**MENSTRUAL HYGIENE MANAGEMENT**

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Background

The purpose of this document is to address the problem experienced by menstruating women especially adolescent girls by initiating the development of simple solutions, based on possible WASH gender approach. Indeed, in the current emergency situation, tackling the issues related to women menstruation needs to be foster by all the WASH actors having a direct or indirect concerns, WASH actors being responsible of Hygiene kit distribution (through the cluster HK strategy), the overall waste management, developing sanitation structure closely related to intimacy space notion (latrines, bathroom).

Several constraints and barriers exist among the women and adolescent girls in managing the menstruation safely and hygienically in the emergency living condition, as camp environment. Currently, a few WASH agencies is taking actions for these specific needs, and hence, a more comprehensive approach is still yet to develop while the WASH cluster need to emphasis more and more all WASH related gender sensitive issues.

Based on Wash cluster study review realized in October on gender[[1]](#footnote-1), the WASH cluster already modified the hygiene kit contents in order to support women on that purpose, including more especially underwear in addition to sanitary pad already included, and also defined more targeted sanitary protection materials in consideration of community habits (cloth rather than sanitary pad for some).

This document is an initial working document and further changes need to be made based on the regular review and inputs from the field situation.

Problems faced by menstruating women

There are practical, social, cultural and financial constraints faced by women and girls every month in the current emergency settings. Women and adolescent girls are struggling to cope with the problems they faced during the period of menstruation. The extent of these problems is compounded by the lack of proper information and education related to the biological facts and practical ways of managing blood flows, lack of regular access to the safe and affordable materials, lack of female friendly water and sanitation facilities. The difficulties faced are in some communities, due to cultural factors, not even addressable either toward their community or the external aid brought.

In addition, the activities of women and adolescent girls are commonly restricted during the menstruation. Among these restrictions, young girls may absent from school or temporary learning spaces and the school performance can be adversely affected.

Current trend in Menstrual Hygiene Management

Majority of the WASH agencies address the need of the menstrual hygiene management through the blanket distribution of hygiene kits (including the sanitary pads, women underwear) and general hygiene promotion activities (including focus group discussion). A few WASH agencies address the need specifically and distribute the separate kit for women. As a result, it creates confusion among the beneficiaries especially men and has been discussed about the need to merge the separate kit with the hygiene kit at the WASH Cluster level. However, the broader interventions are still required to response the specific need of women and girls comprehensively.

In addition, the diverse backgrounds of the women in the targeted population make the differences in the preference of the sanitary protection materials. Some women prefer to use the clothing materials whereas more educated women or women displaced from urban areas prefer the disposable materials. However, there is no detail assessment on how many percentages of women actually use the disposable materials (sanitary pads). *No generalization should be done as the number can vary from one place to another.*

Currently, women reported that there is lack of privacy for using or changing menstrual materials, inadequate waste disposal facilities and the unsupportive attitude of the men. All of these build up the barriers to women in order to practice or manage the blood flow hygienically and safely.

On the other hand, few interventions are in place to promote the knowledge and information on the specific needs related to the menstruation, while no specific IEC materials has been developed and employed.

Besides, most of the WASH facilities are not female-friendly, mainly in terms of privacy and equipment, and some school girls also report that there is no place for them to change or use the sanitary protection materials at schools or temporary learning spaces. Women reported that they are uncomfortable to use the WASH facilities where men and boys are around and find it difficult to dispose the used sanitary pads (usually wrapped with papers) and majority of women dispose the used sanitary pads into the latrine pits. As a consequence, this creates additional problem in desludging of the latrine and causes shorten lifespan of the latrine pits. Similarly, women who use the washable sanitary materials also find it difficult to dry the cleaned sanitary cloth.

Another important factor is the availability of the sanitary protection materials (sanitary pads). All women report that they get the sanitary materials through the distribution of hygiene kits and it is difficult to buy the materials in the market (only in Rakhine) and moreover, they cannot afford to buy them. Sometimes, they do not get the sanitary pads regularly and make them worry. In conclusion, it is important for all WASH actors to break the barriers and take further steps to understand the needs and practices related to the menstrual hygiene management.

Key interventions for effective menstrual hygiene management

The following interventions are recommended by WASH Cluster for the effective menstrual hygiene management in Rakhine. Increasing the access to the feasible sanitary protection materials can be defined as the most important intervention. Hence, it is important to ensure that the distribution of hygiene kits which include the items for women are occurring regularly. As this can be an issue where the access is difficult, an alternative option is to create the availability in the local market. In that case, the local market which is still occurring at a certain extent can be an option and the voucher system with local market can be considered as an alternative in such difficult situation. On the other hand, it is important to have the data on the number of women and adolescent girls per location so that WASH agencies can plan for the required quantity of materials.

The current WASH facilities are implemented in consultation with women to a certain extent. Structures such as door lock inside the latrines, latrine cleaning items were already included in the current latrine design. However, women reported that they feel uncomfortable using the latrine if they were seen by men and boys[[2]](#footnote-2). Therefore, to create more privacy, a high wall should be made in front of the latrines. Moreover, ***waste bins should be placed inside the latrines*** to ensure women have a proper way to dispose the used sanitary pads. WASH agencies should discuss with the women how to empty these waste bins when they become full. For example, creating roster for each household in each month.

Another important intervention is to develop and employ the IEC materials specific for the menstrual hygiene management. Hygiene Promotion activities should also emphasis on the importance of the menstrual hygiene management. Intervention like printed instructions on how to dispose in local language should also be undertaken to increase the awareness related to the disposal of used sanitary pads in order to minimize the impact on the lifespan of the latrine pits.

Finally, it is important for the community especially men and boys to understand the physiological process of the women and they should be sensitized about the menstrual hygiene management to reduce the unsupportive attitude towards women and adolescent girls.

Table 1. Key interventions for effective menstrual hygiene management

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| No. | Key interventions | Key activities |
| 1. | Increase the access to the feasible sanitary protection materials | * Provision of sanitary protection materials (washable or disposable) through hygiene kits * Create or increase market access * Collect date for the number of reproductive women in targeted population |
| 2. | Provision of female-friendly WASH facilities | * Consultation with women and girls (Focus group discussion) * Create spaces for women and girls in provided WASH facilities, as laundry facilities and discrete drying cloth spaces * Improve the of WASH facilities to become more female friendly (e.g. individual bathing room[[3]](#footnote-3), high wall in front of the women-latrines to prevent seeing from surroundings) * Create waste disposal facilities (waste bin and papers or plastic bags) for sanitary pads and should be included in the latrine cleaning kit. |
| 3. | Emphasizing the specific IEC program for menstrual hygiene management | * Integrate specific education program for women and girls for the biological facts and practical way of managing blood flow through the hygiene promotion activities. * Provide IEC materials for menstrual hygiene management. * Instructions on how to use and dispose should be printed on the sanitary pads in local language. |
| 4. | Creating supportive environment and positive attitude for menstrual hygiene management | * Break the barriers and taboos through FGD and specific hygiene promotion activities * Desensitize the unsupportive environment and attitude of community (e.g. teaching of men and boys in of menstrual hygiene management separately) |

Main Findings & Lesson Learned

There is very few WASH agencies implementing specific menstrual hygiene management activities in the current emergency settings. Despite efforts through hygiene kit contents, the current interventions do not address all the issues faced by women and girls in managing the blood flow as well as the effectiveness of the intervention is still a question.

Moreover, the WASH facilities should be adjusted to the need of the women. Therefore, a more comprehensive approach is still yet to define for every women and girl to be able to cope well with the problems related to the menstruation.

Recommendations

1. The number of women in reproductive age, the number of women using the disposable pads or washable clothes, the average number of pads/clothes used in one cycle should be specifically collected by each wash actors, per location targeted to be able to better cover the sanitary protection materials needs in order to understand whether the current level interventions is adequate or not.
2. Evaluation through hygiene promotion activities on the perception of women on the current WASH facilities should be conducted either through the focus group discussion or structured questionnaires to understand their problems and find out the appropriate solutions.
3. After finding out the barriers and constraints of the women, adapt the exiting WASH facilities should be done to create an enabling environment for the women. For example, high wall in front of the latrines, waste disposal facilities to dispose used pads etc.
4. It is important to find out the practices (how they use, wash and dry) of the women who use washable clothes for the menstrual management in order to promote or share the safe and hygienic practices among the women group.
5. Awareness raising about the importance of the menstrual hygiene management should be done to minimize the negative attitude of the men, to remove the taboos related to the women’s menstruation and to raise the self-esteem and pride of the women.
6. Specific IEC Materials should be developed in order to promote the safe and hygienic practices in menstruation and to break the social taboos and barriers that exists in the targeted population.
7. In the WASH technical working group, the need of a specific kit including the content of the items for women and girls should be discussed to find out the appropriate approach for better menstrual hygiene management.

Reference Documents

1. Tracey Crofts and et al, June 2012, Water, Engineering and Development Centre(WEDC), Loughborough University, Menstrual Hygiene Management for school girls in Low income countries.
2. Sarah House, Thérèse Mahon and Sue Cavill, 2012, First Edition, Menstrual hygiene matters, A resource for improving menstrual hygiene around the world
3. Tim Hayden, 2010, Presentation on Menstrual Hygiene Management In Emergencies: Taking Stock Of Support From Unicef And Partners
4. Dr. Deepthi Wickramasinghe, 2012, Sri Lanka, Managing menstrual hygiene in emergency situations: How far from reality?
5. Evidence to policy, 2012, The Great WASH Yatra and WSSCC’s 3-Prong Approach to Menstrual Hygiene Management
6. Sarah House and et al, 2013, Sanitary protection materials for emergency responses – considerations and current practices

1. Report on Gender Analysis on WASH emergency response in Rakhine, by Simona Seliškar in October 2013 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Report on Gender Analysis on WASH emergency response in Rakhine, by Simona Seliškar in October 2013 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Several actor are now exploring the possibility to developed private bathroom space in the shelter structure: It would have to be documented in the coming month [↑](#footnote-ref-3)