

Integrating Menstrual Hygiene Management into school health interventions

Approach aims to create an enabling environment to support girls

In Kenya, [only 35% of women](#) use hygienic products during their menstrual periods, and only 40% have access to adequate sanitation facilities. Additionally, 32.5% of adolescent girls report having no prior knowledge about menstruation before their first period. The [Unicef/WHO Joint Monitoring Plan Report 2019](#) noted that only 49% of women and girls in Kenya have access to water for use during their periods and only 29% access all sanitation elements needed for menstrual hygiene.



Girls participate in Menstrual Hygiene Day activities in 2019.

Afya Uzazi MHM Interventions: Afya Uzazi

implements menstrual hygiene management as an integrated component under the comprehensive school health program in Nakuru and Baringo counties, upper primary and secondary schools. The approach focuses on the following key areas, aimed at creating an enabling environment:

- a) **Education and awareness creation:** In Nakuru County, the project has engaged a national trainer of trainers (TOT) who facilitated sensitization sessions for 20 teachers each in Kuresoi North and Kuresoi South sub-counties, in 2017-2018. In Baringo County, on the other hand, the project facilitated similar sessions for 20 teachers each Baringo North, Baringo Central, and Mogotio sub-counties. The sessions targeted school heads and health club patrons, to ensure that these teachers with leadership positions cascade the messages and ensure recommended follow-up actions are implemented. Awareness creation also helps fight the stigma of menstruation.
- b) **Access to Products:** Afya Uzazi supports linkages with the ministries of health and education to ensure that vulnerable girls access hygienic sanitary pads from a [national sanitary towels](#) program and other schemes. The project supports the transportation of the products to schools as well as messaging sessions regarding appropriate use and proper disposal of the hygiene supplies.
- c) **Access to Sanitation:** The projects support local public health officers to engage school management committees to construct new sanitation facilities and rehabilitate existing ones, as well as incorporate menstrual hygiene-sensitive aspects within hygiene facility refurbishment, such as bathrooms with private dressing areas for girls as needed when menstruating.

- d) **Policy and Advocacy:** The project utilizes high-level advocacy events such as the global [MH Day](#) held annually on May 28 to raise awareness on menstrual hygiene, highlight inequities in access to MHM products and facilities, offer solutions and promote dignified menstruation. County leadership teams are rallied to act on identified gaps, such as strengthening the MHM product supply, particularly to children attending school in remote, low resource settings.

Planned Actions: To mark global MH Day 2020, Afya Uzazi will work jointly with the sub-county health management committees to raise awareness on menstrual hygiene in line with the 2020 theme, *It's Time for Action*, in the 'periods in a pandemic' scenario. The project will popularize the Menstruation Bracelet, an emerging global symbol for menstruation. This advocacy activities aim to consolidate action and support around MH as well as combat period stigma. The project will also support the distribution and sensitization of school health stakeholders (upon re-opening of schools) on the new Kenya MHM Policy 2020. This will ensure that actions and programs are aligned to the policy for greater impact.

Menstrual Hygiene Day 2020 Activities – Nakuru County: The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified vulnerabilities that girls in slum areas face in accessing hygienic sanitary pads and sanitation facilities, due to loss of household income among the urban poor, who rely predominantly on daily wage jobs. Most of these girls relied on improved better sanitation structures and sanitary pads distributed periodically in schools, which are now closed, to manage their periods with greater dignity. Due to restrictions to ensure social distancing, no large public event will be held to commemorate MH Day in the sub-counties that Afya Uzazi supports. Instead, the Nakuru County Department of Health and Afya Uzazi will conduct socially distanced messaging sessions using car-mounted megaphones at strategic points in four low-income settlements in Nakuru Town. Public health officers will work with community health volunteers to distribute sanitary pads and bar soap to the identified vulnerable households.

Menstrual Hygiene Management in the Community

Besides the school health activities, Afya Uzazi program has integrated menstrual health in other interventions that include sexual and reproductive health education for out-of-school youth, empowerment sessions for adolescent mothers as well as in population, health and environment (PHE) interventions. Male and female youth champions who have been trained to facilitate small group sessions for young people sexual and reproductive triggers discussions that enable young people to understand issues such as menstrual hygiene management in their contexts.