



Session Summary 28 August 11:00 - 12:00 CEST

Speakers: Dr. Inga Winkler (Columbia University), Thorsten Kiefer (WASH United), Guna Raj Shreshta (MHM Partners Alliance Nepal), Chiqui de Veyra (GIZ Fit for School Philippines), Rabia Baloch (GIZ Sanitation for Millions Pakistan), Anika Malkus (Welthungerhilfe Uganda), Ina Jurga (WASH United)

Moderators: Alice Brandt, Tabea Seiz, Jan Schlenk, Louisa van den Bosch

Recording: www.youtube.com/watch?v=bMRMExvKCJE

Presentation: bit.ly/3if7bRU

1 Summary

The menstrual movement has made progress in the recent years, with the WASH sector providing an entry point. German organisations successfully addressed the issues of awareness and stigma (Menstrual Hygiene Day), education (WASH United, Fit for School, Sanitation for Millions), infrastructure (Sanitation for Millions, Fit for School) and products (Welthungerhilfe) at a scalable level. It is essential to abolish the stigma. For example, through more inclusive language and programming (for all people who menstruate and in all settings) across sectors.

2 Keynote speech: Dr. Inga Winkler (Columbia University) about the global menstrual movement and its future directions

The **Menstrual movement** already has come a long way, Menstrual Hygiene Day 2020 set new records in terms of campaign involvement, the [Menstrual Health Hub](#) lists more than 700 organisations working in the field. **There is great potential to become a transformative movement for gender justice and human rights.** We need to reconsider whose voices we consider leading, authoritative and worthy of amplification. We need to decentre Menstrual Health efforts in order to include ALL who menstruate.

The **WASH sector** has proven to be an excellent entry point for addressing menstruation, but it is time to move into a broader space by capitalizing on the menstrual movement. With the WASH sector, the focus is often too much on building facilities and providing menstrual products, we must acknowledge that the barriers are more complex and cannot be overcome by menstrual products alone.

There is a need for comprehensive menstrual **education** that takes body literacy seriously and goes beyond menstrual hygiene education. There is a need for broader and more comprehensive awareness raising from programming and policy making with the aim to normalise menstruation and to make attention to the menstrual cycle standard practice.

Above all, we need to tackle **menstrual stigma**, which persists in countries across the world. Current efforts to improve menstrual hygiene may reinforce stigma by focusing on cleanliness and hygiene that sends the message to menstruators to “keep leaky and messy bodies under control.” Menstrual products and WASH facilities alone will not normalise menstruation and change socio-cultural norms. Instead, we need to address how concerns about menstrual disclosure, self-monitoring and

stigma contribute to psycho-social stress, anxiety and how this in turn affects health care, education, experiences in the workplace and other aspects of public and private life. In a society characterised by gender inequality, individuals during menstruation are still stigmatized as hysterical, not trustworthy and unfit for decision making.

Menstrual Health is often framed as an adolescent girls' issue failing to acknowledge the **diversity** of menstrual experiences and needs. We need to take the commitment to 'leave no one behind' seriously. We need to understand how stigma intersects with race, ethnicity, caste, class, culture, religion, and other factors.

See also [The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Menstruation Studies](#)

3 WASH United's highlights from Menstrual Hygiene Day 2020 and the Menstruation Bracelet campaign (Thorsten Kiefer)

- Despite COVID-19's impact that limited on the ground events, [Menstrual Hygiene Day 2020](#) set records: 4,141 articles (double the media coverage of 2019) were published, 151,000 social media contributions were posted, and in total 411 million people were reached
- **Menstruation Bracelet:** visual symbols have the power to activate people and support social change. People were very creative in building and sharing the Menstruation Bracelet to create more awareness
- Menstrual Hygiene Day will continue all-year round engagement (e.g. MH Day Studio: Impact on 23 September 2020)

4 MHM Partners Alliance's policy advocacy around MHH in Nepal (Guna Raj Shreshta)

- Informal alliance of more than 80 organisations, established in 2017
- Alliance's tasks: Policy advocacy across various sectors and ministries, knowledge platform and sharing, innovations and

research work, alignment of governmental and non-governmental actions in MHM

- Emergency COVID-19 response: help for disabled women, provision of pads for poor women
- Support for national programme initiated by the President of Nepal for free sanitary pads distribution to schoolgirls in 30,000 public schools, 1.4 million girls
- Support for dignified menstruation friendly school curriculum revised (grades 4-12)
- Support for 13 Points declaration on MHM on 28 May 2020

5 Fit for School Philippine's scaling integrated MHM into WASH in Schools programming (Chiqui de Veyra)

- MHM within WASH in Schools (WinS) Programme includes primary and secondary interventions
- All schools should implement the primary interventions: access to information, female-friendly sanitation facilities, access to MHM supplies, integration of MHM into existing monitoring system. While secondary interventions are limited to schools with more resources
- Monitoring system: MHM related indicators are monitored through national WinS monitoring system; in addition the [Three Star Approach for WinS](#) (GIZ/UNICEF 2013) provides direction and triggers action.
- Baseline monitoring was conducted in 2017/2018 with 30,586 schools (primary and secondary), follow-up was conducted in 2018/19 with 35,005 schools
- Results: Increase of water availability in schools, functional toilets, availability of sanitary pads, information, education and communication (IEC) material on menstrual health, information on proper disposal of sanitary pads
- Objectives: Institutionalise MHM within the education sector to align with national standards and policies, promote

sustainability of activities, schools as good venue involving different groups and stakeholders

Source: [Philippine DepEd WASH in Schools Three Star Approach WinS Monitoring Results: Menstrual Hygiene Management](#)

6 Sanitation for Million's MHH in Balochistan, Pakistan (Rabia Baloch)

- 40% of total female population of Pakistan is of reproductive age
- Balochistan: Is a tribal area, MHH has been largely neglected, women and girls have no access to knowledge and services, health is not considered as human right, in consequence millions of women and girls are denied their right to health, education and gender equality, maternal mortality ratio is comparatively high due to mismanaged menstruation
- S4M designed and implemented measures on MHH in public institutions and healthcare facilities in cooperation with Government of Balochistan, and education department with support implementing partner
- Tasks: Awareness creation, supply provision, infrastructure (also menstrual waste management)
- Awareness creation: 200 public school teachers and lady health workers have been trained as MHH trainers to further tailor knowledge in schools and communities
- Lady health workers are fully recognised members of the health sector at household or community level, have access and acceptance in community
- Infrastructure: Provision of MHH kits to students and teachers in 13 public schools (additional construction of female-friendly toilets) and 18 healthcare facilities
- Results: Approximately 50,000 girls and women have benefitted from measures both in infrastructure and awareness creation in all three implementing countries

See also: [Sanitation for Millions Approach towards Menstrual Waste Management - and Menstrual Health](#)

7 Welthungerhilfe's Ekopo Loo for enhancing MH for schoolgirls in Karamoja, Uganda (Anika Malkus)

- Project started in May 2018, targeting 2,000 schoolgirls from 13 secondary schools in 5 districts
- Objectives: improved access to improved MH methods, enhance knowledge on MH and sexual reproductive health for schoolgirls and schoolboys, management, teachers and parents
- Activities: distribution of menstrual cups, MHH and SRH education
- Intervention has been accompanied by surveys in order to find out what has worked well and where are the challenges
- What worked well: multi-stakeholder approach (teachers, healthcare workers, etc.), engagement of boys (important to reduce stigma), close follow-up, mentoring and coaching, partnerships
- Challenges addressed: (1) Hygienic handling of menstrual cups: WHH provided solar cookers at schools to ensure that girls were able to sterilize their cup at the end of their menstrual period. (2) Impact of COVID-19: since schools are closed, follow up and counselling through project staff in the girls' home villages
- Success: 97% of schoolgirls have access to cups, 60% are using the cup, 90% of all students have comprehensive knowledge of MHH and SRH

8 WASH United's MHH education guide for scaling education about menstruation (Ina Jurga)

- Existing tools and available approaches were costly and complex to implement

- WASH United has developed easy low-cost solution together with girls and trainers to educate, engage and empower girls
- Education guide as a tool to be integrated into any educational programme
- So far 1.5 million girls were reached, possible due to work with partners
- Available for India and Africa (both in several languages) and soon Arabic
- [Free for download](#), free online capacity building, option for partner's logos on guide

9 Summary of discussion about the term "menstruators"

- Ambivalence of the term „menstruators“ to address that not all females menstruate and not all who menstruate are females
- It is inclusive vs. not sure if it works for different audiences (for example laypeople, contexts where speaking about menstruation at all is still difficult)
- If the term will be used more frequently, it might become a common understanding
- WASH United uses “women and girls” but depending on the context, where they have more space to explain, they add an extra text that they acknowledge that not all women and girls menstruate, and not all people who menstruate are women and girls
- Where possible use "people who menstruate" or “menstruator" but stay aware that sometimes it might derail attention from the key points to bring across
- It strongly depends on the context, audience and aim one is having
- Just because JK Rowling made a very questionable comment (text released on Devex on MH Day had the term "people who menstruate" and she used that to

make fun in a tweet and sparked a huge debate about gender and terms), it should not stop us from having the discussion on terminology and the impact it might have

- Wikipedia community: Current consensus is to keep it as "females" (as it's a biological sex topic, related to anatomy, not a gender topic) in the [Wikipedia article on menstruation](#) (due to common use and not have undue weight to side topics). A similar discussion also took place on articles in relationship with penises. People have argued to use "individuals with a penis" instead of "men" but this has been rejected by other Wikipedians ([Link](#))
- Is the term “menstruators” disempowering women? We could celebrate menstruation as a positive experience that females can rally around. By "denying" it to be a unique female experience it could serve to disrupt that joint feeling amongst women. Similar to unisex toilets and the history of sex-separation in public toilets. "[Claims of discrimination being the basis of sex separation may actually harm women because they, if incorrect, erase and contort women's history; they may in fact be presented mainly to provide relief for other vulnerable groups](#)"
- Biological sex: [Thread](#), which shows how something that seems quite defined is actually quite diverse. Case of [Caster, the South African runner](#)
- Wikipedia as a great balanced source of information on terminology. If you want it changed about menstruation, menstruators etc. then getting consensus on Wikipedia is an important step

For more information see also SuSanA's new Compilation of Resources [Menstrual Hygiene Management: Relevant, Inter-Sectoral and on the Rise](#)