

CDI WORKING PAPER SERIES

Menstrual Product Disposal in Tanzanian Schools

WP # 04/2020

Romy Welch and Angharad Williams

University of Cambridge



Cambridge Development Initiative
CUSU, 17 Mill Lane
Cambridge CB2 1RX
United Kingdom
www.cambridgedevelopment.org



Cambridge Development Initiative Working Papers

The Cambridge Development Initiative (CDI) Working Paper Series, launched in 2018, draws together research volunteers from the University of Cambridge as well as academics, policy makers and practitioners beyond, to think critically and innovatively about the issues that are central to CDI's work in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The scope of the working paper includes education, health, entrepreneurship and WaSH, with special relevance to the East African context.

The CDI working paper series is a collection of papers, peer-reviewed, and aimed at collaborative and cross-disciplinary research. The series includes papers presented by the CDI research volunteers from the Research Team and occasional papers written by external advisers and experts. The CDI Research Team also welcomes papers from academics working on fields that relate to the CDI research agenda.

Series Editor 2020: Gauhrishi Narang, Research Director (UK), CDI

Publisher: Cambridge Development Initiative, Cambridge, UK

For expression of interest in contributing to the series or any other queries, contact:
research@cambridgedevelopment.org

Menstrual Product Disposal in Tanzanian Schools

Welch, R. and Williams, A.

I. Introduction

This paper looks at the barriers that adolescent girls in Tanzania face when attempting to dispose of menstrual hygiene materials whilst at school. The paper then aims to evaluate what the major causes of poor menstrual hygiene are in Tanzania, and how they can best be addressed. The conclusion of the paper then is that the lack of safe disposal points for menstrual materials is the major cause of poor menstrual hygiene. The paper is thus able to conclude that the creation of discreet and toilet spaces which meet the needs of menstruating girls is required.

Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) is a growing concern of development work. It was included in the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations and several major non-governmental organisations have projects tackling the issue. Furthermore, a growing body of academic literature has appeared considering the causes of, and potential solutions to, the issue.

In Tanzania the vast majority of girls express anxiety about menstruation, and report that this negatively affects their schooling¹. When girls feel that it to be apparent that they are menstruating they will often fail to attend school, and even when they do they report not feeling able to participate fully. As menstruation is experienced by most adolescent girls and occurs on average for several days a month this is having a serious impact on the life opportunities of these girls.

While the amount of research carried out in Tanzania, and the Dar es Salaam region in particular, is still limited, a considerable amount of work has been carried out worldwide in attempting to establish the common causes of poor MHM. The literature suggests that there are broadly two types of cause. Firstly, those which relate to knowledge. It is clear that many girls in less-economically developed countries have a lack of knowledge about what menstruation is, and how it can be managed. This is compounded in some cases by the existence of taboos which tend to place menstruation as a dangerous and polluting force, and thus contribute to female anxiety around the issue². Secondly, in many instances there is also a lack of resources. This is twofold, both a lack of appropriate sanitary products at an affordable price, and a lack of infrastructure with which to deal with the limited sanitary products that are available³.

¹ Vaughn, J. (2013). A Review of Menstruation Hygiene Management among Schoolgirls in Sub-Saharan Africa. [online] Available at: <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/6503/711a859ea872b27a00ddb746f8bc26ba34a6.pdf> [Accessed 20/03/20]

² Vaughn, J. (2013). A Review of Menstruation Hygiene Management among Schoolgirls in Sub-Saharan Africa. [online] Available at: <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/6503/711a859ea872b27a00ddb746f8bc26ba34a6.pdf> [Accessed 20/03/20]

³ SNV Netherlands Development Organisation. Girls in Control: Compiled Findings from Studies on Menstrual Hygiene Management of Schoolgirls. [online] Available at: https://snv.org/cms/sites/default/files/explore/download/snv_girls_in_control_baseline_report.pdf [Accessed 20/03/20]

Research carried out within Tanzania suggests a lack of infrastructure contributes towards the anxiety girls feel as they are not confident that they can deal with menstrual disposal when at school. A limited number of schools have the appropriate toilets and bins to allow for safe and comfortable menstrual material management. This is both in terms of disposal and, as many girls use reusable material, cleaning and drying facilities. Additionally, neither schools or local governments tend to set out clear guidelines for how MHM is to be addressed.

Key to solving the problem of menstrual disposal then is the creation of toilet facilities. These toilets need to provide space for the cleaning and drying of the reusable menstrual products girls tend to use. Furthermore, these spaces need to offer privacy, in particular from male peers, and must be integrated into disposal systems. It should be feasible for CDI to integrate these physical alterations into their already existing WASH schemes. However, the first step is of course to coordinate with school, their pupils and teachers, to discuss what action can be taken.

II. Impacts of poor menstrual material disposal

In order to establish how the Cambridge Development Initiative (CDI) can best work to reduce the problem posed by poor MHM in schools, the exact nature of the problem needs to be further understood. This firstly involves understanding the specific impacts of poor MHM, by considering both qualitative reports from the girls effected and quantitative data from organisations already attempting to address the problem.

Surveys carried out by the UN in a wide range of countries reveal that in areas with poor MHM, menstruation is almost always considered not just a source of physical discomfort, but a source of shame and embarrassment, and that girls report a high level of associated anxiety⁴. While the surveys are too widespread to offer specific insight into Tanzania the consistency of their findings indicates certain universal issues. In particular many girls cite fears about both the smell and sight of blood, which is upsetting to the girls and provokes teasing when noticed – particularly from their male peers. The issues of poor MHM and high levels of anxiety are mutually reinforcing, as a lack of MHM means that the majority of girls are at constant risk of leakage. A study by Vaughn six years early than the UN survey found that fear of leakage led to girls sitting still in class and waiting until classmates have left the room before getting up⁵. Vaughn also reports that in the sub-Saharan region the shame surrounding evidence of blood is a problem when it comes to disposal as the lack of appropriate facilities mean many girls have to resort to disposing of them in the environment, where the distinctive smell may attract animals or the attention of others.

The research identifies several serious impacts of this type of negative experience around menstruation. The most immediate concern is the amount of schooling that is missed as a result of girls not feeling comfortable menstruating in the school environment. A report

⁴ United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). (2019). Guide to Menstrual Hygiene Materials. [online] Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/wash/files/UNICEF-Guide-menstrual-hygiene-materials-2019.pdf> [Accessed 20/03/20]

⁵ Vaughn, J. (2013). A Review of Menstruation Hygiene Management among Schoolgirls in Sub-Saharan Africa. [online] Available at: https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/6503/711a859e_a872b27a00ddb746f8bc26ba34a6.pdf [Accessed 20/03/20]

within the last five years by Ssewanyana and Bitanirwe on the menstrual habits of girls across sub-Saharan Africa found that the majority of girls missed between 1.6 and 2.1 days every month⁶. This will have a long-term impact on the education and thus the lifetime opportunities, of those children. Jewitt and Ryley found that considerable differences existed within Kenya between wealthy girls who can afford disposal sanitary products and those who cannot⁷. As Kenya is a country with a similar socio-economic position to Tanzania it may well be the case that the problem is worse than averages suggest in more-deprived areas.

In the long-term the development of illness can emerge as a result of poor menstrual hygiene. Levels of urine and vaginal infection are higher than average in areas with poor MHM. The South African government's report on a 2018 UN conference dedicated to MHM notes that the unhygienic practices surrounding menstruation can even lead to slower recovery from pregnancy⁸. Although it should be noted that in theory this is not a problem unique to the school environment, KITE research has suggested that in fact school facilities tend to be worse than those available to the vast majority of girls at home⁹. Thus, schools can in fact become a space in which the long-term health of female pupils is compromised.

With such severe consequences it is clear that the issue of menstrual hygiene needs to be addressed. However, in order for this to be done, the specific causes of the problem must be understood.

III. Causes of poor menstrual material disposal

a. Overview of causes

There are a variety of causes for poor MHM, and this report provides a summary of them, before assessing which are most appropriate for CDI to attempt to address.

One of the largest causes of anxiety for menstruating girls is the shame associated with the act despite it being a common and natural occurrence. Vaughn's report on the culture surrounding menstrual health in Tanzania reveals that the issue is shrouded in silence, with many girls dealing with it completely alone, in fact in rural areas 50% of girls surveyed had never before discussed menstruation¹⁰. Furthermore, what little discussion is had tends to be

⁶ Ssewanyana, D. and Bitanirwe, B. (2017). 'Menstrual hygiene management among adolescent girls in sub-Saharan Africa'. *Global Health Promotion*, 26(1).

⁷ Jewitt, S. and Ryley, H. (2014). 'It's a girl thing: Menstruation, school attendance, spatial mobility and wider gender inequalities in Kenya'. *Geoforum*, 56.

⁸ Department of Women: Republic of South Africa. (2018). *First East and Southern Africa Regional Symposium Improving Menstrual Health Management for Adolescent Girls and Women: Final Report*. [online] Available at: <http://www.thecaseforher.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/MHM-Symposium-Report-final.pdf> [Accessed 20/03/20]

⁹ KITE. Report on menstrual health management at Mabibo Secondary.

¹⁰ Vaughn, J. (2013). *A Review of Menstruation Hygiene Management among Schoolgirls in Sub-Saharan Africa*. [online] Available at: https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/6503/711a859e_a872b27a00ddb746f8bc26ba34a6.pdf [Accessed 20/03/20]

negative, with menstruation associated with improper sexual behavior and the belief that the sight of a menstrual cloth can act as a curse. These beliefs de-naturalise the process and contribute to the anxiety girls experience.

These cultural taboos impact the lack of education about the topic that is received in schools. There is no curriculum requiring schools to teach the children about puberty, and so it is largely down to the discretion of individual schools. While the Ministry of Health has produced a comprehensive educational booklet addressing the issue this is not always present in schools¹¹. The dominance of male teachers may be one reason, as men often express being uncomfortable about the issue however it is also the case in some communities that the taboo around menstruation remains strong enough to challenge this sort of activity¹².

Another cause of poor MHM is the type of materials girls tend to use. A report by Tamiru et al found that in Tanzania 84% of girls use reusable materials – very few report being able to afford the type of disposal sanitary product that is dominant in more developed countries - and this holds a high risk of leaking or emitting a smell if not dealt with correctly¹³. Jewitt and Ryley discovered this is further exacerbated by the use of unconventional materials, such as dried leaves¹⁴, that are reported amongst the poorest girls in Kenya, and such a pattern might be present in Tanzania as well.

Several causes of poor MHM in schools then have been identified. Given the current shape and scope of the work carried out by CDI this report will focus only on menstrual disposal as a focus area for improvement as it is here that CDI stands to make the greatest impact.

b. Outline of the situation in Tanzania

Of the multiple factors causing absenteeism among menstruating pupils, one particular factor which frequently features in studies is the lack of infrastructure in schools to help with menstrual hygiene management. Indeed, in the 2015 Tanzanian Water and Sanitation Network (TAWASNET) factsheet identifies a lack of sufficient infrastructure in schools as one of the two main factors contributing to absenteeism in menstruating students, the other being poor practice surrounding knowledge transfer about menstruation.¹⁵ This contributes in

¹¹ Tellier, S. and Hyttel, M. (2017). Menstrual Health Management in East and Southern Africa: A Review Paper. [online] Available at: [https:// esaro.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/ pub- pdf/UNFPA %20Review%20Menstrual%20Health%20Management%20Final%2004%20 June%202018.pdf](https://esaro.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/UNFPA%20Review%20Menstrual%20Health%20Management%20Final%2004%20June%202018.pdf) [Accessed 20/03/20]

¹² SNV Netherlands Development Organisation. Baseline Survey Report On Menstrual Hygiene Management. [online] Available at: https://snv.org/cms/sites/default/files/explore/download/girls_in_control_baseline_report_-_tanzania.pdf [Accessed 20/03/20]

¹³ SNV Netherlands Development Organisation. Baseline Survey Report On Menstrual Hygiene Management. [online] Available at: https://snv.org/cms/sites/default/files/explore/download/girls_in_control_baseline_report_-_tanzania.pdf [Accessed 20/03/20]

¹⁴ Jewitt, S. and Ryley, H. (2014). 'It's a girl thing: Menstruation, school attendance, spatial mobility and wider gender inequalities in Kenya'. *Geoforum*, 56.

¹⁵ Tanzania Water and Sanitation Network TAWASNET (2015). *Study report: Improvement of Menstrual Hygiene Management in schools in Tanzania*. (p.1)

multiple ways to absenteeism, which will be further explored in this section. These can include: students feeling a lack of confidence during menstruation that impedes them from staying in class, lack of privacy when using toilets, and difficulties when using reusable products, among others. Of course, all these factors intersect, and each exacerbates the other.

c. Hygiene concerns

The lack of confidence students feel when menstruating at school is one of the main causes of absenteeism, and one which is clearly linked to the inadequate hygiene provision in schools. In a UNICEF report using data from a questionnaire of 480 girls, it was found that 98% of the schools visited did not have sufficient hygiene and washing facilities (including running water, private changing rooms and soap). The report notes that ‘the available SWASH facilities were in bad condition which caused stress and pains to schoolgirls’.¹⁶ The girls reported that they perceived themselves to smell back because of this lack of provision, something they considered as shameful and embarrassing. This embarrassment is partly due to their inability to wash themselves in school; many girls worry about their personal smell or their menses leaking onto their clothes. 48% of girls interviewed said that they frequently lost concentration in class due to their embarrassment.¹⁷

Another serious problem is the disposal of reusable menstrual products, such as scraps of old fabric, which the majority of girls surveyed use (84%).¹⁸ The students surveyed revealed that they usually either dropped these materials in latrines or had to carry them home in their bags causing them to feel very embarrassed, especially if other students found them in their bags (some girls reported that boys deliberately searched their bags to tease them). Although 70% of girls interviewed thought that the use of reusable pads would relieve their embarrassment, buying reusable pads is not an option for many of these girls, due to their relatively high cost. This embarrassment is one of the most significant causes in girls’ absenteeism during menstruation. The report found that 48% of girls miss class due to menstruation, with 36% staying home during days of heavy flow and 12% not attending school at all during the whole menstrual period.¹⁹ We must, however, keep in mind that this study was carried out in rural

¹⁶SNV (2014). *Baseline survey report on School Girls’ Menstrual Hygiene Management issues*. [online] Available at: https://snv.org/cms/sites/default/files/explore/download/girls_in_control_baseline_report_-_tanzania.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0Nf7_WQe2dLyUNzd4QY-pbuwAjuw_WbzIGTmyu0ShALn-BsKw4jEdAHbE. [Accessed 7/03/2020]. (p.vi)

¹⁷ SNV (2014). *Baseline survey report on School Girls’ Menstrual Hygiene Management issues*. [online] Available at: https://snv.org/cms/sites/default/files/explore/download/girls_in_control_baseline_report_-_tanzania.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0Nf7_WQe2dLyUNzd4QY-pbuwAjuw_WbzIGTmyu0ShALn-BsKw4jEdAHbE. [Accessed 7/03/2020]. (p.5)

¹⁸SNV (2014). *Baseline survey report on School Girls’ Menstrual Hygiene Management issues*. [online] Available at: https://snv.org/cms/sites/default/files/explore/download/girls_in_control_baseline_report_-_tanzania.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0Nf7_WQe2dLyUNzd4QY-pbuwAjuw_WbzIGTmyu0ShALn-BsKw4jEdAHbE. [Accessed 7/03/2020]. (p.vi)

¹⁹ SNV (2014). *Baseline survey report on School Girls’ Menstrual Hygiene Management issues*. [online] Available at: https://snv.org/cms/sites/default/files/explore/download/girls_in_control_baseline_report_-_tanzania.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0Nf7_WQe2dLyUNzd4QY-pbuwAjuw_WbzIGTmyu0ShALn-BsKw4jEdAHbE

areas (Sengerema, Chato, Magu, Siha, Babati, Karatu, Njombe and Mufindi districts) and so may not be as representative of the situation in Dar-es-Salam.

Studies have also identified difficulties with cleaning reusable products as a particular barrier to attending school while menstruating. As previously mentioned, the majority of girls (84% in the SNV survey) use reusable materials, such as fabric, which need washing and drying. Students therefore need access to clean water and space and light for drying these materials. The SNV report indicates that it became clear through focus group discussions that such materials are often dried in ‘unhygienic conditions’²⁰. Inadequate washing and drying of reusable materials leads to irritation in many cases, and even infections such as urinary tract infections (UTIs) or reproductive tract infections (RTIs). Many girls feel the need to dry them secretly, away from sunlight as they lack adequate water to properly clean the clothes and they do not wish them to be seen by their peers. This lack of privacy also affects girls’ ability to wash themselves and change menstrual hygiene products. A TAWASNET factsheet quotes a study by the National Institute for Medical research, noting that 52% of girls’ latrines do not have doors²¹. This can be not only embarrassing, but may perhaps expose girls to the risk of assault, or at least the fear of assault.

d. Summary of attempts to address the situation

Organisations working in Tanzania have tested various ways to find a solution to this problem, including the provision of reusable pads, improving provision of disposable pads, and installing incinerators in schools. These schemes have had their successes and drawbacks. For instance, the Twaweza scheme run by Femme International in the Kilimanjaro region, 2017, provided students with the choice of a reusable menstrual cup or reusable pads, provided to them in a pack which also included a bowl, towel and soap for washing. This was provided alongside a series of interactive workshops on menstrual health. Surveys undertaken 6 months after the start of the programme reported that use of the reusable products remained high, especially with the reusable pads, which 95.7% of the students who had chosen them were still using.²² Despite this success, some girls reported itching when using the pads, which is usually a result of inadequate washing and drying of the pads. For this reason, the report concluded that ‘access to water, soap, and ability to dry in

[_tanzania.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0Nf7_WQe2dLyUNzd4QY-pbuwAjuw_WbzIGTmyu0ShALn-BsKw4jEdAHbE](#). [Accessed 7/03/2020]. (p.4)

²⁰ SNV (2014). *Baseline survey report on School Girls’ Menstrual Hygiene Management issues*. [online] Available at: https://snv.org/cms/sites/default/files/explore/download/girls_in_control_baseline_report_-_tanzania.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0Nf7_WQe2dLyUNzd4QY-pbuwAjuw_WbzIGTmyu0ShALn-BsKw4jEdAHbE. [Accessed 7/03/2020]. (p.6)

²¹ Tanzania Water and Sanitation Network (TAWASNET) (2015). *Fact sheet: Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) to schoolgirls*. [online] Available at: <http://www.tawasanet.or.tz/files/Fact%20Sheet%20MHM%20Tanzania.pdf>. [Accessed 7/3/2020].

²² Rubli, J. (2017). *Monitoring and Evaluation Report, Kilimanjaro Region: Successes and lessons learned from the Twaweza program*. [online] Femme International: Tanzania. Available at: https://www.femmeinternational.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Femme-International-ME-Report-2017.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2dISMN4mp78RRFE0ELWhDvWXB-xSTpFnQBOUwWRQZf4DIB5Qw85ot_bo. [Accessed 07/3/2020]. (p.11)

sunlight have been the greatest barriers to effective use'.²³ Although menstrual cups are easier to clean as they do not require prolonged drying, Femme International reported that those girls who initially chose menstrual cups tended to use them less over the first six months (65% reported using it regularly or semi-regularly²⁴) compared to those girls who chose reusable pads. This is not surprising, given the more invasive nature of the product and stigma surrounding vaginal insertion.

The study by SNV investigates the possibility of improvising access to disposable pads. 70% of students interviewed said they would want to use disposable pads if possible. However, the other 30% of students were concerned with the safety of disposable pads, with 8% of these saying that they would not use disposable pads even if they were free, as they had been told that the pads would harm their reproductive system.²⁵ Even if concerns about safety were not a problem, the price of pads is a barrier to their widespread use. Only 2% of girls in this study were able to afford reusable pads as their main form of managing menstruation- although we must keep in mind that this study was carried out in a rural district.²⁶ Students reported that they would be able to use disposable pads if their price was more than halved, which is evidently economically unviable.

In addition, even if disposable pads were easily accessible, it is clear from studies carried out in Tanzania that disposal of pads would become a barrier to their use. A UNICEF report found that 63% of school latrines have no place to dispose of sanitary pads.²⁷ This report also indicated problems with the use of incinerators to dispose of pads, an idea which has been suggested to combat problems of disposal. However, the report found that there was a lot of embarrassment surrounding their use, which contributed to a low uptake of the idea. Better

²³ Rubli, J. (2017). *Monitoring and Evaluation Report, Kilimanjaro Region: Successes and lessons learned from the Twaweza program*. [online] Femme International: Tanzania. Available at: https://www.femmeinternational.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Femme-International-ME-Report-2017.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2dISMN4mp78RRFE0ELWhDvWXB-xSTpFnQBOUwWRQZf4DIB5Qw85ot_bo. [Accessed 07/3/2020]. (p.11)

²⁴ Rubli, J. (2017). *Monitoring and Evaluation Report, Kilimanjaro Region: Successes and lessons learned from the Twaweza program*. [online] Femme International: Tanzania. Available at: https://www.femmeinternational.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Femme-International-ME-Report-2017.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2dISMN4mp78RRFE0ELWhDvWXB-xSTpFnQBOUwWRQZf4DIB5Qw85ot_bo. [Accessed 07/3/2020]. (p.11)

²⁵ SNV (2014). *Baseline survey report on School Girls' Menstrual Hygiene Management issues*. [online] Available at: https://snv.org/cms/sites/default/files/explore/download/girls_in_control_baseline_report_-_tanzania.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0Nf7_WQe2dLyUNzd4QY-pbuwAjuw_WbzIGTmyu0ShALn-BsKw4jEdAHbE. [Accessed 7/03/2020]. (p.5)

²⁶ SNV (2014). *Baseline survey report on School Girls' Menstrual Hygiene Management issues*. [online] Available at: https://snv.org/cms/sites/default/files/explore/download/girls_in_control_baseline_report_-_tanzania.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0Nf7_WQe2dLyUNzd4QY-pbuwAjuw_WbzIGTmyu0ShALn-BsKw4jEdAHbE. [Accessed 7/03/2020]. (p.4)

²⁷ Van Agthoven, A. *MHM Virtual conference: Supporting Tanzanian schoolgirls with their menstrual health management*. [online] UNICEF Tanzania. Available at: https://www.unicef.org/wash/schools/files/Tanzania_MHM_Virtual_Conference_.pdf. [Accessed 7/3/2020].

education on how to use the incinerator was one possible solution, although the report ultimately concluded that the most important solution was to better understand local menstrual hygiene management practices.

To conclude, organisations working in Tanzania have found that the main barriers to improved menstrual health and hygiene practice have included poor sanitation provision at schools as an important factor. This lack of provision causes difficulties when washing, changing, and disposing of menstrual products and materials. This causes shame and embarrassment and can even lead to infections, increasing absenteeism among menstruating students. The lack of sanitation provision can even impede the use of more suitable materials, such as disposable or reusable pads.

c. Current infrastructure provision in schools

It is therefore necessary to investigate in more detail the sanitation infrastructure in schools in Tanzania. Multiple studies have found that a worrying lack of sanitation provision lead to difficulties in girls using school facilities- especially for menstruating girls. For example, in a survey covering 11 districts of Tanzania, UNICEF found that only 11% of schools met the minimum standard for latrine provision. Of the remaining 89%, 26% has either no latrines at all, or had less than one latrine per hundred pupils. In addition to this, as previously mentioned, 52% of the latrines for use by girls have no doors, and 63% have no place to dispose of menstrual products. As for washing and personal hygiene, only 9% of the latrines were reported to be clean, and a mere 1% had soap available. Water facilities for washing were only available in 62% of schools, and when available these were non-functional in 46% of the cases.²⁸ SNV's report found a similarly poor situation, with the situation rated as 'bad' in 98% of secondary schools. The report explains that this evaluation was given because latrines were in a bad condition, with few drop holes, inadequate provision of water and no changing rooms for girls, as there were apparently beyond the school budget.²⁹ In contrast, a survey by KITE carried out on 26 female students found that most students were able to use water to clean themselves at school, although this water was cold. Only 5% of students reported using soap and water at school. We must keep in mind that this survey was carried out on much smaller numbers, which may explain the apparent better provision of water reported. A general trend of poor provision for personal washing is evident.

The students in this survey reported another problem with disposal of products- shame of using bins in case their used products were seen. 85% of girls interviewed said they usually disposed of pads in the toilets due to their embarrassment, resulting in the toilets becoming clogged. KITE identified slow collection of bins by the local authorities as contributing to

²⁸ Van Agthoven, A. *MHM Virtual conference: Supporting Tanzanian schoolgirls with their menstrual health management*. [online] UNICEF Tanzania. Available at: https://www.unicef.org/wash/schools/files/Tanzania_MHM_Virtual_Conference_.pdf. [Accessed 7/3/2020].

²⁹ SNV (2014). *Baseline survey report on School Girls' Menstrual Hygiene Management issues*. [online] Available at: https://snv.org/cms/sites/default/files/explore/download/girls_in_control_baseline_report_-_tanzania.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0Nf7_WQe2dLyUNzd4QY-pbuwAjuw_WbzIGTmyu0ShALn-BsKw4jEdAHbE. {Accessed 7/03/2020}. (p.10)

this embarrassment.³⁰ The report by TAWASNET ultimately found that, out of the 765 schoolgirls interviewed, only 35.7% of girls were satisfied with the provision for menstrual hygiene at their school.³¹ This study was conducted in the Temeke district of Dar es Salam and in the rural Kilombero district, which suggests that this figure may be more representative of the situation in Dar es Salam than other studies conducted purely in rural regions.

e. Current national policy

As for official menstrual health policy, the TAWASNET study reported that national education policy does make reference to menstrual hygiene management in the 2010 and 2012-2017 Schools WASH guidelines. The national Ministry of Education and Vocational training has a minimum standard of one toilet per 20 girls or per 25 boys, although according to previously mentioned data, this standard is clearly not consistently met.³² On the level of local authorities, there does not seem to be a clear policy on menstrual health management. Through discussion with local education officials, TAWASNET found that 75% of local authorities decentralise menstrual hygiene management planning to schools themselves, with ‘matrons’ or other female teachers being responsible for this. The other 25% mentioned their ongoing intentions to improve provision of latrines in schools (one latrine per 20 girls, as per government guidelines).³³

In addition, the SNV study reported that there was no official policy on menstrual hygiene in many of the schools surveyed. 80% of the school committees and teachers interviewed said that there had never been provision in the school budget for menstrual hygiene management, including bins, incinerators, and emergency pad supplies.³⁴ In contrast, at some schools, it was found that teachers would provide emergency supplies of menstrual products if a girl was in need while at school. 55% of students surveyed by TAWASNET reported having infrastructure in place at their school to help them with their menstruation, which may include provision of pads, additional clothing if needed, disposal of used pads in bins or incinerators. However, this provision has many limitations; girls are expected to pay for these services in many schools, contributing between Tshs.100-200 per month, most of which goes towards buying disposable pads. Other students complained of being given only one pad for

³⁰ KITE. *Report on menstrual health management at Mabibo Secondary*. (p.4).

³¹ Tanzania Water and Sanitation Network TAWASNET (2015). *Study report: Improvement of Menstrual Hygiene Management in schools in Tanzania*. (p.21).

³² Tanzania Water and Sanitation Network TAWASNET (2015). *Study report: Improvement of Menstrual Hygiene Management in schools in Tanzania*.

³³ Tanzania Water and Sanitation Network TAWASNET (2015). *Study report: Improvement of Menstrual Hygiene Management in schools in Tanzania*. (p.11).

³⁴ SNV (2014). *Baseline survey report on School Girls’ Menstrual Hygiene Management issues*. [online] Available at:

https://snv.org/cms/sites/default/files/explore/download/girls_in_control_baseline_report_-_tanzania.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0Nf7_WQe2dLyUNzd4QY-pbuwAjuw_WbzIGTmyu0ShALn-BsKw4jEdAHbE. {Accessed 7/03/2020}.(p.vii)

the whole day, pads sometimes being expired as they have been stored for a long time, or having nowhere to dispose of the pads they use.³⁵

Overall, it is clear that policy on menstrual health management in schools, while acknowledged at a governmental level, is too often left to school management to deal with. Perhaps for various reasons, such as a lack of awareness, lack of budget, or taboo around the subject, school councils often fail to address the issue and leave female teachers and students to manage provision themselves. This leads to financial pressure on schoolgirls. The provision for sanitation in schools is clearly often poor, although our data may be slightly skewed by relying on reports from mainly rural areas. However, it is clear that schools generally are unable to provide a clean, safe environment for menstruating girls. They lack adequate water and soap, methods to dispose of reusable pads, places to wash and dry reusable menstrual products, and in some cases, infrastructure for privacy such as doors and locks.

IV. Recommendations for how to improve menstrual material disposal

a. Difficulties

Poor menstrual hygiene management, particularly poor menstrual hygiene disposal, is clearly a complex problem which presents a considerable barrier to girls receiving a full education in Tanzania. These recommendations attempt to address the question of how CDI can best act in order to contribute to the tackling of this problem.

The projects undertaken by CDI remain localized and relatively small-scale meaning that the organization is not best placed to attempt change on the national scale. Instead CDI should aim to work with schools, and other local groups where appropriate, to improve the toilet facilities schools provide as this is both a feasible and effective way of tackling poor menstrual waste disposal. However, it is important to acknowledge firstly that there will be limitations to the extent of improvement CDI can create. Therefore, in order to have the greatest impact possible the organization will need to be strategic in its efforts.

CDI cannot be responsible for the provision of temporary supplies - such as soap or washing detergent - as this would require personnel to be frequently distributing and monitoring the use of such facilities, and CDI projects are based on a model in which most of the work is undertaken by summer volunteers or in partnership with other non-governmental organisations. Furthermore, it makes sense in terms of saving on both financial and personal costs for CDI to integrate the changes in menstrual health disposal within already existing WASH projects. This should be possible as CDI already undertakes work improving community toilet facilities, and MHM could be incorporated as an extension of that work. Complex alterations attempted by larger non-governmental organisations, such as the building of incinerators into toilet blocks then are unlikely to be a sensible approach³⁶.

³⁵ Tanzania Water and Sanitation Network TAWASNET (2015). *Study report: Improvement of Menstrual Hygiene Management in schools in Tanzania*. (p.14)

³⁶ Livingstone Tanzania Trust. Breaking the taboo of menstrual hygiene. [online] Available at: <https://www.livingstonetanzaniatrust.com/mhm> [Accessed 20/03/20]

Having assessed the ways in which CDI will be limited, it is crucial to try to work out in which ways the organization can make a sustainable and meaningful difference. To achieve this the report will carry out a consideration of the key areas which are currently preventing the safe disposal of menstrual waste. There are four of these areas of concern: cleaning, drying, privacy, and disposal.

The first area that needs to be addressed is the ability of girls to carry out cleaning in the school toilet facilities. This needs to be both of themselves and of sanitary materials, especially as most girls opt for reusable ones which soak up the blood. The primary concern for cleaning is the provision of water, which may be in the form of running water in the toilet blocks themselves. However, other solutions are also possible, for instance the filling up of buckets from an alternative site of running water. In fact, buckets are often necessary if the girls are wishing to wash menstrual materials, and basins are not available.

The second activity that needs to be facilitated by any projects undertaken by CDI, is the provision of space to dry menstrual products as being able to wash menstrual products is of very little assistance if they cannot be dried. House et al's guide to MHM globally found that the best method for drying is to hang cloths or underwear, in the open under the sun³⁷. In theory this should be possible as Tanzania is a country with a warm climate and drying lines are relatively inexpensive. The difficulty arises with regards to the final point of concern which is ensuring privacy. Girls feel a great sense of shame and embarrassment regarding their periods and consequently the drying lines could not be kept in any area where male individuals could see them³⁸. The tenability of this would depend on the specific school in question, but in some instances drying facilities may have to be inside the toilet facilities.

Privacy then is the third important factor to consider in the facilitation of menstrual disposal. This is essential at all stages of the disposal chain from the toilets themselves to the spaces for the washing and drying of menstrual materials. In terms of ensuring it: doors with locks on separating individual toilets are essential, and this also allows girls the possibility of washing in private. However, the toilet block and any drying space also should be separate where possible from that of the boys, as the attention of boys was a major concern of girls. Furthermore, House et al also found that many girls are concerned about their teachers seeing menstrual blood so teachers should use toilets separately, either different infrastructure or different time, where possible³⁹. In the long-term strategies which attempt to tackle the attitude of male pupils and teachers to menstruation should be implemented in order to eliminate this concern. However, this would be too large a project for CDI to undertake, and so focusing on infrastructure changes is more feasible.

³⁷ House, S et al. (2012). Menstrual Hygiene Matters: A resource for improving menstrual hygiene around the world. [online] Available at: https://www.susana.org/_resources/default/3-2210-21-1426498269.pdf [Accessed 20/03/20]

³⁸ SNV Netherlands Development Organisation. (2014). Girls in Control: Compiled Findings from Studies on Menstrual Hygiene Management of Schoolgirls. [online] Available at: https://snv.org/cms/sites/default/files/explore/download/snv_girls_in_control_baseline_report.pdf [Accessed 20/03/20]

³⁹ House, S et al. (2012). Menstrual Hygiene Matters: A resource for improving menstrual hygiene around the world. [online] Available at: https://www.susana.org/_resources/documents/default/3-2210-21-1426498269.pdf [Accessed 20/03/20]

Finally, in the case that girls are choosing to use non-reusable products there must be bins, with lids in order to reduce the chance of embarrassment or shame. In addition, the eventual disposal of any such waste needs to be considered. It may be that there is waste collection organized by local authorities, but such systems are often poor and will vary based on the district the school is in⁴⁰. Even in order to use a centralized refuse collection, individuals within the school must be made responsible for the collection of toilet waste.

b. Suggestions

The report has so far offered general suggestions, which could apply to any situation where menstrual health hygiene is a problem. However, it is now important to look at specific solutions that CDI could reasonably implement with the time frame and financial resources that are available to the organization.

The work of the WASH projects undertaken by CDI has thus far has been centered on the building of toilet facilities with simplified sewage⁴¹. This provides a really good basis for the provision of MHM, as simplified sewage allows for the disposal of blood as well as urine and feces. Furthermore, the toilets constructed by CDI offer the user privacy which is essential for girls to manage menstruation. These projects have been carried out on a small scale in communities, and for this to work in a school a slightly larger facility would have to be constructed so the ability to scale up production would have to be investigated.

CDI is also committed to running sexual and reproductive health workshops, which could be another resource for the implementation of menstrual hygiene disposal⁴². Firstly, the workshops provide a space in which to discuss any potential changes as it is absolutely essential that any plan to improve MHM consults both the school girls and the teachers of the school in order to ensure that it is meeting their specific, localized needs and is not just based on a generalized idea of what the needs of Tanzanian school girls are. Secondly, the workshops may provide a beginning point for discussing rules around the use and care for new facilities.

The information gathered from these discussions would then become the basis for the monitoring and evaluation program CDI would need to use in order to ensure the success of any MHM scheme. Such a program would need clear targets, and these could take the form both of implementing specific infrastructure changes suggested by girls, but also a change in attitudes towards MHM at school. Targets then would vary on the basis of specific school populations and their needs. However, in each case they would enable CDI project managers to ensure their work was having the desired impact, and furthermore give them the ability to recognize when changes needed to be made.

This report then would suggest that the most feasible course of progress for CDI is to work with schools to facilitate the building of toilets, such as those that have already been

⁴⁰ KITE. Report on menstrual health management at Mabibo Secondary.

⁴¹ Cambridge Development Initiative. WaSH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene). [online] Available at: <http://www.cambridgedevelopment.org/wash.html> [Accessed 20/03/20]

⁴² Cambridge Development Initiative. Health. [online] Available at: <http://www.cambridge.development.org/health.html> [Accessed 20/03/20]

constructed as part of the WASH projects. These toilets need - at the very minimum - to allow for discrete washing, drying and disposal of menstrual materials if they are to address the problem of menstrual material disposal.

V. Conclusion

In conclusion, this report recommends the most viable way to improve menstrual health management in Tanzanian schools would be to facilitate the construction of toilets and areas for washing that meet the requirements of menstruating students. The identified requirements include privacy in the form of a locked door, provision of water and soap, provision of a method to dispose of menstrual products, a basin to wash reusable menstrual materials, and an area for drying them with sufficient space and sunlight. As discussed in this report, the majority of primary and secondary schools do not have this infrastructure in place. This report has identified difficulties in implementing this new infrastructure. For example, CDI will be unable to guarantee a continued provision of soap or washing detergent as they operate using volunteers during the summer months. This method of operating also negates the possibility of installing more complicated infrastructure, such as building incinerators. However, CDI does already operate in the WASH sector to improve toilet facilities, so perhaps this project could be integrated into this work.

The impact of an improvement in hygiene provision would be highly beneficial to the attendance rates of menstruating pupils, as they generally feel discouraged from attending school while menstruating due to concerns about menstrual materials leaking or smelling. This report's recommendations focus on the usage of traditional reusable materials as opposed to manufactured reusable materials, as it seems unfeasible for CDI to improve access to disposable menstrual pads and cups, which are expensive and, in the case of pads, must be purchased relatively frequently. In addition, facilitating disposal of such pads would require cooperation with local authorities, which may be beyond CDI's ability. However, improving hygiene infrastructure to allow students to use their reusable products in a cleaner and safer way is a more feasible solution. CDI will be able to build on this work in their sexual and reproductive health workshops, which will provide an opportunity for discussion of the new facilities and also for obtaining feedback. This feedback will be essential in the monitoring and evaluation of this project, as it will allow the collection of data about how such facilities are being used and students' opinions on them.

Bibliography

Chandra-Mouli, V. and Patel, S. (2017). Mapping the knowledge and understanding of menarche, menstrual hygiene and menstrual health among adolescent girls in low- and middle-income countries. *Reproductive Health*.

Department of Women: Republic of South Africa. (2018). First East and Southern Africa Regional Symposium Improving Menstrual Health Management for Adolescent Girls and

- Women: Final Report. [online] Available at: <http://www.thecaseforher.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/MHM-Symposium-Report-final.pdf> [Accessed 20/03/20]
- House, S et al. (2012). Menstrual Hygiene Matters: A resource for improving menstrual hygiene around the world. [online] Available at: https://www.susana.org/_resources/documents/default/3-2210-21-1426498269.pdf [Accessed 20/02/20]
- Jewitt, S. and Ryley, H. (2014). 'It's a girl thing: Menstruation, school attendance, spatial mobility and wider gender inequalities in Kenya'. *Geoforum*, 56.
- KITE. Report on menstrual health management at Mabibo Secondary.
- Kuhlmann, A. (2017). Menstrual Hygiene Management in Resource-Poor Countries. *Obstetrical & Gynecological Survey*, 72(6).
- Livingstone Tanzania Trust. Breaking the taboo of menstrual hygiene. [online] Available at: <https://www.livingstonetanzaniatrust.com/mhm> [Accessed 20/03/20]
- Rubli, J. (2017). *Monitoring and Evaluation Report, Kilimanjaro Region: Successes and lessons learned from the Twaweza program*. [online] Femme International: Tanzania. Available at: https://www.femmeinternational.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Femme-International-ME-Report-2017.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2dISMN4mp78RRFE0ELWhDvWXBr-xSTpFnQBOUwWRQZf4DIB5Qw85ot_bo. [Accessed 07/3/2020].
- SNV Netherlands Development Organisation. Baseline Survey Report On Menstrual Hygiene Management. [online] Available at: https://snv.org/cms/sites/default/files/explore/download/girls_in_control_baseline_report_-_tanzania.pdf [Accessed 20/03/20]
- SNV Netherlands Development Organisation. Girls in Control: Compiled Findings from Studies on Menstrual Hygiene Management of Schoolgirls. [online] Available at: https://snv.org/cms/sites/default/files/explore/download/snv_girls_in_control_baseline_report.pdf [Accessed 20/03/20]
- Sommer, M. and Sahin, M. (2013). Overcoming the Taboo: Advancing the Global Agenda for Menstrual Hygiene Management for Schoolgirls. *American Journal of Public Health*, 103(9).
- Ssewanyana, D. and Bitanihirwe, B. (2017). 'Menstrual hygiene management among adolescent girls in sub-Saharan Africa'. *Global Health Promotion*, 26(1).
- Tamiru, S et al. (2015). Towards a sustainable solution for school menstrual hygiene management: cases of Ethiopia, Uganda, South-Sudan, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe. *Waterlines*, 34(1).
- Tanzania Water and Sanitation Network (TAWASNET) (2015). Fact sheet: Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) to schoolgirls. [online] Available at: <http://www.tawasanet.or.tz/files/Fact%20Sheet%20MHM%20Tanzania.pdf> [Accessed 20/02/20]

Tanzania Water and Sanitation Network TAWASNET (2015). Study report: Improvement of Menstrual Hygiene Management in schools in Tanzania.

Tellier, S. and Hyttel, M. (2017). Menstrual Health Management in East and Southern Africa: A Review Paper. [online] Available at: <https://esaro.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/UNFPA%20Review%20Menstrual%20Health%20Management%20Final%2004%20June%202018.pdf> [Accessed 20/03/20]

The Cup. (2018). The Cup Summit 2018 Report. [online] Available at: <https://menstrualcupcoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/TheCupSummitReport.pdf> [Accessed 20/03/20]

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). (2019). Guide to Menstrual Hygiene Materials. [online] Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/wash/files/UNICEF-Guide-menstrual-hygiene-materials-2019.pdf> [Accessed 20/03/20]

Van Agthoven, A. MHM Virtual conference: Supporting Tanzanian schoolgirls with their menstrual health management. [online] UNICEF Tanzania. Available at: https://www.unicef.org/wash/schools/files/Tanzania_MHM_Virtual_Conference_.pdf. [Accessed 20/03/20]

Vaughn, J. (2013). A Review of Menstruation Hygiene Management among Schoolgirls in Sub-Saharan Africa. [online] Available at: <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/6503/711a859ea872b27a00ddb746f8bc26ba34a6.pdf> [Accessed 20/03/20]