



MHM signs at Akadot Primary School in Tororo District, Eastern Uganda

Plan/Richard Wainwright

Key Summary

Menstruation is a fact of life for 2 billion women and girls globally, and yet in many places, girls face serious barriers to managing their periods.

-  Plan **delivers** menstrual hygiene management (MHM) programming in more than 25 countries across the Americas, Africa, and Asia.
-  We **adapt** and **construct** MHM-appropriate sanitation and hygiene facilities in schools, communities, and health care facilities.
-  We **improve access** to menstrual hygiene supplies, which includes establishing **sanimarts**, and partnering with MHM-related social enterprises like Be Girl and AFRIpads.
-  We **engage men, boys**, and key community stakeholders to **eliminate the stigma and taboo** surrounding menstruation.

Menstruation Can Affect All Aspects of a Girl's Life:

Education

Girls may miss school during their periods due to lack of facilities or necessary supplies.

Health

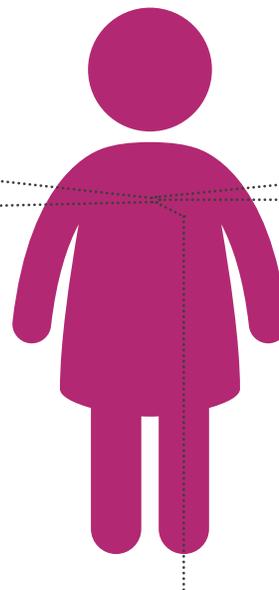
Use of improvised menstrual hygiene materials can lead to infection.

Economics

Women may miss work if they don't have access to the supplies or facilities they need.

Dignity

Girls may suffer from discomfort, endure teasing and shaming, and be excluded from everyday activities.



Participation

Girls may be distracted or less productive during school, work, and other activities due to pain, discomfort, and fear of leaks.

MHM Survey

In 2016 and 2017, Plan International conducted a Federation-wide survey of its MHM-related work. Plan collected responses from 21 offices (out of 72) across Asia, Africa, Europe, North America, and Australia, including 15 of the offices implementing MHM programs. Key findings from the survey include:

- At least **12 countries** are adapting or constructing MHM-friendly sanitation and hygiene facilities.
- At least **15 countries** are improving access to menstrual hygiene products.
- At least **15 countries** are improving knowledge and skills related to MHM.
- At least **12 countries** are addressing the stigma and taboos related to menstruation.
- Although women and girls are the principal targets of MHM programs, **Plan also targets other key stakeholders** such as men and boys, teachers, government officials, and health care workers.
- Schools and communities** are the most common locations for Plan's MHM programming; however, **health care facilities, work places, savings groups,** and other locations are also targeted.

Plan's Comprehensive Approach to MHM

Our goal is to ensure that girls and women can confidently and comfortably manage their periods. This requires a comprehensive approach, addressing their immediate needs for supplies and facilities, as well as ensuring they have the knowledge and skills to understand what menstruation is and their options for managing it. It also means developing environments in which girls are supported instead of facing restrictions, shaming, and teasing.

Create Girl-Friendly Sanitation Facilities

Women and girls require safe, private sanitation facilities at home, school, and work so they can discreetly and comfortably go to the bathroom and/or change their menstrual hygiene materials. Plan adapts or constructs MHM-friendly sanitation and hygiene facilities for girls around the world. While this work is focused primarily in schools, we also work in communities and health care facilities to improve access to MHM-friendly facilities and address key issues such as: access to water and/or handwashing in or near the facility; ability to lock latrines from the inside; discreet disposal of materials, (i.e. in trash cans, trash chutes, etc.) or incineration; having a place to hang reusable menstrual pads to dry; the construction of changing rooms.

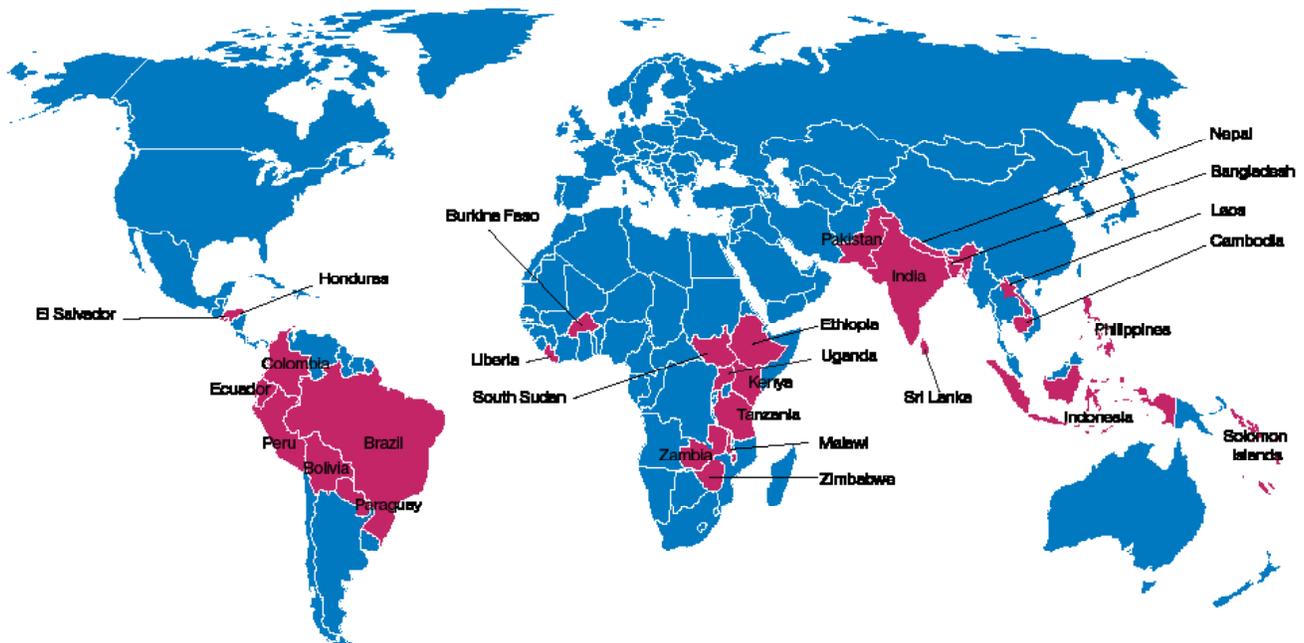
- The WASH in Schools Project in **Zambia** (2013-2015), which improved sanitation and hygiene facilities at schools, benefitted **11,349 school girls**.
- In **Zimbabwe**, the Improving Community-Based Water Supply and Basic Sanitation Project constructed **girl-friendly sanitation facilities at five schools**, including changing rooms, handwashing stations, and incinerators for the disposal of used menstrual hygiene products.

Improve Access to Sanitary Products

In many cases women and girls do not have access to quality, hygienic menstrual hygiene products. By partnering with social enterprises and the private sector, Plan works to improve the availability, affordability, and range of menstrual hygiene products. In certain situations, such as emergencies and disasters, Plan distributes menstrual hygiene products to ensure that the most vulnerable populations have access to these necessities. To date, our projects in this area have focused on reusable pads and disposable products.

- In **Bangladesh**, Plan provided seed funding to help establish **sanimarts**, including purchasing the materials needed to produce sanitary pads, and stocking the marts with basic cleaning supplies such as soap and handwashing units.
- In **Colombia**, Plan is partnering with the social enterprise Be Girl in a pilot project to provide 3,636 girls with access to period panties.

Plan's Menstrual Hygiene Management Programming Around the World





Lovisa, a teacher and Afripads dealer, teaches students about menstrual hygiene.
Plan/Nyani Quarmyne

Increase Knowledge and Skills

Due to the stigma and silence surrounding this issue, women, girls, men, and boys often know very little about menstruation and menstrual hygiene. To address this critical gap, Plan promotes menstrual hygiene education through community platforms such as girls' clubs, parenting groups, and teacher trainings. This work occurs primarily in schools and communities, as well as in health care facilities. While the targeted audiences vary from project to project, the most common are girls, women, teachers, and boys. In some projects, we also target local government officials, traditional leaders, and community health workers who can help reinforce important messages on MHM in their communities.

- In **India**, through the Astra Zeneca-funded Youth Health Program, Plan reached **40,000 girls and boys** by developing a curriculum and training peer educators to effectively target and teach girls and boys in their communities. The training curriculum consisted of five flip books, five technical documents, and five facilitator guides on 1) health and wellbeing; 2) lifestyle education; 3) menstrual hygiene; 4) reproductive health; and 5) water and sanitation.
- In **Cambodia**, through the Promoting Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights project, Plan educated **15,000 youth, including 8,000 girls**, on sexual and reproductive health topics such as menstruation and MHM.

Create Supportive Environments

For many women and girls, periods are a source of shame and embarrassment, due in part to the social taboos and stigmas associated with menstruation. In some cultures these taboos lead to serious restrictions on the daily activities of menstruating women and girls; in many, the stigma means that they cannot discuss MHM freely.

To improve the lives of women and girls, Plan is working to break the silence and dispel the stigma and shame by engaging with communities through participatory channels such as community theater, radio spots, and interactive trainings.

Plan understands that it is essential to educate men and boys about menstruation and MHM too, as they are vital to changing societal attitudes and creating a positive environment for girls and women. To address the stigma and taboos associated with menstruation, we target a range of audiences including: girls and boys, women and men, teachers, parents, government officials, village chiefs, and traditional healers.

- In **Bangladesh**, Plan used theater and folk songs to facilitate discussions, disseminate information, and correct common misconceptions about menstruation.
- In **Ethiopia**, Plan trained school girls and boys on MHM stigma and taboos. The students then initiated discussions on these topics with their parents and community elders to disseminate the new information. In addition, teachers, government staff, and CSOs were trained to support the girls and boys as agents of change. To further target youth populations, we also used our savings groups as a platform to train youth to promote community dialogues about menstruation. The savings groups are attractive to youth and provide gathering places to host conversations.

“My mother told me not to rinse my hair, get close to boys, water flowers, or eat sour food while I am on my period.”

- Venin, 12, Indonesia

“I was 13 when I got my period. I thought I'd hurt myself.”

- Alinafe, 15, Malawi

“When I first started my period, I would often miss five or six days of school, as there were no proper toilet facilities.”

- Esha, 14, India

MHM Program Examples From Around the World

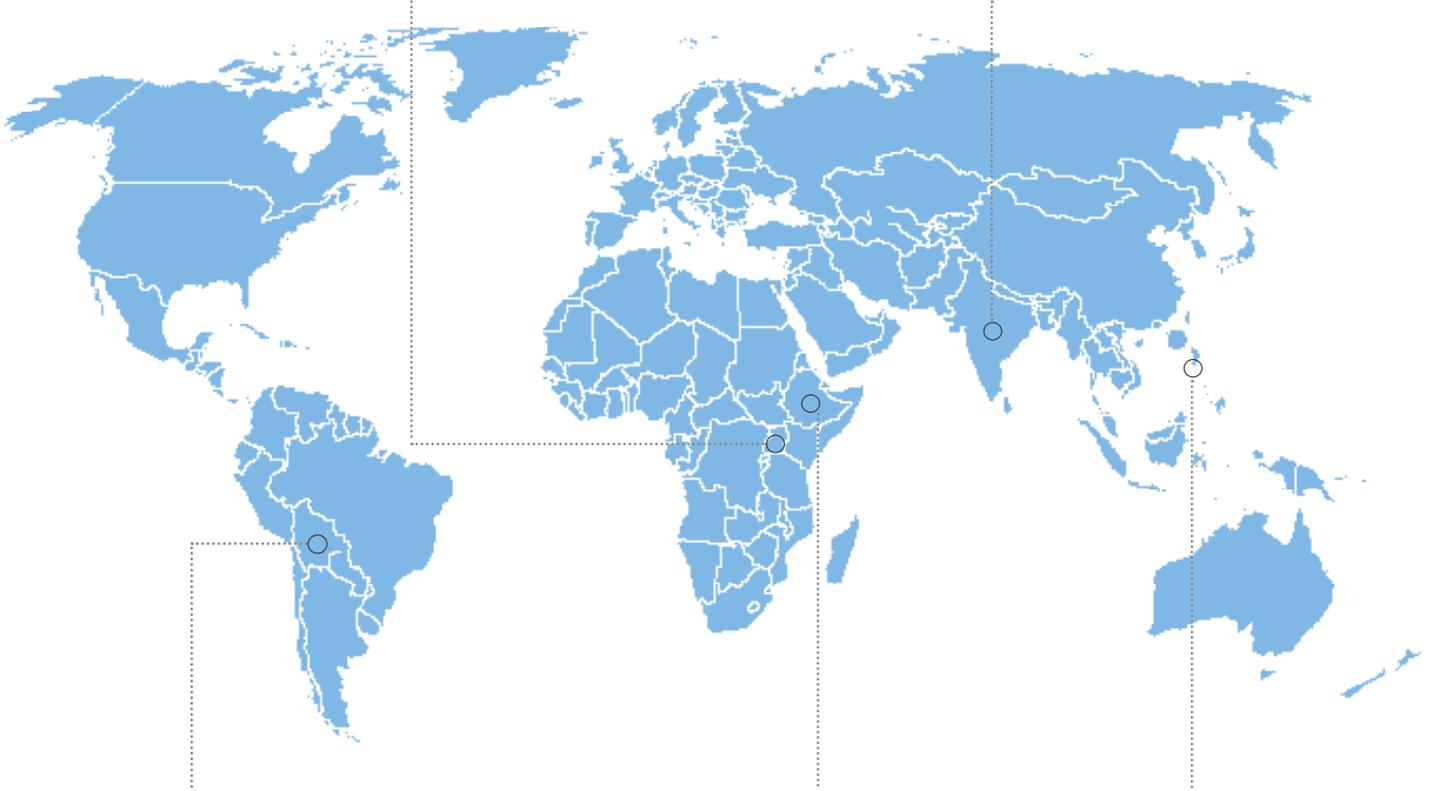
Uganda

The Menstrual Hygiene Management project (2012-2016) helped **100,000 rural women and girls to manage their menstruation safely and effectively**. We helped increase MHM knowledge, eliminate stigma, and expand access to affordable and hygienic sanitary pads among women and adolescent girls. **We also partnered with the Ugandan social enterprise AFRIpads** to support the distribution of their reusable pads and to increase the number of AFRIpads dealers.

India

In Uttar Pradesh, the Right to Optimal Health program aimed to improve knowledge, attitudes, and practices of adolescent girls related to reproductive health and menstrual hygiene. 140 master trainers were trained, and more than **300,000 adolescent girls in 1,870 schools** were educated on menstrual hygiene and reproductive health. The girls also received complimentary sanitary pads.

As part of an economic empowerment program called Banking on Change, Plan provided female entrepreneurs with support and business skills training, including supporting them to develop a sanitary pad production unit. The participants have now installed and manage sanitary napkin vending machines that allow **6,000 women in the community easy, affordable, and discreet access to MHM supplies**.



Bolivia

In Santa Cruz, Plan partnered with local communities to address the practical needs of girls and boys related to sanitation and menstruation, and also to address the practical needs of girls and boys related to sanitation and menstruation, and the related social norms and beliefs. We constructed **27 new gender-segregated bathrooms, benefitting 677 students** so that girls and boys have access to private, safe, hygienic facilities. We also trained teachers, girls, and boys on menstruation and basic sanitation and hygiene practices.

Ethiopia

As part of the Girls Empowerment Through Education project, **Plan supported MHM programming in eight schools**. To improve knowledge, we trained girls and teachers about what menstruation is and how to manage it. **We partnered with the social enterprise Be Girl** to distribute and test the effectiveness of Be Girl's reusable pads and period panties. We renovated the schools to provide girl-friendly sanitation facilities with handwashing stations and clean water.

Philippines

As part of the response to Typhoon Haiyan, Plan **provided 7,000 families with separate garbage bins** in or near female toilets for the disposal of menstrual products. We also provided hygiene kits, including sanitary pads, to **40,000 families**.