



# Position Paper on **Integrity** towards MHM Strategy 2020

Menstrual hygiene management (MHM) is a major health issue affecting women and girls of reproductive age worldwide. Bangladesh as a developing country Menstruation and menstrual

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practices still face many social, cultural, and religious restrictions which are a big barrier in the path of menstrual hygiene management. There are almost 54 million menstruating women and among them a large number is school going girls. According to Bangladesh Bureau of Statistic's National Hygiene Survey 2018, 50 % of the adolescent girls use cloths instead of sanitary napkins. On average a student spent 7-8 hours, so during menstruation this is very important to have emergency sanitary pad and changing facility in schools. But according to National Hygiene Survey 2018, 74 % girls reported that they do not change sanitary napkins at schools due to unavailable of proper MHM facilities. Lack of Transparency, Accountability and Participation of service providers and recipients making the situation worst. By implementing Annotated Water Integrity Scan (AWIS) tools in School of Ramgati and Bhola, the participants assessed five key areas around school WASH service related to quality of sanitation facilities, gender, MHM, inclusion and budget expenditure. From that study, it was clear that it is not possible to bring enabling WASH environment in schools without integrity among the stakeholders.

Like others, Bangladesh is committed to achieve SDG targets by 2030. MHM is one of the action plan under the target of SDG 6.2 (achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those

in vulnerable situations) but it has a large effect on other several SDG targets; such as Goal 3 (Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages), Goal 4 (Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all), Goal 5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls), Goal 8 (Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all) and Goal 12 (Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns).

## MHM situation in schools of Bangladesh:

Among the 11 directives stated in School WASH Circular-2015, directive number 5 and 6 clearly stated that school authority will keep emergency sanitary napkins (on-payment if needed) and a female teacher will discuss about MHM with her students in class. A separate chapter has been included by National Curriculum and Text Book Board (NCTB) in the text book. But According to National Hygiene Survey 2018, Around 38% students does not use sanitary napkins while at schools and around 74% girls do not change sanitary napkin at school due to lack of proper facilities and 30% girl students do not go to the schools during menstruation. Only 36% girls reported that their school arranged menstrual hygiene education sessions.

Female students from 30 schools in 2 administrative units of Bangladesh were interviewed for an assessment on school WASH on MHM issues they face. The results show that only 19% reported that school attendance is unaffected by menstruation: 8% reported that girls do not usually come to school when they have their period and a further 73% that girls leave school earlier when they have their periods. (Source: RCT on School WASH-2019 by DORP, Ngo forum, WIN and Stockholm University)

Secondary School authority is solely responsible to maintain proper WASH facilities for their students but it is seen that there is lack in Transparency, Accountability and Participation (TAP) among the service providers and recipients in the schools.

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## Key Findings: Lack of integrity in MHM facilities in schools

- In 2015, the Ministry of Education has issued a circular by giving 11 directives to schools where student and the toilet ration is mentioned 187:1 whereas the Sector Development Plan (SDP) 2011-2025 set the recommended number is 50:1. Setting Standard is Important. That will enhance the accountability and transparency of the stakeholders.
- WaSH is under Local Government Division (LGD) while School WaSH has no separate authority to look after. School is accountable to whom for WASH/MHM Facilities?

- Bangladesh Health Facility Survey 2014, Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey 2017, National Hygiene promotion strategy for WSS sector in Bangladesh 2012, SDGs Financing Strategy 2017, the investment for WaSH in schools is not given any direction on MHM which shows that there is need of transparency in the national policies regarding MHM in schools
- The 7th Five-Year Plan of the Government of Bangladesh recognizes the importance of inclusive and separate toilets for girls in schools with adequate facilities for sanitary pads and cleansing materials. No specific and transparent Guideline for WASH and MHM in Schools in the national strategy.
- Available, accessible and reliable water, sanitation and hygiene are the integral parts of Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) which is one of the most neglected areas due to NOT having proper guidelines as well as Participation.
- District education office is mainly the administrative and monitoring authority. They are not always able to fund schools for any infrastructural or WASH facility. They are the monitoring authority who plays vital role to ensure education and WASH facilities for students.
- According to SDP 2011-25, toilet and student ratio should be 1:50. But it is far from reality there nearly 126 students are using one toilet in Bholand in Ramgati. The number is 121 students per toilet.
- According to National Hygiene Survey- 2018, only 36% girls reported that school arranged menstrual hygienen education sessions for girls. 62 % use sanitary napkins but 74% girls do not change sanitary napkins at school due to lack of separate toilets/changing rooms. 35% students reported facing health problems related to menstruation. It is clearly

understandable that schools are not MHM frindly and not following any standard MHM guideline. There is a gap in Accountability and Participation is seen here.

- Integrity includes Transparency, Accountability and Participation (TAP) which needs to be considered in Planning process, so that MHM in Schools and institutions get its proper attention.

## Area of opportunities

### Lack of Transparency, Accountability and Participation (TAP) of the different stakeholders:

When it comes to a concern of collective effort, it becomes nobody's responsibility. It requires the attention of different segments of the government. For example, the Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, Ministry of Social Welfare, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Health - all are involved to work on MHM issues. A collaborative effort is needed with the

*Ms. Sheta Rani who is a student of class seven in Balur Char High School in Ramgati. She is a disable person. In her menstruation time, she has to miss 3-4 days of class due to absence of sanitary napkin and special provision of changing and disposal of the sanitary napkins at school. This absenteeism also affecting to get her Government Stipend.*





participation from different stakeholders of the society. To ensure that there should be a precise MHM strategy on board describing the roles and responsibilities of every stakeholder for making them accountable towards their duties and also monitoring system should be strengthened with a view of transparent and participatory approach.



## Way forward

- Specific guideline of Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) in School need to be incorporated in the MHM strategy 2020. The guideline will be in line with SDG targets and mentioning specific roles and responsibilities of stakeholders, budget allocation, monitoring authority for implementation of the strategy needs to be incorporated.
- Revised MHM strategy should be analyzed through a gender lens and special focus need for the people leaving below poverty line to make sure that girls are not left behind. This holds true also with children with disabilities.

Progress is possible by providing more visibility to the topic, and training teachers and students (boys) on the basics of MHM.

- School girls need to be provided with low cost sanitary pads to help them continue attending school during menstruation. To make sanitary napkin available in Hard to Reach Areas, local entrepreneurs need to get loans and other logistic support from Government sectors for production of low cost sanitary napkins.
- Role of Media is very crucial for Social and Behavior Change Communication and need to emphasize for circulating Strategy and its implementation plan.
- Guideline for Operationalization of the MHM strategy in Schools needs to be ensured by SMC, Upazila Education Officer as well as DPHE, Upazila Parishad and Union Parishad. A specific guideline can be attached at Annex of the Strategy for implementation at School level.

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