

## Appendix 8: Menstrual hygiene and sanitation systems: Key lessons for educational messaging

Menstrual hygiene and sanitation are topics that are not often discussed openly. Social attitudes worldwide, particularly about menstruation, have restricted information sharing in the past. Lack of attention to the menstrual hygiene needs of girls and women is limiting their options, particularly for secondary education. The United Nations Children's Fund estimates that 1 in 10 African girls either skips school during menstruation or drops out entirely because of lack of menstrual hygiene management (MHM) options. Studies have confirmed that educating girls is associated with development and health benefits to the girls, their families, and society. Benefits include protecting girls from HIV/AIDS, sexual abuse, and exploitation; reducing child and maternal mortality; improving child nutrition and health; decreasing fertility rates; enhancing women's political participation; and improving economic productivity.

As governments are beginning to acknowledge the need to support low-income girls and women by subsidizing menstrual hygiene products, the impact of the increased volume of disposable products on sanitation and waste disposal systems must also be considered. Similarly, as sanitation systems are evolving and human waste is increasingly being reused, guidance and information for women on how and where to dispose of used menstrual hygiene products is needed which takes women's needs into account.

Information is needed by sanitation and solid waste management decision-makers and system operators as well as girls and women who use the systems. Countries will need to review and consider their sanitation and solid waste management systems and guidelines as key educational messages are developed. Pretesting messages with target audiences is important to ensure good comprehension. Clear graphic images are can be useful, where appropriate.

The following messages are examples that have emerged from research conducted by PATH in the University of Maryland's Menstrual Management and Sanitation Systems project in 2012. Countries will need to develop messages appropriate for their situations.

- Ministries of water and sanitation, ministries of education, ministries of finance, ministries of gender, sanitation and solid waste management system planners, and NGOs working in the sanitation and solid waste sectors.

- Menstruation is normal and necessary.
- Only human waste should be disposed of in (piped or dry) communal sanitation systems
- Menstrual waste blocks piped toilets and increases costs to municipalities
- Seek input from women/girl users of sanitation systems on culturally-appropriate disposal approaches
- Dedicated disposal bins for menstrual waste should be where toilets are.
- When selecting and introducing menstrual hygiene products for low income women and girls, analyze increased volumes of waste that will be produced and plan for appropriate disposal containers and collection schedules
- Menstrual waste should be disposed of in lidded containers and collected regularly
- The risk of disease transmission from dried menstrual blood is low.
- Keep sanitation and solid waste management workers healthy by providing appropriate protective equipment – thick gloves
- Sanitation system workers
  - Menstruation is normal and necessary
  - Only human waste should be disposed of in (piped or dry) communal sanitation systems
  - Menstrual waste blocks piped toilets and increases costs to municipalities
  - Dedicated disposal bins for menstrual waste should be where toilets are.
  - Use appropriate protective equipment - thick gloves - when handling human waste.
  - The risk of disease transmission from dried menstrual blood is low.
- Women (based on sanitation system type):
  - Menstruation is normal and necessary
  - Place used menstrual hygiene products in (include local recommendation – disposal bins, incinerator - for menstrual waste).
  - Only human waste should be disposed of in (piped or dry) communal sanitation systems
  - Menstrual waste will block flush toilets.
  - Menstrual waste fills communal latrines quickly.
  - Menstrual waste can be disposed of in a household latrine by women of the household