



**Menstrual Disposal,
Waste Management
& Laundering in
Emergencies**

A Compendium

Acronyms

Acknowledgements

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4 CS	Coordination, Consultation, Culture, Communication
CU	Columbia University
CXB	Cox's Bazar
DIY	Do It Yourself
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IEC	Information, Education and Communication
IRC	International Rescue Committee
MHM	Menstrual Hygiene Management
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
PVC	Polyvinyl Chloride
SWM	Solid Waste Management
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene

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Contents

1



Introduction

Page 5

2



Review of Key MHM Concepts

Page 9

3



Consultation

Page 11

4



Female-Friendly Toilets

Page 15

5



Menstrual Material Disposal

Page 21

6



Menstrual Material Waste Management

Page 31

7



Washing, Drying & Storage

Page 39

8



Information, Education & Communication

Page 49

Preface

Menstrual Disposal, Waste Management & Laundering in Emergencies: A Compendium aims to provide strategic guidance to support organizations and agencies seeking to rapidly address these critical and often overlooked aspects of an MHM response. The compendium complements the MHM in Emergencies Toolkit, which identified a few key gaps in practice, namely: menstrual disposal, waste management and the laundering of reusable materials. The compendium was informed by a desk review, qualitative assessments with a range of humanitarian actors and organizations, environmental inspections of new approaches and strategies being piloted and direct discussions with displaced girls and women directly experiencing these issues.

We acknowledge that the toolkit utilizes a binary approach (girls and women), and thus does not recognize the diversity of people who menstruate. There is considerable unexplored scope to broaden these programs to become more inclusive and responsive, and to carefully consider the language used when equating 'women and girls' with 'people who menstruate' for the various contexts in which humanitarian response efforts occur.

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Back to contents



1 Introduction



2 Review of key MHM concepts



3 Consultation



4 Female-friendly toilets



5 Menstrual materials disposal



6 Menstrual materials waste management



7 Washing, drying & storage



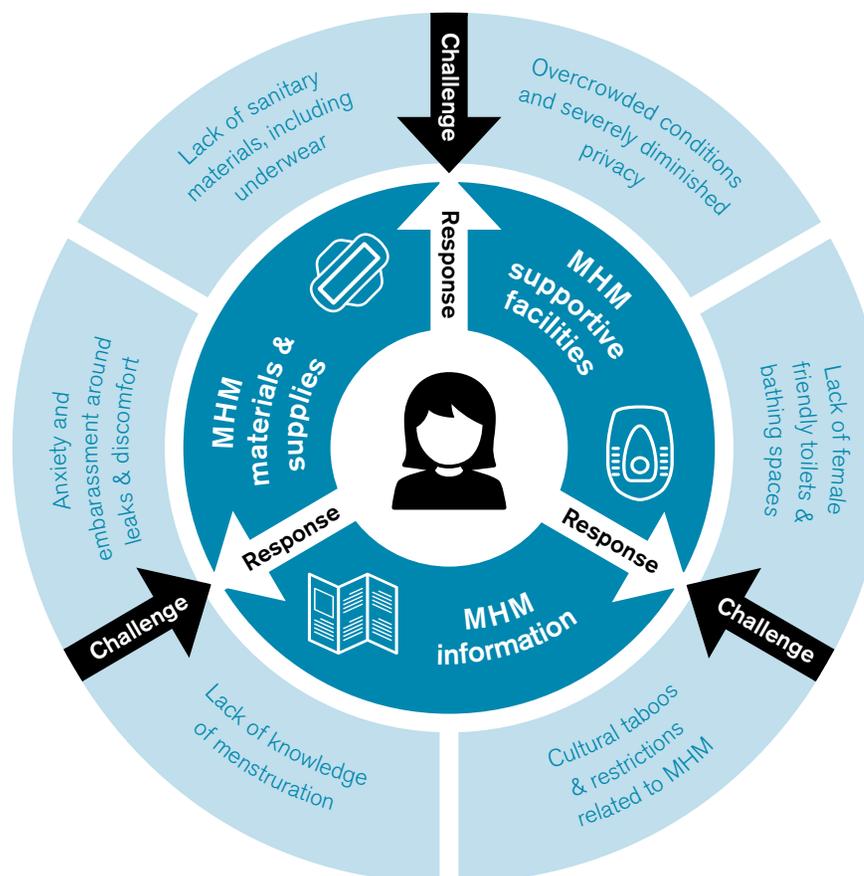
8 Information, education & communication

Globally, there is increasing attention towards incorporating menstrual hygiene management (MHM) into humanitarian response. However, in the majority of emergencies, the distribution of menstrual materials by response actors to adolescent girls and women is the most common activity. Although materials are essential, their distribution represents only one component of a complete MHM response (see Figure 1). Women and girls must also have appropriate menstrual hygiene and health information, in addition to the practical ability to use available menstrual materials as intended.

More specifically, there has been insufficient attention provided to two key areas of an MHM response:

- 1) menstrual material disposal and waste management; and
- 2) menstrual material washing and drying. Left unaddressed, existing MHM responses are insufficient, and will not be successful in meeting beneficiary needs. This compendium aims to contribute to filling this gap.

Challenges and Responses to MHM in Emergencies



Compendium on MHM Disposal, Waste Management & Laundering



Back to contents



1 Introduction



2 Review of key MHM concepts



3 Consultation



4 Female-friendly toilets



5 Menstrual materials disposal



6 Menstrual materials waste management



7 Washing, drying & storage



8 Information, education & communication

Although there has been considerable progress in the openness with which menstruation is discussed, along with increased comfort in the provision of menstrual materials, this progress has not applied to discussions around the handling of used, bloody, menstrual materials. These remain, perhaps, one of the most taboo items in the world.

For any woman or girl who changes her pad or other menstrual material during her period, there is an immediate question about what to do with the used pad or material. If disposable, there needs to be a way to dispose of it. If it is to be reused, it needs to be washed, dried and stored, ready for re-use. In almost all cultures across the world, there is extreme stigma associated with other people (especially, but not limited to, men) seeing or being aware of the existence of this used material.

This compendium focuses on some specific practicalities of managing menstruation in humanitarian contexts. Whereas the MHM in Emergencies Toolkit provides guidance on the broader context of providing for menstruation in a humanitarian response, this compendium aims to provide practical guidance on some approaches to menstrual material disposal, waste management and laundering.

This guidance seeks to address key gaps with respect to the specific practicalities of managing menstrual materials. Displaced women and girls using disposable products face clear challenges figuring out how to get rid of them in their constrained contexts. And those using reusable materials must be able to wash, dry and store them hygienically between periods, similarly with limited privacy. To date, humanitarian responders have provided few innovative solutions for these challenges.

In discussing these issues, the compendium draws on a survey of good practices being utilized by organizations around the world, to propose approaches that may be adapted to new responses and new contexts.

Four Key Practical Tasks: Disposable & Reusable Materials

Washing & drying of reusable materials



Reusable materials, including reusable pads and pieces of cloth, need to be regularly cleaned with soap and water and then fully dried to ensure both their hygienic and comfortable reuse. This can be difficult when there are water shortages (making it difficult to wash), rainy seasons (making it difficult to dry) or an insufficient amount of soap is available. An inability to properly wash reusables can result in bad odors, discomfort and the premature disposal of the material by users.

Lack of privacy is also a major problem. People do not want to be seen washing their used menstrual materials, nor do they want others in their family or community to see the materials that are drying. The need for secrecy often leads to women and girls re-using materials that are still damp (as they do not have sufficient time to dry), or that have been dried under mattresses, under clothing, or in other unsanitary locations which can be prone to mold.

Disposal of used menstrual materials



Disposable materials are intended to be disposed of after a single use. As girls and women use several disposal materials per period, they will need to frequently perform this task. In the absence of adequate disposal options, many girls and women drop used materials into pit latrines, forests, rivers or bury them; all in an effort to maintain their privacy.

Disposal options should be discreet and aligned with the cultural norms of the target population. Girls and women are often uncomfortable if others (men, women and children) can see their menstrual waste. The need for disposal systems is particularly urgent in settings where single-use materials (e.g. disposable pads) are commonly used.

In addition, the disposal of reusable products is a frequently overlooked aspect of many disposal approaches. Attention should be given to solutions that will incorporate eventual disposal of reusable pads, cloth and period underwear.

Waste management or final disposal

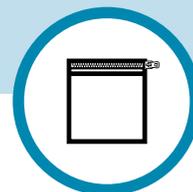


Waste management refers to the final (or secondary) disposal of menstrual waste (e.g. used menstrual materials) which may be completed by girls and women themselves or, as is usually recommended, by sanitation workers. When girls and women conduct this task, they may burn this waste informally at home, bury it or combine it with other household waste for dropping into pits or an existing solid waste management system (if operating). When handled by sanitation workers, final disposal methods can include incineration or dropping waste into larger protected dumping sites such as landfills.

There may also be recycling efforts and waste sorting after collection. Women and girls often feel discomfort disposing of menstrual waste if they know it may be handled by others, or may be seen by others, especially by men. This may lead them to resort to their own approaches (e.g. burying or burning of used materials).

In some cases, there may also be beliefs around disposal itself. For instance, some cultures believe that burning menstrual blood is bad and will cause health problems for the former user.

Storage of menstrual materials



Storage of menstrual materials refers to 1) the immediate storage of used menstrual materials between washes (e.g. when a girl changes a pad at school) and 2) the storage of menstrual materials between monthly periods.

Even after laundering, reusable menstrual materials are often considered embarrassing. Living conditions for displaced populations can make the storage of menstrual materials challenging due to a range of factors such as limited privacy and the need to keep the reusable materials dry and clean to prevent mildew or insect infestation. Girls and women may need support, in the form of protective and leakproof bags/cases, to safely and discreetly store their menstrual materials. Otherwise they may not go to school or outside the home while menstruating.



Back to contents



1 Introduction



2 Review of key MHM concepts



3 Consultation



4 Female-friendly toilets



5 Menstrual materials disposal



6 Menstrual materials waste management



7 Washing, drying & storage



8 Information, education & communication

Compendium on MHM Disposal, Waste Management & Laundering



Back to contents



1 Introduction



2 Review of key MHM concepts



3 Consultation



4 Female-friendly toilets



5 Menstrual materials disposal



6 Menstrual materials waste management



7 Washing, drying & storage



8 Information, education & communication



Aim of Compendium

The objective of the Menstrual Disposal, Waste Management & Laundering in Emergencies Compendium is to complement the existing [MHM In Emergencies Toolkit](#) published in 2017. During the development of the toolkit, it was recognized that insufficient learning and strategies were available around how best to support displaced girls and women with menstrual disposal, waste management and the laundering of reusable materials. This includes hardware and software approaches which ensure that girls and women are able to utilize and benefit from the increased provision of menstrual materials and supplies in many humanitarian contexts.

In order to encourage MHM programming which is aimed at supporting menstrual material disposal, waste management and laundering, **this compendium highlights a range of new solutions currently being tested around the world with the intention of promoting more localized dialogue and considerations** amongst humanitarian responders working in new and ongoing displacement contexts around the world.

Compendium
on MHM
Disposal, Waste
Management &
Laundering



Back to contents

MHM in Emergencies Basics: A Quick Overview

When integrating MHM into an emergency, it is important to consider three key components: Materials & Supplies, Facilities and Information. More detailed information can be found in the [MHM in Emergencies toolkit](#). Within each of these components, there are the relevant aspects for designing approaches for menstrual materials disposal, waste management and/or

laundry, including storage between cycles or directly after use.

For each emergency context, the types of menstrual materials, types of facilities and types of information provided are inter-connected. This necessitates a coherent approach starting from material selection, through to final waste management, for an effective MHM response. The practicalities around the handling of used materials, such as laundering of reusables, also need to be incorporated into the planning.



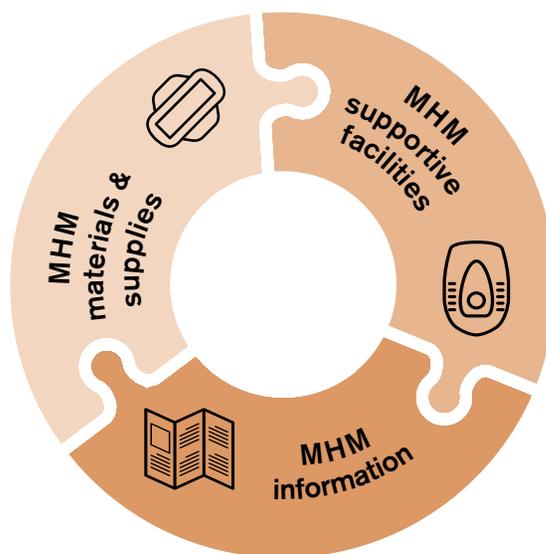
1. MHM Materials & Supplies

Prior to selecting a menstrual material for distribution in a new emergency, consider cultural implications, what types of supplies are needed to support management requirements, how facilities should be designed and any educational instructions that may be required.

Optimizing the usage of menstrual materials:

Different menstrual materials require different tasks associated with their proper usage. Both software and hardware solutions can enhance the usage and acceptability of these products. Software solutions include ensuring girls and women have sufficient information on how to use the materials, such as how to wash, dry and dispose of them. It can also include tips for minimizing the likelihood of stains and reducing odors in reusable materials. Hardware solutions include providing supplies that improve usage such as laundry detergent (as opposed to just basic soap) for removing blood in reusable pads and on underwear, providing leakproof bags to enable convenient and discreet storage and transport after changing pads, and/or ropes for home-based drying of reusables materials (see [Chapter 7](#) for more information).

3 Components to an MHM response



- 1 Introduction
- 2 **Review of key MHM concepts**
- 3 Consultation
- 4 Female-friendly toilets
- 5 Menstrual materials disposal
- 6 Menstrual materials waste management
- 7 Washing, drying & storage
- 8 Information, education & communication

Compendium on MHM Disposal, Waste Management & Laundering



Back to contents

- 1 Introduction
- 2 **Review of key MHM concepts**
- 3 Consultation
- 4 Female-friendly toilets
- 5 Menstrual materials disposal
- 6 Menstrual materials waste management
- 7 Washing, drying & storage
- 8 Information, education & communication

Compendium on MHM Disposal, Waste Management & Laundering

2. MHM Supportive Facilities



Girls and women need WASH facilities or other private locations for managing menstruation and its related tasks. This includes spaces for changing menstrual materials during the day and night as needed, disposing of menstrual waste, bathing or cleaning themselves, washing and drying their used menstrual materials and underwear and private storage for re-use during the next menstrual cycle.

Existing taboos and secrecy around menstruation in many societies mean that WASH actors should consider the following illustrative examples when consulting with girls and women around design and implementation:

- **Girls and women often prefer not to take used menstrual waste out of a toilet.** They are concerned that others may see them carrying it. Thus, optimal disposal options should be directly inside toilet stalls where girls and women have some privacy.
- **Girls and women may have blood on their hands or clothing after changing menstrual materials;** water inside or nearby the toilet stall enables them to discreetly wash their hands or clothing without others seeing this blood.
- **Blood in water after bathing or laundering can be embarrassing for girls and women,** so drains in bathing spaces may need to be covered to mitigate this exposure.

3. MHM Information



Girls and women need to know how to properly use any new menstrual materials or facilities provided to them. Aspects of the menstrual materials, supplies and facilities being introduced may be different than what girls and women used prior to displacement, so it is essential to provide clear information, often in the form of demonstrations, on how to properly use these new materials or resources. MHM information should also include basic menstrual health education (especially for pubescent girls), and address harmful cultural or social norms related to menstruation. See [Chapter 11](#) from the toolkit for more information on the delivery of education for girls, as they may need different information than women.

Reminder: Menstrual Materials vs Menstrual Supplies



Menstrual Materials: Materials used to catch blood such as a pad, piece of cloth, tampon, menstrual cup, period underwear or any other preferred method.

Menstrual Supplies: Any supplementary items needed to support the management of menstruation such as supplies for washing/drying of reusables, storage bags or instructions on how to properly use or maintain the product.¹

Effective Usage of Menstrual Materials: What do girls & women need to know?

Reusable Materials:

- How do I insert or attach the reusable material?
- What is the ideal duration of wear for the reusable material (as to avoid leaks, irritation or health risks)?
- How do I properly clean (wash and dry) the reusable material for continued usage over time? What other supplies do I need to properly clean it?
- How do I safely store the reusable material between each usage or menstrual period?
- How and where do I eventually dispose of a reusable material after their prescribed lifespan?

Disposable Materials:

- How do I insert or attach the disposable material?
- What is the ideal duration of wear for the disposable material (as to avoid leaks, irritation or health risks)?
- How and where do I properly dispose of the material following single usage?



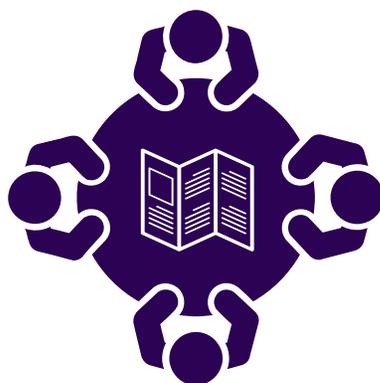


Back to
contents

Introduction

Consultation should be the first step when designing or improving any MHM-supportive facilities or programming. When consultation is utilized from the onset, there is often higher acceptability and utilization of facilities and resources by girls and women. Careful consultation is especially important when trying to address solutions for taboo-laden topics like menstrual disposal or the handling of menstrual blood while washing and drying menstrual materials.

All consultation activities should be led by females to enhance the comfort and ease of participants. In some cases, it might be useful to collaborate with Protection actors or Community Volunteers who have pre-existing relationships with female beneficiaries and may be able to more easily foster their participation or solicit feedback on specific topics.



Consulting girls and women

There are a variety of methods that can be used to ensure girls and women are involved with the design of MHM supportive facilities and programming. Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with age-segmented groups of adolescent girls and women can be a useful tool for soliciting inputs. It is important not to overlook vulnerable girls and women, such as those experiencing physical or mental disabilities. Additional consultation methods can strengthen the consultations, such as:

- Conduct one-on-one interviews to complement FGD, and allow for more in-depth exploration of taboo topics that girls and women may not be comfortable discussing in front of peers;
- Develop physical models or drawings to depict WASH facilities, their layout and potential solutions and improvements to address girls' and women's needs;
- Invite girls and women to inspect the facilities during construction to ensure they feel confident about their recommendations for improvements and determine if any further refinements may be needed;
- Invite girls and women to view newly constructed or renovated facilities in nearby communities in order to assess reactions and perceptions on acceptability prior to scaling up.
- Conduct walk-throughs of existing facilities where girls and women can convey their opinions and recommendations on specific aspects;

Engaging Men and Boys

When designing or constructing new WASH facilities or resources for girls and women, it is often necessary or useful to include men and boys in the process. Some reasons include:

- Challenges may arise when larger or more conveniently located WASH facilities are provided to only the female population. Male beneficiaries may decide to use new female facilities, regardless of gender signage, which can make female users uncomfortable and less likely to use the facility.
- Negative reactions from male community members may arise from providing new female facilities. Discussions with community leaders can be a useful place to assess the possibility of this challenge arising and address it early.
- The location of the facility may determine not only a female user's comfort level in using the facility, but also if the males in their families are accepting of it, especially at night. Assessing male perspectives on the location of a new facility can be useful prior to construction.
- Sometimes boys and men may not have considered some of the distinct sanitation needs of females in their community. By reviewing these various issues with them proactively, they may be more likely to support and champion the development of new or improved facilities.



1 Introduction



2 Review of key
MHM concepts



3 Consultation



4 Female-friendly
toilets



5 Menstrual materials
disposal



6 Menstrual materials
waste management



7 Washing, drying
& storage



8 Information,
education &
communication



Back to contents

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Review of key MHM concepts
- 3 **Consultation**
- 4 Female-friendly toilets
- 5 Menstrual materials disposal
- 6 Menstrual materials waste management
- 7 Washing, drying & storage
- 8 Information, education & communication

Compendium on MHM Disposal, Waste Management & Laundering

Examples from the Field: Consultation Practices

Utilizing an inclusive girl-centered consultation process

Location

Dzaleka Refugee Camp, Malawi

Organization

Plan International

Basic Information

Plan International utilized a Human Centered Design (HCD) approach to generate insights from girls and women in Dzaleka Camp exploring challenges and solutions related to MHM. This included engaging with a diverse group of girls and women across a range of ages, ethnicities, religions and levels of education. In addition, Plan also engaged families/ foster caregivers, local gatekeepers and institutions within Dzaleka Camp. The 2-week HCD process included an initial phase comprised of observation of community spaces, FGDs and discussions with girls and various actors involved in MHM programming. The focus was on exploring the MHM experiences and challenges experienced by girls and young women. Following this phase, a co-creation process was introduced with girls, women, boys and men aimed at identifying solutions to the identified challenges. This included the use of drawing, modeling and other participatory approaches aimed at soliciting input and feedback. This included exploring issues related to menstrual disposal, washing and drying of reusable products in a context where worries about witchcraft were very prevalent.

Benefits

Segmenting the groups by age (including separating early adolescents from older adolescents) enabled girls to be more confident sharing their insights and thoughts. Important insights were generated regarding the specific challenges associated with witchcraft beliefs and their implications for identifying solutions related to disposal or washing of menstrual materials. These insights are now being used to inform the development of potential solutions aimed at addressing these issues.



Examples from the Field: Consultation Practices

Interactive surveys and co-creation sessions for informing WASH design

Location

Somali Region, Ethiopia

Organization

Save the Children UK (STC UK) and Eclipse Experience Ltd.

Basic Information

DA consultation strategy was introduced by STC UK and Eclipse which utilized a user-centered community engagement methodology comprised of two core components: interactive digital surveys and co-creation sessions. These two interconnected components were used to inform how to design improvements to child-friendly sanitation spaces. The interactive surveys, which used visual components to help overcome literacy barriers, also involved the production of visual outputs that could quickly inform design decisions. The surveys included questions based on scales of “smileys” and interactive questions which enabled participants to respond by tapping on the digital illustrations on the tablet. The co-creation sessions with community members were then utilized to dig deeper into issues and enable for a collaborative process for creating solutions for addressing the issues identified. Although specific to child-friendly sanitation, such methods could prove useful for soliciting girls’ and women’s feedback on sensitive topics related to menstruation and female-friendly sanitation solutions.

Benefits

Digital tools can help overcome literacy barriers and be highly adaptable based on the context. In addition, such tablet surveys may be cost effective and useful for the rapid data collection, analysis and creation of visual outputs to inform decision making during an acute emergency response.

Challenges

Data collectors and co-creation facilitators will require training and may be unfamiliar with the new technologies and interactive survey methods. There is the potential for equipment malfunction or breakage, especially in challenging environments.

Additional Resources

[Ethiopia Pilot Outcomes Report](#)

[Interactive Digital Survey Findings - Ethiopia](#)

[User Centered Community Engagement Collective Case Study Reports](#)



Back to contents

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Review of key MHM concepts
- 3 **Consultation**
- 4 Female-friendly toilets
- 5 Menstrual materials disposal
- 6 Menstrual materials waste management
- 7 Washing, drying & storage
- 8 Information, education & communication

Compendium
on MHM
Disposal, Waste
Management &
Laundering



Back to contents



1 Introduction



2 Review of key MHM concepts



3 Consultation



4 Female-friendly toilets



5 Menstrual materials disposal



6 Menstrual materials waste management



7 Washing, drying & storage



8 Information, education & communication

Examples from the Field: Consultation Practices

A Social Architecture Approach for Developing Female Friendly Toilets

Location

Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

Organization

Oxfam with support from UNICEF and UNHCR

Basic Information

During the development and construction of female friendly WASH spaces, WASH staff in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh implemented an iterative social architecture approach to better involve girls and women across the entire process. The social architecture approach consisted of multiple consultations with women and girls in the community over the course of 9 months, from the initial consultation to assess their needs and decide on the design, the creation of 3-D models so that they could visualize and discuss the layout, inspections of the facility as it was being constructed and follow-up consultations. The female friendly WASH space developed was comprised of toilets, a shower room and a laundry area.

Benefits

The social architecture approach was able to capture girls' and women's voices during the design and construction phases. For example, girls and women indicated they would prefer for the toilets to be combined with the shower and laundry area, as this would reduce stigma they felt when entering standalone toilet blocks. The inclusion of girls and women throughout the entire process also generated buy-in to facilities, with women and girls indicating they were more likely to take ownership of the facility and ensure for its proper maintenance and cleaning.

Challenges

This approach involves many consultation sessions with community members, which may take months and delay an organization's ability to construct facilities quickly. Future iterations of this approach may need to be conducted at a faster pace. Additionally, because it is dependent on community opinion, female friendly toilet units in each community may have different designs based on different needs (2).



“ Every male person was saying that if the facility is nearby my house, I will let my woman or girl go use that one. If it is just a bit far, then maybe I will not let my ladies go use the washroom. ”
WASH officer, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh³



Back to contents



1 Introduction



2 Review of key MHM concepts



3 Consultation



4 Female-friendly toilets



5 Menstrual materials disposal



6 Menstrual materials waste management



7 Washing, drying & storage



8 Information, education & communication

Introduction

In overcrowded and privacy scarce displacement contexts, toilets are often the only space available for girls and women for changing or disposing of their menstruation materials. Toilet stalls, which may be the most private and secure spaces available in displacement contexts, oftentimes fall short in actually addressing the full sanitation needs of women and girls.

The diagram on the next page depicts the key components of a 'Female-friendly Toilet'. This concept was developed through direct discussions with displaced women and girls living in a range of humanitarian settings. Despite there being significant differences in cultures and contexts, strong agreement emerged around the essential components for making toilets safer, more appropriate for meeting girls' and women's needs, and thus, increasing the likelihood of their use.

Water availability inside the toilet stall is particularly relevant to menstruation. Girls and women may have blood on their hands or clothing after changing menstrual materials. Thus, water inside or nearby the toilet stall enables them to discreetly wash their hands, clothing and/or reusable pad without others seeing this blood. In other cases, they may want to rinse or wash a reusable pad on the spot, prior to taking it home for more thorough washing and drying.

With respect to disposable materials, girls and women often prefer not having to take used menstrual waste outside of the toilet given concerns that others may see them carrying it. When possible, disposal options should be located directly inside the toilet stall to promote privacy and ease of use for girls and women. If toilets are pit latrines, girls and women may be likely to drop used materials directly into the pit if alternative, culturally appropriate disposal options are not provided, thus potentially increasing the fill rate of the latrines.

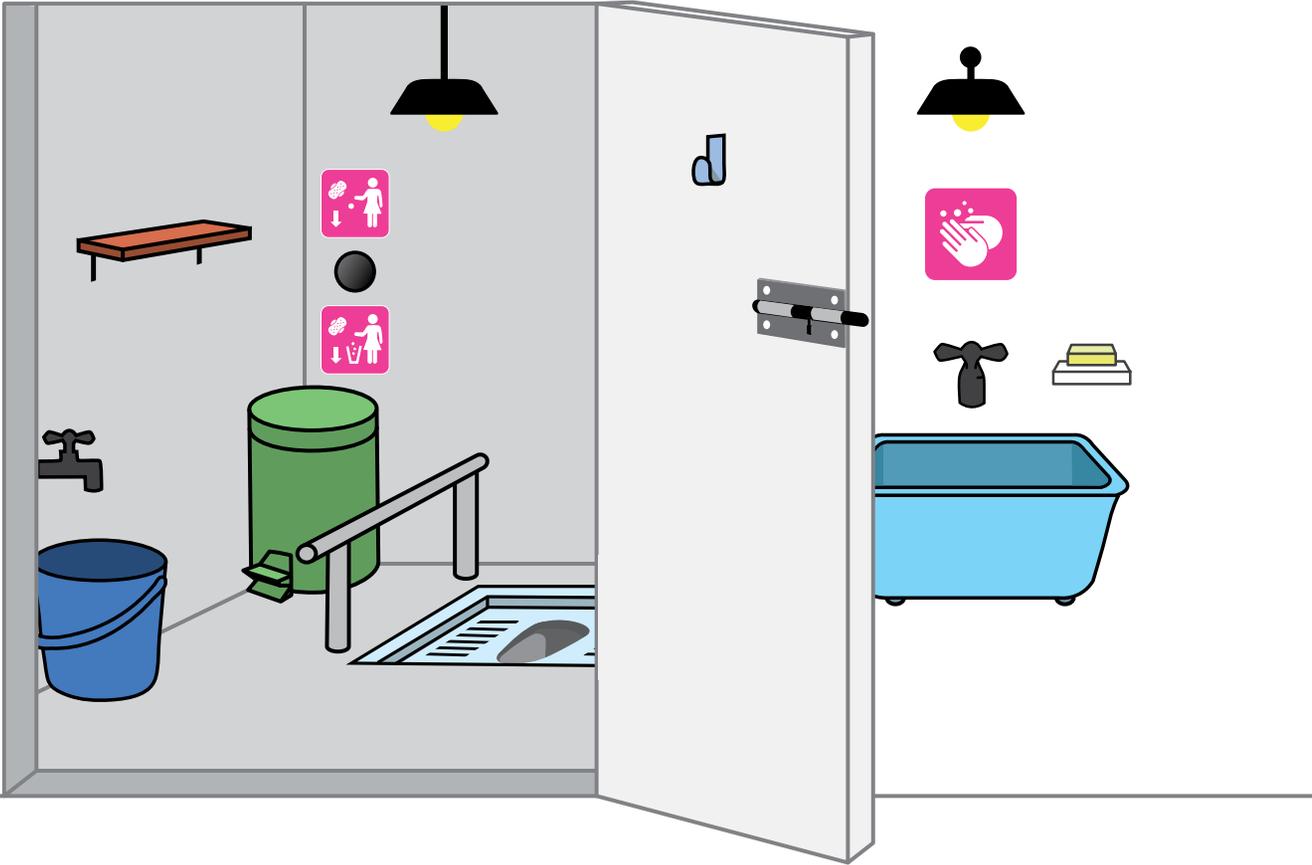
Besides the features inside the toilet stall, the entire design of toilet/washroom facilities provided for women and girls should be thought through carefully, especially in terms of their placement or location within the built environment.

- **Access:** Depending on the culture, it may be shameful or embarrassing to be seen entering toilet blocks. The more visible that toilets are to other members of the community, the more challenging it may be for women and girls to access them. Sometimes, it may be helpful to combine female toilets with other 'women-only' facilities, such as showers and laundry areas, so that it is less apparent why a person is entering a facility. In addition, accessing toilets during the nighttime can be problematic for many girls and women given safety concerns, poor lighting and fears of vermin or dogs.
- **High Demand:** Where there are long queues for toilets, there is oftentimes pressure to use the toilet quickly, with others banging on the door and asking you to hurry. This pressure can make girls and women especially uncomfortable when needing to change or clean menstrual materials or clothing.

“ The houses are too small and don't allow for privacy. It is one room for the entire family. The size of the house and the lack of separation from the men and boys is a problem. ”

Rohingya Woman, Rakhine State, Myanmar⁴

An example of a female-friendly toilet



Adequate numbers of safely located toilets separated (with clear signage) from male facilities.
Some units should be accessible to people with disabilities



A shelf and hook for hygienically storing belongings during usage



Easily accessible water (ideally inside the cubicle) for girls and women to wash themselves and menstrual materials



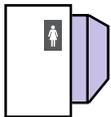
Safe and private toilets with inside door latch



Clear signs instructing girls and women to dispose of menstrual waste in the trash bin or chute



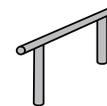
Night time light source both inside and outside of the toilets



Walls, door and roof are made of non-transparent materials with no gaps or spaces. Entrances should be screened so that people cannot be seen entering and leaving the cubicle itself



A chute for discreet disposal of menstrual materials
OR
Trash bins (with lids) to dispose of used menstrual materials



Grab bars to assist pregnant, elderly or disabled persons – format can vary and is to be discussed with users



- **Privacy:** Many toilets have gaps around the door, holes or gaps in their structure, low walls or wide gaps under doors. These design flaws result in anxiety by women and girls that they can be seen from outside while using the toilet and changing their menstrual materials.
- **Security:** Many toilets lack latches, as they are often stolen or broken. The lack of a secure latch creates a constant risk that someone might open the door while the toilet is in use.
- **Gender:** In some humanitarian responses, toilets are designated to be 'shared' by two or more families, without gender segregation. In other cases, even if toilet blocks are marked as male or female, people do not necessarily follow the rules. For women and girls especially, the presence of men (or possibility of their presence in the future) in the toilet can make management of menstruation more stressful.
- **Stigma:** When developing a block of female toilets for communal or institutional use, it is not advised to just design one or two of the stalls as "menstruation" supportive (e.g. disposal option, water inside). This can lead to stigma and reduce the likelihood that women and girls will use those stalls for fear of inducing shame when others see them enter.
- **Maintenance:** Toilets, especially those shared with multiple families or open to the public, often become dirty, and may deteriorate or be vandalized, unless suitable community structures are in place. The provision of appropriate disposal options that are regularly serviced can also improve perceptions of cleanliness by users.
- **Special Needs:** Many girls and women may experience physical and intellectual disabilities that necessitate the support of a caretaker when accessing toilets and managing their menstruation. Additional room may be needed inside the stall for the caretaker or design measures (ramps, bars) to enhance ease of use (see [toolkit](#) for more information).



“ The informal settlements are not secure, so we can't go outside [to the toilets] at night.... ”

Syrian Woman, Beqaa Valley, Lebanon²



Back to contents

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Review of key MHM concepts
- 3 Consultation
- 4 **Female-friendly toilets**
- 5 Menstrual materials disposal
- 6 Menstrual materials waste management
- 7 Washing, drying & storage
- 8 Information, education & communication



Back to contents

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Review of key MHM concepts
- 3 Consultation
- 4 **Female-friendly toilets**
- 5 Menstrual materials disposal
- 6 Menstrual materials waste management
- 7 Washing, drying & storage
- 8 Information, education & communication

Compendium on MHM Disposal, Waste Management & Laundering

Examples from the Field: Female Friendly Toilets

Modifying existing toilets to be more Female Friendly

Location

Nyaragusu Camp, Northwest Tanzania

Organization

Oxfam-Tanzania in collaboration with the IRC

Basic Information

Existing toilet blocks constructed for adolescent girls attending school were modified after the initial construction to become more female friendly. This included the introduction of a few inexpensive modifications to enhance girls' comfort while using the toilets. Hooks and a shelf were added inside each stall so girls could hang their bags or clothing while using the toilet or changing their menstrual materials. A mirror inside the stall was introduced so that girls could check for blood stains on their clothing. Lastly, buckets of water were provided directly in each stall to ensure girls could wash any blood off their hands and the toilet slab.

Benefits

Even though the toilets had already been constructed, simple "add-on" improvements can be introduced at a later point in time. These basic measures can enhance girls' confidence in using the toilets and changing their materials during the school day. These measures were provided in all of the toilet stalls, not just one, to reduce the potential for stigma.

Challenges

The water buckets in each stall need to be routinely filled throughout the day. There is potential for theft of the mirrors or hooks.



Examples from the Field: Female Friendly Toilets

Combination toilet, shower and laundering spaces for females

Location

Rohingya Camps outside Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

Organization

Oxfam with support from UNICEF and UNHCR

Basic Information

Consultation with girls and women during the design phase identified a dislike of standalone toilet blocks as female users felt uncomfortable when others could see them entering the toilets. Instead, girls and women preferred a combined unit, where the showers, toilets and a laundry area were all located in one entirely fenced in space. In addition, women recommended adding a variety of other female-supportive measures, including a bamboo pole in the toilet stall to assist older and pregnant women when they squatted, and a bench in the shower space.

Benefits

Girls and women liked the design as no one knew the reason they were inside the female WASH unit, as the combined space provided them with enhanced privacy.

Challenges

As this unit was larger than normal toilet blocks, it required more land for construction. The size made it challenging to find adequate locations in the already space limited camps. In addition, Rohingya girls and women had limited mobility. Thus, identifying a location that was close enough to their homes so that they would be permitted to freely use the facilities required dialogue and compromise with male household heads.

Additional Resources:

1. [Women's Social Architecture Project - Phase 1 Final Report](#)
2. [Social and Feminist Design in Emergency Contexts Article](#)



Back to contents

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Review of key MHM concepts
- 3 Consultation
- 4 **Female-friendly toilets**
- 5 Menstrual materials disposal
- 6 Menstrual materials waste management
- 7 Washing, drying & storage
- 8 Information, education & communication

Compendium on MHM Disposal, Waste Management & Laundering



Back to contents

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Review of key MHM concepts
- 3 Consultation
- 4 Female-friendly toilets**
- 5 Menstrual materials disposal
- 6 Menstrual materials waste management
- 7 Washing, drying & storage
- 8 Information, education & communication

Examples from the Field: Female Friendly Toilets

Modifying existing toilets to be more Female Friendly

Location

Rohingya Camps outside Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

Organization

Red Crescent Society of Bangladesh with the support of the Danish Red Cross

Basic Information

Conversations with women and girls revealed that many feared getting stuck in a latrine at night and during monsoons, along with concerns about being followed into a latrine. In response, male Rohingya volunteers who were supporting the construction of new latrines brainstormed about a solution. Their proposed solution was to create an emergency alarm device to address this issue. The volunteers designed a bamboo pole and stick device that can be used to make an alarm noise to alert neighbors if needed. After testing, women and girls recommended that the height of the pole needed to be easily reached while a user is sitting or using the latrine.

Benefits

While the needs of women and girls vary by context, and WASH solutions will depend on locally identified preferences, this is an example of a simple solution to a widespread problem that was designed by the beneficiaries themselves and implemented at low cost.

Challenges

Implementation of this alarm system required consultations with user groups to ensure all women and girls would be able to benefit from the system.





Back to contents



1 Introduction



2 Review of key MHM concepts



3 Consultation



4 Female-friendly toilets



5 Menstrual materials disposal



6 Menstrual materials waste management



7 Washing, drying & storage



8 Information, education & communication

Introduction

Disposing menstrual materials, meaning used materials with or without blood stains still on them, is a highly sensitive and frequently stigmatized experience for most girls and women. Used menstrual materials are considered distasteful and associated with strong negative cultural taboos.

Girls and women in most humanitarian contexts do not want anyone, including females, cleaning staff, children and especially males to see this waste. Sensitivities around menstrual waste can make it challenging to find good ways to support girls and women. Disposal solutions must be discreet and culturally acceptable, requiring sustained consultation with girls and women, and clear education promoting proper use.

Current Practices

Before designing and introducing a new menstrual disposal solution, it is essential to know girls' and women's:

- previous (pre-displacement) practices
- current menstrual disposal practices
- cultural beliefs and stigmas surrounding menstruation

This learning will enable design of a disposal solution that meets girls' and women's needs.

Key Things to Remember:

Girls & women use on average 7-10 disposable pads per month;

- Disposal challenges can lead to unhygienic coping strategies, like wearing a menstrual material for longer than 4-6 hours;
- Extended usage of materials can result in discomfort, irritation and higher likelihood for stains;
- Even when using reusable materials, girls and women will have to throw them away eventually; Disposal options are still needed, although less frequently.

Key Questions to ask:

1. What type of menstrual material did girls and women use prior to displacement?
2. What type of menstrual material are they currently using in this context?
3. How and where did girls and women dispose of menstrual waste back home (prior to displacement)?
4. How and where are girls and women currently disposing of menstrual waste in this context?
5. What types of challenges do girls and women experience throwing away menstrual waste in this context?
6. What are girls' and women's beliefs and/or worries about disposing of menstrual materials in this context?
7. How would girls and women prefer to dispose of menstrual materials?



Back to contents

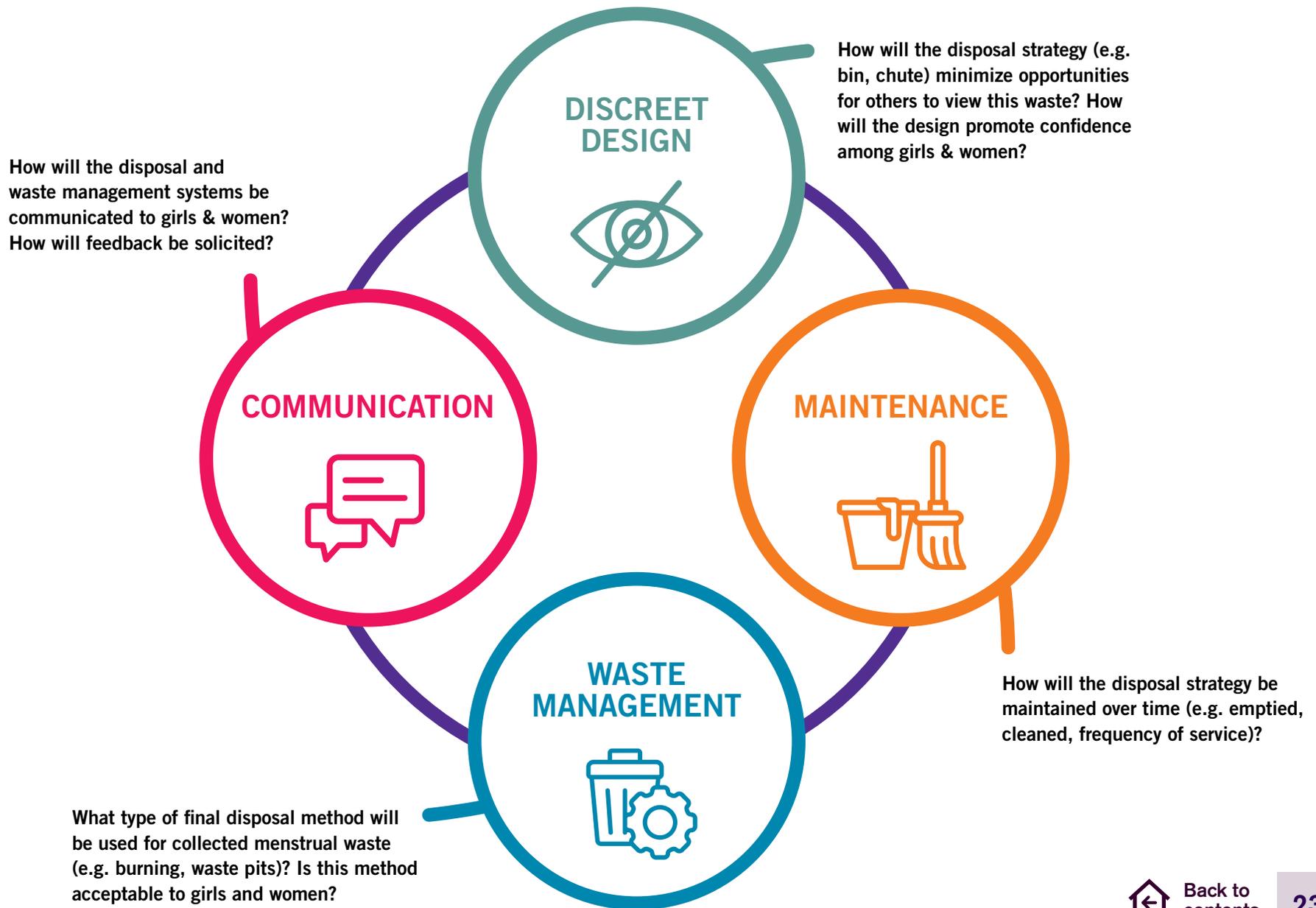
- 1 Introduction
- 2 Review of key MHHM concepts
- 3 Consultation
- 4 Female-friendly toilets
- 5 **Menstrual materials disposal**
- 6 Menstrual materials waste management
- 7 Washing, drying & storage
- 8 Information, education & communication

Methods for Disposal

Girls and women generally adopt one of the following methods when disposing of menstrual waste. Disposal behaviors may be influenced by environment limitations, materials used, facility design, facility location, and cultural practices and beliefs around menstruation or used materials.

Method	Practice	Considerations
Household solid waste streams 	Menstrual waste is often combined with other types of household waste. It is then either picked up or dropped off at designated disposal points.	This method tends to work fine if there is a functional solid waste management system in place. In some cases, waste may pile up in communities, posing environmental hazards. Girls and women may not be comfortable with this method if they think their menstrual waste will be left in the open and/or seen by others.
Disposal containers or bins inside toilets or bathing spaces 	Menstrual waste is sometimes directly put into disposal bins or other containers. This method is most commonly found in communal or institutional toilets.	A cleaning system, which includes routine emptying of the containers/ bins, is essential to promote confidence by users and thus usage. Most girls and women prefer for the containers to be discreet and covered to minimize others ability to see inside. This system is likely only feasible in gender-segregated toilets given sensitivities about males seeing this type of waste.
Immediate burning (at the household level) 	Some girls and women may prefer to immediately burn used menstrual waste, either separately or alongside other household waste.	Burning is usually more challenging in camp contexts given space limitations and safety regulations about household-level fires. Burning, especially of plastics often found in disposable and reusable materials, can also emit particulates, dioxins and furans, which are unhealthy for the nearby community.
Ad hoc disposal or burial of waste 	Ad hoc disposal refers to the disposal of menstrual waste by discarding it outdoors, often in alleys, fields or rivers. Burial of menstrual waste outside, a common practice for many girls and women, may be how they managed menstrual disposal prior to displacement.	These practices can create environmental hazards and unsanitary living conditions. They are especially problematic in densely populated, flood-prone or loose soiled environments. Stray animals and children may also uncover this waste. Ad hoc disposal or burial practices are often performed at night or before dawn to enhance privacy, which can also pose security challenges for girls and women.
Disposal directly into toilets 	Throwing used menstrual materials directly into toilets/latrine holes is often the most convenient and private option. This is especially the case in the absence of any other disposal solution being available inside the toilet facilities.	Any water seal (flush) toilet is prone to blockage, in the P-trap itself, or in the drain line or sewer beyond. Direct disposal can also increase the rate at which pits, cesspits and septic tanks fill and also make de-sludging more difficult as the equipment may become clogged. Cloth, including reusable pads, is generally more problematic than disposable pads with respect to de-sludging.

MENSTRUAL DISPOSAL: FOUR KEY ELEMENTS





Back to contents

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Review of key MHM concepts
- 3 Consultation
- 4 Female-friendly toilets
- 5 **Menstrual materials disposal**
- 6 Menstrual materials waste management
- 7 Washing, drying & storage
- 8 Information, education & communication

Communal Facility Disposal Hardware

Communal or shared toilets, which often serve multiple households in displacement contexts, may be the only location where girls and women are able to change menstrual materials. Toilets are also often the preferred space for girls and women to dispose of menstrual waste, given preferences to not have to take menstrual waste outside of toilet stalls for risk of others viewing it.

Important Note: If toilets are not gender segregated, many girls and women may not be willing to use any disposal solution that is provided inside of them, such as a dustbin.

A range of different examples of disposal strategies have been identified from both emergency and non-emergency contexts around the world.

Examples of Menstrual Disposal Strategies for Communal Toilet Facilities

Piped Disposal Chutes in Communal Toilets

Location

Rohingya Camps outside Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

Organization

Red Crescent Society of Bangladesh with the support of the Danish Red Cross

Basic Information

Pipes made of 75mm (3") Polyvinyl chloride (PVC) are inserted into the back of the toilet stalls to form chutes, leading to vaults lined with concrete rings (1.8m or 6' deep). Users can dispose of their menstrual waste through the chute, and it is deposited into the vault. The waste in the vault is collected for incineration every 3 months. To ensure girls and women know what the disposal was and how to properly use it, clear signage with pictures was placed directly over the chute.

Benefits

Women can directly dispose of pads without being seen and without fear that others will see the menstrual waste and associate it with them.

Challenges

Girls and women indicated sometimes also using water to ensure waste made it successfully down the pipe. In some events, pads did get stuck. In some locations, a bamboo stick was kept inside the stall, to clear the pipe as needed. Water was also sometimes used to move materials through the pipes, but could result in higher filling rates of the vaults.

Additional Resources

[A webinar presentation describing the design and implementation proces](#)



Examples of Menstrual Disposal Strategies for Communal Toilet Facilities



Back to contents

Basic Waste Bins with Lids

Location

Internal Displacement Camps located in the Rakhine State, Myanmar

Organization

Oxfam Myanmar

Basic Information

Rohingya refugees living in camps were found to be either burying menstrual waste or putting it directly into the toilets, which resulted in the clogging of toilets. In response, WASH workers introduced basic covered waste bins in gender segregated communal latrines. Such waste bins were designed to allow women to dispose of materials without having to leave the stall. Environmental cleaners were responsible for the routine collection of the waste from the bins for disposal in communal incinerators located in the camps.

Benefits

This method allowed women privacy in that they do not need to leave the toilets with used menstrual waste for burying or other disposal methods. It also protects the integrity of the toilet hardware and reduces the clogging of pipes.

Challenges

In many contexts, girls and women are uncomfortable using any type of open waste bin as they fear others may see that waste, including cleaners, and know it is theirs. This is especially a challenge when there is not gender segregation of toilets. Hygiene concerns, such as exposure to germs, that are associated with touching lids, can also be an issue. In addition, smaller bins, such as this model require more frequent servicing by cleaners as they have limited capacity. Cleaners, when from the same culture as the community, have also been found to scold or shame girls and women when putting their menstrual materials in these waste bins.



- 1 Introduction
- 2 Review of key MHM concepts
- 3 Consultation
- 4 Female-friendly toilets
- 5 **Menstrual materials disposal**
- 6 Menstrual materials waste management
- 7 Washing, drying & storage
- 8 Information, education & communication

Compendium on MHM Disposal, Waste Management & Laundering



Back to contents

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Review of key MHM concepts
- 3 Consultation
- 4 Female-friendly toilets
- 5 **Menstrual materials disposal**
- 6 Menstrual materials waste management
- 7 Washing, drying & storage
- 8 Information, education & communication

Examples of Menstrual Disposal Strategies for Communal Toilet Facilities

Waste bins with pedal-operated lids

Location

Dhaka, Bangladesh

Organization

icddr, b and Johns Hopkins University

Basic Information

A new waste bin with pedal-operated lids was piloted in communal toilets in urban slums in Dhaka. The reason for introducing these bins was that the toilets were filling very quickly due to the dropping of all types of waste, including menstrual cloth and pads, into the pits. Desludgers indicated that the waste was creating challenges for them, especially pieces of cloth. Discarded trash was also found to make the toilet environment uncomfortable for users. In response, a new disposal system was introduced into the communal toilets aimed at diverting menstrual waste (in addition to diapers and other bathroom waste) from direct drops into the latrines. To promote usage, both signage and demonstrations were conducted with the community. Both paid cleaners and volunteers were used for emptying the bins in the pilot activities (2).

Benefits

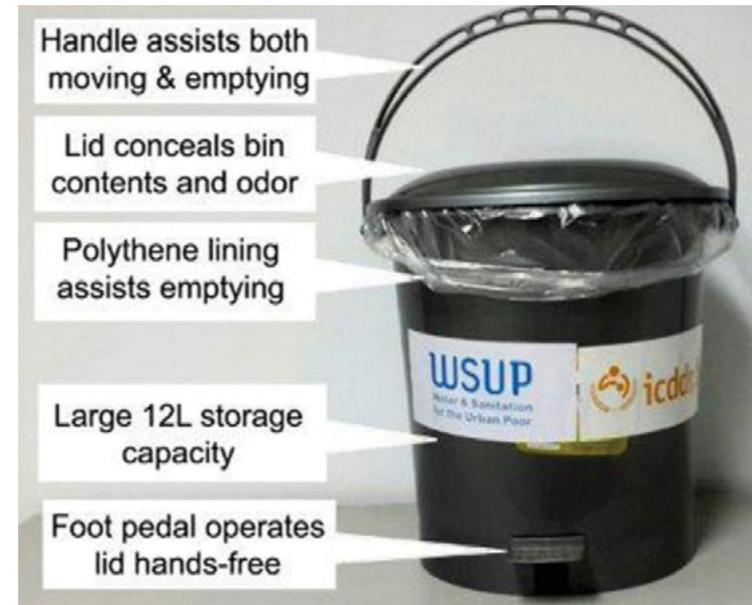
Women found the pedaled waste bins with lids to be an acceptable option and liked that the pedal enabled them to open and close the receptacle without touching it. The liners in the toilets can make it easier for paid cleaners and volunteers to conduct emptying duties as needed. Users also indicated reduced toilet blockages since the bins were provided.

Additional Resources

1. An article by Yeasmin et al. 2018 describing intervention

Challenges

This system requires frequent emptying of disposed materials and potential for theft of bins. Toilet users and cleaners indicated discomfort when viewing menstrual waste in bins which could lead to discomfort by users. Some women would wrap the menstrual waste in paper or polythene prior to disposal to reduce detection. Researchers suggested exploring a bin with a flap rather than a lid to better conceal the waste inside the bin.



“ I prefer to bury because someone can see it if they throw it in the latrine; and men are using the female latrines. ”

Rohingya Woman, Rakhine State, Myanmar⁴

Examples of Menstrual Disposal Strategies for Communal Toilet Facilities



Back to contents

Piped Disposal Chutes in Hospital Toilets & Bathing Spaces

Location

A hospital serving Rohingya refugees and the host community outside of Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

Organization

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) – Holland

Basic Information

Female toilets and bathing/shower spaces were equipped with a disposal chute system. This included 100mm (4") PVC piped chutes that provided a discreet disposal option from directly inside the stall. The PVC pipes were inserted into the back wall of the toilet which led directly to colored-coded buckets placed directly outside of the toilet blocks and shower facilities. The buckets, coded red to indicate that they should be disposed together with medical waste, were then emptied daily at the on-site incinerator. As this disposal solution may be new to many girls and women, clear signage and education on proper use is essential.

Benefits

Women can dispose of waste easily and discreetly, without fear that other women or cleaners will see that waste or associate it with them. This system works well within the context of a medical facility, where there is a clear and active waste management and disposal system, with trained sanitation staff on hand.

Challenges

Materials may get stuck in the pipe, causing blockages to occur; buckets require semi-regular emptying and final disposal. Patients, males or children may get curious about the bucket's purpose as they are visible behind the toilet blocks. However, the clear color-coded system across the hospital complex for classifying medical waste may reduce the likelihood for inadvertent interacting with this waste.



- 1 Introduction
- 2 Review of key MHM concepts
- 3 Consultation
- 4 Female-friendly toilets
- 5 **Menstrual materials disposal**
- 6 Menstrual materials waste management
- 7 Washing, drying & storage
- 8 Information, education & communication



Back to contents

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Review of key MHM concepts
- 3 Consultation
- 4 Female-friendly toilets
- 5 Menstrual materials disposal
- 6 Menstrual materials waste management
- 7 Washing, drying & storage
- 8 Information, education & communication

Examples of Menstrual Disposal Strategies for Communal Toilet Facilities

Disposal Chutes in Schools in post-earthquake Nepal

Location

A secondary school in post-earthquake Nepal

Organization

Oxfam-Nepal

Basic Information

Disposal slots were incorporated into female latrines for girls attending secondary school. The slot is directly connected to the latrine and leads to a small brick container outside of the facility. Items placed in the disposal container via the slot were emptied by cleaners regularly. Along with the disposal slots, the female friendly latrines also feature proper lighting, lockable doors, and water for cleaning and hand washing.

Benefits

Allows girls to easily and discreetly dispose of used materials while using the latrine while at school. No one can view the menstrual waste once deposited through the slot into the secured container.

Challenges

The visible external brick container located outside the latrine may attract the curiosity of children or dogs. Secondary disposal containers must be emptied regularly and transferred for final disposal. Ideally, the latrines and disposal pits must not be located near male latrines to ensure girls feel comfortable while using them.



Additional Resources

- 1. [Oxfam blog describing MHM in schools activities in post-earthquake Nepal](#)
- 2. [Oxfam blog describing girl-friendly toilet facilities in post-earthquake Nepal](#)

Examples of Menstrual Disposal Strategies for Communal Toilet Facilities

A complementary waste hole for exclusive disposal in school-based pit latrines

Location

Nyaragusu Refugee Camp in northwest Tanzania

Organization

Oxfam-Tanzania in collaboration with IRC

Basic Information

Due to taboos associated with menstrual blood, including fears of witchcraft if used materials were taken or seen by a stranger, Congolese girls in Tanzania indicated discomfort in disposing of used menstrual materials directly into drop pit latrines at schools. This included worries that if they put a pad or cloth into the pit, people would identify it as theirs. In response, a separate waste hole was designed in the latrine. The latrine hole leads to the same pit as the toilet, yet is smaller in design and offers protection from disposed materials being retrieved or viewed.

Benefits

This option responds directly to girls' worries about menstrual waste being associated with them. It provides a discreet alternative for the easy dropping of menstrual waste directly in the latrine stall.

Challenges

The separate waste hole does not reduce issues related to faster fillage rates of pits. The lack of IEC information also led to some confusion by girls in terms of the purpose of the hole.



Back to contents

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Review of key MHM concepts
- 3 Consultation
- 4 Female-friendly toilets
- 5 **Menstrual materials disposal**
- 6 Menstrual materials waste management
- 7 Washing, drying & storage
- 8 Information, education & communication

Compendium
on MHM
Disposal, Waste
Management &
Laundering



Back to contents

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Review of key MHM concepts
- 3 Consultation
- 4 Female-friendly toilets
- 5 **Menstrual materials disposal**
- 6 Menstrual materials waste management
- 7 Washing, drying & storage
- 8 Information, education & communication

Compendium on MHM Disposal, Waste Management & Laundering

Examples of Menstrual Disposal Strategies for Communal Toilet Facilities

Color-coded pedal operated waste bins in hospital toilets

Location

A hospital serving Rohingya refugees and the host community outside of Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

Organization

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) – Holland

Basic Information

Red waste bins were placed in latrines for women staying in the maternity ward of the hospital. The pedal operated waste bins allow women to dispose of used materials easily and hygienically. Waste bins are emptied by female cleaners and taken for final disposal. Basic education on proper disposal behaviors with the bins were provided in some stalls.

Benefits

Women feel more comfortable using waste bins with lids and also liked the pedal function so they did not have to touch the lid with their hands and risk exposure to germs. The bins were frequently emptied by cleaners throughout the day which promoted confidence by users.

Challenges

This option requires more frequent emptying of disposed materials and locations for intermediate storage until final disposal so may operate better in institutional settings.





Back to
contents

Introduction

Menstrual waste management is a fundamental component of solid waste management (SWM) when providing sanitation services in humanitarian response. The design of the SWM system, including whether it promotes privacy or aligns with the cultural values of users, strongly influences girls' and women's willingness to dispose of used menstrual products through the system (see Chapter 5). In some contexts, women and girls may need to know that their menstrual waste will remain hidden and not identifiable as it moves towards final disposal.

In some contexts, it may be helpful to treat menstrual waste as a separate category of waste; in other cases, it can be better to commingle it with the other types of waste in the community.

Where there are waste pickers and recyclers going through waste for recycling and recovery, keeping menstrual waste out of the general waste may be beneficial. Waste pickers may be reluctant to handle menstrual waste, and women and girls may be uncomfortable with their waste being picked through. Where public toilets are serviced by waste bins, the contents of these bins may be collected separately and taken directly to an incinerator, for example, rather than being mixed in with all the other waste from the facility.

Important Note: Separating out menstrual waste at a household level may lead to discomfort and should be done with caution.

Classification of Menstrual Waste

Every country and context may have different classification systems for menstrual waste. This includes whether to categorize menstrual waste as either: 1) a general solid waste product or 2) a medical waste product. **If such classifications have not been specifically determined by government or camp authorities, it is recommended that this waste should generally fall into the solid waste category.** Waste classification can have implications on how menstrual waste can be disposed of, transported, contained and eventually treated.

Key considerations for a menstrual waste management system include:

- The SWM system should account for different types of menstrual materials, recognizing that each type has direct implications for the system. The menstrual waste type can impact the frequency of waste removal, desludging requirements and the method for final disposal.
- Not all girls and women in a community will have the same preferences around disposal and/or waste management. For example, some may prefer to burn their used menstrual materials privately while others may prefer to bury them outside. Consultation is essential!
- Cleaners' adherence to routine schedules for menstrual waste removal can strongly impact girls' and women's confidence in the disposal system, in addition to influencing general perceptions of environmental cleanliness and the acceptability of the toilet facilities.

Staff and Training Requirements

Cleaning and waste management staff may be apprehensive about handling menstrual waste due to existing taboos or discomfort around menstruation. Thus, it is important to consult staff about any hesitations they may have so that any worries or beliefs can be incorporated into training activities.

Other key considerations include:

- **Toilet cleaners and waste handlers need to be suitably equipped with protective clothing and containers.** This includes proper gloves, footwear, transport containers/bags and cleaning supplies to minimize exposure and promote confidence while completing cleaning duties.
- **In many cases, it may not be appropriate for male cleaners to be involved in collecting this waste** as it can induce discomfort by female users that men may come into contact with their menstrual waste. Male cleaners may also indicate a lack of willingness to handle such waste.
- **Cleaning staff's attitudes towards menstrual waste can impact girls' and women's comfort and willingness to utilize a disposal option.** For example, perceptions of negative judgement or discomfort by cleaners can hinder girls and women from using disposal bins that are provided.

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Review of key MHM concepts
- 3 Consultation
- 4 Female-friendly toilets
- 5 Menstrual materials disposal
- 6 **Menstrual materials waste management**
- 7 Washing, drying & storage
- 8 Information, education & communication

Compendium
on MHM
Disposal, Waste
Management &
Laundering



Back to contents

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Review of key MHM concepts
- 3 Consultation
- 4 Female-friendly toilets
- 5 Menstrual materials disposal
- 6 Menstrual materials waste management**
- 7 Washing, drying & storage
- 8 Information, education & communication

Methods for Final Disposal

One of the following methods is generally used for dealing with end-line menstrual waste disposal, often at either the individual or community (camp) level.⁵ The method can be based on the material selection available, facility design/location and cultural practices.

Consultation with Girls and Women

Girls' and women's beliefs and anxieties around menstrual waste should be determined prior to deciding how menstrual waste will be included in the SWM. Consultation can identify how menstrual waste was managed at the household and community levels both prior to and during displacement. As girls and women may be using a new type of menstrual material than before displacement, their disposal approaches may also have changed.

Method	Practice	Considerations
Informal Burning (household-level) 	In many contexts, it is common to burn household waste on a routine basis, a practice that may have also been used prior to displacement. In such events, menstrual waste is often combined with other household waste items. This uncontained burning may take place directly outside households or settlements.	Burning is usually more challenging in camp contexts given space limitations and safety regulations about household-level fires. Burning, especially of plastics often found in disposable and reusable materials, can emit unhealthy fumes to the nearby community.
Collective Burning (community-level) 	At the community level, household waste is collectively burned at specific burning sites. This can include incinerators, metal containers/drums or open waste pits. Burning or incineration is often operated by community members, cleaners or volunteers. See next page for more on formal incineration.	The primary reason for burning household waste is volume reduction, which is generally in excess of 90%. It can also reduce smell from rotting organics, reduce methane production, and (in the right circumstances) sterilize infectious waste. It is generally easier to ensure safety measures are in place at formal incineration sites in camps or community settings. This includes ensuring that specific community members, cleaners or volunteers are trained on proper usage. Menstrual waste often contains polymer liners, which when burned at lower temperatures can release dioxins and furans, as well as smoke and particulates. It is important therefore to select a location where smoke does not blow across settlements.
Disposal in burial pits or landfills 	Dedicated waste disposal sites, such as landfills or waste pits are also commonly used. These disposal sites may be filled through direct household drop offs of waste or through collection at communal waste collection bins. For the latter option, waste collectors or volunteers are generally responsible for transporting this waste from the communal waste bins to the designated pits.	If pits are too close to settlements, people may not want to put menstrual waste in them for fear of others seeing it. They may also worry about animals or other people getting access to unburied waste in landfills.

Incinerators for Final Disposal

There is growing interest in using incinerator technologies for the final disposal of menstrual waste. This includes a range of different models or strategies. The appropriateness of different incineration approaches, however, has not been widely explored for usage in humanitarian emergencies.



Back to contents



1 Introduction



2 Review of key MHM concepts



3 Consultation



4 Female-friendly toilets



5 Menstrual materials disposal



6 Menstrual materials waste management



7 Washing, drying & storage



8 Information, education & communication

Key considerations when introducing final disposal burning devices (burning chambers and incinerators)

1. What are the construction or installation requirements for introducing the new incinerator or burning chamber?
2. How do the new burning devices align with existing regulations in terms of emissions and handling safety?
3. What is the fuel source? Is it affordable and available? If electricity, is the supply reliable enough?
4. Will the burning devices be able to manage varied menstrual waste (disposable pads, reusable pads, cloth, etc.) and other waste that may be added?
5. Will menstrual waste need to be separated by type prior to using the burning device? If yes, how will that process be done?
6. Where will the incinerator or burning chamber be located? For example, have considerations for user discretion and the mitigation of human exposure to harmful emission been assessed?
7. Will users dispose of materials into the device themselves, or will an operator or cleaner load it from the waste receptacles?
8. How will the burning device operate over time and at what frequency? What are the training needs of staff or operators of the burning devices?

“ For some, it is not normal to dispose of your sanitary materials with burning. So when beneficiaries say, ‘we don’t burn because of this...,’ I think we need to respect them. ”

WASH Actor, Northwest Tanzania⁶

Compendium
on MHM
Disposal, Waste
Management &
Laundering



Back to contents

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Review of key MHM concepts
- 3 Consultation
- 4 Female-friendly toilets
- 5 Menstrual materials disposal
- 6 Menstrual materials waste management**
- 7 Washing, drying & storage
- 8 Information, education & communication

Below includes a summary of a few incinerator types commonly used in development contexts where most of the learning on incineration is happening:

Incinerator Type	Description	Benefits	Challenges
Low-cost, locally produced incinerators (burning chambers)	These low-cost options are created from a range of materials such as metal drums or containers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cheap to build; • Easy to install in a variety of institutions or venues; • Require minimal maintenance to operate; • Can use easy to acquire kindling for operation (paper, wood); • Fit design to space limitations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can emit toxic fumes when burning plastics; • Do not exceed 300 degrees and thus may not effectively burn or may require a long time to burn waste; • The ash produced may not be safe for gardening/re-purposing; • Lack of standard designs means they may not adhere to specific standards.
Electric incinerators	These are more expensive incinerator options that have emission controls and run on electricity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion of filters to reduce unhealthy emissions although types and quality of filter vary by model. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Require a trained waste handler for operation; • Are more expensive and require consistent electricity for operation; • Limited capacity and some models do not burn all types of pads.
High-temperature incinerators	Generally found in hospitals and institutional settings and can incinerate all types of menstrual products efficiently and quickly.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Careful regulation of temperature and pressure can control for emissions; • Can incinerate a range of menstrual product types. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Require a waste sorting system in place prior to usage; • Require a trained waste handler for operation; • Expensive and large in size.

“ Women were putting the pads down the latrines and it was clogging the pipes. They would take sticks to try and force the pads down and this was creating problems. ”
 WASH Engineer, Rakhine State, Myanmar⁷

Examples from the Field: Menstrual Waste Management Solutions at Communal Toilet Facilities



Back to contents

On-site incinerators located near Toilet Blocks

Location

Displacement camps in Rakhine State, Myanmar

Organization

Oxfam Myanmar and Solidarities International

Basic Information

WASH staff working in Rohingya camps indicated challenges with the clogging of toilets from discarded menstrual waste. In response, covered waste bins were introduced in female toilets to redirect this waste. Girls and women, however, were uncomfortable using the waste bins inside toilet stalls due to worries that others may view their waste. To create an effective solution, Oxfam and Solidarities International piloted a small incinerator box program. Through consultations with women, it was determined that the “MHM boxes” would be placed nearby female latrines to enable easy disposal. The design required women to dispose of disposable pads in an opening at the top of the box. The pads would then fall onto an internal metal rack where they could not be viewed from outside of the box. Paid female environmental workers were then responsible for operating the incinerators, which included lighting a small fire at the bottom of the box every 1-2 weeks. A few iterations of the MHM boxes were developed and tested during the pilot phase.

Benefits

The incinerator provides a conveniently located method for both intermediary and final disposal of menstrual pads. A routine system for waste removal (routine burnings) is in place to build users' confidence in the system. On-site incinerators simplify the menstrual waste management system, as the waste does not need to be transferred between sites.

Challenges

Women indicated that there were not a sufficient quantity of disposal bins and that many of the bins were located too far from their shelters. A lack of solar lighting near the boxes made them difficult to use at night. This was important as many women indicated to dislike being seen putting sanitary pads inside of the bins.

Additional Resources

1. Oxfam/SI Pilot Process and Findings Presentation



- 1 Introduction
- 2 Review of key MHM concepts
- 3 Consultation
- 4 Female-friendly toilets
- 5 Menstrual materials disposal
- 6 **Menstrual materials waste management**
- 7 Washing, drying & storage
- 8 Information, education & communication

Compendium on MHM Disposal, Waste Management & Laundering



Back to contents

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Review of key MHM concepts
- 3 Consultation
- 4 Female-friendly toilets
- 5 Menstrual materials disposal
- 6 Menstrual materials waste management**
- 7 Washing, drying & storage
- 8 Information, education & communication

Compendium on MHM Disposal, Waste Management & Laundering

36

Examples from the Field: Menstrual Waste Management Solutions at Communal Toilet Facilities

On-site incinerators located near Toilet Blocks

Location

Polonnaruwa District, Northwest Sri Lanka

Organization

The Sri Lanka Red Cross Society (SLRCS) with support from the IFRC Disaster Relief Emergency Fund

Basic Information

Upon visiting schools used as temporary shelters for flood-displaced populations in Northwest Sri Lanka, SLRCS learned that girls and women had been discarding menstrual waste in piles of garbage on the premises. Probing revealed that men were responsible for cleaning the toilets, and thus girls and women were not comfortable disposing of menstrual waste in the toilet trash bins. Although strong cultural menstrual taboos hindered exploring the issue, the SLRCS team conducted a series of FGDs with school actors (male and female teachers, school administrators) and parents. This led to the decision to provide on-site incinerators. The project team utilized a design developed by Solidarite International and Oxfam that had previously been piloted in IDP camps in Myanmar. After creating a draft sketch of the incinerator, SLRCS received approval from the school authorities and the local Medical Officer of Health and Public Health Inspector. Next, both men and women were consulted regarding the placement of the incinerators. Male volunteers also supported the construction process once the location was selected. It was decided that the incinerators would be placed near the female toilets behind a privacy wall to ensure confidentiality.

Benefits

The incinerators were developed from discarded barrels for the body, an exhaust pipe and a metal grill that separated the loading chamber and the burner. This model enabled the community to reuse existing materials available at the community level, and thus cost effective. The placement of the incinerator behind a privacy wall ensured improved privacy for girls and women. The incinerators were burnt twice a week to manage the routine waste collected.

Challenges

The incinerator design may generate harmful emissions when burning and should be conducted when girls or women are not nearby the facilities. Implementation research on how the incinerator operates over time is needed, including the process of emptying the trash bins into them.

Additional Resources

[Technical sketch of incinerator](#)



Examples from the Field: Menstrual Waste Management Solutions at Communal Toilet Facilities



Back to contents

Communal waste bins for integration into Solid Waste System

Location

Al Azraq Refugee Camp in Jordan

Organization

World Vision International

Basic Information

Communal waste bins were provided across camp grounds, including on each row of household caravans. Syrian girls and women generally dispose of their menstrual waste directly into plastic bags, along with toilet paper and tissues, and drop the bags either directly into the communal waste bins or add them to larger bags of household waste for later disposal. This waste was then transferred by paid sanitation workers to a Solid Waste Management site where waste sorters are responsible for sorting the waste into three streams: organic waste, recycling and refuse (with menstrual waste classified as the latter). All waste sorters were provided with proper protective clothing, including jackets, gloves and boots. Some basic community education was also provided to girls and women to promote the continuation or uptake of these menstrual waste disposal practices. Eventually the menstrual waste, along with all other refuse waste, was transferred to an offsite landfill⁸.

Benefits

Girls and women did not indicate major challenges with this disposal method, often citing how they had followed similar practices prior to displacement. Although some indicated that a waste bin inside the toilets would be preferred, the lack of gender segregation for many of the communal toilets made this option challenging. Despite waste collectors needing to sort through these items, the containment of menstrual waste inside plastic bags reduced handling requirements and enabled for a quick sorting process. Waste sorters also indicated that oftentimes, the texture of the items inside the plastic bags allowed them to assess the contents without opening the bags.

Challenges

Waste collectors will likely still have to handle some amounts of menstrual and other toilet related waste while sorting. This method also requires the use of additional plastics, which has a negative impact on the environment.



- 1 Introduction
- 2 Review of key MHM concepts
- 3 Consultation
- 4 Female-friendly toilets
- 5 Menstrual materials disposal
- 6 **Menstrual materials waste management**
- 7 Washing, drying & storage
- 8 Information, education & communication

Compendium
on MHM
Disposal, Waste
Management &
Laundering



Back to contents

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Review of key MHM concepts
- 3 Consultation
- 4 Female-friendly toilets
- 5 Menstrual materials disposal
- 6 Menstrual materials waste management**
- 7 Washing, drying & storage
- 8 Information, education & communication

Examples from the Field: Menstrual Waste Management Solutions at Communal Toilet Facilities

Color-coded buckets and bags to promote waste separation

Location

India

Organization

Meerut Cantt Board

Basic Information

A new menstrual disposal strategy was implemented at the household level by Meerut government members. As a result of being equipped with new pink dustbins and pink bags, women and girls are able to dispose of menstrual waste directly in the bins, which sanitation workers then collect along with the rest of the household waste. The new menstrual waste disposal system allows women to dispose of all menstrual waste in one bin, rather than having to decide if it should be disposed in the blue dry waste bin or the green wet waste bin. Not only does the implementation of color-coded buckets and bags allow women to more comfortably and easily dispose of waste, but it also protects sanitation workers from unnecessary exposure to unhygienic materials and aids in final disposal. (5)

Benefits

With this method, women and girls are able to dispose of menstrual materials with increased ease and comfort. Additionally, it allows the waste that is generated by the community to be more easily and efficiently sorted without exposing sanitation workers to unhygienic materials.

Challenges

Women may experience embarrassment using pink bins, as they signify that she is menstruating and, without proper education and sensitization, the color-coded bins may be used incorrectly. Bins may also be re-purposed for other household tasks beyond waste collection.

Additional Resources

1. [News article describing waste collection system](#)



“ Once a volunteer found four pads in the latrine. He accused me of tossing them there and reported me to the Mahji. I swore on the Quran that I did not do this! The volunteer then came to my house with the used pads in a bag and requested I bury the materials properly this time. I was so ashamed. ”
Rohingya Woman, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh⁹

7 Washing, Drying and Storage



Background

Reusable menstrual materials encompass a range of products designed for multiple wears over time, including items such as:

- reusable pads;
- pieces of cloth;
- underwear (period specific and regular);
- menstrual cups.

It is important to consult girls and women on the acceptability of reusable materials in a new context. In many places, girls and women may already have experience using pieces of cloth as a primary (or supplementary) menstrual material method. This can make the continuation of this practice easier, or ease the introduction of similar methods, like reusable pads.

The distribution of reusable menstrual materials—particularly reusable pads—is increasingly common in humanitarian responses, as influenced by a range of factors. These include:

- beneficiary preferences;
- sustainability and environmental concerns;
- the availability of higher quality reusable products;
- increased humanitarian sector awareness.

Reusable products require proper maintenance over time to ensure that they can be effectively used. This means humanitarian programming should include attention to supportive supplies, facilities for washing and drying, and basic information on best practices for ensuring optimal usage of the reusable material over time. Discreet and private facilities for bathing and the washing and drying of materials is critical. Such facilities may also prove useful to girls and women using disposable products, as they too require private spaces for changing materials, cleaning themselves and laundering underwear or other garments with blood stains.

Water & Soap = Essential!

- All reusable options are dependent on reliable access to water and soap;
- If girls and women lack the soap and water needed to wash a reusable material, they may feel they have no choice but to throw it away;
- Consider the provision of mixed materials (reusables & disposables) for contexts experiencing episodes of drought/water shortages.

Overview of Requirements

When supporting girls and women with the washing, drying and storage of menstrual materials, it is important to be aware of what each maintenance task entails, which supplies may be needed, where each task will occur, and what type of information would be useful. A breakdown of these requirements for various menstrual products can be found on the next page.



Back to contents



1 Introduction



2 Review of key MHM concepts



3 Consultation



4 Female-friendly toilets



5 Menstrual materials disposal



6 Menstrual materials waste management



7 Washing, drying & storage



8 Information, education & communication

“ We suffer in rainy season because it is not easy to dry them and so when you have a heavy flow you might run out and have to do something else. ”

Nigerian IDP Woman, Maiduguri, Nigeria¹⁰



Back to contents

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Review of key MHM concepts
- 3 Consultation
- 4 Female-friendly toilets
- 5 Menstrual materials disposal
- 6 Menstrual materials waste management
- 7 Washing, drying & storage**
- 8 Information, education & communication

Considerations for Washing, Drying & Storage of Reusable Menstrual Pads or Cloth

	Washing	Drying	Storage
Supplies 	<p>A bucket and a regular supply of sufficient soap (preferably laundry soap/detergent or a suitable soap for removing stains) supports proper washing. Many girls and women may not want to use the bucket used for washing menstrual material for other household tasks and washing. Reliable access to water is essential.</p>	<p>Although it is ideal to dry menstrual materials in the sun, privacy concerns may not make this option viable. A drying line, pins and a piece of cloth for covering or hiding the material can allow women to select where they feel most comfortable drying intimate items (e.g. pads, underwear).</p>	<p>A secure storage bag/container can reduce the likelihood for leaks or the emission of odors. It can also reduce the potential for mold or insects infesting the materials when stored between monthly periods.</p>
Facilities 	<p>As shelters are often crowded, washrooms or laundry facilities should be available for cleaning tasks. These facilities should be conveniently located to water, enable privacy, even from other females and have a covered drain so blood cannot be detected.</p>	<p>Whenever possible and if culturally acceptable, provide semi-private areas for drying intimate items like pads and underwear in female-only laundry or bathing spaces. In the absence of semi-private spaces available for drying, useful supplies, such as pieces of cloth to cover items that are drying at home can support drying efforts.</p>	
Information 	<p>Provide demonstrations and/or information pamphlets when new products are introduced so that girls and women know how long to wear them before washing and how to properly wash the material (e.g. soaking pads).</p>	<p>Provide tips and practical ideas on how to discreetly and more quickly dry reusable items (taking into account the context and product type).</p>	<p>Provide basic information on how to store 1) menstrual materials in between washes and 2) menstrual materials in between monthly periods in order to promote confidence and continued usage of materials.</p>

Practical advice for washing reusable materials and reducing odors

1. The type of soap matters; some soaps or detergents may be more effective than others in removing odors and stains. Consult girls and women to determine which soaps or detergents work best to promote confidence in reusable material usage when developing hygiene kits.
2. Soaking reusable menstrual materials in normal temperature water can help loosen dried blood from the fabric and make the washing process easier. Soaking can reduce the overall amount of water necessary for cleaning to reduce the amount of time required for scrubbing out blood stains.
3. Provide leak proof bags that seal when distributing reusable materials. These bags, for example, can mitigate a schoolgirl's anxiety that someone may smell a used pad or cloth sitting in her school bag while in class.
4. Vinegar added to water when washing can help reduce odors in menstrual pads, cups or cloths. Consider distributing vinegar periodically (with instructions on proper usage).

Menstrual Cups

Despite growing interest in the use of menstrual cups in emergencies, there remains little empirical evidence regarding their acceptability or feasibility in humanitarian contexts.¹¹ A few camp based pilots and small-scale programs in development contexts have provided initial learning, including factors that increase acceptability and additional resources girls and woman may need for successful usage.^{12, 13, 14}

A few key things to consider:

- **Menstrual cups may not be an appropriate method in contexts where water scarcity makes it hard to properly wash and sanitize them before reinsertion.**
- General guidance for cleaning a menstrual cup involves boiling water and sanitizing the cup. A lack of a private cooking area may pose challenges for doing this discreetly.

- Girls and women may need an additional pot for conducting the sanitization tasks as they may not be comfortable using the same cookware that they use for household cooking.
- Prior to considering menstrual cups, determine if beneficiary cultural norms include the acceptability of the insertion of materials into their bodies. This may be a particular concern among adolescent or unmarried females.
- Education, training and peer support is needed to quell girls' and women's concerns regarding menstrual cup use.¹¹

Considerations for washing, drying and storage of a menstrual cup

	Washing	Drying	Storage
Supplies 	<p>Women and girls require an adequate and conveniently located supply of water so they can rinse used menstrual cups before reinsertion. Sufficient soap must be available so that women can wash their hands prior to removing or inserting their menstrual cup. Girls and women require a designated pot and a private space to boil water and sanitize used menstrual cups prior to storage between periods.</p>	<p>A separate cloth or mesh bag should be supplied to women to aid in the drying of menstrual cups.</p>	<p>For monthly storage, dark bags that are made from a breathable material such as mesh should be provided so girls and women can store menstrual cups in a discreet and hygienic way until their next period.</p>
Facilities 	<p>Women and girls prefer to have their own space when cleaning intimate items, such as menstrual cups, as they often experience embarrassment washing in front of others. Washing of menstrual cups requires that women and girls have access to private and appropriate facilities where water can be boiled, such as a kitchen or cooking area.</p>	<p>Similar to the facilities required for washing, women and girls also require adequate facilities for drying. Menstrual cups should be dried in an area with adequate privacy and air flow.</p>	
Information 	<p>Provide basic information on how to use menstrual cups, including how long they should be worn to prevent infection or other conditions, how to insert and remove and demonstrations on how to properly wash cups.</p>	<p>Provide basic information on how best to dry menstrual cups, including tips to make the process more discreet and hygienic.</p>	<p>Provide basic information on how to store menstrual cups between periods to promote confidence by users and prevent cups from being exposed to germs and bacteria.</p>



Back to contents

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Review of key MHM concepts
- 3 Consultation
- 4 Female-friendly toilets
- 5 Menstrual materials disposal
- 6 Menstrual materials waste management
- 7 **Washing, drying & storage**
- 8 Information, education & communication



Back to contents

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Review of key MHM concepts
- 3 Consultation
- 4 Female-friendly toilets
- 5 Menstrual materials disposal
- 6 Menstrual materials waste management
- 7 **Washing, drying & storage**
- 8 Information, education & communication

Supplies for Cleaning Reusable Products

As previously noted, girls and women require supportive items to ensure they are able to clean reusable menstrual materials properly. The following items should be considered when designing a hygiene kit or routine distributions:

1. Bucket

Girls and women often prefer a designated bucket solely for washing menstrual materials due to discomfort and societal taboos around using the same bucket that is utilized for other household washing and water fetching tasks.

2. Soap and/or laundry detergent

Girls and women need consistent access to hand soap and/or laundry detergent to be able to effectively clean menstrual materials and themselves every month. Soap for hand washing is especially important for girls and women inserting menstrual cups.

3. Clothesline and clothespins

Girls and women need to be able to dry reusable cloth and pads in between wears. Provide household clothesline and clothespins to enable girls and women to dry these materials in a location that is convenient and private.

4. A piece of cloth to cover drying materials

In many locations, girls and women prefer to put pieces of clothing or cloth on top of menstrual materials that are drying so that others cannot view these items. A thin, dark piece of cloth can ensure such privacy.

5. A leak proof bag

Girls and women need to be able to store their reusable menstrual materials between daily changes (before they have had a chance to clean the material) and monthly period cycles. Storage bags for menstrual products should promote discretion, prevent leaks and odors and protect the material from mold and insects.

6. A pot or container for disinfecting (menstrual cups only)

As the routine boiling of water for disinfecting is a key component for menstrual cup care, girls and women may need a designated pot for this task. Some girls and women may not be comfortable, or societal taboos may prohibit, using the same pot as is used for household activities.

7. Information

Girls and women need instructions on how to use the various supplies provided to ensure for their proper care and usage over time. This may include both demonstrations and illustrated information cards.



“ It is not ideal to use the pit where you defecate to also wash your pads...it has a bad smell. ”
Adolescent IDP girl, Borno State, Nigeria¹⁰

Facilities for Washing and Drying Reusable Materials

While the supplies and information needed to support washing, drying and storage of menstrual materials vary by type of material, the types of facilities needed are fairly consistent. Determining an appropriate location for washing and drying reusable materials is influenced by the design of the camp or shelters, space limitations, the environment, the location of water access points, the availability of supportive laundering supplies and girls' and women's personal preferences.

For example, some girls and women may prefer to use bathing facilities and showers for performing these tasks, while others may prefer to use designated laundering facilities or even the toilets.

Careful consultation with girls and women is essential for determining the right approach for laundering menstrual materials in each context.



Bathing Facilities

Many girls and women prefer to wash menstrual materials while bathing given the convenience, privacy and the availability of water and/or drains for bloody laundering water. Most girls and women prefer to manage their general bathing and menstrual washing needs in a household bathing space; however, such options are often not feasible, especially during the acute phase.

A few specific design considerations can improve bathing facilities and address these needs. As noted in the [female friendly toilet chapter](#), in some contexts girls and women may prefer bathing spaces to be combined with toilets or laundry areas for increased privacy. Consult with girls and women to identify these preferences.

Design measures for communal washing facilities should include:

- Gender segregation
- Convenient water source
- Locks and appropriate building materials to ensure safety and privacy (no gaps or holes)
- Covered drainage to hide bloody water
- Disposal options (for girls and women who change menstrual materials while bathing)
- A platform for sitting (especially useful for pregnant or elderly women)

Laundry Facilities

Many girls and women prefer to clean their menstrual materials while washing other household laundry, their underwear and other personal items. Laundering spaces may be preferred locations for these tasks because of conveniently located water taps, drainage for dirty water, and the availability of clotheslines for immediate drying. Key considerations when designing laundering facilities:

- Designated laundering facilities may ensure girls and women have improved privacy, especially when washing intimate items like underwear or menstrual pads.
- Laundry spaces may also be places where girls and women go to socialize and connect with their peers, particularly in contexts where girls' and women's movement is restricted.
- Beneficiaries may prefer facilities with combination spaces that allow for both socializing and privacy; this could be a few stalls for washing private items and a larger area for socializing and communal washing.
- Providing a screen or wall around the entire laundering space enhances girls' and women's comfort with both washing and drying of intimate items.

A basic laundry facility should include:

conveniently located water, discreet drainage, a few privacy stalls, platforms for sitting during washing, drying lines and a screen around the entire area.



Back to contents

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Review of key MHM concepts
- 3 Consultation
- 4 Female-friendly toilets
- 5 Menstrual materials disposal
- 6 Menstrual materials waste management
- 7 Washing, drying & storage**
- 8 Information, education & communication

“ I am not comfortable drying [at home] at all because I fear someone might come and see the pads.” ”

Congolese Refugee Girl, Northwest Tanzania⁶

MENSTRUAL WASHING, DRYING & STORAGE NEEDS OF DISPLACED GIRLS AND WOMEN



SHORT-TERM STORAGE	WASHING	DRYING	MONTHLY STORAGE
<p>SUPPLIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A secure, dark-colored or opaque bag that prevents leaks or odors to store used materials until they can be washed 	<p>SUPPLIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soap and/or laundry detergent • A designated bucket for menstrual-related washing 	<p>SUPPLIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drying line and clothespins • Cloth for covering the menstrual material when drying to promote privacy 	<p>SUPPLIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A secure, dark-colored or opaque bag to store materials in between periods to prevent mold, dirt or insect infestation
	<p>FACILITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water in or nearby the washing location • Enables privacy (including from other girls & women) • Covered drain so bloody water is not visible 	<p>FACILITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Female-only laundry or bathing spaces should provide a semi-private drying area (when possible) 	
<p>INFORMATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to securely and discreetly change and store used menstrual materials to promote confidence throughout the day 	<p>INFORMATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to properly wash used menstrual materials and how long they should wear the product before washing 	<p>INFORMATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to discreetly and quickly dry the menstrual materials after washing 	<p>INFORMATION</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to securely, hygienically and discreetly store menstrual materials inside their homes

Examples from the Field: Laundry Spaces

Integrating an MHM friendly laundry space inside a protection center

Location

Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

Organization

CARE Bangladesh

Basic Information

Girls and women were consulted and found to lack a private space for washing laundry, especially sensitive items like menstrual cloths and underwear. A laundry bar and private drying space was integrated into an existing women's protection center. This enabled women to wash their laundry while at the women's protection center; a space already considered to be private and safe. The laundry bar included a series of open laundry stalls lined up in a row, each with a small platform for sitting; a design which enabled women to socialize during their washing. To provide girls and women with some additional privacy when washing more sensitive items a shower curtain divider was placed between

each stall. This allowed girls and women the autonomy to select when they did or did not want extra privacy. A series of drying lines were provided in discreet areas of the compound for the drying of menstrual cloths and underwear.

Benefits

Integrating the laundry facility into a location that was already considered to be safe and private by girls and women (the protection center) may enhance user confidence. The protection center already had a protective privacy wall around the facility and was considered to be a female-only space. Girls and women could use the laundry facility and then allow their clothing, including menstrual cloth, to dry while participating in center programming. Lastly, girls and women going to the space to report instances of GBV may be able to use the excuse of laundry as an explanation for visiting the protection center.

Challenges

Finding sufficient space to incorporate a laundry area into an existing protection center may prove challenging, especially in space-limited contexts. This integrated approach also results in the laundering space to be available for use only when the Protection space is open, which may not always be convenient for girls and women. The upkeep and maintenance of the laundry facility will require additional support by the protection team operating the center and may require close collaboration between WASH and Protection actors.

Additional Resources

1. [Gender Operational Review Report \(Women's Refugee Commission, Pg 15\)](#)
2. [MHM Laundry Bar Floor Plan, Rohingya Refugee Camp 15 \(Purdie, R., Fischer, K\)](#)
3. [CARE MHM in the Rohingya Camps Video Summary](#)



Back to contents

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Review of key MHM concepts
- 3 Consultation
- 4 Female-friendly toilets
- 5 Menstrual materials disposal
- 6 Menstrual materials waste management
- 7 **Washing, drying & storage**
- 8 Information, education & communication

Compendium on MHM Disposal, Waste Management & Laundering



Back to contents

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Review of key MHM concepts
- 3 Consultation
- 4 Female-friendly toilets
- 5 Menstrual materials disposal
- 6 Menstrual materials waste management
- 7 Washing, drying & storage**
- 8 Information, education & communication

Compendium on MHM Disposal, Waste Management & Laundering

Examples from the Field: Laundry Spaces

Integrating a private laundry space in a female friendly WASH unit

Location

Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

Organization

Oxfam with support from UNICEF and UNHCR

Basic Information

Combined toilet, bathing and laundry facilities were constructed for girls and women in Cox's Bazar. These female friendly WASH units were developed to allow girls and women discreet places for conducting all their sanitation and hygiene needs. These spaces allowed girls and women to wash their menstrual materials and laundry in two places: 1) inside the bathing room, which included a drying line, drain and a cement block for sitting; or 2) in an outdoor laundry area, which included drying lines, drains and a rainwater harvesting system. The draining system led to a soak pit directly outside the facility. The entire WASH unit had a wall around it to ensure privacy while conducting these activities.

Benefits

Girls and women liked that others in the community would not know the specific reason they were using the space given its multiple functions. The layout of the space also enabled girls and women to select their own preferences on where they wanted to wash and dry sensitive items like underwear or menstrual materials.

Challenges

Given the communal layout of the facility, girls and women may still worry about other females seeing them while they wash and dry intimate items. They may also worry about leaving items to dry in the WASH unit as there is the potential for theft.



Household washroom spaces

In some emergencies, the provision of shower construction kits or basic supplies to support the construction of home-based bathing spaces can ensure that it is easier for girls and women to conduct menstrual hygiene practices safely and comfortably. These spaces can be used for a range of activities including 1) bathing, 2) washing/drying of family and personal laundry and menstrual materials and 3) a safe and private location for changing menstrual materials, especially during nighttime. Regulation of these spaces, however, may be challenging. Poor drainage systems can result in standing grey water outside of household shelters, and the misuse of the space as an emergency toilet can create unhygienic conditions within household shelters. Close collaboration between WASH and Shelter actors is recommended.



Examples from the Field: Household-level washrooms

“Do it yourself” (DIY) Shower Construction Kits

Location

Cox’s Bazar, Bangladesh

Organization

Oxfam with support from UNHCR

Basic Information

During the acute phase of the emergency, families began using the corner of their households to bathe. As girls and women often prefer to bathe in the privacy of their homes rather than in communal facilities, camp staff recognized the need for a modified approach. Thus, in response to these makeshift bathing cubicles that were popping up, WASH actors began distributing basic shower kits for the construction of home-based showers. Shower kits in the CXB context include tarpaulin, bamboo and wire to construct the shower as an extension of the home. Do It Yourself (DIY) shower kits were provided to households for community construction. The showers (or

bathing spaces attached to shelters) were rapidly constructed in a short period of time and were positively received by beneficiaries.

Benefits

Home-based DIY shower kits allow women and girls to bathe in privacy, which ensures their safety. Furthermore, they allow women and girls the space to change their menstrual materials during the night without having to leave their shelters.

Challenges

Home-based DIY shower kits require installation and construction by beneficiaries. They require maintenance over time and cleaning supplies to ensure they are properly maintained. In some cases, it was found that these spaces were being used as emergency toilets, especially during the night, which can pose hygiene risks. The shower kits are also associated with health risks due to improper drainage and standing grey water.

**OXFAM Humanitarian Response
for REFUGEES in COX’S BAZAR, Bangladesh**


OXFAM

**SHOWER KIT
Distribution**
Kutupalong Refugee Camp
Kit Content


UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency


Booark Bamboo 8’ 1 piece


**Tarpaulin
(2mx10m)
1 set of 10m**


**GI Wire #18
1 kg**


Mulli Bamboo 4 pieces



Back to contents

- 1  Introduction
- 2  Review of key MHM concepts
- 3  Consultation
- 4  Female-friendly toilets
- 5  Menstrual materials disposal
- 6  Menstrual materials waste management
- 7  **Washing, drying & storage**
- 8  Information, education & communication

Compendium on MHM Disposal, Waste Management & Laundering



Back to contents

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Review of key MHM concepts
- 3 Consultation
- 4 Female-friendly toilets
- 5 Menstrual materials disposal
- 6 Menstrual materials waste management
- 7 **Washing, drying & storage**
- 8 Information, education & communication

Compendium on MHM Disposal, Waste Management & Laundering

Examples from the Field: Laundry Spaces

Integrating a private laundry space in a female friendly WASH unit

Location

Borno State, Nigeria

Organization

IRC

Basic Information

Women and girls in IDP camps in Borno State were primarily using reusable materials for menstruation – a few have reusable pads, but most use cloth. Living conditions are crowded, with little privacy, so it was a challenge to wash and dry materials out of sight of the public, and of men. In a series of FGDs, women and girls requested a multi-purpose communal WASH space, with toilets, shower rooms, laundry and drying lines all within an enclosed fence. This enabled women to move in and out without outsiders knowing the purpose of the visit, and materials could be washed and dried out of sight of men.

Once constructed, though, women and girls did not use the screened drying lines for any purpose, not even for ordinary garments. Follow up discussions found that the screens hindered them from keeping an eye on their personal laundry and deterring theft and lines hung closer to home were preferred. In fact, when a storm blew down the privacy screen for one WASH facility, there was an increased uptake of the lines, at least for general laundry. The WASH team ultimately moved the drying lines outside the screens. They also began supplying household drying kits, so women and girls could hang lines at home for menstrual materials and underwear; the kits included pieces of cloth to cover sensitive garments.

Discussion

The engagement with women and girls before the construction of the multi-use WASH spaces was extensive, and conducted by experienced, female WASH practitioners. At that time, women and girls were confident in their preferences. It was only when they tried out the new infrastructure that they realized the challenges.

Utilizing other engagement approaches, such as scenario mapping, might have injected other perspectives and thoughts into the discussion. However, people do not always know what their experience of a new thing will be, including challenges they will find. The program learned that it needed to adapt quickly, and iterate to arrive at solutions that worked for women and girls in the camps.



Screened drying area as part of a multi-purpose WASH space



Demonstration of menstrual materials being dried on lines close to home, under a 'wrapper' cloth.



Back to contents

Introduction

Effective MHM programming on menstrual materials laundering, disposal and waste management depends on having clear and sustained information, education & communication (IEC) targeting girls and women. Newly displaced girls and women may not be familiar with the materials and facilities being provided in a given emergency context, or how to properly use them for their MHM needs in unfamiliar and constrained settings. The provision of clear information on how best to use MHM resources and facilities can greatly improve girls' and women's utilization and confidence in MHM programming. In addition, guidance can assure more sustained and effective programming, such as preventing blockage of toilets when materials are disposed of improperly, or the polluting of the local environment with menstrual waste.



A few key considerations when developing IEC materials for menstrual disposal, waste management and laundering include:

1. Menstrual disposal

Girls and women need information on how to dispose of used menstrual waste when provided with new and sometimes unfamiliar menstrual materials. This includes how to properly dispose of both disposable and reusable materials (over time).

2. Menstrual waste management

Girls and women need to know how a menstrual disposal system will operate over time, including the frequency for cleaning/waste removal, who will be conducting those duties, and if their privacy will remain intact. They also need to be aware of the planned final disposal method to be used. This information is critical for generating buy-in and utilization of menstrual disposal systems.

3. Washing, drying & storage

Reusable menstrual pads or cups may be unfamiliar to girls and women. Girls and women need instructions on how to maintain these materials properly and hygienically. Building their confidence around maintaining these materials, including how to reduce stains and odors, is likely to enhance utilization and reduce their anxiety.

Menstrual Materials and Behavior Change

In some contexts, girls and women may be expected to change longstanding MHM behaviors, a very private and personal issue. For example, if a woman has been burying her menstrual materials prior to displacement for the past fifteen years, asking her to change this practice may make her very uncomfortable or create feelings of shame. Similarly, if a woman has been using cloth to date, she may not know how to use a disposable pad; the reverse is also true.

Consultation with girls and women about their menstrual practices prior to displacement is essential. This can help practitioners to determine how:

1. to propose modifications to longstanding practices
2. to create compelling educational materials that convey why a new context requires modifying prior MHM practices

Engaging with female volunteers from the beneficiary community may be very helpful in understanding girls' and women's preferred practices, potential resistance to change and messaging that might be effective. Directly involving these volunteers in educational efforts with girls and women can also be effective.



1 Introduction



2 Review of key MHM concepts



3 Consultation



4 Female-friendly toilets



5 Menstrual materials disposal



6 Menstrual materials waste management



7 Washing, drying & storage



8 Information, education & communication

Compendium on MHM Disposal, Waste Management & Laundering



Back to contents

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Review of key MHM concepts
- 3 Consultation
- 4 Female-friendly toilets
- 5 Menstrual materials disposal
- 6 Menstrual materials waste management
- 7 Washing, drying & storage
- 8 Information, education & communication

Girls and women may be adapting to new materials; understanding their past and preferred approaches to laundering and disposal is essential for uptake and use of new approaches.

Barrier and Motivator analysis is important in messaging

IEC materials are important tools for promoting MHM behaviors, if the behaviors make sense to the women and girls in the community, and are feasible and convenient to practice. Some examples can be found of IEC materials which tell women and girls what not to do, but don't provide adequate alternatives. If 'correct disposal' involves a walk to a distant disposal facility, as opposed to dropping the material into a toilet within arm's reach, then IEC messaging is unlikely to be effective.

IEC messaging cannot mitigate for poorly thought out or culturally inappropriate facilities. If there are significant barriers to uptake of a desired practice, then people will not follow the guidance provided.

Engaging with girls and women in an iterative design process

When developing IEC materials on sensitive topics like menstruation or disposal, it is important to ensure that the messaging is culturally appropriate and will be effective in reaching the target users.

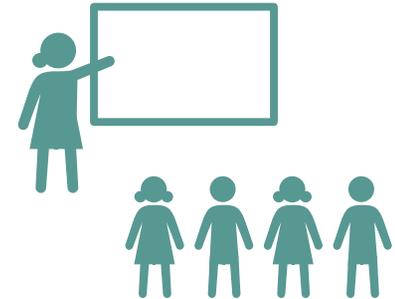
A few important things to consider, including illustrative questions to explore:

- **Ensure messaging is appropriate for a range of education and ability levels.**
 - What is the average literacy level of the different age groups of menstruating girls and women?
 - What visuals or pictorials are commonly used in the population?
- **Field testing IEC materials with a diverse range of girls and women can ensure that IEC materials are easily comprehended; modifications can be made prior to finalization. This can be done in small focus groups or in one-to-one sessions.**
 - What are the ethnic backgrounds of the people in the camps, and does messaging need to be modified for each?
 - Are there sensitivities around depicting blood on materials?

- **Including visual depictions of key messaging with text-based materials can accommodate those who are illiterate or unfamiliar with the content or vocabulary being used.**

- Are only visuals preferable for comprehension? Or a combination of text and visuals?
- Are photographs or drawings more acceptable to girls and women?

To design effective IEC materials, it is essential to engage with girls and women from initial inputs through to monitoring to assure final versions lead to desired MHM laundering or disposal practices.



“ They [Rohingya IDPs] were never taught at first how to use the pads or how to dispose of them... when they first got the pads, they just thought they were tissues. ”
Protection Staff, Rakhine State, Myanmar⁷

Demonstrations or Community Education Techniques

IEC materials are important tools for promoting MHM behaviors for improved laundering, disposal and waste management, and should be accompanied with demonstrations. Demonstrations on improved or recommended practices for handling menstrual materials in a given emergency are important for reinforcing learning, and may serve to break down some of the taboos and sensitivities around menstruation. This can be especially useful when discussing how to wear or maintain a new menstrual material, as the product type and washing methods may be unfamiliar for many girls and women. Such educational sessions and demonstrations should take place in private, all-female settings to enhance the comfort of girls and women.



Signage to promote or “nudge” users towards adopting new practices

The use of “nudges” has shown to be an effective tool for improving healthy practices, such as hand washing. Similarly, simple signage inside toilet stalls and facilities can help:

1. to promote hygienic MHM practices
2. to improve sustained usage of menstrual materials
3. to improve the lifespan of WASH facilities

Location is key! Placing signs directly inside toilets can serve as a regular reminder about the recommended way to dispose of menstrual waste. In addition, nudges should be complemented by broader community education efforts that explain to girls and women how the disposal and waste management systems operate.

If girls and women do not know how menstrual waste will be discreetly handled over time, they may not trust the new system to operate in a way that ensures their confidence and privacy.

IEC should be inclusive to the needs of vulnerable populations

Vulnerable populations, which includes girls and women that are very poor, unaccompanied, orphaned, from indigenous or minority groups, or those with physical or developmental disabilities should be considered when developing IEC materials.

- IEC materials may need to be tailored to account for the developmental or educational levels of vulnerable girls and women.
- Different education formats may be useful to for the same messaging such as audio formats to support girls and women who are blind (loud speaker, radio) while a written format (pamphlets, flipcharts) or the use of simplified words and pictures may prove supportive for girls with intellectual disabilities.

It is also important to consider the education needs of caregivers as they may be responsible for supporting girls and women with their menstrual disposal and laundering needs. Trainings, community education and pamphlets may all prove useful to caregivers needing guidance on how best to support individuals in their care.

“I have seen that hole in the toilet [the disposal chute], but I do not know what it is used for?”

Rohingya Woman, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh³



Back to contents

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Review of key MHM concepts
- 3 Consultation
- 4 Female-friendly toilets
- 5 Menstrual materials disposal
- 6 Menstrual materials waste management
- 7 Washing, drying & storage
- 8 Information, education & communication

Compendium on MHM Disposal, Waste Management & Laundering



Back to contents

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Review of key MHM concepts
- 3 Consultation
- 4 Female-friendly toilets
- 5 Menstrual materials disposal
- 6 Menstrual materials waste management
- 7 Washing, drying & storage
- 8 Information, education & communication

Examples from the Field: IEC on menstrual disposal and laundering

Menstrual Disposal Signage inside toilets

Location

Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

Organization

Bangladesh Red Crescent Society with support from the Danish Red Cross

Basic Information

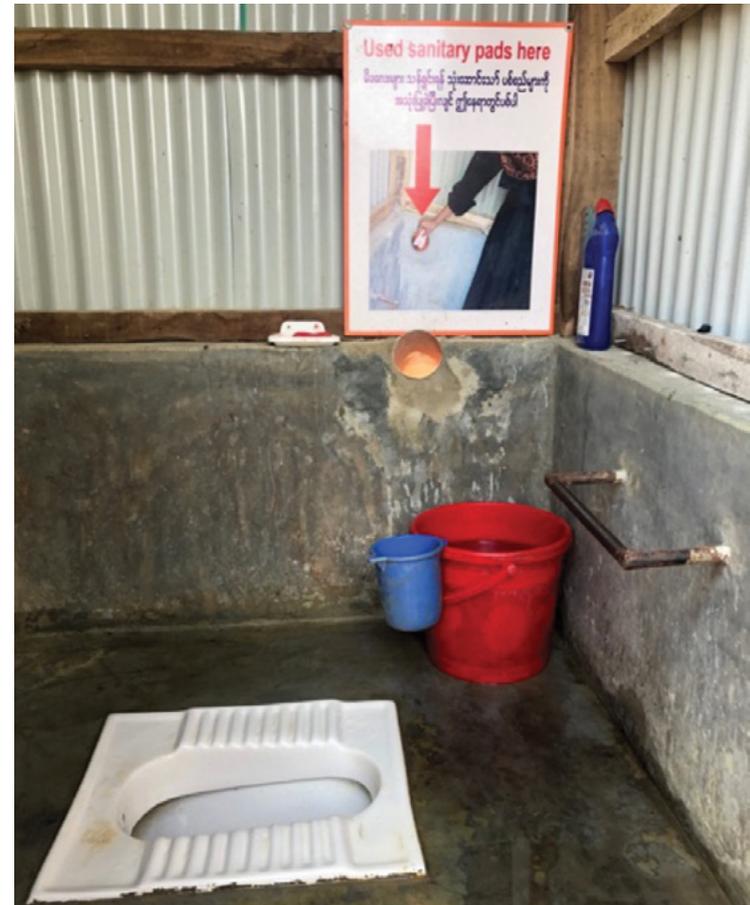
Clear signs explaining how to use the new disposal chutes were installed in female toilet stalls. The sign, written in English and Rohingya, also included a visual on the proper practices to ensure that all users, including those that may be illiterate, could understand the guidance being provided. In addition to these signs, a community education campaign was also initiated to ensure that girls and women understood the rationale for the new disposal and waste management system being introduced, including why it was important for them to shift away from burying or dropping materials directly into latrines.

Benefits

These simple and easy to produce signs help to remind or “nudge” girls and women to utilize the new disposal chute system. For users who may be illiterate, the visual may prove useful.

Challenges

The signs may be stolen or may deteriorate over time, thus requiring replacement. Some girls and women may be uncomfortable with the signs and overt displays about menstruation.



Examples from the Field: IEC on menstrual disposal and laundering

Menstrual Disposal Signage inside toilets

Location

Dhaka, Bangladesh

Organization

Water & Sanitation for the Urban Poor (WSUP) and icddr,b

Basic Information

In order to deter community members from putting down improper waste (including menstrual pads and diapers) into communal toilets in a slum in Dhaka, a new disposal system was introduced. This included the use of pedal operated waste bins with lids and a routine system for cleaning and emptying these bins. In order to encourage users to utilize this new hardware, community education was provided, which included educating girls and women on how to properly dispose of menstrual waste. In addition to the community education, signs and stickers indicating proper and improper disposal strategies were displayed inside the toilets. The signs were written in Bengali but also included a visual for users who may be illiterate.

Benefits

These simple and easy to produce signs were useful reminders to users on proper disposal strategies.

Challenges

These signs may make some users uncomfortable and may be taken down or peel off over time. The signs may need to be replaced over time.

Additional Resources

1. [An article by Yeasmin et al. 2018 describing intervention](#)



Back to contents



1 Introduction



2 Review of key MHM concepts



3 Consultation



4 Female-friendly toilets



5 Menstrual materials disposal



6 Menstrual materials waste management



7 Washing, drying & storage



8 Information, education & communication



Back to contents

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Review of key MHM concepts
- 3 Consultation
- 4 Female-friendly toilets
- 5 Menstrual materials disposal
- 6 Menstrual materials waste management
- 7 Washing, drying & storage
- 8 Information, education & communication

Examples from the Field: IEC on menstrual disposal and laundering

Educational Pamphlets on Menstrual Product Usage

Location

Rakhine State, Myanmar

Organization

Oxfam

Basic Information

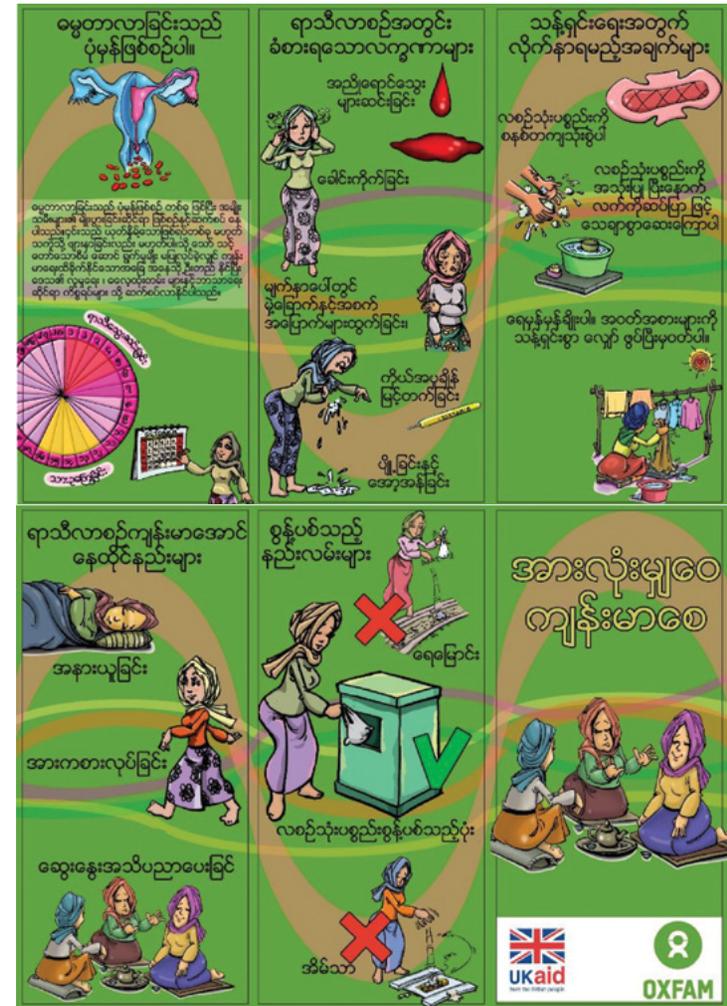
Basic information on how to properly dispose of menstrual materials and wash and dry reusable menstrual materials were developed for Rohingya women living in Rakhine State. This included attractive pamphlets which provided visual depictions on the basic tasks involved with disposal and laundering of reusables. The pamphlets were then included with distributions of menstrual materials and supplies to ensure girls and women knew how to properly use the items being provided.

Benefits

By providing printed pamphlets with visuals, girls and women could take the IEC materials home and show others in their household this information. Girls and women can also revisit the materials if they have questions later in time. By providing the materials in both text and visually, they are able to reach a broader audience, including individuals that may be illiterate.

Challenges

These graphics are specific to the context and thus require finding a local artist for development. Print-based resources will require sustained printing, which may have budgetary implications over time.



Additional Resources

Other IEC materials examples on menstrual disposal, waste management and laundering have been provided below:

1. [International Federation of the Red Cross MHM IEC Materials for disposable and reusable pads \(available in English, French, Arabic, Spanish and Portuguese\).](#)

2. [Myanmar Red Cross MHM Materials.](#)
3. [Ghana Education Service \(GES\), with support from UNICEF IEC materials on MHM, including flipcharts for adolescent girls and boys](#)

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Back to contents



1 Introduction



2 Review of key MHM concepts



3 Consultation



4 Female-friendly toilets



5 Menstrual materials disposal



6 Menstrual materials waste management



7 Washing, drying & storage



8 Information, education & communication

Compendium on MHM Disposal, Waste Management & Laundering

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