# UNDERSTANDING MENSTRUAL HYGIENE MANAGEMENT BARRIERS TO IMPROVING GIRLS ATTENDANCE AT SCHOOLS IN NORTHERN GHANA

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#### BACKGROUND

• Catholic Relief Services (CRS) implemented the \$4.7 million I-SHINE\* project in 138 schools in 6 districts in northern Ghana from January 2014 – June 2017.

#### **KEY PROJECT AIMS AND ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED:**

- To address school attendance and retention and the quality of the learning environment.
- To reduce girls' absenteeism because of menstruation from 31% to less than 10%.
- Worked with Ghana Education Service to include menstrual hygiene in lessons for boys and girls, using Behavior Change Communication (BCC) tools.
- Provided 142 gender-friendly and disability-sensitive sanitation facilities with changing rooms to enable girls to hygienically manage their menses.
- Sensitized 17,580 parents on MHM through community social structures, including savings and loans groups.

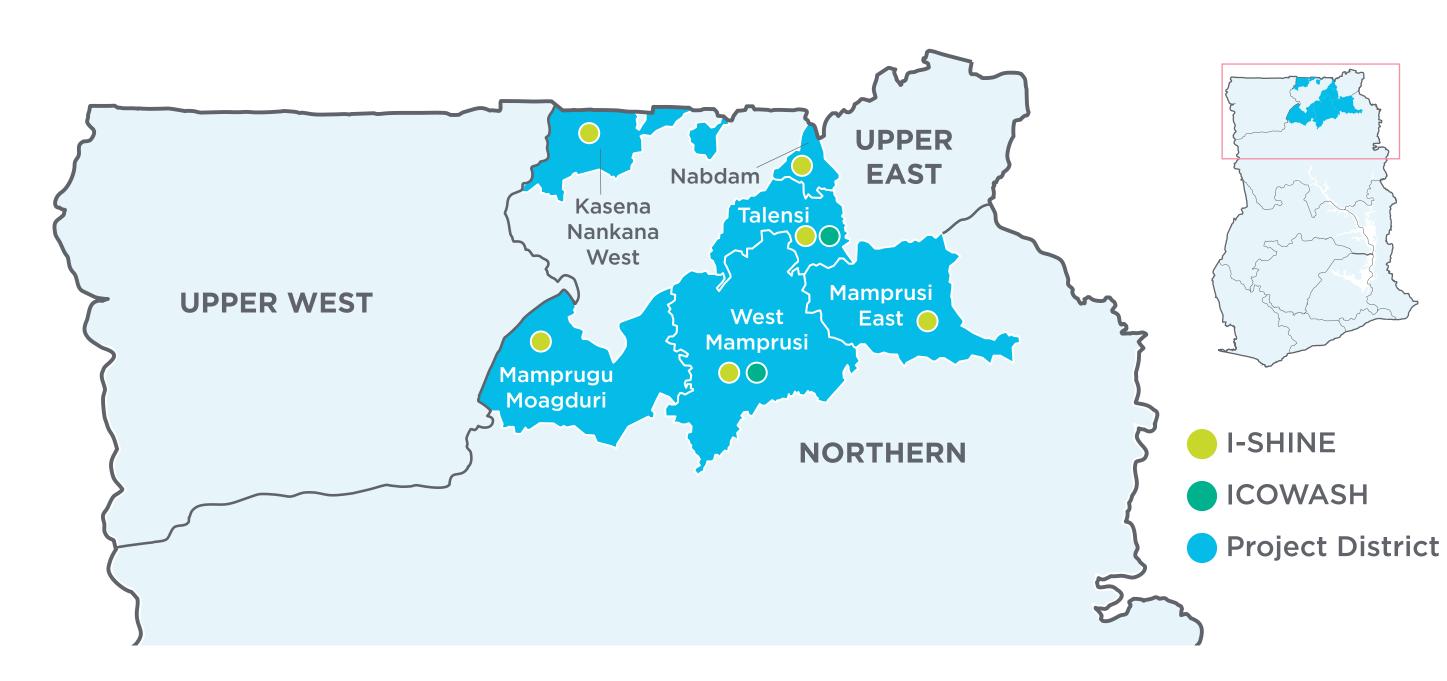


Figure 1: Map of I-SHINE and ICOWASH Operational Districts

#### **RESULTS OF MID-TERM EVALUATION:**

- 64% of girls feel comfortable managing menstruation at school.
- 16% still missed school due to menstruation.
- CRS, in collaboration with the Desert Research Institute—University of Nevada and the University for Development Studies in Ghana, conducted operational research to unravel the persisting barriers that keep girls out of school during their monthly period.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE** OPERATIONAL RESEARCH

- To understand the barriers keeping girls out of school due to their monthly period.
- To determine how to better serve the needs of school girls and reduce female absenteeism.

#### METHODS

- Interviews were conducted in 37 schools involving 349 girls between the ages of 8 and 19 in primary classes 4, 5, and 6, and Junior High School (JHS) 1 and 2.
- Focus group discussions were held with 15 school girls and 13 adults in each of the six project districts. Focus groups for adults were conducted separately for school teachers and community members (women and men separately).

and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust.

#### RESULTS

From the study, the 2 key barriers to retention at school during menstruation are the following:

- Uncomfortable at school (47%; N=117)
- pain during menstruation (32%; N=38)
- feeling embarrassed (23%; N=27)
- lack of menstrual pads (19%; N=22).
- Inadequate knowledge: 44% (N=121) of girls did not know about menstruation before their first period.

Also, while 78% (N=216) of girls reported using the pad changing room provided in latrines during menstruation, 49% (N=105) wanted modifications to the changing rooms. Key among what to change or add to make them more comfortable were menstrual pads, availability of water and mirrors.

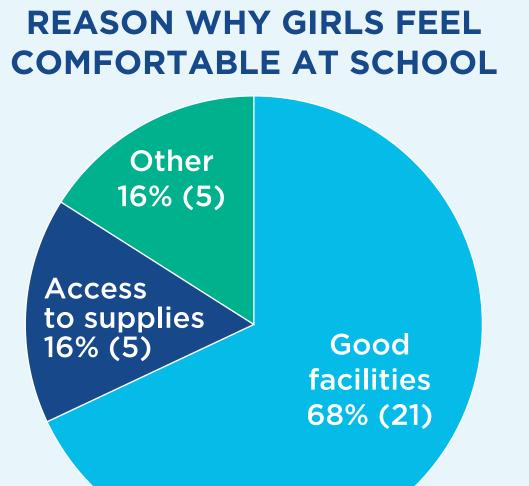


Figure 2: Comfortability analysis of menstruating girls

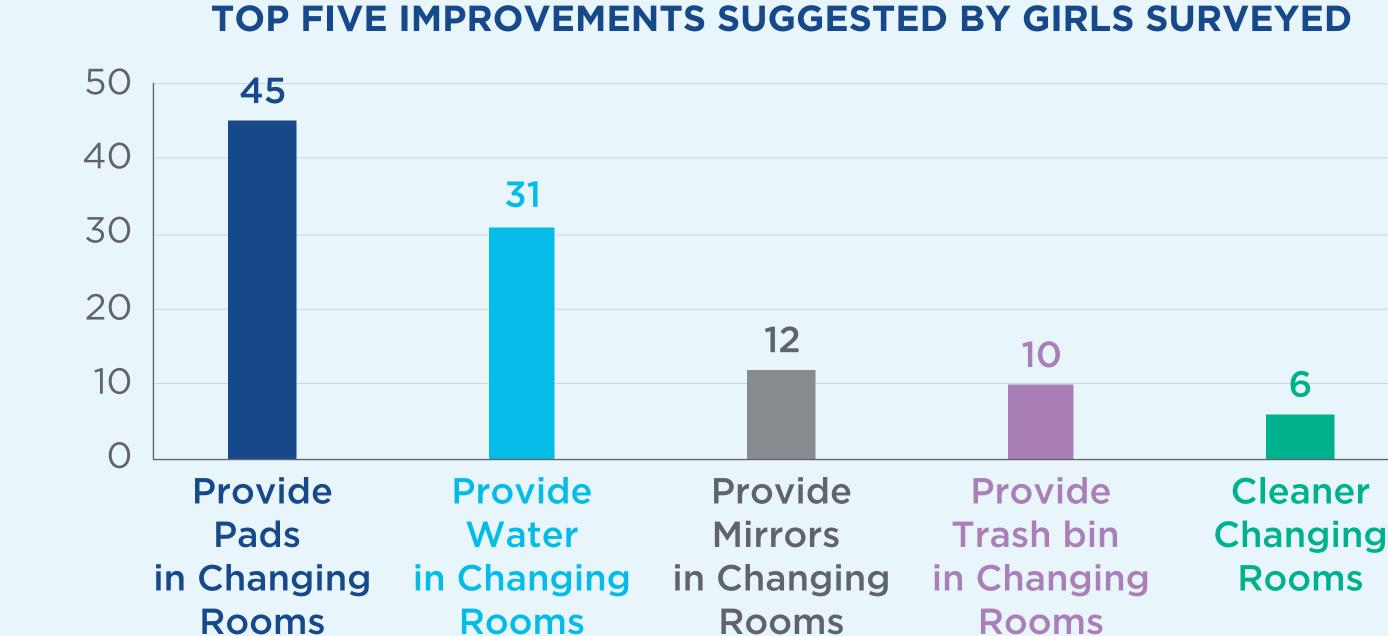


Figure 4: Recommended improvements or additions to the pad changing rooms (including a word cloud)

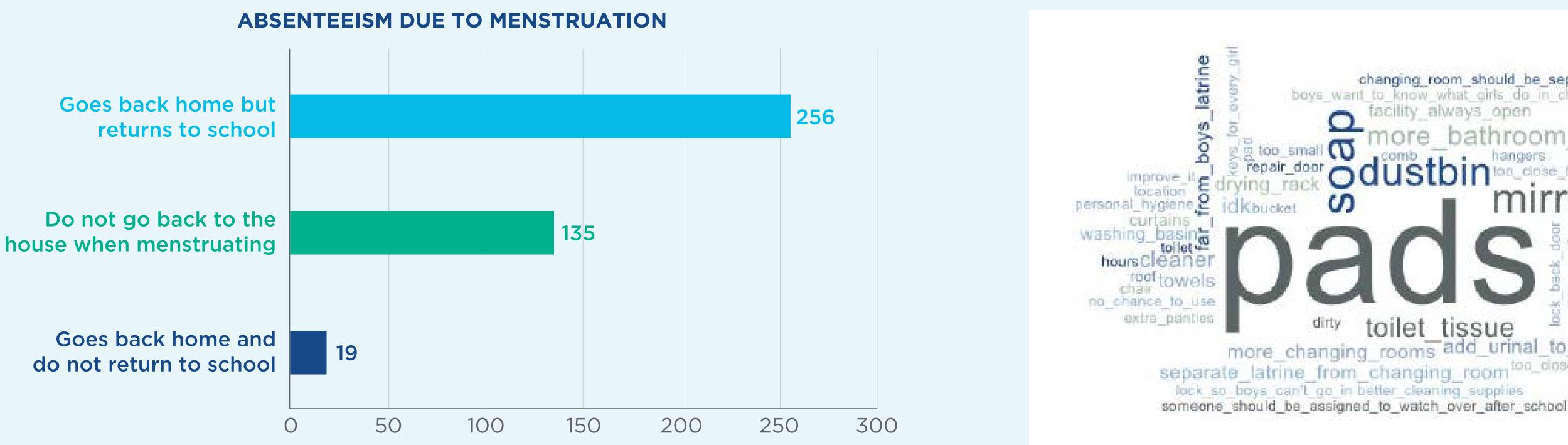


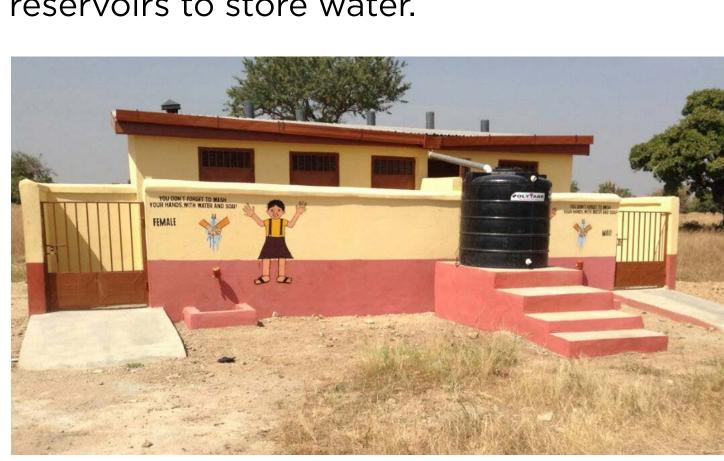
Figure 3: Impact of menstruation on girls' school attendance

# more changing rooms add\_urinal\_to\_changing\_room omeone\_should\_be\_assigned\_to\_watch\_over\_after\_school

## MODIFICATIONS TO PROGRAMMING AFTER STUDY

CRS modified implementation strategies during the second half of project. These included:

- Intensification of menstrual hygiene education to increase knowledge on management of cramps and eradicate common misconceptions.
- Redesign of sanitation facilities to include mirrors and hangers in changing rooms, pad disposal chambers (with incinerator), and reservoirs to store water.



Richard Ntibrey (CRS)



#### CONCLUSIONS

The endline survey revealed that:

- 92% of girls had learned about menstruation in school.
- 79% used the pad changing room.
- Percentage of girls missing school as result of menstruation decreased to 7%.
- Low availability of MHM products remains a barrier to girls' school attendance.

Learning from the study, the 2nd phase of the I-SHINE project (ICOWASH: ≈\$6.5M; Aug. 2017-July 2020) will:

- Emphasize MHM products for adolescent girls in 80 schools:
- conduct operational research on marketing culturally acceptable and affordable reusable MHM products
- support local dressmakers to produce them
- Conduct formative research on BCC to deliver messaging that targets women, girls, men and boys on the socio-cultural and emotional drivers on WASH and menstrual hygiene practices.



Students prepare for class in Tongo-Beo community in Ghana. Michael Stulman/CRS

"I had my first menstruation one early morning during school assembly when I was in primary five. A colleague behind told me I was bleeding, but I didn't believe it because I knew I had no cut on any part my body. She kept insisting until the attention of others was drawn to it. It is a day I don't want to remember again because I was seriously mocked by my colleagues. Since then, I never attended school on days that I had my menses until the I-SHINE project was introduced to my school. Under the project, a gender friendly toilet facility with a pad changing room was constructed for my school".

> -By Basiru Zenab, a 17 years old form 2 student of Sayoo E/A Junior High School, West Mamprusi District, Northern Ghana



