Toilets are not enough: addressing menstrual hygiene management (MHM) in secondary schools in Malawi
Introduction

Toilets are not enough:
Sally Piper Pillitteri, September 2012
Toilets are not enough

• Introduction, aim and objectives of 2011 research
• Participative research methodology
• Results
• Recommendations
• Conclusions
• Questions
Malawi

Size of England; pop. 14 000 000

153/169 on HDI
3 regions & 28 districts

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Aim and Objectives

Aim:
• to carry out a pilot study on the beliefs, problems, requirements and awareness around MHM in secondary schools

Objectives:
• Develop participatory research into MHM
• Identify issues and beliefs around MHM
• Ascertain girls’ MHM requirements
• Evaluate the methodology for future use
## Schools selected for study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type</strong></td>
<td>Urban Girls’ boarding</td>
<td>Co-ed Boarding</td>
<td>Peri-urban CDSS</td>
<td>Peri-urban CDSS</td>
<td>Rural CDSS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance from Lilongwe</td>
<td>Centre</td>
<td>25 kms</td>
<td>15 kms</td>
<td>15 kms</td>
<td>140 kms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N° of visits</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N° of PGS</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N° girls</td>
<td>519</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N° Form 3 girls</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N° girls for questionnaire</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age range of PGS girls</td>
<td>14-18</td>
<td>14-18</td>
<td>16-21</td>
<td>15-18</td>
<td>16-19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PGS girls: mean age at menarche</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12.72</td>
<td>14.43</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Questionnaire

• 104 girls out of 134 answered questionnaire
• Central region: 67; Southern: 20; North: 17
• Christian 95%; Moslem 5%
• Mean age of girls 16.38 years
• Median age at menarche (1st menstruation) was 13-14 years
• 31% unaware about menstruation prior to menarche
• 30% scared; 26% sad; 28% happy
Rural CDSS PGS

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# Participatory methods

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Toilet Walk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Making a school toilet map</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Toilet drawing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Priority list for improving MHM in schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Writing first menstrual experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Anonymous question and answer session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Writing a puberty curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Closure session with participatory groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Stakeholders interviews</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Mapping the school toilets

Toilets are not enough:
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Results: Three main themes

- Cultural beliefs & Awareness
- Infrastructure & resources
- Knowledge & Education

Toilets are not enough: Sally Piper Pillitteri, September 2012
Infrastructure, facilities and resources

Toilets are not enough:
Sally Piper Pillitteri, September 2012
No water for flushing & blocked with sanitary pads & faeces
Open pit for sanitary napkins

Toilets are not enough:
Sally Piper Pillitteri,  September 2012
Incinerator for disposable sanitary pads
No doors – stolen

Toilets are not enough:
Sally Piper Pillitteri, September 2012
Door-less design toilet

Toilets are not enough:
Sally Piper Pillitteri, September 2012
No space for girls to change
Girls liked to squat
Good advice, but.....
No water for washing
No Handwashing: no soap, stolen taps, blocked basins

Toilets are not enough:
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Why girls do not use school toilets
multiple answers possible

Toilets are not enough:
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Alternatives to school toilets

Toilets are not enough: Sally Piper Pillitteri, September 2012
Days absent last term n=104

Toilets are not enough:
Sally Piper Pillitteri, September 2012
Toilets are not enough:
Sally Piper Pillitteri, September 2012

Girls’ MHM priorities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>21.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspirin</td>
<td>4.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl Club</td>
<td>4.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bin</td>
<td>6.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soap</td>
<td>8.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incinerator</td>
<td>11.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>17.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanitary pads</td>
<td>26.02%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cultural beliefs and practices

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Write your menstrual story

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Cultural beliefs and practices

• “Menstruation is the end of childhood.”
• “Menstruation is strictly secret”.
• “It was the worst day of my life”.
• “If someone sees my blood in the toilet she can use witchcraft to poison me.”
• “I would never wash my cloth at school; if people steal it they can take it to practice witchcraft on me.”
Cultural beliefs and practices

• “We need to stop these myths around menstruation”.
• “Use the word menstruation at all policy meetings.”
Education and knowledge

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Education and knowledge

• “Guidance and support at school is more important than anything. There is nobody to talk to. When we have problems we just run from class and go home.” C.5
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Recommendations

• Pads: reusable or biodegradable
• Girl-friendly toilets: doors, water, soap, disposal method, cleaning materials/rosters/hygiene club
• Maintenance of sanitation facilities
• Puberty knowledge for girls easily available
• MHM training for teachers & puberty workers - & boys
• Incorporate MHM into the school curriculum

Toilets are not enough: Sally Piper Pillitteri, September 2012
Pads: reusable
Pads: disposable

http://content.yudu.com/Library/A1tj9y/CanusuAkarsuPortfolio/resources/5.htm

Toilets are not enough: Sally Piper Pillitteri, September 2012
Girl friendly latrine

Toilets are not enough:
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.. but empty water tank
Coherent information on managing menstruation
Girls’ Voices

• “Friends gave us wrong information. We didn't know about cotton blocking toilets and how to manage, and now we do.”

• “Does the government know about our problems? The toilets are broken. Tell them there are no cleaning materials. Tell them we miss school because we are cleaning toilets.”
Girls’ Voices

• “Before I thought that being a girl was horrible and I wanted to be a boy. I was anxious about periods but after this work I’m not fearful. Now I like being a girl. I help others when they are menstruating – tell them it is OK, how to use a cloth, how to be hygienic.”

• “We have enjoyed doing this. Next year we can start a girl-friendly club. We’ll be very happy if the report is published and it helps our sisters in Malawi.”
Conclusion

• Participatory research is productive and raises awareness of MHM
• Toilets are not enough to address MHM in schools
• Listen to girls’ voiced needs and provide information
• Develop infrastructure; provide pads & education; PLUS transform cultural practices
• Support local NGOs in raising awareness amongst partners and policy makers
• Include MHM in the school curriculum – primary & secondary
• Coordinate information and approaches
Questions?

THANK YOU

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