

Girl-friendly toilets for schoolgirls

Helping adolescent girls

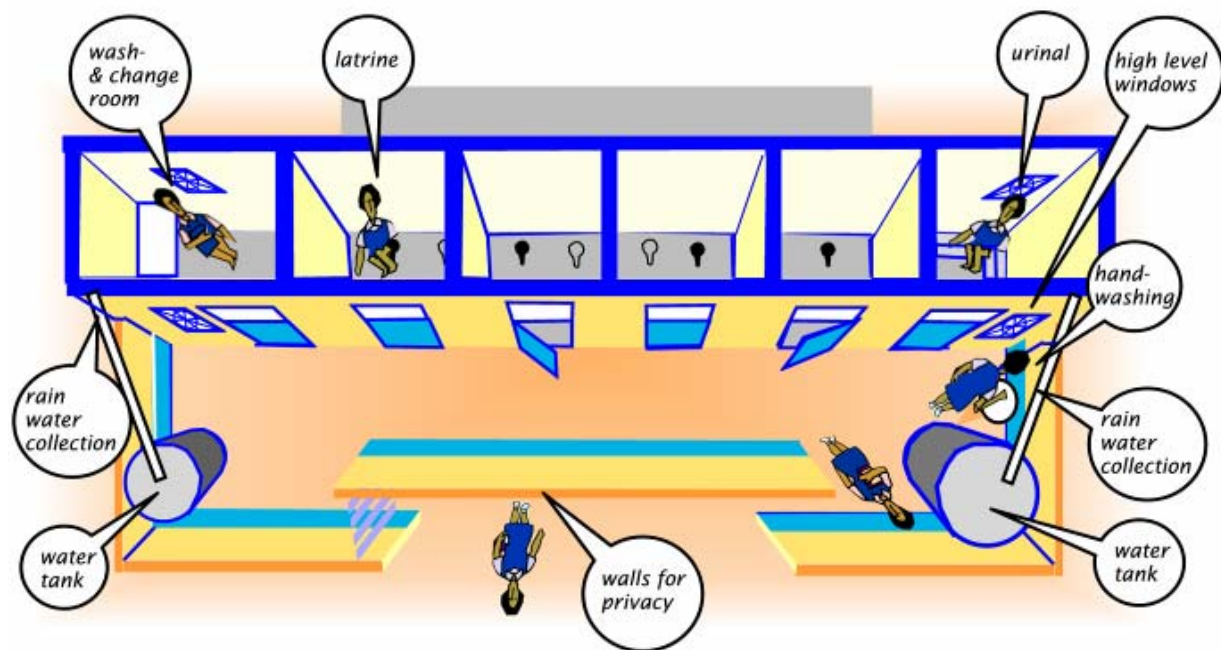
In the life time of a women, she will have a total of around 3,000 days of menstruation. For her basic schooling period which range from Grade 4 to 10 the number of such days is 450. There is a growing awareness of special needs of young women in the school. At school, girls are faced with poor facilities – inadequate water for washing, lack of soap, no privacy and non-functioning or insufficient toilets. This reduces school attendance. **Adolescent girls are often absent from school due, in part, to inadequate water and sanitation facilities.** It is important to realize that one out of two 13 year old girls will probably be menstruating. One in eight girls begins to menstruate (menarche) when she is 11 years or younger.

A UNICEF report in Kenya stated that one in ten school-age girls do not attend school during their period. In Uganda¹, of 300 primary school girls involved in research, 94% reported some problems at school during menstruation. Three out of five girls (61%) reported staying away from school. To improve the situation, 94% of the girls said “teach us correct facts and educate the boys”. Four out of five said that more facilities are needed for girls and that the facilities should be kept clean. Research in Peru² showed that the onset of menstruation has negative impact on girl’s participation in primary school. Girls remain at home during menstruation because of beliefs, not feeling well and because facilities are insufficient.

At all times, adolescent girls need facilities that provide privacy and security to avoid risk of harassment. The designs and services should ensure that all school girls have (1) separate latrines from boys, (2) water for washing, and (3) free or subsidized sanitary napkins. The development organization *Plan International (Ghana)* being acutely aware of this, took up the challenge and decided to develop a model ‘girl-friendly latrine’.

¹ <http://www.sn.apc.org/fred/quest/quest-strategy.htm#nine> Quality education for social transformation

² Office of women in Development, USAID. Peru Menarche and Its Implications for Educational Policy in Peru http://www.worlded.org/Docs/Menarche_Study_Final_3_8_01.pdf



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These toilets are designed taking into account the needs of girls and young women in several ways:

- There is a **wash-room** that the girls can use to change or clean themselves in privacy during menstruation and the other times of the month.
- The latrine is specially designed to meet the needs of the adolescent girl in that the **squat holes are slightly bigger** to cater for the girl's physiological urge of urinating while defecating.
- There urinals have doors to **allow for privacy** .
- **Rain water** is collected from the roof of the sanitary unit.
- **Water and soap** is provided within the wash-room and at the exit of the urinal.



From a school girl

My menstruation started very early, at 10 years, at school one day. I went to my teacher and asked if she could help me because it seemed that I had sat on something very sharp which must have cut me on the bottom. Teacher said no, this happens to all women and I could go home. It was difficult walking home so no one could see me. At home my mother gave me some cloth to wear but did not say what menstruation was about.

We have only one toilet in our school for everyone. When my time of month would come I would pretend to be sick so that I did not have to go to school... It was awful to have to use the toilet quickly, without water and so no one would know.

of the uterus.

2. The odour during menstruation can be eliminated by good hygiene and washing.
3. Several personal hygiene skills for menstrual hygiene such as: (a) taking a daily bath during menstruation and (b) using hygienic material like sterile pads, and (c) wiping from front to back after using toilet to avoid bladder and kidney infections.

During 2006, ten full-scale pilot sanitary units are being field-tested in three different regions of Ghana. The models will be evaluated with feedback and support of the user groups – the schoolgirls. On this basis, the designs will be improved. The first signals are that the girl-friendly toilets are successful. The Government of Ghana is now considering introducing this design in other parts of the country.

Reflections

Improving the attendance of girls in schools probably requires more than only constructing facilities. Well-designed toilets and water points are necessary but not sufficient to have an impact. A combination of education, communication and construction are needed to ensure so that girls have well-designed facilities which they want to and know how to use correctly, including an understanding of personal hygiene. Girls (and boys) should understand what is happening to their bodies in adolescence and that these changes are natural (see the text box).

The results of incorrectly planned programs can be disappointing. For example, one school program constructed small incinerators so that girls could burn cotton pads. However these were never used. The girls were too poor to use throw-away pads, and instead they wanted a large water bucket in their toilet for personal cleaning. However, this had not been provided as no one had talked with the girls (or women teachers) before construction. In a girl-friendly program, it is important to consult with girls and women teachers during planning and to monitor the use and maintenance of facilities after construction.

Facilities

While the challenge is universal of ensuring that facilities are girl-friendly, the specific approaches and designs will probably differ between countries, regions or even districts. The designs should be relevant to local practices as well as optimizing use of local materials and construction approaches.

Ensuring lowest cost for an adequate facility, that is balancing cost with quality, is important. This implies that programs need to be cost-conscious (and honest) if carried out by contractors under tender. On the other hand, community-built facilities should adhere to minimum and easily communicated standards while still being affordable.

The design was developed by asking girls about their needs and ideas on how toilets should be designed. On the basis of this, the design has been developed. The costs of building the pilot building latrine was approximately \$3500/each in Ghana.

Hygiene education

Currently *Plan International (Ghana)* is working on the development of effective education on menstrual hygiene and management along with the girl-friendly latrines. The learning goals are to teach the girls that:

1. Menstrual blood is not dirty or unhygienic or unclean. It is simply blood and tissue from lining

Contact details for more information

About the Ghana girl-friendly schools: *Plan International*, Accra Ghana. For further information contact Water and Sanitation Adviser Lorretta Roberts at: lorretta.roberts@plan-international.org

Further reading:

Nahar, Q.; Ahmed, R. (2006). Addressing special needs of girls : challenges in school. Paper presented at the Second South Asian Conference on Sanitation (SACOSAN-2), 20-21 Sep 2006.

<http://www.environment.gov.pk/sacosan-2005/Proceedings/Thematic%20Papers/Qumrun%20Nahar%20Paper.pdf>

El-Gilany et.al. (2005). Menstrual hygiene among adolescent schoolgirls in Mansoura, Egypt. In: *Reproductive Health Matters* 2005; 13(26):147-152

Annex

About the WASH in schools case studies

Developed by IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre under the SSHE Global Sharing project financed by UNICEF.

Over the decade a rich pool of experience and programming has evolved in school programs for water, sanitation and hygiene education, which we call WASH in schools or SSHE. Hundreds of millions of children are currently attending schools that have, in one way or another, become part of this ambitious effort to enhance the lives and life opportunities of young people around the world.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, these programs focused largely on construction. This usually meant building water points and toilets in schools. Current experience, however, has provided a strong evidence base on the crucial need to combine hardware (facilities) with software, that is, management, organization, capacity development, educational methodologies and promotion of hygiene behaviors. Participation of key stakeholders—teachers and educational staff, local government and community groups, parents and children – is seen as key to the success of these new WASH in school programs.

This collection of case studies examines both hardware and software aspects of WASH in schools and in different settings. The case studies focus in one way or another on four general themes: planning and management; actions in the school and teaching-learning; technology and design; and, scaling up or expanding WASH in schools while retaining its quality. The case studies are drawn from experience in Africa (Burkina Faso, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Senegal, Somalia, Zambia), Asia (Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Vietnam) and South America (Bolivia, Colombia, Nicaragua). The case studies provide insights into programs supported by UNICEF and also by other institutions such as the Aga Khan University, Caritas, Plan International and NETWAS International. Despite the breadth of institutional and national experience upon which the case studies draw, it must be noted that these 14 papers only provide a glimpse of the rich and often exciting experience in WASH in schools from around the world. Nonetheless, this is a ‘glimpse’ which will hopefully provide the reader with worthwhile insights into the current state of the art in school programming. At the end of each case study there is contact information for the reader seeking further information.

The case studies were prepared by the staff of the IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre in collaboration with Annemarieke Mooiman and Sumita Ganguly. The preparation of the case studies was overseen by Therese Dooley and Henk van Norden of UNICEF (New York) whose support is greatly appreciated.

All case studies are available at the WASH in Schools web site: <http://www.schools.watsan.net>

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