

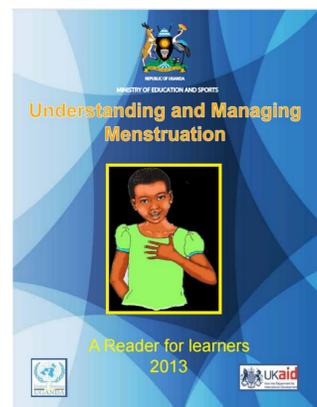


# A multi-sectoral approach to improving menstrual hygiene management in schools in Uganda: Experience and lessons

Ministry of Education and Sports, Uganda



Girls' Rights Club members displaying the re-usable sanitary towels they made (MoES, 2013).



## Background

Menstruation marks the beginning of many changes in the lives of girls. It is a transition from childhood to womanhood. Although it is a normal process for all women and girls, it is a challenge as well as a barrier to girls in Uganda. Girls are usually inadequately prepared for development, uninformed about the implications of menstruation, not supported to manage the menstruation cycle, and in most times, girls lack the necessary facilities and infrastructure.

The Ugandan government in collaboration with different developmental partners, private sectors, and NGOs have embarked on a number of interventions aimed at improving menstrual hygiene management (MHM) among girls, especially those in primary and secondary schools.

## Objectives

The two main objective of the Ministry of Education and Sports of Uganda were:

1. To share the Ugandan experience on improving MHM in primary and secondary schools.
2. To draw lessons from others countries and stakeholders for future planning and improving MHM in Uganda.

## Good Practice

District dialogues with key stakeholders have provided a good opportunity to reflect on factors that undermine girls' education including MHM in schools and getting parents to support girls' education.

Through the collaboration of MoES, Ministry of Health and UNICEF through the School Health Programme, schools have been equipped with water, sanitation and hygiene facilities including the development of the Handbook on their maintenance. This has improved the maintenance of WASH facilities.

## Activities

The Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) with the Ministry of Health and development partners like UNICEF, DFID through the Girls Education Challenge, Plan International among others are working to meet the needs of girls in school through:

- Production and dissemination of information, education, and communication (IEC) materials in the form of a reader, a video, and a seminar on MHM, all led by MoES with support from partners.
- Building capacity of learners and teachers on MHM through training and imparting skills on how to make re-usable sanitary towels from available local materials.
- Construction of facilities to improve sanitation and hygiene for girls to manage their menstruation better through the provision of water tanks for rainwater harvesting, hand washing facilities, changing rooms, construction of incinerators and provision of sanitary towels;
- Media advocacy, sensitization of the public, and awareness among policy makers on MHM.

## Learning and Implications

The two main findings and recommendations from this research were:

### 1. Sanitary protective materials (particularly sanitary towels) are still expensive for the majority of school aged girls in Uganda.

The education sector therefore needs to:

- Work with the parliament of Uganda and Ministry of Finance and Economic Development on reducing taxes on sanitary towels.
- Engage with private companies to reduce the cost of sanitary towels.
- Provide emergency sanitary towels to girls in primary and secondary schools.
- Train teachers, parents and learners on making re-usable sanitary towels from locally available materials.

### 2. Most schools still lack the necessary facilities to support girls in effective MHM. The education sector therefore needs to improve sanitation and hygiene in schools, including the construction of washrooms, latrines, and incinerators.

## Future Directions

- Train school management committees and communities on the maintenance and management of the WASH facilities in schools.
- Support schools to identify and establish enterprises for schools to generate income for supporting MHM.
- Construction of boreholes near schools to provide water for cleaning and washing.
- Review the BRMS to include MHM related indicators including working with the Directorate of Education Standards (DES) to incorporate MHM indicators in routine school support supervision.

## Conclusion

The Ugandan Ministry of Education and Sports understands the importance of supporting teenage girls. Through the building of MHM friendly infrastructure and efforts to reduce the costs of sanitary towels, the Ugandan Ministry of Education and Sports hopes to increase healthy menstrual hygiene among teenage girls. MHM is critical to ensure that these girls have a conclusive and supportive learning environment in order to enjoy the right to education.