



Menstrual Hygiene in Schools in South Asia:

2018-2020 update

Key Observations

- The Red Bracelet Campaign has received support from parliamentarians, ministers, monks, nuns, school health coordinators as well as shop keepers selling sanitary pads.
- Private-sector actors are increasingly engaging in MH, particularly selling sanitary products of different kinds, both disposable and reusable.
- The Red Dot Campaign was launched on MH Day in 2019 to promote the segregation of used sanitary pads before their disposal in schools and nunneries.
- Social media (e.g. the official Menstrual Hygiene Bhutan page on *Facebook*, *Instagram*, and *TikTok*) has been successful at spreading awareness, information, videos, and messages of MH solidarity by NGOs, government officials, celebrities, and youth.



WASH in Schools (WinS) overview:

(<https://washdata.org/monitoring/schools/dashboard>)

Drinking Water Availability

59% of schools have basic water supply

32% of schools have limited water supply

9% of schools have no water supply

Sanitation

76% of schools have basic sanitation

14% have access to limited sanitation

10% do not have sanitation

Hygiene

84% of schools have limited facilities

16% of schools have no facilities of handwashing with soap and water



Key WinS issues

- Access to soap and handwashing stations has improved across schools. The Ministry of Education (MoE) reports that from 9,654 handwashing tap points in early 2020 (before the COVID-19 pandemic), tap points have increased to 17,071, an increase of 77% at the end of 2020.
- Teachers from remote schools as well as nuns and monks in monasteries and nunneries have been equipped with the skills to sustain WASH services.
- Schools are working towards meeting the standards of female-friendly toilets for girls. Girls' changing rooms are increasingly available in schools as a result of the capacity building of School Health Coordinators (SHC). The rooms have a bucket and lid, some kind of shower (a bucket of water and a jug) and soap, as well as a SATO pan latrine.

MH Overview

Policies Standards Guidelines Legal frameworks	The MoE's Department of School Education launched a campaign to break the silence (Red Dot Bhutan), recognising menstruation as a primary public health issue.
	Individual schools' Annual Health Plans often include plans to build girls' changing rooms.
Education materials Curriculum materials Teacher training materials Additional resources	In 2020 SNV, UNICEF, the MoE and Ministry of Health (MoH) launched a knowledge book on menstrual health and hygiene based on a formative study and KAP survey carried out by the MoE, MoH, SNV, and UNICEF. The main objective of this knowledge booklet is to complement other interventions developed to address MH knowledge gaps that girls and nuns face. The Education Minister, J B Rai, launched the book.
	The MH bracelet campaign, the Red Dobchu (Red Bracelet Campaign), was launched in 2020. It has received support from across the country in advocating for MH. The Red Bracelet or the Red Dobchu is a global symbol for menstruation. Each red bead in the bracelet represents empowerment, hope, love, care, and solidarity.
	In 2018 Kuzoo FM radio conducted a nationwide #GirlTALK campaign addressing issues related to adolescents, such as MH. The campaign involved radio, video, Facebook, Instagram, as well as <i>Yeewong</i> Magazine, the only female magazine in Bhutan.
	UNICEF, in collaboration with the MoH and MoE, organises annual School Health Coordinator trainings on the seven key hygiene behaviours. The Bhutan Nuns Foundation provides training in nunneries as well as workshop in nunneries and monasteries for additional MH training.
Is MH in EMiS?	Since 2019 the routine monitoring for MH in schools is provided through WinS programmes and EMiS.
Current evidence – key findings	In 2019 the <i>Bhutan Health Journal</i> reported that: The common sources of information for 36.7% of students with a good knowledge of MH were mothers, teachers, and sisters.
	The majority of girls used commercial pads (92.5%), others used clean cloths (5.7%), and tampons (1.6%).
	9.8% of students were absent from school during menstruation in the month prior to data collection.
	Common restrictions during menstruation include visiting religious places (67.6%) and participating in sports (4.3%).
	A number of surveys have been run to monitor WASH, including the 2019 baseline survey for WASH in monastic institutions.

Coordination platforms/ mechanisms at national/ sub-national levels	<p>The online Facebook campaign, Red Dot Bhutan, and the Red Bracelet Campaign are used to share information and coordinate partners from the government, NGOs, teachers, the media, religious bodies, and a range of other actors.</p> <p>MH Day is another way to coordinate partners. New partners include Greener Way, Bhutan's first, private, waste-management company.</p>
MH in schools practice ▶ Materials ▶ Disposal	<p>Sewing machines were distributed among nunneries to make reusable sanitary cloth pads using environmentally-friendly local materials. The adoption of reusable pads was limited, due to issues with washing and drying in cold climates/cold water. Commercial pads, tampons, and menstrual cups are increasingly available, though the cost of imported sanitary pads and tampons includes a sales tax and import duty. Local entrepreneurs are also producing disposable and reusable pads.</p> <p>The Red Dot Campaign promotes the safe disposal of sanitary pads by encouraging women and girls to take an eco-friendly bag or paper and mark it red for proper disposal. This helps segregate menstrual waste for waste collectors. The 2019 MH Day focused on the environmental impact of poor, sanitary waste-management, as part of the Red Dot Campaign. Rural populations usually dispose of pads by burial. The environmental aspect of sanitary waste caught nationwide attention, including that of the Prime Minister of Bhutan.</p> <p>The Health Minister launched an electric incinerator to help the safe and hygienic disposal of sanitary pads at nunneries (donated by Clean Bhutan and Bhutan National Bank).</p> <p>In 2019 the MoE supplied 184,000 free sanitary pads to 107 remote schools, including three special institutions, and 17 nunneries; an initiative funded by UNICEF.</p> <p>The SHC has a role in mobilising funds for O&M in schools including stocking emergency sanitary pads and soap. The SHC provides peer-to-peer support on how to raise funds for these items. The SHC can also give out paracetamol for minor ailments such as period pain.</p>
Equity and inclusion	<p>There has been targeting of vulnerable/resource-deprived households, such as girls with disabilities (and their caregivers). For instance, the technical working group of the MH Day 2020 committee included: SNV, Bhutan Nuns Foundation, Religion and Health Project, and disabled peoples' organisations (DPOs), such as Ability Bhutan Society.</p> <p>A girl with visual impairments is represented in the Red Bracelet Campaign video. Activities have also reached schools for the blind and deaf.</p> <p>An inclusive toilet design for child monks and nuns was developed. 173 child monks and nuns in three monastic institutions now have inclusive toilets that provide safe drinking water, handwashing facilities, proper lighting, and water-heating systems. Planners and architects have been informed about the construction guidelines for persons with disabilities.</p>



MH Journey in Bhutan

Year	Key steps – Bhutan WinS MH
2018	The Department of School Education of the MoE and UNICEF produced 'KAP (Knowledge, Attitude and Practices) of MHM by adolescent school-going girls and nuns'.
	A facilitator's guide was produced on empowering monks and nuns to promote sustainable WASH practices in Bhutan.
	The 2018 UNICEF's WASH Field Note 'Menstrual hygiene management: The challenges facing students and nuns in Bhutan' was launched during the 2018 South Asian Conference on Sanitation. It is based on the 2018 KAP study on the MH of adolescent schoolgirls and nuns, conducted in collaboration with the MoH, MoE, the Central Monastic Body, and UNICEF Bhutan.
2019	Schools, nunneries, the MoE, SNV, and UNICEF launched the #RedDotCampaign on MH Day to promote the safe disposal of used sanitary pads and to reduce the menstrual footprint. Students, teachers, and the public were sensitised on the safe disposal of sanitary pads.
2020	A week-long MH awareness-raising campaign, led by the MoE and supported by the MoH, UNICEF, and SNV. The Red Bracelet Campaign began online on 20 May; the bracelet has five beads representing empowerment, dignity, hope, love and care, and solidarity. The campaign culminated on MH Day with the Education Minister launching a knowledge book on MH.

What's coming up? Opportunities for MH in WinS

- In the future, inclusive school toilets will be built to provide access for children with disabilities.
- The Knowledge Book will be disseminated to schools, nunneries, and monastic institutions. Options for translating the book into braille are being considered.
- Health Coordinators' trainings, including MH, will be initiated in monastic institutions.

References:

Menstrual Hygiene Bhutan: https://www.facebook.com/Menstrual-Hygiene-Bhutan-409183966158806/?ref=page_internal.

SNV (2020), A Knowledge Book on Menstrual Health and Hygiene: <https://snv.org/cms/sites/default/files/explore/download/2020-menstrual-hygiene-booklet-snv-in-bhutan.pdf>.

Thinley Dorji, Sangay Wangmo, and Krit Pongpirul (2017), 'Age of menarche and menstrual hygiene of pubertal female students in Bhutan: a cross-sectional survey', *Bhutan Health Journal*, 2019, May. Vol. 5, Issue 1.

Royal Government of Bhutan, The National Commission for Women and Children (2019), 'National Review Report on the Implementation of Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action June 2019': [https://asiapacificgender.org/sites/default/files/documents/Bhutan%20\(English\).pdf](https://asiapacificgender.org/sites/default/files/documents/Bhutan%20(English).pdf).

UNICEF (2018), 'KAP (Knowledge, Attitude and Practices) of Menstrual Hygiene Management by Adolescent school-going girls and nuns in Bhutan': <https://www.unicef.org/bhutan/media/211/file/Menstrual%20Hygiene%20Management%20Report%202018.pdf>.

Reviewers:

Sonam Gyaltshen WASH Officer, UNICEF Bhutan

Sonam Pelden Communications Officer, UNICEF Bhutan

Maha Muna, Gender Advisor, UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia