



**Introduction**

This brief aims at supporting policy and decision makers take adequate steps in ensuring all girls in Kampala Capital City Authority schools have the right to manage their periods safely and with dignity. Proper and

adequate menstrual health and hygiene (MHH) is central to a woman’s physical, mental, spiritual and psychosocial wellbeing. MHH is important for the fulfilment of girls’ and women’s rights, a key objective of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The brief unpacks the socio- economic implications of menstrual health, acknowledges

progress made so far, existing gaps and gives policy recommendations to guide lessening on-going gaps in policies. The paper calls for a human rights-based approach for planning and delivery of menstrual hygiene management (MHM) in both private and public schools in Kampala.



**Background**

Investing in girls’ education is essential to advancing development, breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty, and allowing girls, and then women to lead better, fairer and more productive lives, (The World Bank, 2011). Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) is fundamental to the fulfilment of girls’ and women’s rights and dignity, a key objective to attaining Sustainable Development Goals (UNICEF, 2019). Despite this, many adolescent girls around the world, miss school or even dropout altogether because they cannot manage their menstrual periods safely and in a dignified manner. Menstruation is a taboo subject, people are reluctant to talk openly about it because of myths, cultural and religious beliefs associated with it. Girls and women are generally considered being unclean or dirty during menstruation, and often restricted from participating in public gatherings, including religious rituals. They are further constrained by access to proper MHM products and worse still a well safely managed and disposal mechanism at school and home.

In Uganda, schoolgirls miss one to three days of school per month because they cannot manage their menstrual periods at school. This is equivalent to losing 11% of learning time by a girl pupil (SNV/ IRC, 2014). Emergencies like COVID-19 pandemic can exacerbate these deprivations since schools have been suspended and a lockdown put in place. The pandemic disrupts MHM material supply chain forcing families to prioritize food and other essentials over menstrual hygiene materials. These barriers have implications on the physical, emotional and psychological well- being, education, employment, livelihoods and participation of adolescent girls and women in the economy thus making significant impact on a country’s development.

**Progress on MHM so far**

In the last two decades Uganda has been breaking the silence and improving MHM among schoolgirls through gender responsive policies that address barriers to girls’ education. The Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Sports (MoESTS) in 2004, developed a National Strategy for Girls’ Education (2015 -2019), whose purpose is to establish a clear framework for identification, implementation and coordination of interventions designed to achieve and promote girls’ education in Uganda. In 2015, the Ministry in collaboration with civil society organisations agreed on a Menstrual Hygiene Management Charter – an initiative and commitment to work together to promote the rights of girls and women during menstruation. A National Menstrual Hygiene Steering Committee was also established under MoESTS with relevant line ministries and Civil Society Organizations (CSO) partners to coordinate MHM efforts. These efforts led to increased MHM

research and advocacy to inform planning, development of MHM conducive environment in schools, promoting of public private sector partnership in MHM and empowering girls and teachers with life skills to manage MHM including making pads.

During the 2016 presidential campaigns, President Yoweri Museveni pledged to provide sanitary pads to primary school girls. Although this pledge remained on paper, it drew attention to MHM issues, bringing together the donor community, civil society, the Uganda Parliamentary Forum for WASH (UPF WASH), MoESTS and Ministry of Health to work hand in hand in joint advocacy, supporting schools girls manage their periods safely and in dignity.

Indeed, the current policy environment is incredibly promising to addressing MHM; it encourages stakeholders at different levels to work together. However, significant gaps remain in implementation of these policies in schools including those in Kampala City.



**Education about menstruation changes everything.**

**Status of MHM in Public Schools in Kampala Capital City Authority**

Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) under the Directorate of Education and Social Services (DESS) and the Directorate of Public Health and Environment (DPHE) plays a significant role in ensuring an enabling environment for girls to manage their menstrual periods safely and in dignity while at school. However, KCCA struggles to manage regulate and supervise public and private schools to deliver a girl friendly school learning environment.

Studies have shown: 40% of girls in Kampala primary schools menstruate; 43% of schools dump used sanitary materials in pit latrines; 34% burn or dump in solid waste bins and a school spends about UGX 331 per pupil per term to provide sanitary materials (Nyenje P, 2015). Furthermore, access to sanitation facilities is still low: the pupil to stance ratio is 57:1 which is below the standard (40:1) per the public health regulation of 2000 (Byansi J. et al 2020).

In Kampala city, 92% of schools have latrines that are usable, and also have sex segregated toilets that offer privacy to girls but water and soap for MHM and disposal of menstrual material is not adequate. Schools are required by law to use waterborne toilets

(MLHUD, 2011) but only 20% of the toilet facilities in Kampala public schools meet this requirement (KCCA and WAU, 2018), closet toilets use a lot of water leading to high water bills for schools.

At KCCA level there is no specific development plan for Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) in Schools, roles and responsibilities are shared between DESS and DPHE (Kimbugwe, et al., 2018) and funding for WASH in Schools is bundled into the overall education budget. The City Authority through collaboration with civil society organisations and donors has supported improvement in MHM by developing WASH standards. Primary schools in the city have participated in improving MHM services. They have put in place measures to support menstruating girls; promote hygiene education; provide a senior woman who mentors/ supports girls, provide emergency pads and disposal buckets in the toilets (Najib B. et al 2018).

In addition, schools have WASH clubs where they learn good sanitation and hygiene practices including MHM. The challenge is that these measures are inadequate in enabling better MHM both at school and home.

Whereas there's a

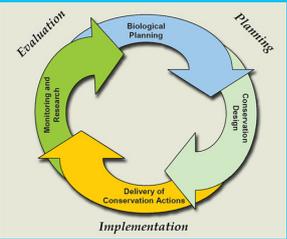
policy directive by the Ministry of Education and Sports vide the MHM Circular No.01/2015 on MHM in Schools, findings from Community Development Initiatives (CIDI)'s rapid assessment of schools in Nakawa indicates that none of the School Management and Senior Teachers from 7 targeted Primary schools in Nakawa, 5 in Lubaga and 4 in Kawempe had seen the circular though they were aware about some of the requirements therein. The limitations are awareness creation among the school managers and the inadequate resources needed to meet the requirements of the circular. The schools are challenged by inadequate infrastructure such as separate toilets and washrooms, with all schools reporting lack of separate private counselling rooms. The schools also report lack of MHM product supplies such as emergency pads, knickers and spare uniforms or even lessos(skirt like cloth) to support the girls who get periods at school.



**Policy Alternatives**

Deliberate and focused action to improve MHH and mitigate persisting challenges discussed above is essential in creating sustainable and applicable MHM programs in all schools within and outside Kampala. Building upon the existing policy and political support, research and practice-based evidence from Community Integrated Development Initiatives (CIDI) and other CSOs, it is possible to ameliorate MHM in Kampala schools. Preliminary findings can be addressed by the proposed interventions in the table below.

## Policy Action Matrix on safe and dignified menstrual health and management in Kampala Schools.

Issue	Action	Responsible party
<p>Limited standards, guidelines and manuals for WASH in Schools in KCCA. - roles and responsibilities are shared between the education and social services directorate and public health and environment directorate</p> 	<p>Accelerate the popularisation of the KCCA WASH in schools standards 2019 to schools and communities</p> <p>Accelerate and popularise the MoES MHM Circular No.01/2015</p> <p>Adopt a human rights based approach for a comprehensive WASH in Schools plan with a list of features that are fundamental to good menstrual hygiene management e.g. separate toilets for boys and girls, toilets with secure locks for privacy, availability of soap and water in toilets, a bin or incinerator for proper collection and disposal of used sanitary materials, changing room for girls.</p> <p>Standardized girl friendly designs that offer convenience and privacy. For example, the sanitary facility for girls should include a washroom and changing room.</p>	<p>Kampala Capita City Authority (KCCA)</p>
<p>Lack of MHM quantifiable indicators for improvements monitoring and evaluation of performance in Kampala primary schools</p> 	<p>Institutionalise a robust MHM implementation, monitoring and evaluation system for all Schools in Kampala city. – key features should include; availability of female friendly toilets, girls changing rooms, availability of water, MHM mentors, provision of emergency support to schoolgirls during MHM, availability of proper collection and disposal of used sanitary materials options.</p> <p>Include MHM in the performance contracts for school head teachers, health and school inspectors so that when assessing their performance, they report about efforts in place to improve MHM in their schools.</p>	<p>KCCA in collaboration with relevant stakeholders (Ministry of Water and Environment, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, MoESTS and CSOs</p> <p>KCCA</p>
<p>Limited cross/multi sectoral coordination and harmonisation of policy and practice on MHM</p>	<p>Work hand in hand with religious, cultural and opinion leaders designing and implementing practical behavioural change communication campaigns targeting whole communities (men and women) to foster better understanding and reducing the negative perception that surround menstruation.</p> <p>Take MHM awareness beyond schools so that girls when outside school environment (like during the Covid- 19 pandemic when schools are closed) can get support.</p> <p>Provide information in accessible and understandable medium for learners including those with specific need such as those with visual impairments.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ministry of Education</li> <li>• Ministry of Gender</li> <li>• KCCA and Development partners</li> <li>• Religious Leaders</li> <li>• Social media influencers</li> </ul>
<p>Limited access, availability and acceptability to Menstrual Products –whether home-made or mass manufactured is limited.</p> 	<p>Support local entrepreneurs/ start-ups to manufacture quality and biodegradable sanitary pads that are acceptable, accessible to schoolgirls.</p> <p>Explore further possibilities of manufacturing and marketing innovative low-cost sanitary towels e.g. working with village saving schemes and credit associations.</p>	<p>KCCA UMA UIRI</p> <p>CSOs, PTAs and SMCs</p>

	Advocate for the removal of taxes (VAT and sales tax) from menstrual hygiene materials to make them more affordable.	CSO, school management committees
Lack of proper disposal facilities that eliminate shame amongst girls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure improved access to hygienic usage, re-use and environmentally friendly disposal of used sanitary materials.</li> <li>• In urban schools where incinerators cannot be constructed due to public health concerns, promote the use of commercial waste management services for non-washable used sanitary pads.</li> <li>• Where possible incinerators/ burning chambers should be built near the girls changing and washrooms.</li> <li>• Address cultural norms that influence the disposal actions that women and girls choose</li> </ul>	KCCA Schools  Traditional Leaders
Limited access to safe water while at school during menstruation periods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage National Water and Sewerage Cooperation to provide water to primary schools at lower tariffs as compared to market rates</li> <li>• Promote rainwater harvesting systems to supplement piped water supply.</li> <li>• Promote inclusive water efficient WASH facilities in schools (e.g. single flush toilets) to reduce on water costs.</li> </ul>	KCCA  SMCs SMCs
Lack of integrated planning for MHM at the School Management Levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan and allocate resources specifically for MHM at school level</li> <li>• SMCs prioritise MHM during the budgeting and planning for the schools.</li> </ul>	KCCA SMCs
Awareness, attitude, perceptions and beliefs - menstrual hygiene is surrounded by stigma, negative cultural and religious attitudes that menstruating girls and women are contaminated, dirty, and impure.	<p>Work hand in hand with religious, cultural and opinion leaders designing and implementing practical behavioural change communication campaigns targeting whole communities (men and women) to foster better understanding and reducing the negative perception that surround menstruation.</p> <p>Take MHM awareness beyond schools so that girls when outside school environment (like during the Covid- 19 pandemic when schools are closed) can get support.</p> <p>Provide information in accessible and understandable medium for learners including those with specific need such as those with visual impairments.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ministry of Education</li> <li>• Ministry of Gender</li> <li>• KCCA and Development partners</li> <li>• Religious Leaders</li> <li>• Social media influencers</li> </ul>

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