



## Girls in Control:

# Compiled Findings from Studies on Menstrual Hygiene Management of Schoolgirls

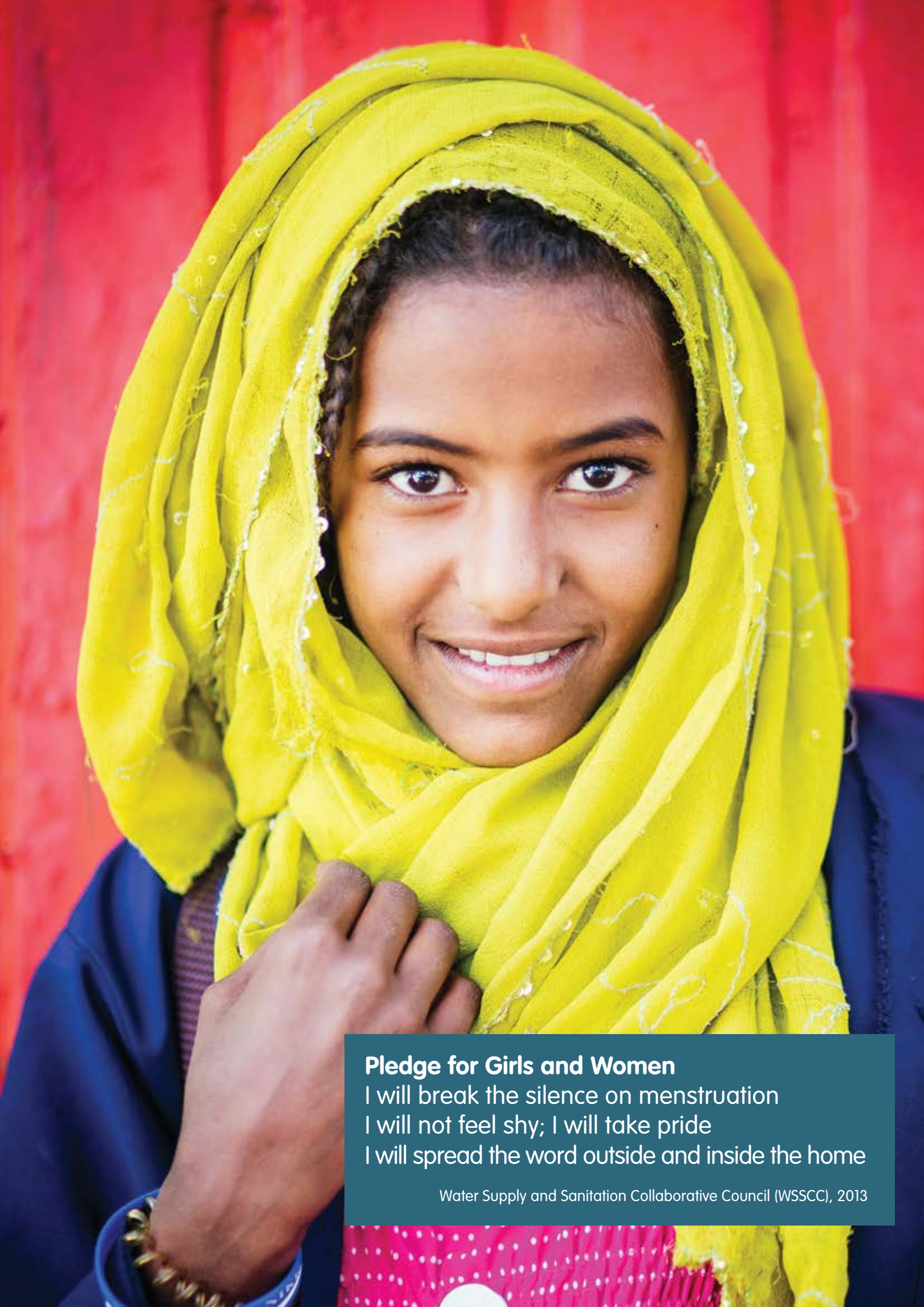


This report has been compiled by SNV Girls in Control Programme Leader  
Selamawit Tamiru in collaboration with country programme managers  
Pasquina Acidria, Chemisto Satya Ali, Lindile Ndebele, Kuribachew Mamo,  
Rozalia Mushi and consultants Beverly Brar and Nick Greenfield. It has been prepared  
in good faith on the basis of the available information, primarily the data resulting  
from the reported surveys in five countries, which are deemed accurate within the  
limitations specified within each individual country report.

All photographs copyright Aidan Dockery/SNV.

#### Disclaimer

The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of  
SNV Netherlands Development Organisation.



### **Pledge for Girls and Women**

I will break the silence on menstruation

I will not feel shy; I will take pride

I will spread the word outside and inside the home

Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC), 2013



What a beautiful theme. Clearly this MHM conference is bringing light to the importance of breaking the silence about menstruation.

Minister of Education, Major Jessica Alupo, Menstrual Hygiene Management Conference, 2014, Uganda

I felt bad when I heard that schoolgirls hide at home for from three up to five days because of menstruation...and also they feel uneasy to disclose when their teachers inquire of their whereabouts...Real awareness creation in the community is crucial, as it will break the silence on menstrual hygiene issues and regain girls' lost dignity.

National SWASH Coordinator, Teresia Kuwite, National Review Meeting, 2014, Tanzania

The teacher highlighted that some girls were using cow dung as sanitary wear. We need to think as government how we can alleviate the problems suffered by women through lack of sanitary wear. Just imagine how cow dung looks and create a graphic image of what our girls go through, 34 years into independence.

Mutasa South MP Irene Zindi (Zanu PF), National Assembly debate, 2014, Zimbabwe

After I received the invitation to officiate at the ceremony I called the Hon. Minister of Social Development, who is a female, and asked her to talk on my behalf since she is a woman and she understands the issue better. Her response to me was, "How long do men still want to keep silent on such an issue? It's high time we break the myth and talk about it, especially you men." With this I was now convinced that I need to play my part and that's why I am standing here in front of you speaking freely about menstrual hygiene. As a father I am going to take it up with my family and talk about menstrual hygiene. The pupils here today really demonstrated the need to create an enabling environment. As a ministry we are going to support this and it's not going to be just an event.

State Minister of Education, Hon. Lopuke Lotyam Michael, South Sudan, Menstrual Hygiene Day, 2014

Seeing blood flowing out of her body, a girl who is experiencing her first menstruation becomes scared. Initiating discussions in these kinds of events will help women and girls in realising that menstruation is a natural and physiological process. It will reinforce personal and group efforts exerted to break the silence around menstruation.

Amina Deneke, Weliso Office of Women, Youth and Children's Affairs, Ethiopia, Menstrual Hygiene Day, 2014

# Introduction

Girls' education is challenged in the developing world due to many factors. Culture and tradition, family income and parental education level all play a role in girls' educational participation and performance.

Girls who are fortunate enough to go to school face their own challenges due to a lack of education on their personal development, including information on menstruation, appropriate emotional support and a lack of water, sanitation and hygiene facilities in schools.

Schools should not only aim to help students to grow intellectually, but also to guide them through the physical and emotional aspects of their transition to adulthood, providing them with the information and skills needed to manage their personal and social development. In particular, by providing menstrual-hygiene-related education and services, schools can help ensure students are equipped to understand and manage these changes before they have to confront them personally. For too long, both schools and parents have remained silent on the issue of menstruation – resulting in menarche and menstrual hygiene management becoming distressing experiences for many young women, negatively affecting their educational attendance and performance. Studies conducted by SNV and other development organisations are highlighting the crucial role menstrual hygiene management education, facilities and sanitary material supply have in enabling girls to meet their potential, both personally and academically.

SNV is addressing the menstrual hygiene challenges facing schoolgirls in five African countries (Ethiopia, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe) under the Girls in Control programme. Addressing the issue of menstrual hygiene management from multiple angles, the two-year Girls in Control pilot is working to reach 141,000 girls in 491 schools, and to improve awareness amongst 8.5 million people in 25 districts across these five countries.

This report highlights SNV's findings in relation to school menstrual hygiene management in the Girls in Control programme countries, addressing cultural and traditional norms, existing menstrual hygiene management practices, policy direction, access to sanitary materials and facilities and much more. It aims not only to illustrate the challenges faced by girls in these countries, but to foster a greater understanding of the situation and what can be done to improve it amongst policy makers, the donor community and development practitioners.

I hope you enjoy reading this report. The challenges are great, but it is only by sharing our knowledge and working together that we will be able to ensure that girls across Africa and the world truly are in control.



Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Selamawit', with a large, stylized flourish above it.

Selamawit Tamiru  
Programme Leader  
Girls in Control

# Executive Summary

SNV launched the five-country Girls in Control menstrual hygiene pilot programme in January 2014, building on insights and experience gained from implementing school-based water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) programmes in 14 countries. This report presents the findings of baseline studies on the menstrual hygiene management of schoolgirls, conducted in the five project countries: Ethiopia, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

The studies comprise quantitative and qualitative data, collected from girls in school, teachers and school management, parents, shopkeepers and other key stakeholders. The researchers also observed the facilities available in schools and the availability of menstrual hygiene wear in local markets. The findings provide baseline data for SNV's Girls in Control Programme and are a rich source of information for anyone interested in how girls in Sub-Saharan Africa experience menstruation and what they need to improve that experience.

The five separate country studies have provided detailed information that is being used in implementation of the individual Girls in Control projects in the different countries. The purpose of this publication is to consolidate the key lessons learned from the studies, which illustrate an overwhelming commonality of experience across the five countries. It is clear that the majority of girls struggle to cope during menstruation, with discomfort, pain, and inappropriate and unhygienic menstrual protection materials, in an atmosphere of silence, taboo and humiliation. They lack decent facilities in schools for changing and disposing of menstrual wear and for washing. Adults in their lives are reluctant to discuss the topic and provide limited support and counselling. Misinformation and demeaning practices abound.

The sections of the report present data and findings from the studies, illustrating the key findings below:

- Accurate information about menstruation and the need for good management of menstrual hygiene is limited, amongst girls, boys and adults. Menstruation is a topic which is not openly discussed, especially with men and boys.
- All the societies studied have taboos and attitudes which can lead to shame, distress and unhygienic or risky practices;

- Most girls receive no information about menstruation before menarche and the majority cannot discuss it at home. Limited information is given in schools, and many teachers feel unprepared to address the issue, even if it is part of the school curriculum;
- Affordable and appropriate hygienic sanitary wear is largely unavailable. Girls generally use a combination of whatever materials they have at hand, which are often unhygienic, resulting in humiliating leaks, discomfort and infections;
- Most schools do not have adequate clean latrines providing privacy and water, where girls can change menstrual wear and wash, and disposal facilities are generally absent; very few schools have pain medication or emergency menstrual wear available;
- There is a general absence of policy direction to guide the education sector, local governments and schools to plan and budget for adequate facilities and support for menstruating schoolgirls;
- Attending school during menstruation is, thus, a miserable experience for many girls, undermining their educational attainment; female teachers are also affected by the absence of suitable facilities in schools.

Suggestions emerged from all the studies to make menstruation a more comfortable and less distressing experience for schoolgirls, that could have a positive effect on their school attendance and performance. Chapter 10 on the Way Forward draws conclusions from these suggestions and links them to strategies being implemented by the Girls in Control Programme.

SNV hopes that the information from these studies, together with the ultimate outcomes and lessons to be learned through the Girls in Control pilot programme, will contribute to the growing dialogue on the management of menstrual hygiene. The ultimate aim is integration of menstrual hygiene management as an accepted component in education policies and programmes, as well as in all school and community WASH interventions, to improve the menstrual experience of schoolgirls, their female teachers and women in their communities.



# Table of Contents

<b>I. GIRLS IN CONTROL</b>	<b>1</b>
Methodology	2
<b>II. BACKGROUND</b>	<b>5</b>
Global Dialogue	5
SNV and Menstrual Hygiene Management	5
<b>III. CULTURAL TABOOS</b>	<b>8</b>
Names for Menstruation	8
Secrecy	8
Beliefs and Taboos	8
<b>IV. KNOWLEDGE ABOUT MENSTRUATION</b>	<b>10</b>
Lack of Preparation for Menarche	10
Lack of Accurate Knowledge	10
Sources of Information	11
Lack of Information in Schools	11
GIRLS IN CONTROL HIGHLIGHT: BREAKING THE SILENCE IN SCHOOLS IN SOUTH SUDAN	13
<b>V. MENSTRUAL MATERIALS USED</b>	<b>15</b>
Limited Use of Commercial Pads	15
Other Protection Materials Used	16
Problems Faced by Girls	17
GIRLS IN CONTROL HIGHLIGHT: MAKING REUSABLE MENSTRUAL PADS	18
GIRLS IN CONTROL HIGHLIGHT: ACCESSIBLE AND AFFORDABLE PADS IN RURAL TANZANIA	18
<b>VI. FACILITIES IN SCHOOLS</b>	<b>20</b>
Latrines	21
Water	21
Waste Disposal	22
Emergency Supplies	22
Girls' Perceptions	22
GIRLS IN CONTROL HIGHLIGHT: GIRL-FRIENDLY LATRINES IN ZIMBABWE	23
<b>VII. POLICY SUPPORT</b>	<b>25</b>
GIRLS IN CONTROL HIGHLIGHT: PARLIAMENTARY ACTION IN UGANDA	26
GIRLS IN CONTROL HIGHLIGHT: PARLIAMENTARY ACTION IN ZIMBABWE	27
<b>VIII. IMPACT ON SCHOOLING</b>	<b>28</b>
Effect on Classroom Experience	28
Days Missed: Girls' Perceptions	29
Adults' Perceptions	29
Dropping Out	30
<b>IX. THE WAY FORWARD</b>	<b>32</b>
Breaking the Silence	32
Menstrual Protection Materials	33
Facilities in Schools	34
Policy Direction	35
GIRLS IN CONTROL HIGHLIGHT: KNOWLEDGE DEVELOPMENT IN PRACTICE	37





# I. Girls in Control

SNV implements five interconnected water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) programme products across 27 countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. WASH in Schools is implemented in 14 countries, with the aim of contributing to a teaching and learning environment that is conducive for both boys and girls. Schools should be able to provide equal opportunity for boys and girls to grow intellectually, socially and physically. However, studies and assessments across the world have shown that the prevailing lack of adequate WASH facilities for schoolgirls, particularly after they start their menstrual periods, can limit them in fully realising their educational potential.

Through implementing comprehensive and inclusive approaches to WASH in schools, SNV has come to understand the crucial importance of addressing the needs of schoolgirls, particularly during menstruation, and has been integrating menstrual hygiene management into its school WASH programmes since 2009.

In 2013 SNV programme offices in Ethiopia, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zimbabwe developed a combined programme bringing together individual country projects addressing menstrual hygiene management in schools, to facilitate the sharing of experience and learning.

SNV approved internal funding for a two-year pilot programme, acknowledging the importance of the issue, the knowledge development benefits and the potential for upscaling and systemic change.

Each country office worked with the relevant government authorities to identify project sites,

**The Girls in Control two-year pilot programme will reach 141,000 girls in 491 schools, and 8.5 million people in 25 districts, across five countries**

detailed activities and budgets. This process took varying amounts of time, resulting in the commencement of actual implementation taking place at different times, between May and September 2014, in the different countries. The five countries have jointly developed a harmonised project implementation and monitoring framework, which is being put into practice in the individual country projects.

The Girls in Control Programme that has emerged through this process is a comprehensive menstrual hygiene intervention, addressing policy, practice, knowledge and attitudes, access to physical infrastructure and sanitary material supply. The two-year pilot programme will reach 141,000 girls in 491 schools with direct project interventions (Table 1), and 8.5 million people in the 25 project districts through the various awareness creation campaigns and advocacy events. The approach followed by SNV in menstrual hygiene management reaches beyond schools, integrates the private sector, promotes local ownership and community involvement and involves governments and other stakeholders at local and national levels for systemic change and sustainability.

Table 1 :Girls in Control Project Locations

Country	District	Number of schools targeted (direct)
Ethiopia	Amhara: Bure and Machakel Woredas Oromia: Sebeta Hawas and Tole Woredas SNNPR: Meskan Woreda, and Butajira Town Administration Tigray: Kilte Awlalo Woreda and Wukro Town Administration	40
South Sudan	Torit, Magwe, Lopa-Lafon, Kapoeta East, Kapoeta South and Ikwotos (Eastern Equatorial State)	49
Uganda	Dokolo, Lira, Mubende and Mukono	80
Tanzania	Sengerema, Chato, Magu, Siha, Babati, Karatu, Njombe and Mufindi	120
Zimbabwe	Masvingo	202
<b>Total</b>		<b>491</b>

## Methodology

At the start of project implementation in each country SNV conducted studies to increase understanding of the existing menstrual hygiene management situation in the project areas and to guide the setting of benchmarks for monitoring progress. The studies focused on four key themes:

- Awareness and knowledge about menstruation;
- Supply of menstrual protection materials;
- Provision of physical WASH infrastructure in schools; and
- Policy direction.

SNV reviewed the data on menstrual hygiene management that was already available. In Zimbabwe the country team decided to undertake supplementary data collection and analysis, incorporating a WASH study that had collected relevant data in 2012. In Uganda, data from the 2014 baseline survey undertaken in the project areas supplemented data from an SNV/IRC 2012 study, in which only one project district was included. In this report the year of the relevant study is given for data cited for Uganda and Zimbabwe. For Ethiopia, South Sudan and Tanzania only one study is cited for each country, conducted in 2014.

The individual country studies were conducted independently, at different times, by different local and international teams of experts from SNV, private consultancy firms, research institutes, government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). In all five countries the trained enumerators were local people with an in-depth understanding of local community contexts and languages.

Each country study team developed its own checklists, questionnaires and tools, and designed context-appropriate methods to undertake the survey on the four themes.

The methodologies used to collect quantitative and qualitative information included: structured interviews, semi-structured interviews, in-depth interviews, semi-structured in-depth interviews, key informant interviews, observation with checklists and focus group discussions.

The data collected from the interview questionnaires was analysed by each country team, using SPSS software, and data from focus group discussions was manually collated, based on recurrent themes and patterns.

---

### The studies focused on four key themes:

- Awareness and knowledge about menstruation;
  - Supply of menstrual protection materials;
  - Provision of physical WASH infrastructure in schools; and
  - Policy direction.
- 

Respondents included schoolgirls and boys, school committees, parents, head teachers, female teachers and heads of school clubs, as well as health extension workers, shopkeepers and community leaders. The rights, anonymity, and confidentiality of the respondents were respected in all phases of the studies, and informed verbal consent was requested before collecting data or taking photographs. To preserve anonymity, all findings are presented without ascribing names or identifiable personal descriptions.

This document has been prepared to share the rich information collected from a wide range of different stakeholders in different contexts and to further understanding of the situation faced by girls during menstruation. The intention is not to harmonise the findings of individual studies conducted with different methodologies, but to share an overview of the menstrual experience of schoolgirls across the five countries and draw some conclusions on how to improve that experience. Some initial highlights from the Girls in Control projects in the five countries are also presented.

**Table 2: Methodologies Used and Coverage**

Country	Methodologies and Respondents	Coverage
Ethiopia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Closed-ended self-administered questionnaires for schoolgirls, grades 7-12: 769 respondents out of sample size 780 (128 per woreda x 6) (98.6/5 response rate) (650 menstruating girls)</li> <li>• Focus group discussions (12 – 140 girls, 12 – 120 boys, 6 – 40 teachers/parents) – 30 open-ended questions</li> <li>• KIs – 32 in-depth interviews with 6 school directors, 6 health extension workers, 5 Woreda WASH Team members, 7 community leaders, 8 shopkeepers</li> </ul>	18 schools in 6 woredas (12 rural/urban primary, 6 secondary) (GiC participating schools)
South Sudan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-administered structured closed-ended questionnaire for – 1,280 school girl respondents, out of 1,800 girls randomly sampled (response rate 71.1%)</li> <li>• Focus group discussions – Schoolgirls and boys, teachers, parents</li> <li>• KIs – Semi-structured in-depth interviews – PTAs/SCMs, local leaders</li> <li>• Observation checklist</li> </ul>	49 primary and secondary schools in Eastern Equatoria State (6 counties)
Tanzania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• KIs – 480 schoolgirls aged 11-19 (15 per school x 4 schools per district x 8)</li> <li>• FDGs – 320 schoolgirls – (10 x 4 x 8)</li> <li>• KIs – 5 health and 2 science teachers, 2 matrons, 3 local government and 3 school committee representatives, per district – 120 (15 x 8)</li> <li>• FDGs – health and science teachers, matrons, LGA and School Committee reps – 80 (10 x 8)</li> <li>• (total of 384 actual participating head teachers, teachers, matrons, patrons and school committee members)</li> <li>• In-depth interviews – 320 parents – (40 x 8)</li> <li>• 96 Sanitary pad producers</li> </ul>	4 schools per district x 8 districts – 32 schools
Uganda 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Questionnaire – 200 schoolgirls, 20 women teachers, 20 head teachers</li> <li>• FDG – 40 questionnaires</li> </ul>	140 schools (20 x 7 districts) – random sample (only one GiC project district)
Uganda 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Closed-ended questionnaire – 604 teachers</li> <li>• Closed-ended questionnaire – 6,384 schoolgirls</li> <li>• Observation – 628 schools</li> </ul>	604 schools – teachers' survey; 137 girls' schools – girls survey; 628 schools – WASH observation: in 4 GiC project districts
Zimbabwe 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4 structured questionnaires for: school heads, teachers, school children, SDC members</li> <li>• Observation checklist</li> <li>• FDGs – provincial and district water sub-committees, SDC Chairs and School Heads – re. involvement in WASH in schools</li> </ul>	WASH study in all 203 schools in Masvingo District
Zimbabwe 2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consolidation of previous findings</li> <li>• KIs – structured questionnaire – qualitative and convenience sampling of major stakeholders – 8 government departments, 4 churches, 13 NGOs (30 respondents)</li> <li>• 4 FDGs – 40 women in community groups and girl-related work</li> <li>• Observation</li> </ul>	Masvingo District



Stigma around menstruation and menstrual hygiene is a violation of several human rights, most importantly of the right to human dignity, but also the right to non-discrimination, equality, bodily integrity, health, privacy and the right to freedom from inhumane and degrading treatment and from abuse and violence.

Dr. Jyoti Sanghera, Head of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNOHCHR), 2013



## II. Background

### Global Dialogue

Silence on the topic of menstruation has been a global phenomenon, even in the context of international attention to the human rights of women and girls. International conventions and action plans have elaborated on women's sexual and reproductive rights, but stopped short of explicitly mentioning menstruation. Awareness is now growing that the menstruation-related stigma experienced by women and girls is a violation of their basic human rights. This stigmatisation leads to conditions that threaten the healthy development of young girls, causing complications which affect their health, impede their full participation in society and education and undermine their dignity.

There is a growing body of evidence, from academic research and data collected by practitioners and experts in WASH, reproductive health and education, that poor menstrual hygiene management has a detrimental effect on the capacity of schoolgirls to benefit from advances in educational opportunities. In 2012 the Menstrual Hygiene Management in Schools Virtual Conference, co-hosted by UNICEF and Columbia University, with over 200 participants, concluded that WASH in Schools programmes have a fundamental role in creating school environments that make it easier for girls and female teachers to manage menstrual hygiene. WASH programmes should ensure that girls' experiences in school are more comfortable and conducive to learning, by providing appropriate facilities and enriched hygiene promotion activities that include menstrual hygiene management topics.

The **United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI)** in 2014 identified five strategies at the school level that can benefit girls' completion of primary school and transition to secondary education. These include: ensuring a reasonable distance to school; a safe and secure school environment; the presence of female teachers; and relevance of curriculum to life skills and the labour market.

The second of the five UNGEI strategies for accelerating secondary education for girls is:

- Availability of private, safe latrines and acceptable menstrual hygiene management facilities, as well as basic reproductive health education.

The **Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC)**, the global WASH membership organisation hosted by the UN, has drawn up a framework which clarifies the three interlinked dimensions of menstrual hygiene management:

- **Breaking the silence:** Girls should be encouraged to talk and discuss this normal biological phenomenon in an informed and positive manner to prepare them emotionally and physically for the onset of menstruation and their monthly menstrual periods.
- **Managing menstruation hygienically and safely:** Ensuring adequate water, cleansing and washing materials and private spaces for managing menstrual flows hygienically and privately, and with dignity, in the home and in public spaces.
- **Safe reuse and disposal solutions:** Ensuring mechanisms for safe reuse, collection and disposal of menstrual waste in an environmentally safe manner.

### SNV and Menstrual Hygiene Management

Across Sub-Saharan Africa school enrolment has been increasing with the introduction of Universal Primary Education (UPE) policies, achieving 78% net primary enrolment rate according to the UN 2014 MDG Report. Authorities have struggled to keep up with the provision of appropriate WASH infrastructure in schools.

WASH interventions implemented by SNV and partners in the five Girls in Control countries contribute to increased access to improved sanitation and safe, sufficient and reliable drinking water, and sustained positive changes in hygiene behaviour. SNV works with all WASH stakeholders, from end users to providers and regulators, in a whole-systems approach to service delivery. SNV's approach to WASH ensures social and gender inclusion and attention to the needs of girls in school WASH activities. This approach has led to specifically addressing the needs of menstruating schoolgirls in the Girls in Control Programme.

**Ethiopia:** Menstrual hygiene management has become a priority agenda item in SNV school WASH programmes, based on insights gained from stakeholder enquiry in four districts of SNNPR in 2009.

SNV has piloted the production and distribution of reusable sanitary pads since 2009 in SNNPR, where trained women's groups produce affordable reusable pads at the local level, using leftover cloth from textile factories. Studies conducted by SNV, UNICEF and other international and national organisations have established that primary schoolgirls in rural areas who have reached puberty suffer during their monthly menstrual cycle from lack of water, appropriate toilet facilities and suitable sanitary wear, and receive limited guidance from school teachers or parents. Though a number of NGOs have started to address the issue, there is no national-level policy direction or programme focused on menstrual hygiene management.

**South Sudan:** SNV implemented the Community Child Friendly School Development Project from 2011 to 2012 in 60 schools in Eastern Equatorial and Upper Nile States, in partnership with UNICEF and the State Ministries of Education. The aim was to increase access to schools and retention, with a focus on girls and other vulnerable children. Assessments undertaken by SNV in 50 schools in 2011 demonstrated that menstrual hygiene is missing in the model being promoted for the creation of a child-friendly environment. This has prompted SNV and its partners to include a strategy to strengthen the integration of school WASH activities, particularly menstrual hygiene management, into their WASH programmes.

**Tanzania:** In 2009-10 SNV, together with other development organisations, including WaterAid and UNICEF, supported the Ministries of Education, Health, Water and Local Government to develop and pilot a set of school WASH guidelines for Tanzania, through a participatory process. This process highlighted menstrual hygiene management as an issue, and in order to gain insight and better understanding SNV conducted studies in two sample districts, Magu and Ukerewe. The studies established the need for a targeted approach to menstrual hygiene management as part of WASH programming in schools.

**Uganda:** SNV has been implementing the Community Empowerment Programme in 306 government-aided primary schools since July 2011, in partnership with UNICEF, the Dutch Embassy and five district governments. The objective of the programme is to improve WASH in schools and promote mentoring, so as to improve retention and performance of pupils. The programme has improved the management of school water supply systems and led to the establishment of nearly 200 functional school health clubs, training about 25,000 girls and boys on how to make reusable menstrual pads in 214 primary schools.

**Zimbabwe:** SNV piloted a menstrual hygiene management project in rural Lupane District in Matabeleland Province in 2012, with the aim of promoting a model based on community and school health clubs. The model is now being taken forward by SNV as a consortium partner in the DFID-funded Improving Girls access through Transforming Education (IGATE) programme, which is being implemented in 468 schools in 10 districts, up to 2017. Together with World Vision and CARE International, SNV is supporting School Development Committees (SDCs) in using girls' clubs to promote menstrual hygiene management. There are natural synergies between IGATE and the Girls in Control Programme, particularly around advocacy and trials of new technologies in girl-friendly latrines. SNV aims to break the silence about menstruation in Zimbabwe through harnessing experiences from other countries and targeted research on reusable pads.

The Girls in Control programme builds on this global experience base to bring together the five project countries in a concerted effort to show how specific interventions can improve the menstrual hygiene management of schoolgirls, enhancing their wellbeing and school experience.



---

Girls only feel free to discuss with their mothers and elder sisters. The man does not even get to know sometimes if his daughter or wife is menstruating. In our culture, we men are not even supposed to talk about menstruation.

A father, Magwi County, South Sudan

---



## III. Cultural Taboos

Menstruation is a taboo subject in all the countries studied. People are reluctant to talk openly about puberty and menstruation because of myths and cultural and religious beliefs. In all five countries there are ideas around women being unclean or dirty during menstruation, and women are generally restricted from participating in public gatherings, especially in churches and mosques, and other religious and ritual activities. Even though menstruation is supposed to be secret, such practices of exclusion make it clear to everyone when girls are menstruating, especially in small communities, and can expose them to embarrassment and shame.

### Names for Menstruation

The names that people use to refer to menstruation show how it is perceived and handled by different communities, and often convey how unwilling people are to mention it. In Ethiopia the “official” name is *Yewer Abeba*, meaning “monthly flower”, but it is also referred to by different tribes as *Idif*, meaning “dirt”, and *Gadawo*, meaning “disease of the abdomen”. In the Central Region of Uganda it is referred as *Ensonga* or “the issue”; people in South Sudan call it *Ada Shaharia*, meaning “the usual monthly”. In Tanzania the more literal name of *Hedhi* is used, meaning “the blood flow”, but this does not reduce the cultural practices and social myths which make it difficult for both men and women to talk about menstruation.

---

In some Ethiopian languages menstruation is known as “dirt” or “disease of the abdomen”

---

### Secrecy

Interviews with men, women, and girls in **Tanzania** indicated that menstruation is secret and shameful. Female teachers and mothers reported in focus group discussions that it is forbidden to discuss menstrual issues with their husbands and during their menstruation they sleep separately. In some areas only grandmothers or aunts are allowed to discuss menstrual issues with girls, although the reason behind this custom was not known to the FGD participants.

In **Ethiopia** 54% of schoolgirl respondents said they are not able to discuss menstrual issues, due to fear (30.6%), shame (20.8%), taboos (17.3%), religious reasons (4.9%) or the fact that it is not customary to talk about it (24.6%). Teachers and other adults in **Zimbabwe** said that openly talking about menstruation makes people uncomfortable, especially young girls. It is seen as a private issue, which is rarely discussed because of religious/cultural beliefs and does not involve men at all. Focus group discussions with parents in **South Sudan** established that issues related to menstruation are secret and that men are not supposed to know about it.

### Beliefs and Taboos

In **Uganda** (2014) at least 20% of the teachers interviewed said that there were still restrictive cultural beliefs surrounding menstruation. 28% of girls reported that people around them expect them to restrict their movement during menstruation.

In **Ethiopia** self-reported problems faced during menstruation by the 650 post-menarche girls surveyed include isolation (48.8%), insult (26.7%) and discrimination (24.5%).

In **Tanzania** according to men, women and girls interviewed in Sengerema, Mufindi and Chato districts, menstruating girls are not allowed to touch water sources, cook, wash dishes, touch plants or pass through planted fields. 60% of parents and school committee members mentioned that the cultural barriers around menstruation are associated with traditional taboos, such as ideas relating to impurity, witchcraft and local superstitions, which lead to negative attitudes and practices. Some girls reported that they had been taught not to dispose of used menstrual materials in open spaces because they might be used in witchcraft, resulting in death or infertility. Adult respondents expressed the view that as a result of existing taboos among the community girls do not receive emotional and financial support during menstruation and their mobility is restricted, including being prevented from going to school.

In the study in **South Sudan** 52% of the girls reported restrictions on their movements during their periods. 25% said that cleansing and rituals



---

### In South Sudan:

- 25% of girls surveyed have experienced cleansing rituals
  - 23% feel unclean during menstruation
- 

are usually performed and 23% felt that they are seen as unclean by the community. Grandmothers often perform rituals when a girl experiences her first periods. Community beliefs and perceptions surrounding menstruation reported by school heads and teachers interviewed are shown in Table 3.

### Attitudes of Schoolboys

Though respondents in every country reported that menstruation is secret, particularly from men and boys, it is clear from the studies that it is hard for girls to hide it. Many girls in the Focus group discussions in **Ethiopia** shared that during menstruation they perform poorly in terms of concentration and attention, particularly due to constant worry that boys might figure out their menstrual status by their movements and facial expressions, and humiliate them. Girls in Focus group discussions in **Tanzania** also mentioned that boys tease and embarrass them during menstruation.

Responses of girls in **South Sudan** as to how boys behave towards them during menstruation included: laughing at them (52.6%); abuse (35.2%); name calling (21.3); humiliation (20.8%); and isolation (16.9%). 26.4% reported being approached for sex at that time of the month “since they have a high attraction to the opposite sex during that time”. Boys, however, refuted the assertion of laughing at girls, on the grounds they do not even know when girls experience their periods, since they hide the fact that they are menstruating.

In **Zimbabwe** 54% of girls had experienced mocking or stigmatisation, 26% reported isolation and 13% that boys call them names during menstruation. In the 2012 study in **Uganda**, girls in Focus group discussions included the attitudes of boys as a factor needing change.

---

### During menstruation girls experience:

- Boys laughing: 56.6%, South Sudan
  - Mocking: 54%, Zimbabwe
  - Isolation: 48%, Ethiopia
  - Abuse: 32.5%, South Sudan
  - Insult: 26.7%, Ethiopia
- 

**Table 3: Some Perceptions and Beliefs about Menstruation in South Sudan**

Some perceptions and beliefs about menstruation in South Sudan
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• If a witch comes across your sanitary materials she will make you barren</li><li>• Women should not bathe in the river during menstruation because they will lose their womb</li><li>• Women should not bathe until the flow is over</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Menstruating girls must stay isolated from their peer groups</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Women are not supposed to use family or community latrines during their menstrual periods</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Menstruation should be kept a secret</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Women are not allowed to sit amongst men during menstruation</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Women are not supposed to visit a certain culturally significant sites</li></ul>



## IV. Knowledge about menstruation

But where did this painful thing called menstruation come from and for what reason?

Female primary school student, Kapoeta East County, South Sudan

The secrecy and taboos surrounding menstruation both result partly from a lack of accurate knowledge, and in turn lead to the continuation of myths and misinformation and to an absence of understanding about the puberty-related needs of girls. Data gathered in the surveys on what both schoolgirls and adults know and think about puberty and menstruation clearly shows that girls are not being provided with timely and accurate information on these subjects.

“What assistance do you need from your father or mother for you to defecate? That’s how menstruation is - it’s something normal.”

A local chief, Kapoeta South County, South Sudan

and consequently are scared and 70% of girls interviewed had received no pre-menarche information. Only 18% of parents interviewed said they had had any discussion on sexual and reproductive health with their children before menarche, and that where these discussions did take place the focus was on avoiding early pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, rather than how to manage menstruation. 83% of parents said they advise their children on puberty or sexual/reproductive issues “when they misbehave” and after they start menstruation.

In addition to the general silence about menstruation, one reason for this lack of preparation for menarche seems to be that parents and other adults in some places do not see any need to talk to girls about it. Comments in focus group discussions, particularly in **South Sudan** and **Ethiopia**, showed that some parents and teachers think that menstruation is a normal bodily function and there is nothing remarkable about it, so girls do not need any explanation or special training. Such views are linked to the general lack of understanding of the need for good menstrual hygiene and its importance for the health and overall wellbeing of girls.

### Lack of Preparation for Menarche

There was some variation across the five countries in the reported ages of girls starting menstruation, with the general range between 11 and 15 years. In **Zimbabwe** it was mentioned that some girls start as early as 8 years of age, with this attributed by respondents to the kinds of food they eat, particularly eggs. The studies indicate that very few girls in any of the countries are prepared for menstruation before it occurs, so that menarche is a distressing experience of fear, pain and shame.

The **South Sudan** study concluded that girls are not adequately provided with information while growing up, so the first experience of menstruation is without any preparation and thus a shock. 72.8% of schoolgirls in **Ethiopia** reported that they had received no information at all prior to starting menstruation.

Focus group discussions in **Tanzania** made it clear that most girls are not prepared for menstruation

### No information before starting menstruation:

- 72.8% of schoolgirls in Ethiopia
- 70% of schoolgirls in Tanzania

### Lack of Accurate Knowledge

Some of the surveys included questions specifically designed to test the prevalence of accurate knowledge. In **Ethiopia** detailed questions were included in the multiple response questionnaire completed by 650 menstruating schoolgirls. 22.4% of the girls did not know that menstrual blood comes from the uterus, while 18.5% had no idea

where it comes from. 21.2% did not know the cause of menstruation and only 55.7% recognized it as a normal physiological process. The remainder believed that it is caused by “a curse of God” (18.3%), “sin” (5.2%) and “disease” (3%). The focus group discussions conducted with parents also found similar ideas about the causes of menstruation.

In a similar questionnaire in **South Sudan**, only 63.7% girls responded that menstrual blood comes from the uterus, 48.7% thought that it is harmful to the body and 28.4% that menstruation a disease. 19.2% thought that pregnant women menstruate. In **Uganda** (2014) 75% of the total schoolgirls surveyed reported understanding what menstruation is, but no details were given as to what they actually knew. 74% claimed to have received some information on how to look after themselves during menstruation.

The study in **Tanzania** concluded that though nearly all the girls interviewed claimed to have some knowledge of puberty-related issues, what they actually know is very basic and 82% of them lack sufficient knowledge to manage their menstruation well. Misinformation is common, such as the beliefs reported from **Zimbabwe** that early menstruation is a sign of having had sex and that dysmenorrhoea will result in not being able to have children. Such ideas cause young girls anxiety and psychological distress.

## Sources of Information

As menstruation is generally secret from men it is the sole responsibility of women to provide information to girls. These women are very often reluctant to discuss the topic and have little education or access to accurate information themselves, resulting in misinformation and negative ideas being passed on to girls.

Girls in **South Sudan** reported getting information from their mothers (83.4%), sisters (82.3%) and friends (71.8%). In **Ethiopia** 54.2% of girls reported that they obtained information from family, specifically mothers and sisters, and 53.4% from friends.

Teachers in **Zimbabwe** (2014) suggested that the majority of girls confide in their mothers or female relatives after starting menstruation, but if the mother is not approachable the girl consults friends. Reticence of girls to raise the topic at home was a common theme across the studies, resulting in them

seeking information from peers, who also often lack access to accurate information. In the multiple-response questionnaire in **Tanzania**, 53.4% of schoolgirls reported that they obtained information from friends, while 32.5% learned from reading and 22.1% from media.

## Lack of Information in Schools

Though the studies showed variations in the information being provided by schools, the overwhelming conclusion is that the majority of girls are not being well-informed in school on issues relating to menstruation.

In **Ethiopia** 67% of girls reported that they had received no education on menstruation at school. In focus group discussions girls said they had the impression that teachers usually avoid the topic, with reproductive health lessons focusing on the reproductive functions of married women.

---

Our problem is that our senior woman teacher does not talk to us; we need her to talk to us on issues of MHM

Female primary school student, South Sudan

---

Only about one quarter of menstruating girls in **Ethiopia** reported having received any information at all before menarche, and only 17.4% of these had received it from school. Teachers and health extension workers reported that menstruation is not covered in their school curriculum and health packages and they cannot talk freely about the issue.

In **Tanzania** more than 80% of school health teachers in focus group discussions said that their knowledge on menstrual hygiene issues was too limited, and they were not clear of their position in supporting schoolgirls. They reported feeling that the only thing that they can do is to advise girls on sex-related issues and diseases and how to “handle themselves as grownups”.

More than 60% of school teachers interviewed in **Tanzania** reported that they mention menstruation too late, after girls have passed the menarche stage, and 72% reported that they talk to pupils

---

## More than 80% of school health teachers surveyed in Tanzania consider their knowledge on menstrual hygiene too limited

---

about such issues only when specifically consulted. Some schools do not have female teachers at all, particularly in remote areas, and girls do not consult male teachers on this issue.

In **South Sudan** it is common for schools to have only male teachers, as just over 12% of total teachers in the country are female. As menstruation is a taboo topic for men this severely limits the possibility of teaching and counselling on menstrual hygiene issues. The gap is partly filled by school health clubs, with 64.6% of girls reporting that they had received information from school clubs.

In the 2014 **Zimbabwe** 52% of girls surveyed said schools did not offer specific lessons on menstrual hygiene management. 40% indicated that lessons were left to class teachers, who often prove non-committal to teaching about menstrual issues.

While 36% of girls in **Zimbabwe** identified senior teachers as being responsible for health issues and the teaching of menstrual hygiene management, 16% indicated that it was left to health masters to provide guidance and information. Though 84% of schools reported having teachers to counsel menstruating girls, 63% of these schools had male counsellors, creating a barrier to girls obtaining the counselling and knowledge they need.

In focus group discussions, male stakeholders displayed limited knowledge of the common physical effects of menstruation and the researchers commented that it was clear that the provision

of multiple-choice responses enabled male participants to hazard guesses. Some school head teachers reported that the focus group discussions were 'eye-opening' to them in terms of the role they could play in improving girls' experience of menstruation and menstrual hygiene in school. .

The absence of knowledgeable adults who are willing to discuss menstruation and can provide accurate information, means that schoolgirls pick up whatever knowledge they can from peers and other sources. This leaves young girls at the mercy of misinformation and negative attitudes, which can be distressing and dangerous, such as the belief voiced in some focus group discussions in different countries that period pain can be relieved by sex.

---

This topic doesn't need to be taught, you can learn at home. It's like knowing to go to the toilet with slippers or shoes.

Male teacher, Ethiopia

---

If the topic of menstruation is taboo at home and not discussed at school it also means that boys have no access to accurate information to correct the negative ideas and attitudes they express towards menstruating girls. Both boys and girls need access to correct information to break this cycle. School health clubs can play an important role in providing this information.

## Girls in Control Highlight: Breaking the Silence in Schools in South Sudan

By the end of 2014 the Girls in Control programme in South Sudan had provided information on managing menstrual hygiene and using reusable pads, to over 4,500 schoolgirls.

### Activities included:

- School meetings for awareness creation;
- Information dissemination through “Talking Compounds”, posters with key MHM messages, developed in nine schools;
- Training in making reusable menstrual pads, through school health clubs.



*Reusable pad promotion and awareness creation by Eastern Bank Adolescent Group at Torit East Primary School*



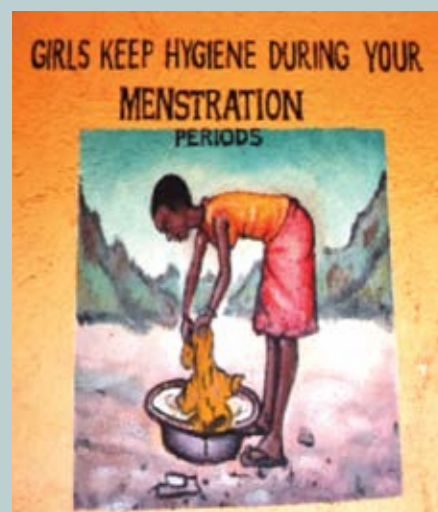
*Health club training in Ikwoto Girls' Primary School*

“We never heard anything openly like this about menstruation, but from today we will also tell our fellow girls who are not in the club about how to be in school during their menstrual period.”


Student, Lukotok Girls' Primary School,  
South Sudan



*Reusable pad production training in St. Bakita Girls' School*



*A sample awareness creation poster*

A young girl with short hair, wearing a maroon school uniform with a white collar, stands outdoors. She is holding a white plastic bag containing several white sanitary pads. The background is a blurred natural setting with green foliage and a dirt path.

In Tanzania 85% of girls interviewed said they had never used commercial pads



## V. Menstrual Materials Used

The studies collected detailed and complex data on the menstrual protection materials used by schoolgirls in the five countries. Although there are differences between and within countries, the overall picture from the studies is that very few girls have access to commercially produced sanitary pads, and they use combinations of whatever materials are available to them, including rags, cotton, sponges and goatskin. In some places, notably in parts of **South Sudan**, no protection is used at all. The materials used are often unhygienic and provide inadequate protection, leading to health implications such as infections, and staining and humiliation, which make it difficult for girls to stay in class.

### Percentage of menstruating schoolgirl respondents not using commercial/disposable sanitary pads:

- Ethiopia 65%
- South Sudan 70%
- Tanzania 85%
- Uganda 93%
- Zimbabwe 72%

### Limited Use of Commercial Pads

Where commercial sanitary pads are costly compared with household income they are not a high priority in family expenses. In some rural areas in Ethiopia the study found that to purchase sanitary pads at market prices costs around one tenth of a poor family's monthly income, or the equivalent of the cost of enough paraffin for a month's fuel needs. This is further complicated by the lack of control that women and girls have over household resources, the fact that girls generally cannot discuss with parents why they need pads, and the general limited understanding about menstrual hygiene, particularly on the part of fathers, who are often the decision makers controlling household finances.

In **Ethiopia** 65.2% of the 650 menstruating girls in the study reported that they had never bought or used commercial pads. Of these, 52.4% gave the

In Ethiopia buying commercial sanitary pads for a schoolgirl can cost the same as one month's fuel needs for the whole family – a difficult choice for many parents to make

reason that they were not long-lasting and 47.6% that they are too expensive. 44.2% were not aware of the availability of sanitary pads in the local market. 41.2% of the 616 girls who reported using any menstrual protection materials had used pads, and 57.6% of these had received them from NGOs or charitable organisations.

Focus group discussions with teachers, parents and girls made it clear that family income affects whether girls use sanitary pads or not, and that even when they are used this is often in combination with other materials. Though 65.8% of the urban respondents in **Ethiopia** reported that they have used pads, girls in focus group discussions in the towns of Butajira, Wukro, and Sebeta said that because disposable sanitary pads are expensive they use them only when they need to go school, and they generally use rags when at home.

In **Tanzania** 85% of the girls interviewed said they had never used commercial pads. 2% reported that they use pads sometimes when they get money, but if they do not have money they use rags and other local materials. A few said in focus group discussions that their parents do not like to see them miss class and so provide them with pads to use only when they are at school, but when they go home they use rags. 72% of those who had used pads had been given the money by their mothers. Some parents in Focus group discussions expressed concern that girls may be tempted into sexual relations to obtain money to buy personal items, including pads. Commercial disposable sanitary pads are used primarily among girls who get financial support from their parents, but pads are too expensive for most families, particularly in rural areas. The reported price-range of one pack of pads was TSh. 2000-3500 (US\$ 1.3-2.3).

In **Zimbabwe** 72% of girls reported never having used pads. When adults in schools were asked what menstrual protection pupils use, respondents in 58% of schools did not mention pads at all.

Many reported pads as just one of the materials being used by pupils, in combination with other materials, such as cotton wool and pieces of cloth (17% of schools); cotton wool (9%); and pieces of cloth (8%).

In **Uganda** (2014) only 6.3% of the 2,609 girls responding to the question reported using disposable pads, with these respondents all from Lira district. In **South Sudan** 72% of girls interviewed in secondary schools and 68% in primary schools said they did not have money to buy sanitary pads.

---

Cloth is ok during winter, however during summer it is very uncomfortable. It rubs against the skin and becomes smelly.

Enseno High School pupil,  
Meskan Woreda, Ethiopia

---

In addition to cost, the limited availability of commercial sanitary pads in local markets makes it difficult for schoolgirls to access them, particularly in rural areas. Teachers and school committee members in **Tanzania** commented that not only were pads expensive, but they were not even available in the local market, except occasionally in pharmacies. This was confirmed by shopkeepers, who gave transport, poor supply systems and low demand as the major reasons for not stocking pads. They said that demand was only from the few salaried women, such as teachers, nurses and government workers. 98% of the rural retailers interviewed suggested that if the cost of sanitary pads could be lowered, then the demand from schoolgirls would increase, but in interviews with parents only 24% were even aware of the existence of pads.

In **Ethiopia** the study team observed that disposable pads were not available in the rural areas of Meskan, Tole, Bure and Machakel, and even in the towns of Butajira and Wukro only four of the ten shops visited had disposable sanitary pads available. In in-depth interviews, shopkeepers reported that there was limited demand for commercial disposable sanitary pads, because people were not aware of them or could not afford them. 27% of respondents in **South Sudan** identified unavailability in their area

- 
- 47% of schoolgirls surveyed in South Sudan do not wear underwear
  - 42.9% in Ikwoto County use no menstrual protection at all
- 

as the reason for not using pads, although the majority had not even tried to look for or buy them because of cost or lack of awareness.

### Other Protection Materials Used

The majority of girls surveyed across the five countries use a combination of available materials, mostly cloth and rags, which they wash and re-use.

In focus group discussions in **Ethiopia** girls, parents and teachers in both rural and urban areas explained that the low cost and easy availability of rags and cloth made them the choice of most schoolgirls. Some girls explicitly mentioned that they prefer cloths to pads because they are cheap and can be reused. In the multiple-response questionnaire, 616 respondents reported using menstrual protection materials, 18.5% of whom reported using disposable rags, 4.3% soft paper, and 51.4% reusable cloths.

---

A woman can only be allowed to put on underwear when her husband has died.

A local chief, Kapoeta East, South Sudan

---

In **South Sudan** girls reported using a diverse range of materials, varying with local availability, as shown in Table 4 below. 26.2% of girls from Lopa-Lafon reported using pieces of mattress, while 20.8% of girls from Lopa-Lafon and Ikwoto County reported using natural materials, such as leaves and tree bark. In three counties, more than 20% of girls reported that they dig holes in the ground to collect their menstrual blood. Girls in focus group discussions reported that they make 'pads' using goatskin and oil, and they try to reduce the blood flow using traditional herbs, such as *bene* which is popular among the Lotuko tribe.



42.9% of girls from Ikwoto County and 22.2% from Kapoeta East reported that they use no menstrual protection at all, and this was corroborated by parents in focus group discussions. 42.7% of the overall schoolgirl respondents in **South Sudan** reported that they did not wear underwear, ranging from 90% in Lopa-Lafon to 38% in urban Torit County.

In **Uganda** (2014) 85% of the 2,609 girls responding to the question reported using cloth as menstrual protection. Only 8.6% reported using reusable pads. Almost all the girls reported providing the materials themselves. 18.2% of the total girls surveyed reported that they did not wear underwear, although no explanation was given as to why.

In **Tanzania** 84% of the schoolgirls interviewed said they used reusable 'pads', including pieces of dresses or scraps of old towels or blankets, cotton and sponge (Figure 5). 45% of girls in **Zimbabwe** reported using old cloths and rags, 29% cotton wool, and 3% newspaper and leaves. In one focus group it was reported that due to poverty girls use pieces of cloth, which they share with their mothers.

### Problems Faced by Girls

Girls face many problems using rags and other materials. Most of the girls interviewed in Tanzania were unhappy with the materials they use, saying they were ineffective, as blood leaks and stains their clothes. In focus group discussions girls commented that though rags, sponges and cotton were cheap, and sometimes free, they cannot withstand the blood flow and sometimes drop out, causing embarrassment.

In **Zimbabwe** girls reported that the materials they use cause discomfort, bruises and infections. In **Ethiopia** girls said they take a lot of care when they stand, sit and walk due to the fear of leaks and blood stains on their uniforms.

Pieces of old cloth and rags can be unclean and expose girls to health problems, including urinary and reproductive tract infections. The culture of secrecy around menstruation means that it is difficult for girls to dry cloths used for menstrual protection in direct sunlight, which is needed to kill germs.

---

Yes, we dry the cloth under the sunlight. But most of the time we place it under some clothes. When we dry it directly then it is in a hidden place - so no-one can see it.

Schoolgirl in a focus group discussion  
in Ethiopia

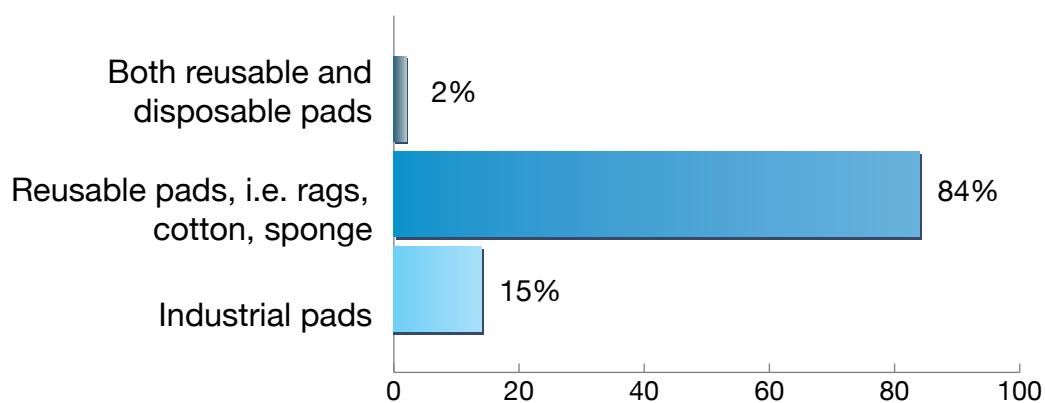
---

Girls in **Zimbabwe** (2014) reported drying cloths and underwear under the bed, and in **Ethiopia** 51.8% of girls surveyed reported drying and keeping their reusable cloths and pads in a "hidden place", due to shame and the fear of them being seen. Some girls reported that even if they dry their cloths outside, it is usually in a place where they cannot be noticed easily by others, and that they hide the menstrual cloths under other clothes. In focus group discussions in **Tanzania**, girls reported that their rags are often in an unhygienic condition, resulting in infections and irritations, due to a lack of water for washing them and the practice of drying them in hidden places, where they are not exposed to sunlight or heat.

**Table 4: Menstrual Materials Used by Girls in South Sudan**

Material used	County					
	Ikwoto %	Kapoeta East %	Kapoeta South %	Lopa-Lafon %	Magwi %	Torit %
Cloth	15.2	12.5	15.2	17.9	26.2	12.9
Purchased sanitary pads	9.2	17	11.4	19	21.9	21.6
Toilet paper	20	8.2	12.9	30.6	18.8	9.4
Cotton	17	12.5	11.5	21	24	14
Pieces of mattress	23.3	7.8	9.7	26.2	23.3	9.7
Natural materials (leaves, tree bark)	20.8	25	12.5	20.8	4.2	16.7
Digging a hole	18.9	21.6	24.3	8.1	24.3	2.7
Ash or sand	16.7	16.7	10.4	29.2	18.8	8.3
I use nothing	42.9	22.2	11.1	11.1	7.9	4.8

**Materials in Use**



## Girls in Control Highlight: Making Reusable Menstrual Pads in Ethiopia

In Ethiopia, a reusable sanitary pad factory has been engaged to produce sanitary kits containing: four reusable pads, two pairs of underwear, soap and a hygiene message. As of the end of 2014, 1,600 pads and 600 pairs of underwear had been distributed in Amhara, Oromia and Tigray, and 1,123 reusable pads in SNNPR, to 2,723 schoolgirls.

An innovative financing system for reusable menstrual pads has been introduced, through a revolving fund with instalments and direct cash payments. 28 local entrepreneurs have been trained to produce and distribute sanitary pads.

Women who have some skills in sewing clothes have been trained to sew reusable pads to facilitate local-level access. As of the end of 2014, 148 people (60 students, 30 teachers, 30 Health Extension Workers and 28 women) from Amhara, Tigray and Oromia have been trained as trainers (TOT) in reusable sanitary pad production and hygienic use of the pads. To facilitate further training and pad production participating schools have received a training manual, along with materials to produce reusable pads (flannel, waterproofing material, scissors, rulers, thread and needles).



*Reusable pad making at the Mariam Seba factory in Mekelle, Ethiopia*



*Reusable pad kit in with two pairs of underwear and four pads*



*A worker puts the finishing touches to a reusable pad at the Mariam Seba factory*

## Girls in Control Highlight: Accessible and Affordable Pads in Rural Tanzania

In 2014, SNV convened a consultation meeting with the relevant regulatory and policy bodies, local government authorities, producers, suppliers and consumers, in order to identify challenges and unlock supply chain constraints influencing the availability, accessibility and affordability of disposable sanitary pads. Initiation of this dialogue has led to improvement of sector coordination and better cohesion between the public and private sectors, with the ultimate objective of ensuring access to sanitary pads for all primary and secondary schoolgirls in rural districts of Tanzania.

### Since the meeting:

- Central and local governments are supporting the implementation and control of the new business model, including research on how to support producers to lower the cost of sanitary pads in rural areas;
- MOUs are being developed between local governments and small and medium enterprises to establish public-private partnerships for sustainable sanitary pad businesses in rural areas;
- Tanzania Bureau of Standards is emphasising control and regulation of sanitary pad quality.

As a result, the price of sanitary pads has reduced from US\$ 1.10 to US\$ 0.55. This price reduction has motivated local governments to encourage school committees to allocate budgets for menstrual hygiene kits for emergency use. Affordable disposable sanitary pads are increasingly accessible in rural markets and the quality assurance and improved price point has increased the number of rural parents buying sanitary pads for their children. In addition, the income of rural sanitary pad agents, who are largely marginalised women's and youth groups, has been increasing due to the expanded market.

A national stakeholder debate on menstrual hygiene management was held on 18 November, 2014, during which the Deputy Minister of Education and Vocational Training, Hon. Anna Kirango, was selected as National Menstrual Hygiene Management Champion.

Hon. Anna Kirango presented a special agenda item during the parliamentary session in May 2015 to convince the government to allocate a budget for improving menstrual hygiene management facilities in schools.



*Students at Magu primary school share a performance on MHM issues*



*Suggestion boxes to collect questions and feedback from students*



## VI. Facilities in Schools

Water, sanitation and hygiene facilities in schools are key inputs for effective learning, yet, just as in other aspects of society, gender discrimination is prevalent in accessing these facilities. In many cases this discrimination is related to cultural beliefs and traditions; generally it is caused by lack of recognition of the different problems and needs of boys and girls in relation to WASH.

This section highlights the existing WASH situation in the schools surveyed in the five countries, as well as the perceptions of adolescent girls about the suitability of the existing facilities for their special needs during menstruation. The lack of suitable toilets and facilities at school is especially difficult for girls during menstruation, as generally there is nowhere private for them to change sanitary wear and wash themselves, or to dispose of used pads or cloths. The study teams collected data on the school WASH facilities from respondents, with this data supplemented by observation in the schools visited. In Tanzania, for example, the team concluded that 98% of the schools in the study have insufficient WASH facilities for girls in terms of water, privacy and adequate waste disposal.

### Latrines

The general conclusion from the studies is that the number and condition of latrines is not adequate in the majority of schools across the five countries.

Out of 18 schools observed by the survey team in **Ethiopia**, five did not have separate toilet blocks for boys and girls. Most of the school latrines observed were full of flies, with foul odour, faeces and urine on the floor, and a lack of water. Although changing rooms were observed at all 18 schools, the survey team reported that in most schools they were nominal rather than functional, as they lacked adequate privacy, sanitary pads and water, and girls fear isolation and discrimination if they are seen going to use them.

SNV's 2012 study of WASH facilities in Masvingo, **Zimbabwe** found that 23% of school latrines were non-functional, and only 51% of schools had latrines that could be rated as being in 'good' condition.

In **South Sudan** 12 of the 49 schools visited did not have separate latrine blocks for boys and girls, and eight had no toilets at all. 16 were observed to have faeces on the latrine floors.

In **Uganda**, 83.8% of schools had separate toilets for boys, girls and teachers. However, 31.4% of the latrines observed were non-functional and only 47.8% were considered 'clean'. 20.7% had faeces on the floor, and 32.8% had flies and foul odour. 27.3% of the 604 teachers interviewed reported that pupils practiced open defecation, and 22% that girls practiced open urination.

### Water

In many schools across the five countries, even where water supplies were available they were not functional throughout the year, and resources were rarely allocated for operation and maintenance of school water systems. Schools relying on rainwater harvesting structures were reported as having water for a maximum of three months after the end of the rainy season. In such conditions few schools can make water available inside the latrines.

In **South Sudan** only 45% of the primary schools surveyed had access to safe water. 38 of 49 had water within the school compound or within one kilometre, but seven of these water systems were found to be non-functioning. Only six of 49 schools had water available inside latrine cubicles (buckets or basins). In Ethiopia none of the schools visited had water available inside the latrine cubicles, while in **Zimbabwe** only 44% of schools with water supply also had water inside the latrine cubicles.

---

### Access to safe water in school:

- 45% primary schools in South Sudan
  - 57.1% schools in Uganda
- 

In **Uganda** (2014) 56.5% of the schools observed had water inside the compound, but only 26.3% had water available inside the latrine cubicles (basins and buckets). 57% of the teachers surveyed believed that the water available at school was safe.

### Waste Disposal

The absence of discreet facilities for disposal of used sanitary wear is also a problem for schoolgirls. Analysis of data from the studies on how girls dispose of used sanitary materials shows that

forests, bush areas and pit latrines are the main places used for disposal. In **Uganda** (2014) 70% of schools were observed to have no disposal facilities available. In **Zimbabwe**, while 62% of the schools visited in the 2012 study appeared to have waste disposal facilities, 65% of the girls said they disposed of used sanitary wear by throwing it in latrine holes.

In **Ethiopia** 43.8% of girls said they threw used sanitary wear in the latrines. Disposal of used cloths and sanitary pads was reported as a challenge in both urban and rural schools in **Tanzania**. Girls in focus group discussions reported disposing of sanitary wear in school toilets, at times causing the toilets to clog. Many focus group participants said that they carried used menstrual materials home in their school bags or pockets, giving a bad smell to their clothes and exercise books.

---

### Used sanitary wear is disposed of in latrine holes, by:

- 65% of girls in Zimbabwe
  - 43.8% of girls in Ethiopia
- 

### Emergency Supplies

Very few of the schools surveyed provide painkillers, sanitary pads or cloths for emergency use. In **Zimbabwe** (2012) only 25% of schools reported having emergency pads on hand, while 24% reported providing painkillers. In South Sudan six of 49 schools reported providing sanitary kits. In **Uganda** (2014) the study team observed that 68% of schools did not have any sanitary materials for the girls.

In **Tanzania** 80% of the school committee members and teachers interviewed responded that schools did not plan or budget for emergency pad supply for girls. Matrons in some schools said they sometimes gave toilet paper, rags and cotton to girls, but the more usual solution was to send girls home if they started menstruating in school. In Ethiopia only 9% of the total 769 schoolgirl respondents reported that schools provided emergency pads, while 7% mentioned provision of painkillers. It is clear that providing support to girls to relieve the pain and

---

### Availability of emergency pads in school:

- 9% in Ethiopia (schoolgirl respondents)
  - 32% of schools in Uganda
  - 20% of schools in Tanzania
  - 25% of schools in Zimbabwe
- 

discomfort of menstruation is a very low priority in schools in all the countries surveyed.

### Girls' Perceptions

In **Ethiopia** 94.5% of total schoolgirl respondents said that there were no safe toilet facilities for girls, with access to water, at school. 28.7% reported that they used the bush or open areas around the school. 81.5% of the 650 menstruating schoolgirl respondents reported that the main challenges during menstruation were lack of water for washing (80.56%), absence of privacy for changing sanitary pads due to inadequate toilets (53.8%), shared toilets for males and females (27%), and lack of doors and locks (40.4%).

---

In our school there is no specific place to dump the cloth; I wish there was a dustbin. Many times we just throw it in the toilet pan.

Schoolgirl in focus group discussion, Tanzania

---

Many girls in the focus group discussions in **Ethiopia** said they avoided going to the toilets during menstruation due to a lack of privacy, or that they went in pairs and thus lost class time waiting for each other.

The 2012 study in **Zimbabwe** cited data collected by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, in

which 63% of girls complained that water sources were outside toilet units, and 44% said water was not always available in the handwashing facilities.

In **South Sudan** 56.6% of girls reported the lack of a private place to change as the primary reason for not going to school during menstruation. In the 2014 study in **Uganda** only 30% of the total girls surveyed reported that they had separate changing rooms.

Girls in focus group discussions in **Tanzania** said that during menstruation they felt like they smelled bad, “similar to a rotten egg”, due to the absence of appropriate washing and changing facilities. The accompanying sense of shame, embarrassment and restriction resulted in them deciding to isolate themselves from others by staying at home throughout their menstrual period.

## Girls in Control Highlight : Girl-Friendly Latrines in Zimbabwe

The Girls in Control project in Zimbabwe has produced a design for girl-friendly latrines for schools, under the project component on increasing girls’ access to appropriate sanitation and menstrual hygiene facilities in schools. 15 local builders have been trained to construct these latrines and as of the end of 2014, 100 girl-friendly latrines units have been constructed in 20 schools.

The standard design for school sanitation in most rural areas and any peri-urban sites throughout Zimbabwe is based on a multi-compartment version of the Blair Ventilated Improved Pit-latrine (VIP), which was introduced by the Ministry of Health in the early 1980s. Multi-compartment units are built with six to ten cubicles, with some designed as urinals. Units for boys and girls are similar.

The Girls in Control girl-friendly design has adapted this model to provide the safety and privacy that girls need, especially during menstruation. The design has doors and locks, water, buckets and a disposal bin for used sanitary materials inside the cubicle.

One important factor that has emerged from research into menstrual health management is that girls do not want to be identified as menstruating, as this can lead to embarrassment and humiliation. The implication is that a girl-friendly latrine design needs to be available to all girls all the time, whether menstruating or not.



*Inspecting girl-friendly model toilets in Zimbabwe*



MHM ITS ABOUT; PARTICIPATION,  
PERFORMANCE AND FULFILLING  
THEIR GOALS

HEDHI YAHUSU; MAHUDHURIO, UFAULU  
NA KUTIMIZA MALENGO YAO.





## VII. Policy Support

The issue of school-based menstrual hygiene management practice needs policy and programme support and significant investment for long-lasting solutions. The studies conducted in the five countries indicate that few policy implementers (including teachers and lower-level officials) or development partners are aware of the existence of policies and strategies to address menstrual hygiene management within education, even where they do exist.

In addition, female representation on school WASH governance structures is limited, contributing to the lack of focus on WASH interventions for girls, such as ensuring adequate facilities for managing menstruation.

In **Ethiopia** the issue of menstrual hygiene management is not explicitly covered either in education sector policy and strategy or health sector policy, strategies and programmes. The Federal Ministry of Health, together with civil society organisations, has initiated the development of national guidelines on menstrual hygiene management. The national standard ratio of latrines to pupils is under 1:100 for girls and under 1:150 for boys.

In **Tanzania** the 1992 Education Policy does not refer to WASH or menstrual hygiene management in schools, although the 2010 School WASH Guideline and the 2012-2017 National School WASH Strategy have included menstrual hygiene management. The Guideline refers to rest rooms for girls and also suggests the use of nurses' rooms for this purpose. The Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MoEVT) has set a minimum standard of one toilet per 20 girls and one toilet per 25 boys. The existence of these policies is not well known by lower-level decision makers and implementers, showing that they are not well enforced.

In the study in **Tanzania**, 64% of local government officials interviewed said there were no strategies to support schoolgirls in terms of menstrual hygiene. When those who said they did have plans were asked to elaborate, 34% only mentioned increasing the knowledge of female teachers, with no mention of improving school facilities or providing emergency pads or painkillers.

76% of school committee members interviewed had only a basic idea of menstrual hygiene, while 93% said

they had insufficient knowledge. They are therefore not in a good position to provide policy direction to schools or ensure that budgets are available. Schools reported that they did not have funds in their budgets for improving or constructing suitable latrine facilities.

---

### Local Government officials in Tanzania:

- 64% - no strategies for menstrual hygiene management
  - 93% - insufficient knowledge
- 

**Uganda** has a Gender in Education Sector Policy that attempts to mainstream menstrual health management, however enforcement has been weak and few policy implementers are aware of its existence. There is also a National Strategy for Girls Education in Uganda, which has not yet been translated into action in primary schools.

In **Zimbabwe** the 2006 amendment of the 1976 Education Act, and related regulations, have made provisions for WASH in schools. It is a requirement that every school should have at least two blocks of toilets, with separate toilet blocks for girls and boys. The number of toilets should be determined by enrolment, in line with Ministry of Health and Child Welfare standard of 25 pupils to one toilet (squat hole). However, the issue of menstrual hygiene management receives little mention in the Act or the 2006 Regulation. The Zimbabwe National Family Planning Council has a structure to address menstrual hygiene management through its youth centres, as well as a reproductive health manual, but lacks the financial resources for implementation. 53.3% of the teachers and school authorities interviewed in the 2014 study in Zimbabwe said that there was no policy around the subject of menstrual hygiene management, and menstrual hygiene management was not covered in the Health Act. 36.7% were unsure whether such policies and guidance existed.

## Girls in Control Highlight: Parliamentary Action in Uganda

Following the 2014 Menstrual Hygiene Day commemoration, which culminated in a march to Parliament and the official launch of the Girls in Control project, the Parliamentary WASH Forum drafted a motion on menstrual hygiene management. SNV engaged with Members of Parliament and contributed to the development of the motion, which has since been passed.

The motion includes the following provisions:

1. That a comprehensive policy on menstrual hygiene management be formulated to enhance implementation of programmes related to the school-going girl child.
2. That Government sets aside funds within the Ministry of Education and Sports to support sustainable menstrual hygiene management programmes as part of the Universal Primary Education Programme.
3. That the Ministry of Education and Sports incorporates menstrual hygiene management as one of the variables that is tracked by the Education Management Information Systems and is reported on under the education sector review as well as monitored on by school inspectors on a termly basis.
4. That Government places emphasis on the provision of washrooms, painkillers, pads, underwear and changing rooms for the girls in schools.
5. That Government incorporates menstrual hygiene management into the Parents and Teachers' Association and School Management Committee agenda.
6. That Government places emphasis on menstrual counselling and support for the girl child in schools through the role of the senior women teachers.
7. That primary schools embark on providing information on menstrual hygiene within the comprehensive sex education framework for both boys and girls.
8. That teacher training colleges incorporate menstrual hygiene management, in addition to sex education, in their training, to equip teachers with skills to support the girl child.

Following the motion, the first national Menstrual Hygiene Management Conference was conducted in August 2014, by the Ministry of Education and Sports and partners, including SNV, WSSCC and the media. With the theme of "Break the Silence on Menstruation: Keep Girls in School", the conference drew stakeholders from across the globe.

According to the February 19, 2015, edition of the daily news magazine, *New Vision*, the Ministry of Education and Sports has passed a regulation for schools to provide sanitary kits for schoolgirls, and also separate facilities for boys and girls, with water. Sanctions are to be placed on any school that does not adhere to this regulation. Though there are differences of opinion on the practicability of this regulation, it is an important step forward, and some schools have started to distribute menstrual hygiene materials to the girls.

## Girls in Control Highlight: Parliamentary Action in Zimbabwe

Through engaging with policy makers the Girls in Control project has contributed to the tabling of the issue of menstrual hygiene management for parliamentary discussion in Zimbabwe. On July 8, 2014, Proportional Representation legislator, Priscilla Misihairabwi-Mushonga, introduced a motion in the National Assembly calling for the scrapping of duty on sanitary wear. The legislator said that it was desperation and the problems suffered by women in the country during menstruation that forced her introduce the motion.

Although some parliamentarians contested the fact that rural women who cannot afford sanitary wear resorted to using traditional solutions such as cow dung and maize stalks to manage menstrual flow, Mutasa South MP Irene Zindi (Zanu PF) explained to the National Assembly during the emotional debate how women use such methods. She drew on examples given by a school teacher during an SNV event promoting sanitary wear, which was attended by Deputy Minister for Women's Affairs, Gender and Community Development, Abigail Damasane.

According to Ms Zindi, the teacher explained the problems faced by poor schoolgirls who could not afford sanitary wear, adding that at times they avoid attending classes for fear of spoiling their uniforms and being harassed by the boys. She explained that young girls resort to using leaves and maize cobs or stalks to block the flow of blood due to a lack of access to proper sanitary wear.

Many legislators during the debate on the motion shared their own experiences and those of their wives and daughters, and called for these "instruments of dignity" (sanitary wear) to be provided free of charge to all women in the country.

The parliamentary discussion resulted in two decisions:

- Removing duty from imported sanitary pads;
- Establishing national capacity for producing pads locally.

### **Excerpt from Parliamentary Record, 8 July 2014:**

MOTION

SCRAPPING OF DUTY ON SANITARY WEAR

MRS MISIHAIRABWI-MUSHONGA:

I move the motion standing in my name that this House - NOTING that sanitary wear is a sexual right for women; COGNISANT that most of the sanitary wear on the market is imported and is therefore subject to duty; CONCERNED that sanitary wear has become unaffordable for the majority of women; FURTHER CONCERNED that most girls miss schooling days every month because they are unable to afford sanitary wear; AWARE that for most elderly women incontinence is part of the aging process and sanitary pads are a necessity of daily life; NOW, THEREFORE, resolves that;

- i) The current 20% duty and 15% VAT on sanitary wear be immediately scrapped; and
- ii) Sanitary wear for elderly women be given free at all reproductive centres.

MS TOFFA: I second.

MRS MISIHAIRABWI-MUSHONGA: Thank you Mr Speaker.



## VIII. Impact on schooling

I am not happy with this situation, last month I missed classes for three days; when I came back to school I found out our mathematics teacher had covered two difficult topics and I don't have anyone to take me through them.

Schoolgirl from Magu District, Tanzania

The studies showed clearly that the menstrual experience of schoolgirls across the five countries is overwhelmingly negative, with humiliation and abuse common, in addition to extreme discomfort and pain. Girls suffer physical and psychological distress resulting from the prevailing environment of menstruation being treated as a taboo subject, along with the absence of support from adults, lack of appropriate sanitary wear and inadequate changing and washing facilities in schools. The combination of these factors can lead to school being a miserable experience for girls during menstruation. Both schoolgirls and teachers reported that girls find it difficult to concentrate on their studies during menstruation and may avoid school altogether.

48% of schoolgirls in Tanzania reported that they lose concentration in class due to fear of staining their uniforms.

### Effect on Classroom Experience

Girls experience period pains and related health issues in an environment of silence, often without support from adults, pain relief or medical care. In **Zimbabwe**, 49% of teachers who reported that girls miss school during menstruation cited period pains as the reason. 40% of girls in **Tanzania** reported that pains such as stomachache, headache and backache made them too uncomfortable to stay in class (Figure 11). 48% of the girls interviewed reported that, in addition to pain, they found it difficult to concentrate in classes due to a lack of confidence caused by poor sanitary wear and fear of staining their uniforms. When stains occur they go home.

71% of schoolgirl respondents in **Uganda** reported that they were negatively affected by menstruation

at school. In **South Sudan** 73.7% schoolgirl respondents cited lack of sanitary wear as the major hindrance to school attendance. Other reasons given were: severe pain (72.5%); lack of a private place to change (56.6%); fear of being made fun of (43.8%); feeling dirty (43.6%); discomfort due to tiredness (43.6%); and not being allowed by parents (21%) (Figure 12).

73.7% of girls in South Sudan reported that lack of sanitary wear prevented them from going to school.

In **Ethiopia** 72% of the 650 schoolgirls surveyed said menstruation affected them at school. 42.3% of the girls said they could not concentrate and 28.2% reported psychological effects such as lack of confidence, while 62.7% reported having had urinary infections and 70.7% some kind of skin discomfort in the genital area. In focus group discussions a majority of girls mentioned physical problems during menstruation, most commonly abdominal pain, followed by excessive bleeding and breast pain. They also mentioned feeling weak and exhausted, and expressed worry about menstruation coinciding with exams. The major hindrances to school attendance were reported to be lack of sanitary pads and adequate toilets with water facilities and privacy to change, as well as feeling dirty, discomfort, tiredness and not being allowed to attend school by parents.

Very few of the schools in the study reported availability of painkillers and first aid kits, which could help ease menstruation-related pain and help girls stay in class.

## Days Missed: Girls' Perceptions

In **Ethiopia** 50.3% of the 650 post-menarche girls in the study reported that they had missed school during their period. Of these, 85% of girls reported missing one to three days per month on average, with 15% missing more than four days. The study concluded that missing an average of three days per month can translate into a loss of as many as 24 to 30 school days per year, or 13% of total learning time (220 school days per year).

---

85% of girls in Ethiopia who reported missing school because of menstruation (334 girls) said they missed an average of 1-3 days per month

---

Girls in **South Sudan** reported missing between one and eight days of school each month due to menstruation, with an average of four days missed. 21% of girls reported not being allowed to attend school during menstruation by their parents. 48% of girls in Tanzania reported missing class due to menstruation, with 36% staying home during days of heavy flow and 12% not attending school at all during menstruation.

In the 2012 study in **Uganda**, 54% of girls reported missing one to three days of school per month due to menstruation, backed up by 77% of teachers estimating girls miss two to three days per month. The study estimated that over 57% of schoolgirls miss 11% of learning time. In the 2014 study, 30.13% of the girls who had started menstruating (4,066 girls) reported that they missed school due to menstruation. In **Zimbabwe** (2014) over 62% of girls surveyed reported missing school for up to two days per month due to menstruation, 28% for between two and four days and 10% for four days or more.

## Adults' Perceptions

Teachers and other stakeholders who participated in the studies showed awareness of how menstruation affects schoolgirls, although they reported not feeling well equipped to support them. 76% of parents in **Tanzania** said they were aware of the challenges girls face during menstruation,

---

The 2012 study in Uganda estimated that over 57% of schoolgirls miss 11% of learning time due to menstruation.

---

and that girls are sometimes forced to miss class during heavy flow to avoid shame, stress and embarrassment if they soil their uniforms due to using inappropriate menstrual protection materials such as rags and cotton.

83% of the school personnel interviewed in **Zimbabwe** (2014) reported that some girls miss school due to menstruation, while 43% of teachers interviewed cited lack of access to sanitary pads as the reason for this absence. Respondents from government departments, churches and NGOs reported that the effects of menstruation on schoolgirls included lack of concentration, psychological distress, poor performance, worry, anxiety and low self-esteem, and low participation in class and sports.

Over half of teachers participating in focus group discussions in **Ethiopia** thought there was a potential correlation between girls menstruating and staying away from school. In the 2012 **Uganda** study, head teachers estimated that 60% of girls missed school during menstruation and 24% of teachers surveyed gave poor management of menstrual hygiene as a reason for girls dropping out of school.

Teachers themselves are also affected by the lack of adequate facilities, and the potential educational effect of absenteeism by female teachers during menstruation is an area for further research.

---

Sometimes I also find problems when I experience my periods because there is no water at school. I prefer to remain at home. I cannot help myself at school.

A teacher in South Sudan

---

## Dropping Out

There are many complex reasons for girls dropping out of school, and some of these were raised in the studies. Families may not value education for their daughters, particularly when faced by extreme poverty. Girls may also be seen as an economic asset due to the potential bride price they can bring to their families through an arranged marriage.

In **South Sudan** there is generally low enrolment of girls in upper primary and secondary school, largely due to early marriage. However, across Eastern Equatoria girls also start primary school late, so that there are menstruating girls even in the earliest grades of primary school. Some parents participating in focus group discussions suggested that girls were sent to school because of the school feeding programmes, and then withdrawn before they complete primary schooling to marry, bringing economic gains to the family in terms of a bride price (generally paid in cattle).

Some parents and teachers in focus group discussions in **Ethiopia** discussed how parents, especially fathers, have been pushing their daughters to migrate to the Middle East to work, leading to a decline in the number of girls in school at the upper primary and secondary levels.

In **Tanzania**, school committee members and parents said the main reasons for girls dropping out of school were pregnancy and early marriage.

Girls in Sub-Saharan Africa face many challenges to staying in school. What is clear from the studies across the five countries is that school is made more difficult for girls by the lack of appropriate water, sanitation and hygiene, facilities. This has a negative impact on their learning and can potentially undermine the efforts made by the education sector to keep them in school. The accumulated loss of class time can result in increasingly poor performance, which can, in turn, lead to failing exams, losing motivation and dropping out of school.

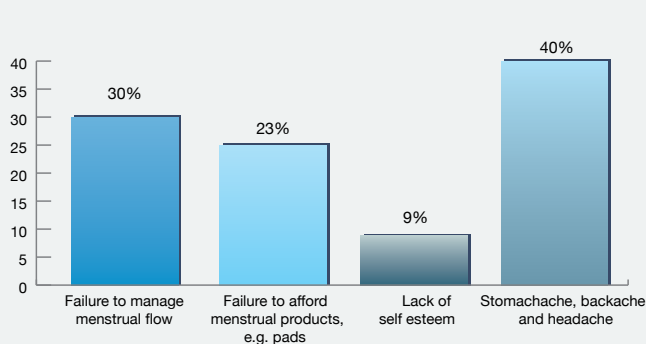
---

People here value cattle so much that they can give away their daughter, even at a young age, just to get cows. So they will not take the girl to school but instead marry her off.

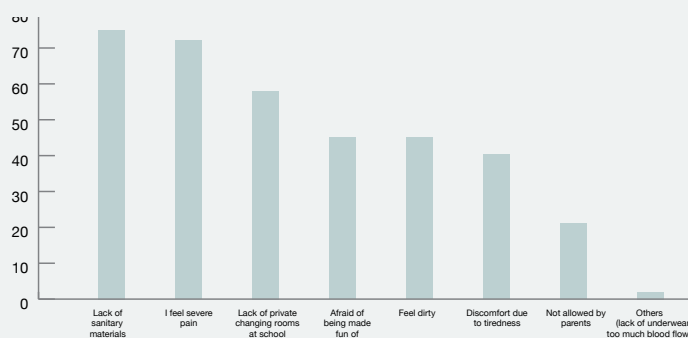
PTA Chairperson, Torit County, South Sudan

---

Challenges faced by schoolgirls during menstruation in Tanzania



Reasons girls in South Sudan miss school during menstruation



---

In South Sudan 64.6% of girls reported that they had received information from school health clubs

---





## IX. The Way Forward

The studies collected a wealth of information, which can inform the design of interventions to improve the menstrual hygiene management of schoolgirls, both within the SNV Girls in Control programme and more widely. The individual country studies have highlighted the specific situations of rural and urban areas and relevant geographical variations, which are being taken into account in planning Girls in Control programme activities and behaviour change communication (BCC) strategies in the country projects.

This section highlights some comments from study participants on what needs to be done, and explains the SNV Girls in Control programme components, which address the four key themes of awareness and knowledge about menstruation; supply of menstrual protection materials; provision of physical WASH infrastructure in schools; and policy direction.

### Breaking the Silence

The studies themselves functioned as first steps in breaking the silence around menstruation in many of the participating communities, bringing attention to a subject rarely mentioned and asking people to think and talk about it. From the discussions it was clear that many people welcomed this and had ideas to share about the importance of changing attitudes and improving knowledge on menstrual hygiene management.

---

**88% of schoolgirls interviewed in Ethiopia think that breaking the silence on menstruation will increase the educational participation of girls.**

---

- In **Zimbabwe** school administrators and other key informants made suggestions on how to minimise the impact of harmful cultural and religious beliefs, including: capacity building of teachers; positively targeting traditional and religious leaders with menstrual hygiene information; involving men; and holding parenting seminars.
- School health clubs are already playing an important role in filling the gaps in providing information on menstruation. In **South Sudan** 64.6% of girls reported that they had received

information from school health clubs.

- In **Tanzania** 21% of girls reported media as being their primary source of information on menstruation.
- 35% of girls interviewed in **Ethiopia** said they had learned about menstruation from school mini-media.
- 87% of teachers in **Tanzania** thought that involving parents in dialogue on how to support their daughters on menstrual hygiene issues would benefit schoolgirls.
- The multiple response questionnaire data in **Ethiopia** shows that 88% of schoolgirls interviewed think breaking the silence on menstruation will increase educational participation of girls. Other advantages mentioned included: avoiding fear and shame (69.8%); decreasing school absenteeism (59.6%); reducing student drop-out rates (52.7%); and improving educational performance (46.0%).
- Health extension workers and school teachers in **Ethiopia** suggested that menstrual hygiene management should be mainstreamed within health extension packages and the school curriculum, and that this would be of paramount importance for girls' education. The important role that health extension workers can play is illustrated by evidence from the focus group discussions with students, teachers and parents that there is better understanding and freer discussion of menstrual issues in those rural areas where health extension workers have already conducted awareness creation activities.
- Some teachers in **Uganda** mentioned that information materials could be useful resources, such as the booklet on menstrual management for schoolgirls published by NETWAS and SNV in 2013.

**SNV Girls in Control Programme Component:** Girls' and community have increased awareness, skills and attitude change

**Planned Programme Outcome:** 8.5 million people (girls, parents, community leaders, development workers, decision makers, and teachers) in the five project countries, gain increased skills and



improved attitudes towards menstrual hygiene management.

The data and suggestions from the studies are being used to inform the Girls in Control programme interventions towards these outcomes. Interventions are specifically targeting boys and men to help address menstrual health issues in schools and communities. Community and school health club models are being utilised to reinforce hygiene behaviour change and mini-media equipment is being given to selected schools for message development.

Training is being provided to media professionals, and radio messages and IEC/BCC materials are being produced and disseminated.

The expected changes resulting from this programme component are:

- Progress in the capacity of local organisations to support improved menstrual hygiene practices and to address stigmatisation through behaviour change communication and empowerment strategies;
- Improved demand and use of appropriate and affordable menstrual hygiene management facilities and products by schoolgirls.

## Menstrual Protection Materials

The current menstrual protection options for schoolgirls are limited by cost, availability and awareness. It is difficult to discern clear preferences on menstrual materials from the data in the studies, due to the general lack of awareness about potential alternatives, such as purpose-made hygienic reusable pads or cost-effective disposal pads.

- In **Ethiopia** many respondents expressed a preference for disposable pads, which are seen as easy to use and to carry. Some participants suggested that if they had the option to choose between sanitary pads and rags/cloths they would want to use disposable sanitary pads, but due to lack of finance they do not have this choice.
- A preference was also expressed for pads in **Zimbabwe**, as girls feel more confident when using pads and less afraid of leaks and embarrassment. However, focus group

discussions indicated that girls would use reusable menstrual pads due to higher quality and comfort than materials currently used and the cost advantage of reusable pads over disposable pads.

- In **Tanzania** 70% of girls would prefer to use disposable pads, and 60% of parents and 62% of teachers would like girls to be able to use pads, as they would like to see them comfortable during their menstruation, completing their studies, performing well and not engaging in risky sexual behaviour for favours. However, most parents would support their children with disposable sanitary pads only if the price were lowered to TSh. 500 to TSh. 800 (US\$ 0.3-0.5) per pack.
- 22% of girls in the **Tanzania** study were worried about the quality of pads, and 8% said they would not use them even if they were free, as they believed they were not safe and would harm the reproductive system. Parents in focus group discussions also mentioned that pads cause fungus and were not safe for health.
- 10% of schoolgirl respondents in **South Sudan** said they would not be comfortable using commercial sanitary pads.

What is clear across the five countries is that girls need to be presented with better alternatives, that are affordable, practical and meet their concerns about adequate protection and health impacts. As quality reusable pads have previously not been available in the market, and awareness about them is limited to a few small NGO projects, participants in the studies were not able to evaluate them as a choice. Although girls might prefer commercial pads where given the choice, realistically they are not an affordable or sustainable option.

The studies also collected information on some innovative alternatives to commercially available disposable pads, which so far have limited outreach but may have potential for scaling up. In Uganda some schools are providing girls with locally produced, affordable and environmentally friendly disposable pads from two companies, AFRIpads and Meka. More information is needed on these pads in terms of affordability and satisfaction in order to assess the potential for including such innovations in SNV's social marketing model, which works with manufacturers, distributors and retailers to provide girls with access to appropriate, affordable and sustainable menstrual products.

## **SNV Girls in Control Programme Component:** Girls have increased access to affordable and safe sanitary material supply

**Planned Programme Outcome:** 141,110 schoolgirls and 3,000 female teachers in 491 schools across the five countries have access to supply of safe and affordable menstrual hygiene management materials.

The Girls in Control programme is working on making sanitary materials more affordable, while also reducing their impact on the environment.

Country-level projects are testing whether reusable pads are an acceptable alternative if they are high quality, affordable, and packaged with the necessary hygiene-related messages.

Girls, boys, teachers, women and health workers are being trained on how to produce reusable pads, and the projects are closely monitoring the experience of girls in using the pads, including washing and drying, which is linked to addressing the taboos related to drying menstrual hygiene materials in sunlight. Further design research is needed to identify quicker-drying innovations and materials.

The Girls in Control programme is also promoting public-private partnerships and conducting supply chain studies and consumer preference surveys to come up with new solutions for private sector investment in menstrual hygiene materials and affordable and sustainable local production.

The expected change from this programme component is:

- Different consumer segments will have improved access to appropriate and affordable menstrual hygiene products and services.

### Facilities in Schools

It has been internationally accepted that in order to manage their menstrual hygiene at schoolgirls need:

- Privacy to change their menstrual protection material as often as necessary;
- Water and soap to wash as required;

- Access to discreet facilities to dispose of used menstrual management materials.

The studies found that most schools do not offer girls this standard of facilities. Both schoolgirls and adults interviewed were clear that improving facilities in schools would make school attendance easier for both girls and their female teachers during menstruation.

- In **Tanzania** 99% of the girls interviewed said they were not satisfied with school hygiene facilities, as they were not user friendly. This was an particular concern when girls were menstruating. School teachers and school committee members also commented that girls were not comfortable during their periods because the school environment was not friendly in terms of allowing them to manage their menstrual flow, which subsequently affected their academic performance.
- The majority of focus group participants in **Ethiopia** mentioned that they could not maintain their privacy at school because the existing toilet facilities and infrastructure were not suitable for female students.
- The **Zimbabwe** study cited data collected by Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in 2012, in which 88% of girls confirmed the need for privacy (including functioning doors) in improved toilet facilities; the majority were not happy with the current state of the Blair toilets without doors, which provide no privacy for changing pads.
- In **Uganda** (2012) 81% of the senior women teachers interviewed were not satisfied with the school facilities for managing menstruation, while 62% of girls chose “better menstrual facilities” as their response to the question of how to keep pupils with menstrual health challenges in school. In the 2014 study, over 80% of teachers surveyed thought that the most accessible channel for ensuring availability of sanitary pads to girls would be through the senior woman teacher.

The data is also clear on the fact that girls are scared of being seen disposing of their used sanitary materials and tend not to use disposal facilities in public areas. The implication is that closed bins or containers inside toilet cubicles are necessary to prevent girls throwing used materials into school toilets.



The data also suggests that girls avoid going to restrooms and changing rooms that are specifically designated for use during menstruation, for fear of being identified as menstruating by fellow students. The implication is that they are more likely to benefit from facilities that are available to all pupils, such as a nurses' rooms, and from girl-friendly facilities being available at all times. It is also important for schools to provide emergency sanitary wear and painkillers, to enable girls to stay in the classroom.

**SNV Girls in Control Programme Component:** Girls' increased access to appropriate sanitation and menstrual hygiene management facilities

**Planned Programme Outcome:** Girls and female teachers in 491 targeted schools in the five countries have access to menstrual hygiene management facilities.

The needs of girls and female teachers need to be integrated as a routine part of the planning and design of WASH facilities in schools. In practical terms, this means ensuring the provision

of separate toilets for girls, with doors and locks, facilities for washing and facilities for disposal of used sanitary wear.

To enable this, the Girls in Control programme is producing design guides for girl-friendly menstrual hygiene management facilities, and facilitating the construction and rehabilitation of such facilities in the target schools. School authorities and staff are being trained in the management, operation and maintenance of WASH facilities and services, to ensure improvements to girls' toilets and hygienic waste disposal systems in schools.

Expected change from this programme component:

- Progress in capacity for the local management and maintenance of school WASH services to include menstrual hygiene management facilities in schools.

### Policy Direction

Schools cannot provide sustained improvements to menstrual hygiene facilities and guidance for girls without appropriate budgets and clear policy

direction. The studies have clearly demonstrated that even where countries are beginning to include menstrual hygiene management in high-level policies, this has not been accompanied by directives and protocols to facilitate implementation. As a result there is limited awareness of these policies and a lack of appropriate strategies to address the issue at the level of local governments and school administrations, even though many teachers, parents and other adults are aware of the challenges that girls face.

In order for attention to menstrual hygiene to be addressed in a way that is effective and sustainable, it cannot be an afterthought or add-on. Menstrual hygiene management needs to be an integral part of wider efforts to promote girls' education. This implies that menstrual hygiene management is an essential component of the dialogue with policy makers, practitioners and communities about girls education, as well as reproductive health and WASH.

**SNV Girls in Control Programme Component:** Increased integration of menstrual hygiene management in school mapping, planning and resource allocation

**Planned Programme Outcome:** National education plans and strategies exist in the five countries and the 25 target district education offices, with clear menstrual hygiene management policy direction. 491 target schools incorporate menstrual hygiene management in their plans and allocated budgets.

The pilot projects under the Girls in Control programme will provide information and insights to

guide the development of protocols, guidelines and manuals to define a standard approach to a safe and appropriate menstrual hygiene environment in schools. Country projects are facilitating multi-stakeholder dialogue at national and lower levels, to promote the inclusion of menstrual hygiene management in district education plans and financial resource allocations, and in school WASH plans.

Expected change from this programme component:

- Progress in capacity for local management and maintenance of school WASH services to include menstrual hygiene facilities.

### Knowledge Development

Knowledge development is an integral component of the programme design, with the aim of increasing understanding and knowledge on the importance of meeting the menstrual needs of schoolgirls and informing the development of appropriate policies and practices.

SNV facilitates multi-stakeholder dialogues at national and local levels and shares the findings of action research in each of the five participating countries to build awareness and motivate action amongst programme partners and governments. Girls in Control aims to ensure that menstrual hygiene is firmly on the agenda of policy makers and resource allocators, in the context of keeping girls in school and empowering women and girls to manage their menstruation with privacy, safety and dignity.

## Girls in Control Highlight: Knowledge Development in Practice

Learning from partners and from Girls in Control programme countries, and sharing the experience with the wider public, is one of the key activities of the programme.

- The five country programme managers and their partners participated in a regional learning event to share their experiences, and visit project activities in practice in Zimbabwe in November, 2014.
- International Menstrual Hygiene Day was celebrated in the five countries in May and June 2014 and 2015, together with partners, including government officials, Members of Parliament, and representatives of schools, the media and NGOs, with the theme of Breaking the Silence surrounding menstruation.
- An article on the project and initial findings has been prepared by programme staff and published in *Waterlines* (Vol 34, No. 1, 2015; *Towards a sustainable solution for school menstrual hygiene management: cases of Ethiopia, Uganda, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe*).



*Participants in the Girls in Control regional meeting in Zimbabwe, November 2014.*



*Producers of reusable menstrual pads with Girls in Control programme staff in Masvingo District, Zimbabwe.*

# Menstrual Hygiene Management Goodwill Ambassadors

---

“Civil society should be involved in the production and distribution of affordable sanitary wear. To increase access the community should support initiatives to make available subsidised sanitary pads for low-income adolescent girls.”

Wro Mulu

---



## Ethiopia

Wro Mulu Solomon Bezuneh is the first woman President of the Ethiopian Chamber of Commerce and Sectoral Associations, and has spent a lifetime in business, community service and creative pursuits, standing strong

for what she believes. Deeply motivated to fight injustice and solve problems, she refuses to back down when matters of principle and honesty are at stake. A woman of great energy, her strong positive attitude and self-confidence, have helped her succeed. She has provided trainings in leadership, entrepreneurship, business development, personal development, gender and rights, and peace building, and is a highly regarded motivational speaker.

Wro Mulu Solomon has received several awards including: the American Biographical Institute Medal of Honor, the United Nations Certificate of Merit Award of Honor, an Honorary Award from Serve the Generation Association, the Star Worker Pin from the Ethiopian Import Export Corp. (ETIMEX), the Extraordinary Leader & Manager Gold Award from D.H. Geda, and an Addis Ababa University EiABC Certificate of Honor for delivering high quality teaching. Today her dream is to develop a state-of-the-art training centre that will train youth, women and future leaders to have the kind of positive attitude and entrepreneurial spirit that will change the direction of the country.



## South Sudan

Ms. Manuela Modong was the runner-up in the 2013 contest for Miss South Sudan, and was among the top 10 models out of 120 contestants in the Miss World event in Indonesia in the same year. Currently she is pursuing a

degree in Gender and Women's Health, at Mbarara University of Science and Technology in Uganda.

Manuela is a strong advocate for girls' education and has initiated a Minimise School Drop-out Programme for South Sudan, addressing through advocacy the challenges faced by girls that deny them their right to education. SNV South Sudan has partnered with her in conducting advocacy through radio talk shows on key menstrual hygiene issues, as well as during the Menstrual Hygiene Day celebration on May 28, 2014.



Girls in Control:  
Compiled Findings from Studies on  
Menstrual Hygiene Management  
of Schoolgirls

Ethiopia, South Sudan, Tanzania,  
Uganda, Zimbabwe

SNV Ethiopia,  
Arada Sub-city, Kebele 01/02  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
Email: [mtamiru@snvworld.org](mailto:mtamiru@snvworld.org)  
[www.snvworld.org/girls-in-control](http://www.snvworld.org/girls-in-control)

