



POLICY BRIEF

Providing adequate sanitary materials and facilities to schoolgirls in Tanzania

Key messages

- In Tanzania, approximately 18% of adolescent girls do not have enough sanitary pads.
- Almost 83% of all schools lack menstrual sanitary facilities especially changing rooms.
- Inadequate menstrual hygiene management in schools results in absenteeism, dropping out, diminished dignity, and a variety of sexual and reproductive health issues, all of which have serious and long-term health and socioeconomic consequences for adolescent girls.
- The Ministry of Health should provide adequate menstrual hygiene materials and facilities in schools, as well as mobilize other stakeholders to do so.
- The Ministry of Health should develop and implement a participatory strategic plan for menstrual hygiene management that will offer the most effective method of providing menstrual hygiene materials and facilities to schoolgirls.

emphasize the importance of every girl and woman

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Menstrual hygiene is important for women's health and well-being. Human rights

managing their menstruation in a safe and dignified manner. However, most girls in developing countries, particularly those in schools,

have inadequate access to menstrual hygiene services and facilities. The sanitary pads that should be used when adolescent girls are expensive and thus out of reach for most girls. Poor menstrual hygiene poses serious health risks, such as reproductive and urinary tract infections, which can lead to infertility and birth complications in the future. Furthermore, improper disposal of menstrual waste has environmental consequences on soil and water because polyethene plastics in sanitary pads do not biodegrade and can remain in the environment for many years. Inadequate menstrual hygiene

environment has a negative impact on girls' academic performance and places a financial burden on families and the government.

This brief aims to assist policymakers and decision-makers in taking appropriate steps to ensure that all school-aged adolescent girls have the

right to manage their periods safely and dignifiedly. It addresses the challenges and consequences of having poor menstrual materials and facilities in Tanzanian schools. It makes policy recommendations to minimize gaps in policies and practices overriding menstrual hygiene management, and it calls for a comprehensive national policy and strategic plan on safe and dignified menstruation guided by a human rights approach.

THE PROBLEM

Menstrual hygiene management is an important aspect women's and adolescent girls' health, safety and dignity ^[1]. Thus, poor menstrual hygiene management in schools can lead to absenteeism, dropping out, diminished dignity, and a variety of sexual and reproductive health concerns, all of which can have serious and long-term health and socioeconomic consequences for adolescent girls ^[2,3]. In schools, adolescent girls' ability to manage their

menstruation is hampered by a variety of factors, including low knowledge level of menstruation, insufficient access to safe and private toilets, a lack of clean water and soap for personal hygiene, and limited access to affordable and sanitary materials and disposal options [4,5]. All of these factors make it difficult for them to manage their menstruation in a safe and sanitary manner.

The meta-analysis of published research from Canon [3], Evans et al [6], Patel et al [5], Van Eijk et al [2], Sharma et al [4], Sumpter and Torondel [7] and Wilbur et al. [8] show that most of the schoolgirls have inadequate access to menstrual hygiene materials and facilities. Likewise, studies that used cross-sectional designs from national health institutions in Tanzania [9-13] indicate that most adolescent girls especially in rural schools in have inappropriate sanitary materials and facilities. Menstruating girls face numerous restrictions,

particularly when it comes to religious and cultural activities [9].

Furthermore, there is improper disposal of menstrual materials used by girls, and sanitary pads are expensive for some families to purchase [14]. These difficulties result in absenteeism, dropping out, diminished dignity, and a variety of sexual and reproductive health problems, all of which have serious and long-term health and socioeconomic consequences for adolescent girls. According to NIMR & PHL-IdC [9] the most common reasons for missing school are shortage of menstrual supplies and changing rooms, embarrassment due to visible stains on clothing, and a scarcity of clean and appropriate toilet facilities.

Menstrual health and hygiene are increasingly recognized by the Tanzanian government, but they are not fully mainstreamed [15]. Most girls in rural primary and secondary schools who have reached

puberty do not have sufficient materials and facilities during their monthly menstrual cycle [12]. They use rags, raw cotton, and maize cobs as local pads. Washing reusable pads is a significant challenge in most rural schools due to lack of water. As a result, disposable pads, which are considered expensive, can be used [8]. Evidence from systematic reviews, randomized controlled trials and epidemiological studies mostly from developing countries, show that poor menstrual hygiene management at schools level are influenced by inadequate menstrual materials and facilities. The increase of the access to quality and affordable sanitary pads will improve the menstrual health and hygiene among the schoolgirls. Therefore, based on Tanzania contexts, this policy brief proposes options that will strengthen and promote the improvement of menstrual hygiene management materials and facilities among school going adolescents.

Current policy for menstrual hygiene management among school girls in Tanzania

While the Tanzanian government has implemented a number of policies to address the comprehensive menstrual needs of adolescent girls, particularly those in schools, there is no stand-alone policy for menstrual health and hygiene in schools [15]. The 2016 National Guidelines for Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene in Tanzanian Schools emphasize the availability and accessibility of menstrual materials and facilities such as water supply, changing rooms, hand washing facilities, solid waste disposal, and menstrual pads [16]. To achieve this, financial and material resources have been allocated to improve menstrual health and hygiene infrastructure, services, and menstrual materials in Tanzanian schools [9]. However, these efforts are insufficient to address menstrual hygiene issues among schoolgirls. Some school students still do

not have menstrual pads or changing rooms where they can rest when they are menstruating. Thus, I propose mobilizing resources to ensure the availability and accessibility of menstrual materials and facilities at the school level in order to improve girls' menstrual health and hygiene and, as a result, eliminate absenteeism and increase high academic performance among girls.

POLICY OPTIONS

It is essential to improve access to menstrual hygiene materials and facilities. To achieve the latter, the Ministry of Health should do the following;

1. Mobilization of increasing sanitary pad subsidies or provision of free disposal pads. This is due to the fact that most sanitary pads are costly and not easily accessible. As a result, because they are easily accessible and mostly self-made, the girls use homemade substitutes.

Currently, the pads cost between Tshs 1,500 and 3,000, which appears to be prohibitively expensive for girls, particularly those living in rural areas. The affordable price range is Tshs 500 to 1,000. The government may deduct a reasonable fees

2. (for instance 2%) from the total revenue obtained from minerals produced in the country in order to subsidize sanitary pads.
3. For example, from July 2022 to March 2023, the Ministry of Minerals collected
4. Tshs 509,314,634,154 ^[17]. Taking 2% of this figure yields
5. Tshs 10,186,292,683. For example, Botswana passed legislation in 2017 requiring all schoolgirls to be provided with free sanitary pads ^[18].
6. Mobilization of reusable sanitary pads that are one-of-a-kind and innovative, made from locally available clothing materials like cotton, which are readily available in the local

market and manufactured in our country. To achieve this, there should be partnership between government and private sector including manufacturing industry to establish the social enterprise that may help women produce and distribute affordable, high-quality sanitary pads within their communities from cotton. Cotton can lead to the production of nearly 100% compostable and biodegradable sanitary pads. Women should be the center of production at that company.

7. Mobilization of provision of dustbins and incinerators in schools for pad disposal rather than throwing them into pit latrines and burying them in the ground, thereby improving disposal practices among girls. Local authorities, local private sectors, and communities should work together to mobilize their resources at the local level to provide simple dustbins and incinerators at their

locations. They can work with local experts to create environmentally friendly and accessible dustbins.

8. Mobilization of building changing rooms for girls in each school because there are shortage of special changing rooms in almost all schools, particularly public schools. Currently, the priority is construction classrooms, toilets, and teachers' houses at schools. However, the construction of the changing rooms should be incorporated in the programs of the constructing the classrooms, toilets, and teachers' houses.
9. Mobilization of installing sanitary pad vending machines (digital vending machines) in each school to help students obtain pads when needed. The Ministries of Health, Trade, and Communication should encourage the private sector to invest in digital vending machines that produce sanitary pads at any time. They should

involve telephone companies (Vodacom, Airtel, Tigo, Tanzania Telecommunications Corporation, and Halotel) and other companies such as African Community Advancement Initiative, Mac Digital Media Tanzania, Tanzacomputer Digital Marketing Agency, and Tanzania Digital Care.

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

1. In order to implement the suggested policy option, the Ministry of Health should develop and adopt a participatory strategic plan for menstrual hygiene management that includes objectives and actions required to achieve those objectives, as well as all other critical aspects of menstrual hygiene management such as financial resources that will help to strengthen materials and facilities at schools. This should be accompanied by the adoption of the United

Nations Children's Emergency Fund menstrual health and hygiene guidelines^[19].

2. The Minister of Health should collaborate with the private sector, partner countries like Denmark, the United States of America, Korea, Ireland, Switzerland, and Canada, faith-based organizations, and international organizations like the World Health Organization, World Bank, United Nations Population Fund, and United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund to provide sanitary materials and facilities to Tanzanian schoolgirls. In addition, the Ministries of Health and Trade and Industry should encourage manufacturers to produce sanitary pads that can be freely distributed to schoolgirls. As stated in the Corporate Social Responsibility Policy, this is done as part of social responsibility^[20].
3. Finally, the Ministry of Health may consider developing a separate

menstrual health and hygiene policy.

Competing interest

No competing interests.

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