

# The Weekly

## Information Resource Bulletin

### FOCUS: Girl's Menstruation and Education

May 28 was the first global Menstrual Hygiene Day celebrated around the world with exhibitions, film screenings, workshops and gatherings, all aimed at breaking the silence around menstruation. This was initiated by WASH United.

According to WASH United, Menstrual Hygiene Day was created to publicly recognize the right of women to hygienically manage their menstruation wherever they are.

There are so many challenges that women and girls, especially school-age girls, face when they are menstruating.

A Malawi Ministry of Education WASH study conducted in 2008 showed that only 23% of primary schools have sanitation of 'acceptable quality and quantity', with 81% lacking hand-washing facilities. This study covered 5,379 schools out of 5,460 in Malawi.

### The goals of the Weekly Bulletin are:

- To encourage community members to take a lead in finding solutions to problems facing their communities
- To give the journalists story ideas on girls menstruation and how it affects their attendance at school
- To promote discussion and dialogue between listeners and other community members on how girls can be helped to always attend school even when they are menstruating

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### The Problem: Girls Absenteeism at School Due to Menstruation

Effective menstrual hygiene is vital to the health, well-being, dignity, empowerment, mobility and productivity of women and girls.

Poor menstrual hygiene may cause stigma and ill health, and can lead to school absenteeism and increased school drop-out rates.

Many girls and women face challenges with managing their periods safely.

Research by several organizations, working on menstrual hygiene in schools in Malawi, has revealed that most girls will stay away from school during menstruation and eventually drop out of school.

Women and girls' capacity to manage their periods is affected by a number of factors, including limited access to affordable and hygienic sanitary materials and disposal options. It leaves many to manage their periods in ineffective, uncomfortable and unhygienic ways.

To manage menstruation hygienically and with dignity, it is essential that women and girls have access to water and sanitation.

They need a private place to change sanitary cloths or pads; clean water and soap for washing their hands and, bodies; and facilities for safely disposing of used materials.

## Activities for Journalists

Use your radio station to help your community, understand how menstrual periods can make girls stay away from school and how this can affect their education.

It is also important to talk about effective menstrual hygiene for every woman.

When in school, girls are particularly worried about how to hide signs that they are menstruating, in fear of being embarrassed by boys in their class. As a result some of them decide not to go to school until they finish their periods.

Facilities in schools to manage girl's menstruation are often inadequate, with no means to keep clean and dispose of used sanitary pads or cloths. Therefore, when they are unable to properly manage their menstruation, girls lack confidence and are distracted in school and often decide to stay home for a few days each month and this can ultimately lead to dropping out of school.

Therefore, poor menstrual hygiene management can have a significant impact on a girls' education.

Realizing that all children have a right to quality education and that educated girls grow into women who tend to have healthier and better nourished babies is really important. It means that later on these girls will most likely do everything to ensure their own children attend school as well when they

have their periods.

Your station can help your community to approach several organizations that are involved in producing or distributing sanitary pads to girls in school.

Organizations such as FAWEMA and Theatre for a Change (TFAC) are two organizations that could be approached.

FAWEMA provides sanitary pads which act as both a sanitary pad and a pair of pants, meaning that it does not rely on the girls already owning suitable underwear, while TFAC provides re-usable sanitary pads and a piece of underwear to the girls.

The communities can also take the initiative by agreeing with their local councilors in building simple toilets for girls at a particular school with all necessities, including soap and a proper door for privacy.

Have a vox pop with school-age girls and ask them about the challenges they face at school when they are menstruating.

Have a round table discussion with a teacher, two students, a traditional leader and a councilor from your area.

Discuss how girls in your community can be helped not to miss school when they are menstruating.

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- [www.unicef.org/wash/schools/files/Malawi\\_MHM\\_Conf.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/wash/schools/files/Malawi_MHM_Conf.pdf)



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