

CRS Ghana Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) Strategy

Background

CRS Ghana, in collaboration with partners from Ghana Health Services (GHS) and Ghana Education Services (GES), implemented the 3.5-year WASH project (2014-2017), Integrated Sanitation, Hygiene and Nutrition for Education (I-SHINE) funded by the Helmsley Charitable Trust.

I-SHINE implemented, Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) in Schools as part of its strategies to make schools WASH Friendly. This was done to encourage learning and teaching to improve attendance and retention of school children. The project deliberately incorporated Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) as an attempt to retain girls in school during menstruation, since this has been found to be one of the major causes of absenteeism from school globally.

Following the successful implementation of the I-SHINE project, CRS Ghana designed another 3-year project, the Integrated Community Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Improvement (ICOWASH) project, also funded by the Helmsley Charitable Trust, as a follow on to I-SHINE. The ICOWASH project continues the successful programming under I-SHINE and has incorporated lessons learned for more robust and impactful outcomes. MHM continues to feature strongly in the ICOWASH project with some few additions and adjustments to the strategies implemented under the I-SHINE project. The goal of the ICOWASH project is to *'improve health and wellbeing of 152,334 rural adults and children in West Mamprusi and Talensi districts in Northern Ghana'*.

CRS Ghana's MHM Implementation Strategies

- **Incorporating MHM into classroom lessons:** WASH mentors trained and sensitized to introduce relevant topics on MHM and to use Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) materials on MHM for classroom lessons and during school health club meeting sessions.
- **Provision of Behavior Change Communication (BCC) materials:** The project supported beneficiary schools with BCC flip charts, posters, WASH Manuals and pictures on MHM. These BCC materials are used by teachers as teaching aids and are posted at vantage points around the schools, including the pad changing rooms to serve as reference points for girl students.
- **MHM Education by Nutrition Champions:** Nutrition Champions are selected from SILC (Savings and Internal Lending Communities) groups and trained in relevant health topics, including sex education and MHM. The Champions then roll out this training with parents and discuss approaches to teaching MHM to their adolescent girls. During I-SHINE, sex/MHM education was taught bi-monthly to parents of girls in beneficiary schools using the SILC meetings as a platform for discussion. This strategy served to fill in any gaps or augment lessons thought in the schools and incorporated parents as a link between households and schools.
- **MHM Coaches in Communities:** Leveraging on SILC groups at the community-level to educate parents on good MHM practices and how to engage their adolescent boys and girls to see menstruation as a natural phenomenon, MHM coaches are identified and trained in the ICOWASH project. These coaches serve as key community members whom girls can confide in for MHM issues.

- **MHM Education and Sensitization in Schools and Communities:** To ensure sustainability of **MHM activities, the ICOWASH project engages** Girl Child Coordinators and Health Promotion Officer from the Ghana Education Services= in the various districts to carry out MHM education and sensitization in schools and during SILC meetings in the communities.
- **Peer Leaders Concept:** The ICOWASH project identifies and trains peer leaders in schools (including boys) to act as coaches for their colleagues in school on issues concerning MHM and how to demystify misconceptions on MHM which boys can tease girls about during their period.
- **Menstrual Calendars:** To help girls in schools track their menses to be adequately prepared when going to school, the ICOWASH project produces and distributes menstrual calendars.
- **Celebration of Menstrual Hygiene Day:** This event is celebrated yearly within various schools and involves drama, quiz competitions, and poetry, among other events, with prizes awarded to deserving winners. Parents and community members also take part in these lively celebrations.
- **Provision of Gender and Disability Friendly Latrines:** The project provides schools with gender friendly latrines, equipped with pad changing rooms and attached incinerators for adolescent girls. This is important to enable girls to conveniently change their soaked pads while in school. Before, girls in their menses went home to change their soaked pads and usually did not return to school until the next day. Some girls missed classes for as long as their period lasted within each month.

Research and Reports

CRS collaborated with the Desert Research Institute (DRI)-University of Nevada (UNR) and the University for Development Studies to conduct research to unravel the persisting barriers that keep girls out of school during their monthly period under the I-SHINE project. The top three reasons why girls were not comfortable at school were: pain during menstruation (33%), feeling embarrassed (23%) and lack of menstrual pads (19%). Also, 44% did not know about menstruation before their first period and 49% wanted modifications to the changing rooms. Key among what to change or add to the changing rooms were the provision of menstrual pads.

From the above findings the ICOWASH project was designed to include operational research on *“market development for locally-sourced reusable sanitary pads”*, as well as a formative research on *“Behavior Change Communication for improved WASH in communities”*. Based on these beneficial research findings, CRS Ghana added two additional strategies:

- **Use research informed BCC communication channels** on MHM for schools, health facilities and community level education to demystify misconceptions on menstrual hygiene and to promote good knowledge and practices on MHM.
- **Business development of re-usable/low cost sanitary towels** for communities by engaging community actors such as seamstresses to take up the production of the sanitary towels as a small - scale business.

Picture Gallery:



Fig. 1: 4-Seater institutional Latrine with pad-changing room and an incinerator attached



Fig. 2: Used pad chamber/ incinerator in full (left picture), and inside of the pad chamber /incinerator (top picture)



Fig. 3: A view of the pad changing room with disposal slot, water tap & drainage (left), mirror and hanger (right)



Fig. 4: A Health Promotion Officer from Ghana Health Service demonstrating how to use the reusable sanitary pad during an MHM education/Sensitization session in a community

**INTEGRATED COMMUNITY WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE
IMPROVEMENT (ICOWASH) PROJECT**



**Menstruation is normal and healthy,
so offer to support and not to tease.**



ADOPTED FROM THE GHANA EDUCATION SERVICE (GES) TEACHING MANUAL FOR BOYS & GIRLS ON MENSTRUAL HYGIENE MANAGEMENT (MHM)

Fig. 5: An MHM poster advocating for male support to menstruating girls

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Always mark the first day of your period
INTEGRATED COMMUNITY WATER SANITATION AND HYGIENE IMPROVEMENT (ICOWASH) PROJECT

Fig. 6: Menstrual calendar to help girls in schools track their menses to be adequately