

BASELINE SURVEY REPORT ON MENSTRUAL HYGIENE MANAGEMENT

*Conducted in Sengerema, Chato, Magu, Siha, Babati, Karatu,
Njombe and Mufindi districts*

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

FGD Focus Group Discussion

IDI In-depth Interview

MDG Millennium Development Goals

MHM Menstrual Hygiene Management

SMC School Management Committee

SSHE School Sanitation and Hygiene Education

SWASH School Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

UNICEF United Nations Children's Fund

WASH Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

WHO World Health Organisation

WSSCC Water Supply and Sanitation Collaboration Council

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SNV implements School girls Menstrual Hygiene Management project in eight districts of Tanzania named ,Chato,Magu,Sengerema,Karatu, Babati, Siha, Njombe and Mufindi Districts. The projects overall objective is to demonstrate a Social Marketing model whereby Private Sectors and micro and small enterprise actions will be facilitated to impact on the social sphere through Inclusive Business Approach to address a problem affecting adolescent girls in schools in society. The project planned to conduct a series of baseline surveys for impact, evaluation and sustainability checks of the project.

This report presents findings of the baseline survey of School girls Menstrual Hygiene Management conducted in the aforementioned eight rural districts of Tanzania. The main objective of this survey was to assess the understanding of MHM issues to school girls, teachers, parents and school committees, looking on the factors affecting menstruating girls at schools including effects of unimproved MHM to girls including low class concentration and dropping. Moreover, to see if school offers a friendly environment to menstruating girls. By Understanding various barriers affecting girls at school will help to improve the girls' performance in rural schools.

Menstrual hygiene is fundamental to the dignity and wellbeing of women and girls and an important part of basic hygiene, sanitation and reproductive health services for which every woman and girl has a right. However, menstruation is too often seen as a taboo, with many negative cultural attitudes associated with it, including the idea that menstruating women and girls are 'contaminated', 'dirty' and 'impure'. According to (WSSCC 2012), every day, 300 million women including school girls experience menstrual flow.

Poor menstrual health management (MHM) in schools has been shown to worry and humiliate adolescent girls and contribute to monthly absenteeism leading to poor performance in schools (UNICEF, 2010; WaterAid, 2009; Lidonde, 2005);. UNICEF (2010) stresses the importance of school toilets which are built to accommodate menstruating girls' specific needs for privacy, space, washing facilities and correct disposal or cleaning of menstrual pads. An environment where these hygienic needs are met can lead to improved dignity and attendance, thus improving girls' education and consequently the development of a country.

Some cultural beliefs about menstruation reinforce gender inequities and have negative impact on the dignity, health and education of women and girls. A number of researches have been conducted and

proved that lack of sufficiency knowledge on MHM issues is the major causes of all those challenges faced by school girls during their menstruation.

The current understanding is that menstruation causes girls to be absent from school, and that continued absence leads to dropout and attrition. Studies have shown that girls miss school during their menses, especially when the school lacks WASH facilities necessary to maintain hygiene (Sommer, 2010).

The survey findings show that:

✚ **82% of adolescence girls lack sufficient knowledge about their body changes and especially on how they can handle and manage themselves during menstruation.**

This ignorance affects girls who need to be supported and guided during the adolescence stage to rescue them from getting into risk of dropping out of school and poor performance. Risky behaviours were mentioned by interviewed girls who like to use disposable sanitary pads. Since they lack financial support from their families, they decide to find other alternative sources of getting money such as engaging in sexual acts to get money to purchase disposable sanitary pads from shops. (*More research is required to determine the extent of this problematic issue and solutions must be drawn to eliminate such behaviours*).

✚ **Inadequate, poor and unsafe MH facilities at schools.** In all eight districts, 98% of the visited schools did not have sufficient SWASH facilities including water, changing/resting rooms for privacy and soap. The available SWASH facilities were in bad condition which caused stress and pains to school girls during the menstrual period e.g . iIn the focus group discussions, girls revealed that, during menstruation they usually feel like they smell bad similar to a rotten egg due to the absence of appropriate facilities at schools and home places hence feeling ashamed, embarrassed and restricted. They hence decide to isolate themselves from others by staying at home throughout the menstrual period without attending school. 70% of the interviewed girls revealed that using disposable sanitary pads will relieve them of those stigmas.

✚ **Poor waste management hygienic disposal of used rags and sanitary pads.** It was revealed by school teachers and school girls that, they usually drop used materials in the latrines and sometimes carry them home in their school bags to dispose of them making their bags and even exercise books to smell bad. Girls also mentioned that boys like to check their bags and if they find them there, they tease/embarrass them.

✚ **Disposable Sanitary pads are not affordable and accessed easily at rural areas.** (*It was thought that only sanitary pads producers could regulate the prices but the study revealed that retailers were the ones who steer the prices at rural areas*) Low demand; transport and poor supply system were mentioned as major reasons. 84% of the interviewed school

menstruating girls use rags in managing their menstrual bleeding including pieces of dresses, or scraps of old towels or blankets, most of the girls who use these materials seem not to be happy with the type of materials they used as they mentioned them to be ineffective as blood leaks and stains their clothes. Commercial disposable sanitary pads are used primarily among girls who get financial support from their parents.

- ✚ **Menstrual products for emergency are not within schools priorities;** 80% of the interviewed School committees and school teachers revealed that they had never planned and allocated the budget for MHM i.e disposable sanitary pads for emergency, dust bins and incinerators in their schools.
- ✚ **Parents do not provide enough education on MHM to their daughters;** this has been associated with shame and silence pervading the issue of menstruation within the family and the community at large has never discussed the agenda. For instance, in Mufindi district, some of the men do prohibit their wives not to discuss with their children on issues of menstruation and when found discussing; they could be punished, or viewed as having hidden agenda.
- ✚ **Parents are ready to see their girls use appropriate and affordable disposable sanitary pads.** Approximately 60% responded that they would like to see their girls use appropriate and affordable disposable sanitary pads for the reason that, they would like to see them comfortable during their menstruation, completing their studies, performing well and not engaging in risky sexual behaviour for favours. Most of the parents said that they would support their children with disposable sanitary pads only if the price will be lowered to between Tsh. 500 to Tsh. 800 Tsh, equivalent to 0.3\$-0.5\$.
- ✚ **Menstruation problems are highly reinforced by cultural, religious, traditions, local customs and taboos concerning menstruation.** i.e some of the children were taught not to use disposable sanitary pads as it brings cancers and if the used materials disposed of in open spaces where people can see them, will be used for witchcraft and girls failing to conceive or will die, mother or father cannot dialogue with their children about MH issues and if will do so, they could die or some were taught to have sex when they feel pain during their menstruation.
- ✚ **Teachers are not comfortable in teaching MHM;** they feel shy and most of them worry about Stigma/ Culture and norms around MHM issues hence, failing to provide psycho-social support for menstruating girls.
- ✚ **Menstrual hygiene issues has been left behind at all levels hence affecting school girls both from rural and urban** i.e girls told menstrual hygiene problems and other factors

including pregnancy had promoted the dropout rate from school. These were proved by School teachers and committees who said that, girl's situation is worse; they really need strong support on reproductive and menstrual issues. The situation of girls dropping out is of high level, whereby, from 2011-2013 school girls dropping out was 1808, 1615, 990 and 152 for Magu, Sengerema, Mufindi and Babati districts consecutively.

It was mentioned by school committees and parents that the main causes of the school girls dropping out were pregnancy and early marriages. Villagers and some teachers take advantage of the pupils' inability to purchase sanitary pads by exploiting them into sexual activities, especially at a time when they get accidents (soil their uniform), here is where seduction starts, if they face male teachers or when men discovered the situation.

The school girls also confirmed by said that, they had been engaged into sexual activities while at school to get money for buying their own staffs including disposable sanitary pads as they are too expensive (*lack of purchasing power due to poverty*) as **one pack ranges from 1.5 \$ – 2.5 \$.**

In order to improve the situation the following key recommendations emerged from the study

- ✚ An enabling environment has to be created to provide school girls with hygienic sanitary wears and private space to manage their menstrual health. This can be done by providing adequate improved school WASH facilities including MHM facilities of 'acceptable quality and quantity including availability of water for personal hygiene and for washing re-usable sanitary changing/resting room, latrines, emergency sanitary protection materials and disposal units.
- ✚ Ensuring the accessibility of low cost ecological disposable sanitary pads for rural school girls that can enable girls to feel comfortable during class hours for several hours without staining their uniforms.
- ✚ School committees and councils should have a sustainability plan for improving MHM at school.
- ✚ Advocate and promote MHM education to girls and boys before and after reaching the age of puberty through school programs.
- ✚ Improve the level of MHM knowledge teaching practices among teachers by sensitizing and training them on MHM issues.
- ✚ Community engagement i.e parents, cultural and religious leaders, both men and women and other stakeholders on MHM issues through sensitization meetings, dialogues, promotions, theatres and social Medias.

- ✚ Strengthening the link and relationship between health teachers/matrons and students through focus group discussions, dialogues, establishment of menstrual hygiene clubs, arrangement of exchange visits, competitions and promotions to create awareness to break the silence on MHM issues.
- ✚ Awareness creation, promotion of positive behaviour change on menstruation hygiene issues amongst parents, actors, partners and policy-makers is inevitable.
- ✚ Development and dissemination of Information, Education and Communication materials specific to menstrual hygiene that can create awareness and break stigma around menstruation.

2.0 BACKGROUND

In 2009-10 SNV together with other development organizations including Water Aid and UNICEF supported the ministries of Education, Health, Water and Local government to develop and pilot a set of school water, sanitation and hygiene guidelines for Tanzania through a participatory process.

During the implementation period, SNV noted that, School girls have poor Menstrual Hygiene Management. so they decided to conduct two short studies on Menstrual Hygiene Management in Magu and Ukerewe districts, which established among other things that, a considerable number of girls who have reached puberty, do not use appropriate sanitary wear during their monthly menstrual cycle. Low incomes coupled with challenges of accessing proper menstrual products are some of the critical factors which hinder primary school girls to manage their menstrual flow with dignity, and, in safe and hygienic ways. In this regard, female pupils either use improper materials to manage menstrual flow, or/and opt to stay at home and not attend school during the 3-4 days of their menses. Without proper sanitary wear, many girls soil their uniforms and consequently suffer psychologically due to shame and embarrassing attacks from their peers and school-mates. Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) is considered to be one of the contributing factors to poor performance of female pupils and it also influences completion rate among female pupils.

In 2010, UNICEF Tanzania initiated implementation of MHM through a local organisation TWESA in collaboration with Dr. Marni Sommer of Columbia University, Mailman School of Public Health. UNICEF has developed a guidance booklet for girls on getting Growth and Changes was developed to help school girls cope with puberty. However increased awareness on puberty and its dynamics the main challenge remains to be on 'limitation of what can be put in practice in absence of WASH facilities and PADS'¹

¹ Astrid van Agthoven 'Supporting Tanzanian School Girls with their Menstrual Hygiene Management' UNICEF Tanzania WIS WebX seminars Thematic Session II 2012.

In acknowledging, SNV Tanzania decided to contribute to MHM improvement for primary school girls through a Menstrual Hygiene Management project which was to be conducted in eight districts across Tanzania. This study was conducted to generate baseline data for the project.

2.1 Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study is to generate information on needs and requirements of school girls so as to enable the producer /importers of sanitary pads to design a cost efficient appropriate sanitary pack for school girls. This study reviews amongst other issues:

- ✚ WASH infrastructure in schools
- ✚ Socio-cultural beliefs and taboos surrounding menstruation
- ✚ Girls' parents and schools committees and health teachers understanding and knowledge of menstruation
- ✚ Girls Interpersonal relationships and psycho-social support
- ✚ Current menstrual hygiene practices in schools
- ✚ Teaching of puberty and MH issues in schools
- ✚ Recommendations for better menstrual hygiene management.

2.2 Data Collection Methods

Data collection methods used were: Key informant interviews (KIIs) and Focussed Group Discussions (FGDs) of in-school girls and In-depth Interviews (IDIs) of school committees, key-informant interviews (KIIs) of teachers, school committees and parent's school administrators; and school observations. The survey were conducted in eight Districts: Serengema , Chato, Magu, Njombe,Iringa, Karatu and Babati in rural Tanzania. The table below indicates the breakdown of the groups produced the information and method used.

Table 1 Sample sizes

TOOLS	SAMPLE	DESCRIPTION
Questionnairefor School Girls (Key informant interview + Focus Group Discussion)	Key informants interview: 15 girls in total :60 per district Focus Group Discussion: 10 girls; 40 per	It focused on girls' experiences in general. Girls discussed feelings, challenges and societal beliefs regarding menstruation and MHM at home and school. They also discussed ways that these challenges can be overcome

	district.	
Questionnaire for; 5 Health Teachers + 2 Matrons+ 2 Science teachers +3 LGAs & 3School Committee representatives (key informant interview + Focus Group Discussion)	FGD (15 per district) key informant interview; 10 per district-randomly	Focused on the school's WASH facilities, Interviews addressed the school curriculum; female students were taught about health, puberty and menstruation. KIIs also focused on how teachers felt about discussing menstruation, and what teachers believed to be the challenges facing menstruating girls. School sanitation facilities including MHM facilities services and products, health & MHM education, disposal facilities, guidance & counselling, cultural beliefs, opinions and recommendations.
Questionnaire for Parents (Men + women) (A middle and lower income classes) Focus Group Discussion + in-depth interview.	In-depth interview (IDIs) 10 parents from each school (40 per district)	Knowledge on MHM issues, understanding, problems/challenges and solutions, means of School Girls support on managing Menstrual flow, voices on taboos related to menses, interpersonal relations, what they preferred in terms of MHM products cost, design, payment modality and size etc.

Before conduction of the survey, supervisors from districts were trained on Data collection from each district. All had common experience in research and were fluent in Swahili. IDIs and FGD questionnaires were in English and then translated into Swahili by project staff .To ensure their privacy; girls were selected at each school with the help of a health teacher, often the matron and head mistress. In the communities, village leaders and often village influential persons were used to accompany the data collector at each house hold.

A total of 480 girls aged 11-19 participated. 384 school committees including health teachers, matrons', patrons, head teachers and social teachers participated.320 parents and 96 sanitary pads suppliers were participated.

The confidentiality of the research was emphasized and the purpose of the study was always shared with the participants in the beginning of the interviews. The interviewees were given a chance to select what /which questions they should answer/respond for them to be free on providing the correct answers, were not required to mention their names and also were allowed to finish the interview at any time. The data collection was successfully completed in all districts and the response rate was excellent.

2.3 Data analysis

All questionnaires were checked by supervisors in the field before leaving each village to ensure they were completed fully and correctly. Questionnaire data was then entered into SPSS whereby, entry errors identified and corrected systematically until no transcription/entry errors remained. Analysis was then undertaken using SPSS in line with Excel sheet. The first round of tabulations provided simple frequency tables. Guidance on more complex analysis was also provided by the team supervisor

SUMMARY OF THE FINDING

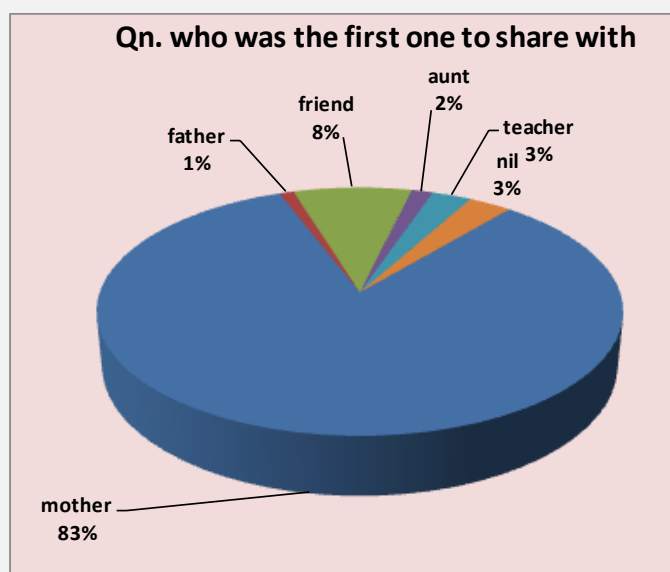
3.0 SCHOOL GIRLS

3.1 Awareness information and communication

The survey indicated that 92% of the interviewed School girls had basic knowledge on puberty issues; they only know the first stage of body changes but limited knowledge on how to handle and manage themselves during the adolescence stage. The remaining 8% of the respondents said, they do not have basic knowledge on puberty issues. Results also indicate that 82% of the respondents lack sufficient knowledge and information about menstruation.

However the survey indicated that 70% of the respondents had received information about menstruation after getting menarche. Moreover, it was observed that behaviour change and communication materials on MHM are not available in schools to support School Girls understand MHM issues.

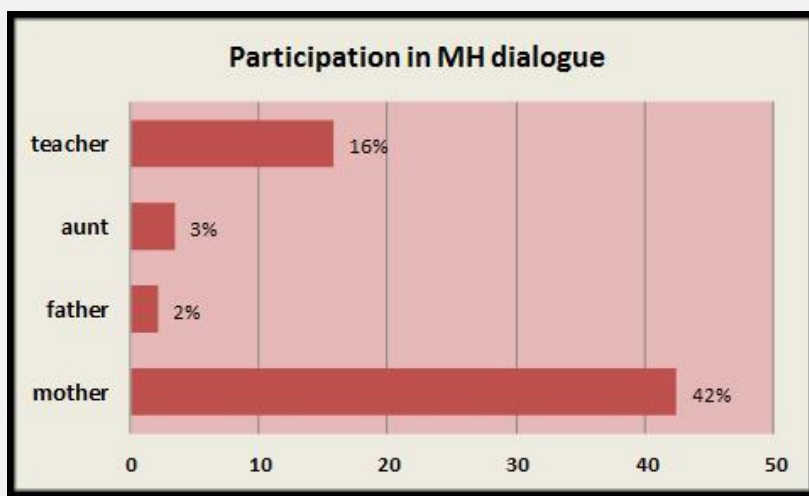
Chart 3.1: Information sharing



86% of school girls indicated that, when they attained menarche the first person to inform was their mother and not father as they felt most comfortable with their mothers because they have experienced the same situation as **chart 3.1 above shows**. Others informed their friends due to limited closeness to their parents. For those who informed their teachers, they said that, they felt

more comfortable talking with their female teachers because they were perceived to be more understanding and sympathetic to their needs. They also mentioned that when they told teachers about their problems, they were always told go home without being given any support or advice.

Chart 3.2 Participation on MH dialogues



77% of Schools girls had participated in menstrual hygiene dialogues, most of them with their mothers and school health teachers as **chart 3.2 above shows**. The main topics discussed were about early pregnancy, HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, cleanliness during menstruation, being careful with boys, sex at an early age and peer pressure at school and home. The most interesting part is that parents only indulge in dialogues with their children only when the children have done something wrong but it is seen as parents do not sit and talk with their children or advise them to help them understand the matter as they grow.

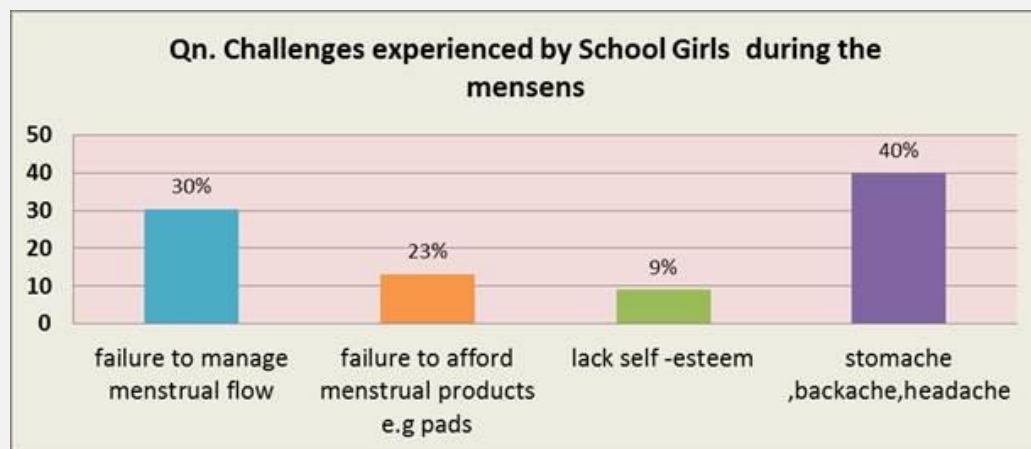
3.2 Challenges faced by girls during the menses

99% of the interviewed girls were menstruating girls, who revealed that they always face many challenges when they are in menstruation. More than 50% said that they always fail to manage well their blood flow and do not afford menstrual pads.

40% experience pains such as stomach-ache, headache and backache making them uncomfortable to stay in class thus losing class time and increasing poor performance leading to dropping out of school. Lack of painkillers and first aid kit at school which could help ease the pain thus helping the girls stay in class as Chart 3.3 below illustrates.

When experiencing the mentioned pains the girls opt to sleeping, taking of warm water/tea, avoid playing in the field, avoid talking to people a lot and others take painkillers if they access them.

Chart 3.3: Challenges face rural School girls during the menses

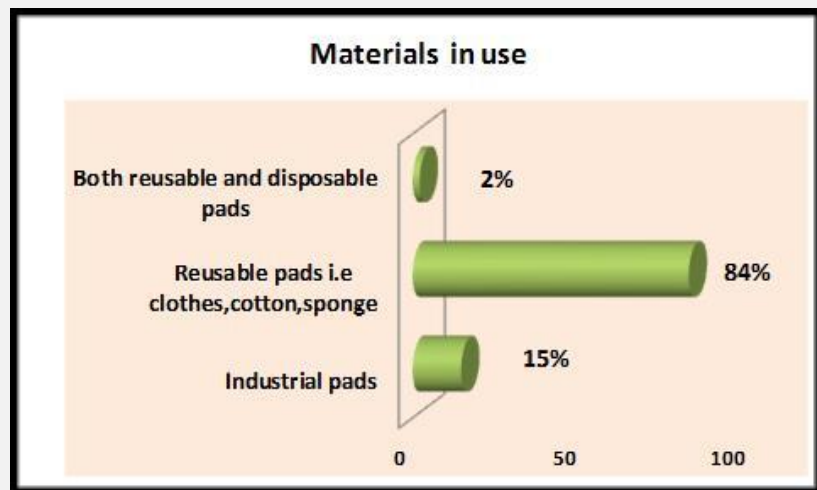


3.3 MHM Practices

Industrial sanitary pads are too expensive for most of the rural families, cannot afford to buy for their children. The cost of one pack ranges from Tsh. 2000 – 3500 equivalent of 1.3\$-2.3\$. Hence, the majority of the interviewed girls use pieces of cloth and occasionally absorbent cotton as sanitary protection material during menstruation. *It is sometimes difficult to get even safe clothes, cotton and sponge to use during menstruation as it is verified in the chart below.*

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Chart 3.4 Absorbent materials used



For those mentioned to use Industrial sanitary pads 72% said they have been provided money by their mothers, 11% fathers and the remaining by friends, sisters and School teachers. For those who mentioned using both reusable and disposable pads indicated that they a few times use pads when they get money but if they do not have money they use rags, and other local materials. Few of them said that, their parents do not like to see them miss classes and they provide them pads to use only when they are at school but when they go back home they use rags.

3.4 School attendance and class concentration

The survey showed that 48% of the interviewed girls miss classes during their menses period. Menstrual hygiene related problems affected 36 to 48 days of absence annually per girl. When their cloth is stained at school, most girls leave class and go home to change. However, 36% stay home during the heavy days. 12% said they didn't come to school at all until when the blood cut off. In focus group discussions in one study, many girls revealed that when they did attend school during menstruation they often performed poorly.

Citation from schools girls:

- **I am not happy with this situation, last month I missed classes for three days when I came back to school I found out mathematics teacher had covered two difficult topics and I don't have any one to take me through -Said Flora from Magu district.**
- **I have been missing two days per each month, each day we have nine class periods' which means that I miss more than 180 class periods. If someone would provide affordable disposable sanitary pads I will convince my parents to support me get them- Saidi Anne from Chato district.**
- **I always feel too much pains during menstruation, my friend told me that they cannot stop until I have sex, said one girls from Magu district**

Girls highlighted menstruation as a major reason for not performing well when they are at school. This is because they miss classes during the menstrual period and also they are unable to concentrate when they remain in the class. In this study, 48% of the interviewed girls mentioned that, they always lose concentration due to the lack of confidence caused by poor sanitary wears as they fear staining their uniform and experience sharp pains i.e stomach ache, headache and back ache.

3.5 Menstrual materials

More than 70% of the interviewed girls said that they would prefer to use disposable sanitary pads when they are at School. 22% said that they want to use pads but they were worried about the quality but if they will if they are assured by the government that pads are safe.. 8% said that they were not ready to use pads even if distributed for free as they were told pads are not safe and will destroy their reproductive system.

For those who had used pads, they mentioned to use 6-10 pieces per month. It also varies as some use pads only when they are at school where they spent one pack per two months. They mentioned that, pads keep them free and make them feel comfortable. Apart from that they can sustain the heavy flow, keep a user very dry and clean and can be used for so long without staining their uniforms, do not scratch and stick on pants hence no embarrassment .

However, pads are not accessible and if they can access them the price is high and their parents cannot afford them. They then proposed the price to be sold between Tsh. 500-800 equivalent to 0.3\$-0.5\$.

For those who preferred local materials i.e rags, ponge and cotton, they said that they are safe to them, very easy to access and cheaper. Some of them can be accessed for free. However, they agreed

that they cannot resist the blood flow; hence they cannot participate in games with them (as sometimes they drop down and this causes embarrassment.). For those reusable materials, they need access to adequate clean and safe water to wash them and a good space and light for drying. In the focus group discussions, girls revealed that rags are often in unhygienic conditions resulting in infections and irritations as they are not properly washed and dried as they lack adequate water, so they usually dry them in secret places, not exposed to sunlight or heat.

They also revealed that, if they were given an opportunity to improve Menstrual Hygiene Management products they would prefer the following design/features

Sanitary pads

- ✚ Should be thin and long
- ✚ Should be designed with only enough cotton in it with no chemicals
- ✚ They should be light in weight
- ✚ Should protect users from bad smell so they should be perfumed
- ✚ They should increase the size
- ✚ They should be available at different sizes
- ✚ They should be of different styles
- ✚ They should be hygienic

Reusable pads

- ✚ Should be designed in such a way that they cannot leak
- ✚ Should be made with quality and clean materials i.e cloths and cotton
- ✚ Material used could be material that can dry well in all weather conditions and easy to clean with a little water.

3.6 Enabling environment for MHM

DeJaeghere (2004, p. 17) says that improving water and sanitation facilities, including the provision of sanitary goods for menstruating girls can be a successful strategy to remove barriers which hamper school attendance among girls. The WASH facilities at the visited schools were poor on which 98% of them do not have appropriate adequate SWASH facilities for girls to enable menstruation such as changing rooms, incinerators and disposal facilities. Only 0.8% of schools had sanitation facilities available for girls to change sanitary cloths while at schools.

99% of the interviewed girls said, they are not satisfied by the school facilities as they are not user friendly especial when they are in menses. Drop holes are not enough to accommodate girls, are not clean, there is no privacy and for those with changing rooms they do not have menstrual products for emergency.

4.0 SCHOOL COMMITTEES AND SCHOOL TEACHERS

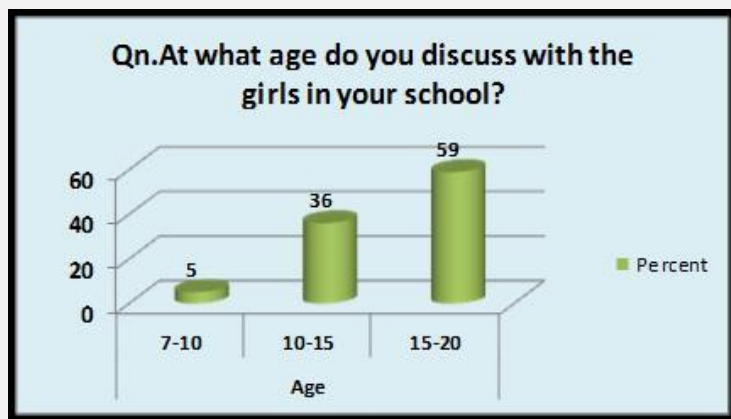
4.1 Awareness information and communication

93% of the interviewed School committees' members said that they do not have sufficient knowledge on MHM issues, 76% had a basic idea of what menstrual hygiene is. According to them taboos, culture and silence on menstrual issues are the source of lack of awareness and limited knowledge on menstrual issues. That is why school committees had never integrated MHM issues within their schools development plans.

School health teachers mentioned that they lack knowledge on MHM issues; they are not clear with their position to support school girls when they face challenges while at school. In focus group discussion with schools health teachers, more than 80% said that their knowledge on MH issues is too limited. The only thing that they can do is to advise them on how to handle themselves as grownups, challenges they may encounter especially from males and sex related issues and diseases.

More than 60% of the interviewed school teachers discussed MHM too late after girls have passed menarche stage as chart 4.1 below illustrates. , 72% of interviewed school teachers revealed that they have been taught/coached School girls about MHM issues only at a point where girls are consulting them and rarely in the special dialogues on puberty issues (not for all schools). They also mentioned that girls prefer discussing menstruation issues with other girls or female teachers. However, some schools do not have female teachers especially those in remote areas.

Chart 4.1: Preferred age by school teachers to discuss with school girls on MH issues



4.2 /School committee and teachers perception on challenges facing children

According to school teachers and school committees, school girls have been encountering many challenges while at school. They mentioned that, girls are not comfortable when they are in menstrual period because the schools' surrounding environments are not friendly to support them to manage well their menstrual flow which affects their performance. For example:

- ✚ Schools lack improved sanitation facilities i.e latrines, changing rooms, water facilities, bathing rooms and a place to wash and dry the used sanitary wears.
- ✚ The menstrual wears used by girls while at school cannot resist the blood flow as most of them use rags which make them uncomfortable fearing of staining their uniforms and most of them deciding to stay home until when the blood cut off.
- ✚ Schools do not keep sanitary wears for emergency i.e pants, pads, cottons, skirts etc to support school girls.
- ✚ Despite the fact that sanitary pads are too expensive but also are not available at the local market, the only place where you can get them is at the nearby pharmacy.
- ✚ Insufficient knowledge on menstruation: School matrons, health teachers are not capable to offer counselling as one of their solutions is to allow girls to go home when they experience pain during their period. Also no proper care when emergencies occur. Some of the visited schools' matrons give toilet paper, rags and sometimes cottons which can endanger health. However, school health teachers feel shy to advise school girls on alternative ways.

Chart 4.2: Council strategy to support school girls on MH issues

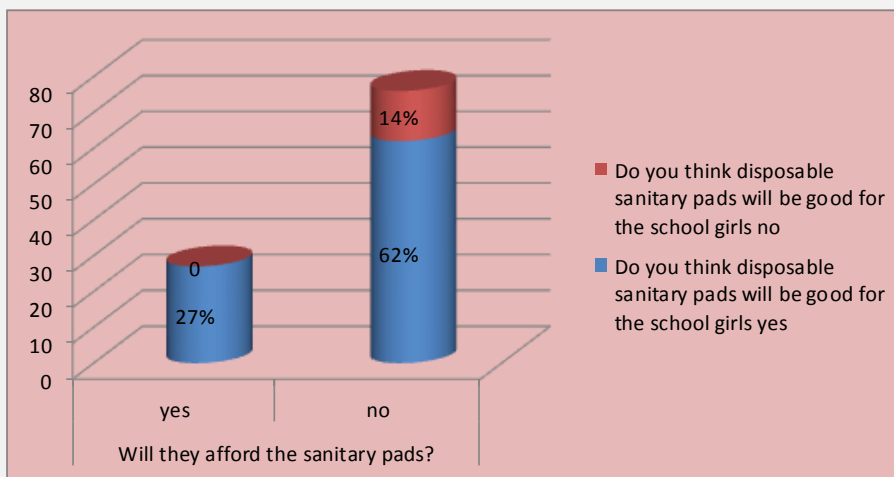


According to School teachers, when they are asked on how they provide support to school girls to overcome the effects at school, they mentioned that they always:-

- ✚ Allow them to go home to change and clean themselves
- ✚ Educating them on how to handle themselves during menstruation.
- ✚ Providing painkillers if they are available though 99% of the visited schools both primary and secondary schools did not have first aid kit.
- ✚ Advising them to use sanitary pads to be able to stay comfortable at school
- ✚ Advising them to always take it easy and take menstruation as a normal issue and always check their calendars' to keep track on their menstruation to avoid embarrassment.
- ✚ Advising the school matron to always keep close to them, advice and counsel them on what is right.

4.3 Acceptability of disposable sanitary pads

Chart 4.3 Acceptability of Disposable sanitary pads



When School committees and School teachers were asked if it will be good for school girls to use sanitary pads and if they will afford them, 62% said yes. There is a need of supporting school girls with disposable sanitary pads but they are too expensive, they won't afford them as **chart 4.3** above

illustrates. They also added that if the price would be Tsh.500, most of parents could afford them. When asked if there is an important need of involving parents to dialogue on how to support school girls on MHM issues, 87% said yes for it would be better for the benefit of the school girls.

99% of the interviewed local government staff mentioned that, they understand the importance of supporting school girls managing MH at school. Though, 64% of them did not have any strategies to support school girls on MHM issues as **chart 4.2 above illustrates**. 34% mentioned to have a good plan to support school girls but also they mentioned that the plans they had, was to ensure that each school has female teachers with enough knowledge on life skills, but they did not mention the issue of changing rooms and how sanitary wears and pain killers i.e sanitary pads and first aid kits would be availed.

It was expected that, sanitation facilities at Secondary schools to be better than those at primary schools but the situation was not like that. In 98% of the secondary schools and 99% of primary schools visited, the situation was bad; schools had latrines with few drop holes and without changing rooms for girls and water systems. The reason for this was the limited budget, schools do not have enough funds for improving or constructing those facilities. And for the case of changing rooms for girls, it seemed not to be within the school priorities.

Hence, based on the school teachers' responses, it seems that their knowledge on MHM issues is still low and they feel shy and others do not have enough time to provide psycho-social support for menstruating girls at school when they face challenges i.e staining their uniform, feeling pain and they usually told them to go back home without providing any support hence affecting girls' participation and performance.

According to the school committees, school teachers and government officials, there is need to seek for ways school girls can be supported to access safe, clean and affordable sanitary pads. They mentioned that if parents will be made aware and sensitised on MHM issues, they will be ready to support their girls to access sanitary pads but only if producers will lower the price. Moreover, they added that, if school girl's sanitary pads will be available they will take the following initiatives to ensure students are accessing disposable sanitary pads;-

- ✚ Ensuring the pads are easily accessible at school, monitoring the price and educating girls on the use.
- ✚ Educating and sensitizing parents and girls and put together clear strategies on how school girls will be accessing the products
- ✚ Ensuring all the menstruating girls access the pads and finding a way they can support those who cannot afford them

- ✚ Looking for donors who will be able to provide pads to students freely and supporting schools to have pads for emergency
- ✚ Maintaining the availability of the products at school
- ✚ Using caution money to buy MHM products for emergency
- ✚ Ensuring the pads are accessed easily at school for the students to use for free from the school budget

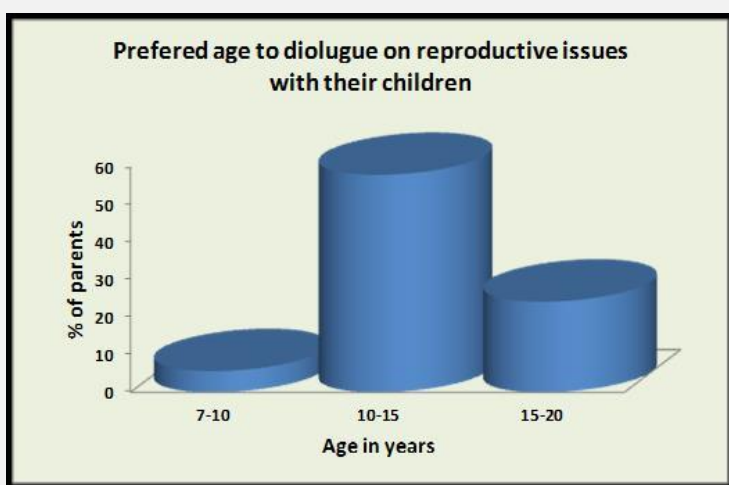
More than 60% proposed that if products will be provided at schools, then for sustainability it will be better for school to arrange the way students will be accessing them by cash to avoid conflict of interest and misunderstanding. The health teachers should be responsible for overseeing the business to protect them from being used or accessed by non-beneficiaries. They also recommended that, all schools should have specific health teachers to teach MHM issues at school to both parents and students to let them become aware with menstrual hygiene management issues. This will increase a chance for parents to support school girls to access hygienic pads.

5.0 PARENTS

5.1 Awareness information and communication

76% of the interviewed parents showed to have a basic idea on puberty issues, only things about the body changes and how menarche occurs. 83% of them said that they always discuss with their children and advise them when they misbehave and after getting menarche as **chart 5.1 illustrates**; they believe that they had been taught everything about puberty issues including menstrual hygiene at school. 18% of parents said they discuss with their children before they get menarche, more than 70% said that their discussion was only based on how they could protect themselves from getting early pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases e.g HIV and to avoid bad peer groups.

5.1: Age preferred by parents to dialogue on reproductive issues with their children



When parents were asked on how they support their children to manage themselves during the Menstrual period they said that, it depends on whether girls will ask for their support; most of them said that if girls asked for their support, they always supported them to get menstrual products/sanitary wears i.e rags, pads (only a few of them mentioned it but even then, only if they have money). They also mentioned to advise them on how they can keep themselves safe in a secret way and how they can manage used rags.

76% of parents were aware of the challenges facing girls during the menses while at school. They said, girls sometimes feel sick and get pains i.e stomach ache, tiredness, headache etc which cause them not to concentrate in class and sometimes decide to go back home leaving classes. They do not have appropriate changing place/room and disposal facilities. They always go back home to change

and occasionally are forced to miss classes especially during the heavy flow to avoid shame, stress and embarrassment if will soil their uniforms. Furthermore, they did not forget to mention the products they use to manage menstrual flow. They said that, all those challenges happened due to the inappropriate products that girls use i.e rags, cotton etc

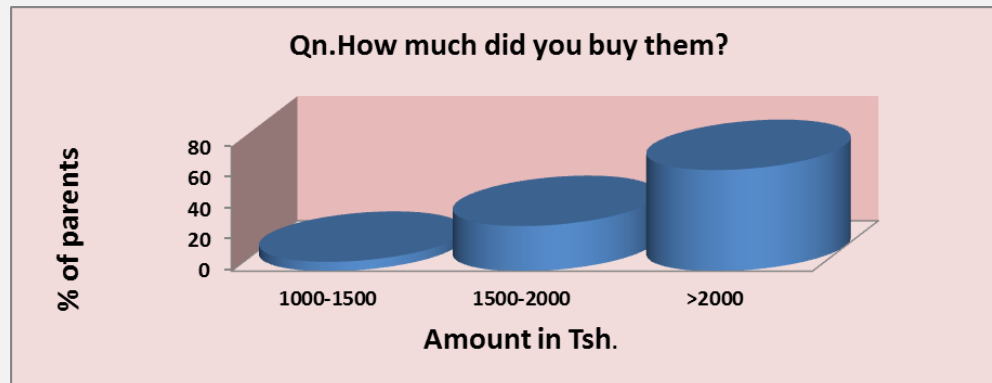
5.2: Sanitary materials

Chart 5.2.1 Awareness on MH materials



When parents were asked about the products that they were aware of, more than 60% were aware of industrial sanitary pads; **Chart 5.2.1** above illustrates. 24% of them said that they had bought sanitary pads at the local market for the past six months and the cost ranged between Tsh.1500-3500 as it is illustrated in **the chart 5.2 below**. For those who said they had not yet bought pads, the main reason was they did not know what a pad is, they lack information and knowledge about menstrual products. Some had heard that pads can cause pelvic cancer and fungus hence their quality is questionable.

Chart 5.2 Material cost



Sanitary pads were proposed as an important product to be used by their children while at school. 96% of parents said they would be happy to see their children use appropriate and quality sanitary wears while in school. When they were asked which product they will be willing to advise their children to use during menstruation, 60% said disposable sanitary pads because they are safe, and which will make them comfortable and to concentrate in class hence improve their performance. 26% mentioned reusable local pads i.e rags, sponge, cotton etc. They had the following complaints about sanitary pads: pads cause fungus, they are too expensive, they cannot afford them, not safe for their health and also said that they are happy with using cloth, even when they had tried pads and others said they do not know them.

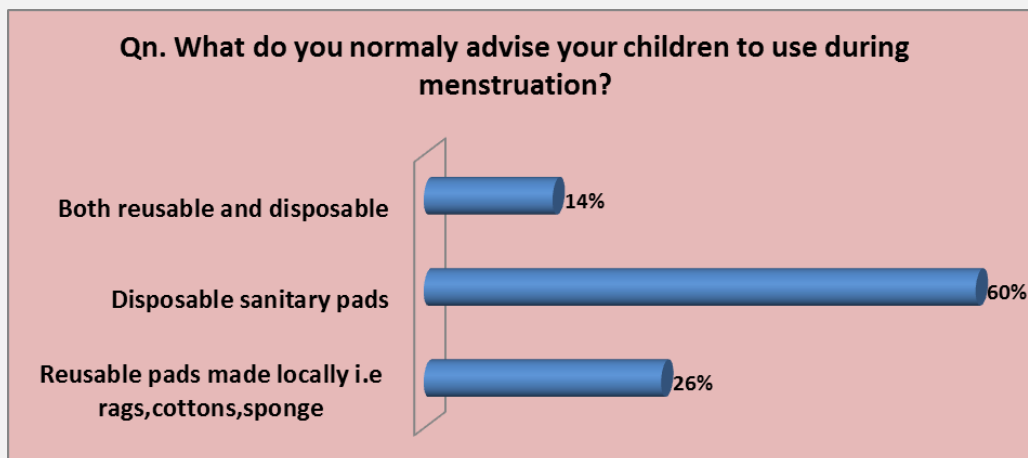
82% of the interviewed parents agreed to pay for pads if asked to buy affordable pads for their children. They mentioned the following reasons **(chart 5.3 Illustrates this)**.

- ✚ It is important for them to access safe and hygienic products for their health benefits but if the products will be of quality and certified by TBS
- ✚ Parents are responsible for their daughters' health
- ✚ Let them not be involved in other business to get funds for pads
- ✚ To help them be free and smart while they are at school compound and to concentrate on their lessons.
- ✚ Want their children to accomplish their studies and fulfil their goals
- ✚ Pads are safe but should be modified, standardised and advertised through media etc.

- ✚ To protect them from using unsafe products i.e rags etc
- ✚ To be on trend

*Appropriate sanitary materials allow girls more secrecy and thus can be resisted by a community-***Said Mr Fanuel from Magu district.**

5.3: Material preferred by parents to be used by their children Please note that at chart 5.2.1 most of parents said are not aware of the reusable and disposable pads – why in this chart disposable is the one parents advise their children to use



When parents were asked what could be done to enable school girls access disposable sanitary pads at the school environment and what they recommended, they proposed the following:-

6.0 TABOOS AROUND MENSTRUAL HYGIENE ISSUES

It was explained and observed that cultural practices, religious beliefs and social myths make it difficult for both men and women to talk about menstruation. They also contribute to lack of information, MH facilities / products in school environments and poor management and disposal of these products which exacerbates the situation for women and girls. According to the interviewed, men, women and girls from Sengerema, Mufindi and Chato districts, menstruating girls cannot be allowed to touch water sources, to cook, to wash dishes, touching plants or passing through the planted farms or places during menstruation. It was also mentioned that parents are not allowed to discuss menstrual issues with their daughters. ' Only a grandmother and an aunt are recommended to do so without even knowing the reason behind it. 60% of the interviewed parents and school

committees revealed that there are no bad cultural barriers on menstrual issues other than traditional issues. It was also mentioned that the existing taboos among the community cause;-

- ✚ MHM topic is not discussed, most girls not prepared well as they are scared.
- ✚ Secret and shameful, associated with impurity, witchcraft/local superstition beliefs and negative attitudes:
- ✚ Lack of emotional and financial support.
- ✚ Mobility: preventing from going to school
- ✚ When experiencing problems – not seeking help
- ✚ Restriction: males do not discuss with their daughters about menstrual issues, they can only be informed by their wives.

7.0 RURAL SUPPLIERS

Supply chain modes for the disposable menstrual hygiene sanitary pads are similar to most of the manufacturers and importers, apart from Kays Industries Limited who at a certain point supply to semi urban areas directly. The rest use traditional methods of supplying through agents, wholesalers and retailers. Rural retailers have been purchasing disposable sanitary pads from urban areas. They mentioned that the demand at rural areas is still low, only well to do people such as school teachers and nurses purchase sanitary pads. 91% of rural shops do not sell sanitary pads, but people access sanitary pads at pharmacies. The reason behind this is that demand is still low because some of the girls don't know how to use pads and have never heard about them. During the focus group discussions, retailers from urban centers mentioned that, rural families with their children in boarding schools have been shopping for disposable sanitary pads because schools instruct them to buy and it is in the school shopping list. Therefore they proposed that, schools should incorporate cost for sanitary pads in the school fees.

99% of the visited pharmacists revealed that, they always targeted government workers i.e school teachers, nurses and community workers and not students. They also mentioned that they rarely sell sanitary pads to school girls. Therefore, 98% of the rural retailers revealed that, if sanitary pads cost will be lowered, demand for them from school girls will be higher hence they will be ready to supply them.

8.0 SOURCES OF INFORMATION

The following were listed down as a source of information that will inspire them to use disposable sanitary pads or to discuss about puberty issues. Majority of the parents said that would prefer to hear from radios, followed by nurses and then televisions. Students mentioned that they would prefer to hear from their School teachers, followed by their mothers and then radios.

7.0 GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Lack of awareness, information and knowledge on MHM issues between actors and lack of appropriate solutions on menstrual hygiene issues have been creating hard environment to school girls during the menstruation. Failure to prioritise the issue is compounded by deeply entrenched gender inequalities, cultural perceptions and traditional beliefs. The cultural taboos and practices surrounding menstruation also create a critical obstacle to the implementers to implement practical solutions. Hence, longer-term strategies to bring about cultural and traditional changes are required.

Supporting adolescence girls on managing menstrual Hygiene and creating safe and hygiene environment in schools which would facilitate good academic environment for school girls' may perhaps be the only way to put an end to the apparently never-ending cycle of issues like dropout, low attendance, low age of marriage and low status of women. Hence, more strategic ways that requires more than simply building a toilet or a classroom are required such as:-

- ✚ Educating school girls on menstrual hygiene issues to enhance their self-esteem and self-confidence to familiarize with the status and problems related to menstruation (***The table below explained the strategies and recommendations provided by parents and school committees***). This should be done through peer to peer health groups or child to child health clubs discussions, dialogues and orientation on health, hygiene, reproductive including menstruation and related physiological knowledge.

Table 2; proposed strategies for accessing sanitary pads and recommendations

Strategies to support School girls to access sanitary pads	Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Parents should support schools to access those products	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Parents should be educated first about the pros and cons of using disposable sanitary pads for them to get enough knowledge and being willingly to support their children
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Government needs to supply school girls pads for free of charge	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Awareness creation for school girls and parents is needed to create demand
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Industries should be facilitated to produce special pads for school girls which are affordable; price should range from Tsh.500-800	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Parents to put MHM products as a family priority

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NGOs should look for ways they can support them (parents) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To ensure pads quality and standards are met
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools to instruct parents to buy them for their school girls by including them as a compulsory item in School forms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To establish parents, suppliers and teachers partnership which can create an enabling environment for School Girls
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The cost for sanitary pads should be added directly into school fees 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School management should find means of supporting girls through the schools' source of income. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve parents on designing the payment modalities 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government should involve supply agents who could make sure that pads reach School girls without any problem 	

✚ Linking physical infrastructure, menstrual products, water, hygiene and sanitation issues to health education and reproductive health programs including Menstrual Hygiene.

✚ Unlock the supply chain nodes and facilitate the innovation of the existing sanitary pads to ensure the accessibility, availability and affordability of School Girls sanitary pads. These can be done through

- Facilitating the producers to innovate from the existing sanitary pads/develop school girls' affordable disposable sanitary pads by identifying appropriate local material that can lower cost.

✚ Supporting schools to have discrete disposal of the used sanitary protection materials, a place to wash, dry and change for girls, and also having sanitary protection materials for emergency at school.

✚ Demand creation and behaviour change to parents and on MHM issues to community at large

✚ Creating an 'enabling' environment through sensitizing relevant actors and encouraging/supporting them to promote positive attitudes/behaviour towards the proper menstrual hygiene management. This can be done by creating awareness and demand on the use and accessibility of affordable, disposable sanitary pads and other menstrual protection materials among girls, parents (both mothers and fathers) and influential/difficult people.

✚ Awareness creation to school committees and school health teacher's on MHM issues through training and sensitization on about, good menstrual hygiene practices, building confidence and competence of the teachers on teaching school girls on MH issues and supporting school

committees to understand the importance of supporting school girls on MH issues by incorporating MH into their school development plans

- ✦ Creating community responsibility for supporting school girls to access appropriate and affordable sanitary pads by enhancing formal and informal community support systems that foster positive behaviour on Menstruation.
- ✦ Advocacy with Government and other relevant stakeholders to integrate and mainstream MHM into WASH programming, schools and district planning/ strategies and school guidelines and monitoring indicators.

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