



## Technical Brief

# MENSTRUAL HYGIENE MANAGEMENT IN SCHOOLS

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### Background

Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) services play a significant role in keeping girls in school. For example, providing clean school latrines, sanitary materials, water, soap, and privacy increases school attendance and reduces absenteeism among girls, especially during menstruation (Chinyama et al., 2019). Therefore, WASH for Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) is a fundamental priority and can foster girls' comfort and self-confidence during

menstruation. Ultimately, this can improve school attendance, reducing eminent gender disparities in accessing education for all children (WHO, 2013).

Recognizing the importance of WASH for MHM, World Vision Zambia has been implementing a menstrual hygiene management programme in schools in some of its Area Programmes to help reduce gender disparities in education.

### Technical Approaches

World Vision Zambia has been using the School Led Total Sanitation (SLTS) programme to address MHM in schools, especially in rural programmes. This approach is implemented in 68 schools of World Vision Zambia's operational areas. SLTS programmes aim at promoting sanitation and hygiene behaviours and provide improvements to sanitation infrastructure, including MHM friendly facilities. In terms of MHM, school-going children are taught how to make reusable sanitary pads and provided with adequate information on MHM. At this stage, the Ministry of General Education office is in attendance to provide technical support and contribute to conducting the trainings in MHM.

Further, World Vision Zambia conducts assessments to determine the adequacy of the implementation of different WASH-related programmes in schools focused on girls who are already attending and those that are about to start attending their menstrual cycles. The evaluation is done using the WASH in Schools (WinS) assessment tools. The assessment enables World Vision Zambia to plan whether to implement MHM in a particular school or not based on needs.

In addition, specific schools' needs are identified, followed by planning for implementation. Such planning activities occur during the Annual Technical Programme planning processes. The planning process also includes planning and allocating funds towards implementing the MHM Programme in the selected schools. World Vision Zambia uses the Detailed Implementation Plan to plan the activities, which incorporates other WASH activities to integrate technical programme activities.

Once the planning process is done, the project implementation process is initiated using a three-phased approach:

- Phase I- Establishment and Development of Community and School Led MHM Behavioural Change Processes through Community and School Sensitization Programmes to demystify MHM Myths. This phase is implemented to introduce the MHM





programme to schools and the surrounding communities. Considering the sensitivity of the issue, community members are first made aware of MHM's importance, which is done by training headmen and Parents and Teachers Associations (PTAs) members. Training of traditional leaders and PTAs is important to avoid such influential people resisting the implementation of the MHM programme.

- Phase 2– Development of Appropriate MHM WASH Facilities in Schools. So far, 20 MHM facilities in schools have been developed. Selected school teachers are then trained on how to coordinate MHM activities in schools and tasked to form MHM clubs in schools. The MHM clubs include both boys and girls who are instrumental in driving the MHM promotion and sensitization activities in the schools.
- Phase 3 – Development, Distribution and Use of Sustainable and Cost-effective MHM Products. The MHM club members take the lead in the development of reusable sanitary pads. World Vision Zambia provides the initial materials during the training of teachers for making the pads. Thereafter, learners/pupils emulate and replicate making pads during their sessions in the clubs. Learners also use the pads to sensitize the rest of the pupils in schools about the need for adopting a mindset of using such items during menstruation. After that, most schools have to budget for the materials required to make the pads to enhance sustainability. Where there is evidence that a school is struggling, World Vision Zambia supports such a school by providing the materials needed. Additionally, World Vision Zambia has a partnership with a local NGO, which makes MHM kits. The NGO donates MHM kits to the clubs through World Vision Zambia's Gift in Kind (GIK) for distribution to schools whenever available.

The activities in all the phases are then regularly monitored to ensure timely and quality implementation of activities by a joint team of World Vision Zambia and the Ministry of General Education.

## Key Outcomes of the MHM Programme

Through MHM clubs established in 68 schools, World Vision Zambia increased knowledge on the biological processes of MHM among school-going boys and girls. In addition, knowledge about biological processes of MHM were extended to men and women in the surrounding communities. Furthermore, World Vision Zambia constructed appropriate MHM WASH facilities in Schools.

As a result, there was increased access to improved safe and sustainable menstrual hygiene management facilities and products for school girls. Consequently, this contributed to increased attendance and retention of girls in schools.

There has also been increased appreciation of MHM by

community members through traditional leaders. As a result, World Vision Zambia has also seen increased participation of women, men, girls and boys in all desired MHM activities promoted by World Vision Zambia. For instance, boys also participate in making reusable sanitary pads as a means of supporting girls and acknowledging that menstruation is a normal biological process. During the club sessions, boys participate in making the reusable pads to break the myths and barriers associated with MHM. In addition, some boys in certain schools reported introducing reusable pads to their family members in the communities where they reside. Consequently, World Vision Zambia helped reduce the stigma associated with menstruation by boys and men in communities.

#### Text Box 1: Key Outcomes of the MHM Intervention

The key outcomes of the programmes include:

- Increased attendance and retention of girls in school.
- Enhanced acceptance and participation of communities especially boys and teachers in MHM activities.
- Reduced stigma associated with menstrual hygiene.

## Limitations and Challenges

Despite the positive outcomes achieved to improve MHM in schools, challenges still exist.

- One of the most significant challenge is that some schools still find it challenging to access materials for making pads and still rely on World Vision Zambia to provide materials. Such reliance on World Vision Zambia will not offer sustainable solutions for the schools and girls in need of sanitary materials beyond the lifespan of World Vision Zambia's programmes. To create ownership of the MHM programme, schools that are struggling to source materials have been linked to schools that are sustaining the MHM programme on their own to learn best practices through exchange learning activities.
- There is still some resistance in accepting the MHM programme in some schools and surrounding communities because of the stigma and secrecy attached to menstrual hygiene. This was mitigated by orienting headmen and PTAs on the importance of implementing the MHM programme. However, more effort is needed to enhance acceptance of the MHM programme in all schools and communities.

## Opportunities

There are opportunities to sustain and scale up the MHM programme in schools.

- Teachers and learners are willing to be trained on MHM and making pads. Such willingness can be leveraged to create enough pads that can be used to generate income for the schools and promote sustainability for the MHM programme. This could also help scale up the programme to other schools and surrounding communities.
- The MHM clubs are relatively affordable programmes that other international Non-Governmental Organizations, schools, government, and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) can support. Specifically, CBOs can be leveraged to support girls within their communities and ensure girls in schools are not affected by the lack of menstrual hygiene materials to use during menstruation.

## Our Call to Action

It is evident that the MHM programme in schools effectively improves menstrual hygiene and school attendance among girls. However, there is still much more work to be done to strengthen MHM among girls. Educating different community constituents about the importance of MHM among girls and women and how to use menstrual products, increasing access to menstrual products, and raising awareness on the importance of MHM to girls and the community is needed. Therefore, the following recommendations to the subsequent actors have been made.

### Policy Makers

- Incorporate the MHM programme in the WASH implementation policy documents.
- Align MHM programmes with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to enhance the significance of MHM activities among different players.

### Partners

- Increase funding for MHM activities because it is an opportunity to help the girls to stay in school and learn.
- Help strengthen implementing structures in schools and communities through capacity building programmes.
- Supporting MHM is essential for actualizing several SDGs including; SDG 3 – Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all ages; SDG 4- Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting long life education; SDG 5- achieving gender equality and empower all women and girls; SDG 6- Ensure availability and sustainable water and sanitation for all.

### Programme Implementers

- To budget for MHM activities in their annual Area Programme plans so that more people are reached with MHM activities
- Enhance monitoring of MHM facilities to ensure they are maintained and used for the intended purpose.
- Ensure exit strategies with schools and surrounding

communities are developed earlier enough to ensure ownership and sustainability of the programmes.

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