BEHAVIOR CHANGE COMMUNICATION PRODUCTS PRODUCED FOR THE MENSTRUAL HYGIENE MANAGEMENT IN THE WORKPLACE ACTIVITY IN KENYA
Behavior change communication (BCC) approaches that focus on menstrual health and hygiene (MHH) in the workplace have the potential to positively influence corporate culture and improve MHH. This resource packet describes the BCC approach of an action research initiative that sought to improve menstrual hygiene management (MHM) in two Kenyan workplaces. The packet provides links to the designed BCC materials, information about how they were developed and applied, and ways in which future implementers may adapt these materials for their own use. It also includes a list of topics for facilitated sensitization sessions that correspond to the BCC tools, as well as key learning points for consideration.

TIPS FOR CUSTOMIZING THESE BCC MATERIALS

☑️ Conduct formative research to understand the target audience(s) and context
☑️ Assess your team’s BCC capacity and engage external expertise where needed (e.g., a BCC advisor to guide the design process)
☑️ Engage local designers who understand MHH and the contextual characteristics of the target audience(s)
☑️ Pilot all BCC materials with target audience(s) and revise as necessary prior to dissemination

DOCUMENT GUIDE

This resource packet includes four chapters:

1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION
2. BCC PRODUCTS
3. SENSITIZATION SESSIONS
4. KEY LEARNING POINTS

Pages that discuss BCC products for this activity include the following components:

- Target audience for BCC product(s)
- Name of BCC product
- Brief description of BCC product, considerations during development, and links for the complete product
- Preview of or excerpts from the BCC product in English and/or Swahili
- Insight on ways to customize and adapt the BCC product, depending on users’ goals
Globally, women workers face daunting challenges managing their periods where workplaces rarely support menstrual health and hygiene (MHH). The USAID Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) in the Workplace activity partnered with two private sector manufacturing companies in Kenya to implement customized workplace interventions that improved menstrual wellbeing. MHM is a subset of USAID’s holistic approach to MHH, which includes reproductive health, water, sanitation and hygiene, education, and social and behavior change. Partner companies differed in size and gender composition: Workplace A employed approximately 700 employees who were mostly men, while Workplace B employed approximately 400 employees who were mostly women. One of the core components of these interventions was influencing workplace culture through BCC. The interventions’ BCC approach aimed to 1) improve employees’ awareness of and knowledge about menstruation in the workplace, 2) address myths, misconceptions, and social stigma that affected menstruating employees, and 3) promote improved MHH-related behaviors in the workplace, thereby contributing to a more supportive work environment for menstruating employees and overall improved MHH in the workplace. An overview of the activity can be found in a brief here.

DEVELOPING THE BCC APPROACH

Based on formative research findings, the BCC approach was designed to address key MHH behaviors, social norms, beliefs, attitudes and practices at both workplaces. These findings illustrated that:

1. There was a strong culture of silence, secrecy, and forbearance around menstruation in the workplace.
2. Menstrual stigma and inadequate knowledge contributed to employees’ limited understanding of menstruation and its impacts on women’s workplace experiences.
3. Inadequate MHH in the workplace negatively affected menstruating employees, especially their performance in the workplace and their relationship with their supervisors.

The research team collaborated with a Kenyan design team, Tatsuo, to produce a creative brief that identified the theory of change, target behaviors, desired changes and outcomes by audience, behavioral objectives, core messages, communication channels used by target audiences, and creative considerations, all based on formative research findings. The research and design teams participated in an iterative copywriting and editing process to fine tune the rhetoric, content, and design of print and digital BCC products. Simultaneously, the research team developed audience-specific sensitization sessions, repurposing content from publicly available educational modules about menstrual health and hygiene and core messages prepared for this activity’s BCC products. Session facilitators from the research team iteratively edited sensitization session facilitation guides prior to implementation. Facilitators conducted brief “light touch” sensitization sessions with key workplace influencers, sometimes collaboratively with content experts (e.g., medical professionals).

Formative assessments for the MHM in the Workplace action research in Kenya identified the following key audiences who might improve conditions for menstruating employees in the workplace:

- Women employees
- Senior management & leadership
- Worker relations & union representatives
- On-site health care providers
- Cleaning staff
- Guards
- MHM Champions
- Men employees & supervisors

WHAT IS A “LIGHT TOUCH” INTERVENTION?

The research team designed both Kenyan MHM in the Workplace interventions with the goal of minimizing time and cost burdens on private sector partner companies. To do so, the interventions engaged employees for up to one hour per month of face-to-face interactions.
FROM FORMATIVE ASSESSMENTS TO A BCC PRODUCT

In formative assessments, women employees at one workplace reported that their supervisors, senior managers, and leaders – many of whom were men – did not seem to understand the effects of menstruation on women’s physical and emotional health at work. Additionally, management seemed to consider menstruating women to be moody, lazy, uncooperative, and insubordinate. Women reported feeling that this perceived bias against menstruating employees negatively affected their advancement opportunities. To change these perceptions and practices, the Senior Management and Leadership Booklet:

- Included information about the effects of menstruation on women
- Reframed menstruating employees as valuable, hardworking, and productive assets
- Dispelled stigma against menstruating employees
- Provided guidance on normalizing menstruation in the workplace

Excerpt from the Senior Management & Leadership booklet

Investing in women’s menstrual health, hygiene, and wellbeing can create a supportive environment for all employees, which contributes to the company’s success.

Anything that influences employees’ productivity, performance, and ability to reach their full potential in the workplace affects the company’s overall business outcomes.
The research and design teams created large posters to illustrate how women employees could properly dispose of used menstrual products in their workplaces’ toilet facilities. These posters prioritized illustrations that visually depicted processes – such as throwing a used disposable pad in the menstrual waste bin – instead of using text-heavy instructions. Swahili versions of these posters were framed and placed in all women’s toilet facilities at the beginning of the intervention period. This poster is available in English and Swahili [here](#).

**POTENTIAL ADAPTATIONS**

- Update graphics to accurately depict visuals of toilet facilities, menstrual waste bins, and handwashing stations, based on the workplace.

- Include disposal, reuse, or washing instructions for menstrual products that are most commonly used in each workplace, instead of only focusing on disposable pads.

- Present guidance in a way that reflects the literacy levels of employees; for instance, use less text-heavy and more self-explanatory illustrations for workplaces where employees have lower literacy levels.
Many women employees at one workplace used WhatsApp to consume social media and communicate with people; therefore, the research team created a WhatsApp group with all women employees at the workplace (including the Managing Director) and distributed 17 informative digital graphics to them over the course of the intervention. The research team also disseminated these informative graphics to a WhatsApp group for women employees at the second workplace, though its reach was limited, given employees’ lower levels of literacy and smartphone ownership at this workplace.

These 17 WhatsApp digital graphics conveyed information about menstrual products, menstrual health and hygiene, pain management, and elements of menstruation-friendly infrastructure. In addition, they sought to normalize and break the silence around menstruation in the workplace, address menstrual stigma and shame, and help employees understand the effects of inadequate MHH in the workplace. Information was presented in both English and Swahili. When producing each graphic, research and design teams:

- Ensured that illustrations accurately depicted Kenyan employees in their workplace, down to the style of their outfits;
- Prioritized a period-positive rhetoric: language that encourages individuals to embrace menstruation with pride;
- Addressed the unintended harm of focusing too much on the negative impacts of menstruation on employees in the workplace; and
- Respected employees’ need for privacy at work.

After sharing each graphic on both WhatsApp groups, a research team member followed up with a reflective prompt, allowing employees to share their thoughts about the content. Some employees used the WhatsApp group to ask clarifying questions elicited by graphics and to discuss their own experiences. A compilation of all WhatsApp digital graphics is available in English and Swahili here.
POTENTIAL ADAPTATIONS

- Use illustrations that visually reflect the relevant workplace setting, employee demographic (including age and gender), and realistic interactions between employees.

- For audiences with lower literacy levels, reduce the amount of text, and develop more visually engaging and self-explanatory graphics.

- Amend messages in each graphic per the audience and BCC goals, and determine how best to communicate these messages (e.g., comic-style panels, text lists, infographics).
MENSTRUAL EDUCATION POSTERS:

The design team adapted two illustrated menstrual education posters – originally created by Ruby Cup® to help adolescent girls understand their body and their menstrual cycle – for adult women employees. The research team identified the need for posters about the physiology of menstruation (depicting adult women instead of just adolescent girls) to use as a visual aid during sensitization sessions with various employees. Both posters are available in English here.

POTENTIAL ADAPTATIONS

☑ Use illustrations that visually reflect the relevant workplace setting, employee demographic (including age, gender, and ethnicity), etc.

☑ Include more instructional text depending on the target population’s literacy levels and whether posters are displayed as part of in-person sessions.
Senior managers and leaders emerged as people who strongly influenced women employees’ menstrual experiences in the workplace. Additionally, senior managers and leaders had direct power to create a more supportive environment for menstruating employees. The research and design teams created a half-page folded booklet to sensitize senior managers and leadership to employees’ menstrual experiences and provide guidance on how they could improve MHH in their workplaces. The booklet includes the following:

- Basic information about menstruation, reproductive health conditions linked with MHH, and employees’ menstrual needs;

- Content that highlights the importance of MHH in the workplace and linkages to Kenya’s national MHM policy; and

- Guidance for managers and leaders on how to create a more MHH-friendly workplace.

The booklet frames this cadre’s commitment to the health and wellbeing of menstruating employees as emblematic of good leadership, showcasing how creating an MHH-friendly workplace fits into their mandate as leaders. The booklet is available at [here](#).

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**POTENTIAL ADAPTATIONS**

- ✔️ Create tailored guidance for specific types of managers and leaders, such as human resources managers or Chief Executive Officers, so that guidance aligns with their unique roles and responsibilities.

- ✔️ To gain buy-in from managers and leadership, use rhetoric and guidance tailored to each workplace’s management style and philosophy.

- ✔️ Include information about relevant policies, such as health and occupational safety mandates or national menstruation-related policies, to strengthen the case for MHH-friendly workplaces.
WORKER RELATIONS REPRESENTATIVES AND UNION REPRESENTATIVES

GUIDANCE BOOKLET

Women employees identified worker relations and union representatives as people who influenced women employees’ menstrual experiences in the workplace. These cadres served as valuable intermediaries between employees and managers. Therefore, the research and design teams created a half-page folded booklet to do the following:

- Increase worker relations and union representatives’ understanding of menstruation and its effects on employees;
- Mobilize worker relations and union representatives to foster a more supportive environment for employees who menstruate;
- Encourage worker relations and union representatives to counter menstrual stigma in the workplace;
- Highlight the importance and relevance of MHH in the workplace; and
- Assist worker relations and union representatives in understanding their role in improving MHH.

The booklet was intended to be used in conjunction with in-person sensitization sessions in order to reinforce lessons learned during these sessions with visually engaging materials that representatives could keep. The booklet is available in English and Swahili [here](#).

POTENTIAL ADAPTATIONS

- Consider the specific ways in which representatives can advocate for employees when developing messages.
- Include information about relevant policies (e.g., health and occupational safety mandates) to strengthen the case for MHH-friendly workplaces.
ON-SITE HEALTH CARE PROVIDER

GUIDANCE BOOKLET:

The nurse at Workplace A and a first aid provider at Workplace B supported menstruating employees with basic menstrual health care. Both the nurse and first aid provider requested more training around menstrual health and hygiene in order to better support women employees who sought their services. The nurse was a trained health professional (though, with minimal training related to menstrual health) who provided on-site healthcare services, and the first aid provider’s role was limited to providing basic first aid. The nurse’s guidance booklet was designed to provide information about the physiology of menstruation, pain management, and the importance of MHH in the workplace, as well as to promote dignified menstruation at work, address menstrual stigma, and provide patient-centered care. The research team collaborated with a physician and reproductive health specialist to facilitate a sensitization session with the nurse. The purpose of the booklet was to reinforce relevant messages and serve as an available resource for the nurse post-training.

The first aid provider’s booklet addressed her limited training and included concrete suggestions on how to support menstruating workers. It covered the same topics as the nurse’s booklet, but simplified technical content. The research team collaborated with a pharmacist and menstrual health specialist to facilitate in-person sensitization sessions with the first aid provider.

Both booklets included information about mitigating gender-based violence (GBV) and supporting survivors in the workplace, as health professionals are often the first point of contact for GBV survivors and are uniquely positioned to detect cases. The nurse and first aid provider’s booklets are available in English and Swahili here.

BCC PRODUCTS PRODUCED FOR THE MHM IN THE WORKPLACE ACTIVITY IN KENYA

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The research and design teams created a “checklist” poster for cleaners at both workplaces who cleaned and maintained toilet facilities. Rather than a literal checklist, this poster presents a list of tasks the cleaner should perform, or considerations they should take into account, while tending to toilets on site. The poster, which was placed in a clearly visible location in each toilet facility, aimed to make cleaners aware of what they could do to support female-friendly toilets. It also reminded women employees what they could reasonably expect in terms of the cleanliness of toilets in their workplace. Designers ensured that the checklist used simple, minimal text and detailed illustrations to accommodate cleaners and workers with low literacy levels. Cleaners also participated in in-person sensitization sessions with the research team about their role in improving workplace MHH and how to maintain female-friendly toilets. The checklist is available in English and Swahili [here](#).
GUIDANCE BROCHURE

Women employees shared during formative assessments that guards checked employees’ personal belongings any time employees would leave their work stations, whether for toilet breaks or to exit the workplace. Women would carry menstrual products in their handbags, including soiled reusable pads, thereby forcing them to reveal their menstrual status to the guards. To address this discomfort, the research and design teams created a brochure that provided guards with basic information about menstruation, including how to create a supportive environment for menstruating employees, how to address menstrual stigma, and general guidance tailored to guards’ unique roles and responsibilities. The brochure accommodated guards’ lower levels of literacy by using minimal text and presenting key messages in a pithy but visually engaging manner. The research team disseminated the brochure to guards during the intervention after facilitated sensitization sessions. The brochure is available in English and Swahili here.

PART 2
CREATING A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR EMPLOYEES WHO MENSTRUATE

Menstruation doesn’t stop when employees enter the workplace. Instead of creating more challenges for employees, factory guards should create a work environment that allows all employees to have better menstrual experiences.

Myths & Facts about Menstruation

D.O.T.

Don’t spread menstruation and menstrual stigma.

Don’t make offensive jokes and remarks about menstruation.

Don’t go about or mock a woman when menstrual blood stains her clothes.

If menstruation is dirty?

Many women worry that menstruation is dirty because menstrual blood might have an odor or because some people think that it’s impure. There is nothing dirty or unhygienic about menstrual blood or menstruation.

Does every employee have the same menstruation experience?

Although most women menstruate, they don’t all have the same experiences. Some girls may have little or no blood, while others have heavy menstrual flow. Also, some experiences tend to be more intense with their periods, while others have a lot of pain and may need to see the first aider to manage the discomfort. Factory guards should direct employees who complain of exceptional pain to the first aider.

Are period stains at work shameful?

Menstrual blood can leak and stain work clothes for many reasons. Factory guards shouldn’t make employees feel guilty, afraid, or ashamed of what happens. Instead, if a woman has stained her work clothes, a factory guard can let her know politely and privately without embarrassing her or calling the attention of others.

B.C.C. PRODUCTS PRODUCED FOR THE MHM IN THE WORKPLACE ACTIVITY IN KENYA

GUARDS

POTENTIAL ADAPTATIONS

☑️ Use illustrations that visually reflect the demographic characteristics of guards at the relevant workplace setting (including age and gender).
The MHM in the Workplace action research recruited employees to implement certain components of the intervention and become sustainable champions for improving MHH in their workplaces. They became integral to the intervention and visible leaders in their workplaces throughout the intervention. The research and design teams developed a small pocket-size brochure that MHM Champions could easily carry, covering: physiology of menstruation, elements of adequate MHH, types of menstrual products, how champions could promote dignified menstruation in the workplace, and pithy content to reinforce the importance of improving MHH in the workplace. The research team trained MHM Champions at the beginning of the intervention and shared this brochure with them at the end of the intervention to reinforce core guidance. The brochure is available in English and Swahili here.

**GUIDANCE BROCHURE**

V. PROMOTING DIGNIFIED MENSTRUATION

How can MHM Champions promote dignified menstruation in the workplace?

- Provide accurate information about menstruation to reduce harmful and incorrect beliefs.
- Encourage people to talk about menstruation (as they feel comfortable) and disarm menstruation-related bullying or teasing.
- Guide new employees on how to maintain adequate menstrual health and hygiene.
- Pay attention to how inadequate MHH affects employees and suggest improvements to management.
- Listen to employees and identify ways to meet their menstrual needs at work; draw these with management.
- Support employees’ access to menstrual products, menstrual education, pain management, and MHH-friendly infrastructure in the workplace.
- Refer employees to health professionals and other MHH resources when needed.

**POTENTIAL ADAPTATIONS**

- Use illustrations that visually reflect the demographic characteristics of employees at the relevant workplace setting.

- Include content that aligns with the intervention’s predetermined role for the MHM Champion.

- Adjust the images and content for information on menstrual products based on the intervention’s specific suite of products.
In addition to creating and distributing BCC products to key workplace audiences, the research team engaged them in in-person or virtual sensitization sessions. The number of sessions or content of sessions can be flexible based on specific needs of sub-audiences and parameters of the workplace. The sessions, facilitated by the research team, covered the following topics:

### SENIOR MANAGEMENT & LEADERSHIP
*One session at both workplaces*
- What is “good leadership” and how to emulate it
- The importance of talking about menstruation
- Physiology of menstruation and the menstrual cycle
- Employees’ physical & emotional menstrual experiences
- Menstruating employees’ needs in the workplace

### MHM CHAMPIONS
*One session at Workplace A and two sessions at Workplace B*
- Understanding menstruation
- MHH and menstrual stigma in the workplace
- Physiology of menstruation and the menstrual cycle
- Employees’ physical & emotional menstrual experiences
- MHM Champions’ role in improving workplace MHH

### WORKER RELATIONS REPRESENTATIVES
*One session at Workplace B*
- Understanding menstruation
- Unpacking menstrual stigma in the workplace
- Employees’ physical & emotional menstrual experiences
- Worker relations representatives’ role in improving MHH in their workplace

### UNION REPRESENTATIVES
*One session at Workplace A*
- Understanding menstruation
- Unpacking menstrual stigma in the workplace
- Employees’ physical & emotional menstrual experiences
- Union representatives’ role in improving MHH in their workplace

### NURSE
*One session at Workplace A*
- Ways to practice patient-centered care
- MHH and menstrual stigma in the workplace
- Providing basic menstrual health care
- Nurse’s role in improving MHH in their workplace

### FIRST AID PROVIDER
*One session at Workplace B*
- Physiology of menstruation and the menstrual cycle
- MHH and menstrual stigma in the workplace
- Providing basic menstrual health care
- First Aider’s role in improving MHH in their workplace

### GUARDS
*One session at Workplace B*
- Physiology of menstruation and the menstrual cycle
- MHH and menstrual stigma in the workplace
- Guards’ role in improving MHH in their workplace

### CLEANING STAFF
*One session at both workplaces*
- Physiology of menstruation and the menstrual cycle
- Understanding MHH- and female-friendly toilets
- Cleaners’ role in improving MHH in their workplace

### MEN EMPLOYEES
*Two sessions at Workplace A*
- Physiology of menstruation and the menstrual cycle
- Role of men in fostering an enabling environment for menstruating employees
- Simple steps men can take to support menstruating employees, including pledges and actions

### SUPERVISORS
*Two sessions at Workplace B*
- Physiology of menstruation and the menstrual cycle
- How supervisors might best view and treat women at work
- Specific ways supervisors can support menstruating employees
At the time of the intervention, most existing BCC products about MHH focused on adolescents, making it difficult to apply existing materials to workplace settings and among adult women. Findings from formative assessments in both intervention workplaces illustrated the unique experiences that menstruating employees faced, as well as highlighting key workplace influencers who might foster a more supportive environment for menstruating employees. Therefore, the research and design teams were able to create customized, targeted, and unique products that directly addressed menstruating employees’ nuanced menstrual experiences.

**FORMATIVE ASSESSMENTS ARE CRITICAL FOR DEVELOPING TARGETED MESSAGES.**

The MHM in the Workplace interventions, which spanned across approximately nine months, were designed to be “light touch” in order to minimize cost and time burdens on private sector partners. In addition to providing menstrual products, improving toilet infrastructure, and guiding workplace policies, the interventions sought to improve workplace culture through behavior change. However, it is difficult to transform social norms that perpetuate menstrual stigma and negatively impact menstruating employees in such a short period, especially in a “light touch” way without significantly engaging employees and key workplace influencers. The research team recognized that behavior change takes time - longer than these time-bound interventions allowed - and accepted that change might not be observed during their brief engagement. The team designed BCC products that would continue to affect change long after the interventions.

**SET REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS FOR A BCC APPROACH THAT ALIGNS WITH THE INTERVENTION’S TIME FRAME.**

At one Kenyan workplace, the level of effort required to implement in-person menstrual education sessions for women and men employees would have required a significant time contribution from both employees and the research team; employees were already discouraged from spending time away from production lines, and taking additional time away from work stations for education sessions would have negatively affected targets. Though in-person sessions might have meaningfully contributed to improved MHH in the workplace, the negative impact of these sessions on the companies’ business goals could potentially counter their benefits. Instead of facilitating sessions with all employees (and subsequently disseminating accompanying BCC products to all employees), the research team pivoted to hold sensitization sessions with specific employee groups, including on-site health professionals and other key workplace influencers. This approach allowed for information and support to trickle down to all employees, with an intent to foster a supportive working environment for menstruating employees indirectly. BCC efforts engaged participant groups according to the employee time granted by company leadership, specifically aligning intervention efforts with business goals.

**CONSIDER EMPLOYEE TIME AVAILABILITY AND COMPANY BUSINESS GOALS WHEN PLANNING THE BCC APPROACH**

Formative assessments revealed that a wide variety of personnel influenced menstruating employees’ experiences. For example, men employees often reinforced menstrual stigma in both workplaces. On the other hand, the first aid provider supported menstruating employees with pain killers. Supervisors and managers represented another influential group since they held power to change policies, systems, and workplace culture to be more MHH-friendly. Finally, menstruating employees’ interactions with guards and cleaners impacted their menstruation-related experiences in small but notable ways. Only educating and sensitizing women employees would have been insufficient; therefore, the activity intentionally focused specific BCC products and messages on key workplace influencers who had power to create a supportive environment for menstruating employees.

The listed BCC products are available on the Global Waters website and the Iris Group website. For more information about how to adapt this BCC approach, please email irisgroup@irisgroupinternational.com.