
- Ensure the involvement of a diverse group of stakeholders;
- Guarantee the active participation of youth (boys and girls);
- Emphasize the cross-cutting nature of MHH;
- Encourage discussions on strengthening linkages between SRH and MHH.

FORMAT

The symposium will be proposed entirely online and will be organized along three main axes (see figure below for more information):

- The first axis corresponds to the plenary sessions, during which transversal topics of interest to all MHH actors/themes will be discussed.
- The second axis is made up of thematic sessions where more targeted exchanges will be proposed on the key elements of the MHH programs. Four interrelated thematic blocks will be discussed, including: multisectoral collaboration, financing and partnerships, key programmatic approaches and interventions, and research, monitoring and evaluation. Additional sessions will also be dedicated to topics of particular interest (such as MHH in contexts of crises).
- The third axis offers a virtual exhibition space, where different actors will be able to present their work on MHH throughout the symposium.

The symposium will be held entirely online.

ORGANIZATIONS AND KEY PEOPLE TO TARGET/INVITE:

The symposium will involve government and civil society partners, regional and global research institutions, the private sector, as well as various technical and financial partners working in the region in the areas of health, education, WASH, communication, child protection, emergencies, social policy and gender.

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SYMPOSIUM OVERVIEW

Plenary

Topics: 1) MHH, a multisectoral theme requiring an integrated approach; 2) Centering adolescents in MHH programming, 3) The scaling up of MHH

Theme 1: A Multisectoral Approach to MHH Programming

Objective: to highlight the importance of multi-sectoral collaboration, highlight key areas of multi-sectoral collaboration, and highlight what works, what doesn't work, or what needs further discussion

Sub-themes: Integration of MHH in adolescent health and education sectors and in public policies and national strategies

Theme 2: Programmatic Interventions

Objective: understand/identify how to build efficient* and innovative programming models.

Sub-themes :

- Knowledge and skills in school and out-of-school contexts
- Interventions on beliefs, perceptions and social norms
- Facilities and services adapted to MHH
- Access to protective equipment
- MHH in crisis contexts

* Effective = Principles of scale (including institutionalization), equity, and sustainability

Theme 3: Financing and Partnerships

Objective : Understand how to broaden the financial envelope for MHH interventions and position MHH to attract funding flows.

Sub-themes :

- Integrating MHH into traditional financing mechanisms
- Innovative financing
- The cost of MHH interventions

Theme 4: Research, Monitoring, and Evaluation

Objective : Define strategic directions to strengthen regional research and database to inform the design and implementation of MHH programs.

Sub-themes:

- Existing research on MHH in West and Central Africa
- M&E Tools

Virtual Exhibitions

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PROVISIONAL AGENDA *(more details will follow as soon as sessions are finalized)*

Time	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4
09.00- 10.30	Opening Remarks Plenary Session	Plenary Session	Session thématique 2 : Approches et interventions programmatiques (suite)	Session thématique 4 : Recherche, suivi et évaluation
10.30 – 11.00	Break/Parallel Exhibition	Break/Parallel Exhibition	Break/Parallel Exhibition	Break/Parallel Exhibition
11.00 – 12.30	Thematic Session 1: Multi-sectoral collaboration	Thematic Session 2: Programmatic approaches and interventions	Thematic Session 3: Financing and Partnerships	Plenary Session Closing Remarks
12.30 – 13.30	Additional sessions of interest	Additional sessions of interest	Additional sessions of interest	