

## Ghana marks 2020 Menstrual Hygiene Day: Stakeholders call for sustained action

*The National Technical Committee on Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) through the Resource Centre Network (RCN) National Level Alliance Platform (NLLAP) commemorated the 2020 Menstrual Hygiene Day (MHD) via webinar with a call for sustained action to change the negative social perception on menstruation. The event that was marked under the theme: "It is time for Action", aimed at creating awareness about challenges adolescent girls face during menstruation, especially in the era of novel Coronavirus (COVID-19).*

### Objectives

Menstrual Hygiene (MH) Day, which falls on 28 May every year, is used as a global advocacy platform to promote good menstrual hygiene management (MHM) practices and raise awareness of the challenges all women and girls face during menstruation. Like last year, the theme for this year remained "It's Time for Action", as we are merely not there yet and want to continue pushing for action, commitments and accountability on menstrual hygiene matters.

The webinar was used to discuss and continue the advocacy for provision of equitable toilet facilities which are gender friendly with changing rooms; easy accessibility of menstrual hygiene products even during pandemics such as COVID-19 and demystifying myths and taboos connected with menstruation among others.

### **Menstruation does not stop during COVID19 pandemic**

Speaking at the MHD Virtual Seminar, the Minister of Education, Dr Mathew Opoku Prempeh, stated that even though the world had been hit by COVID-19, "there is the need for girls to be cautious about their menstrual health."

He observed that COVID-19 indirectly affected Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) and mentioned mobility restrictions, challenges in obtaining essential items, interaction reduction with social support networks and privacy of household members.

Dr Prempeh noted globally more than 800 million women and girls menstruate every day, yet they faced barriers to properly manage their menstrual periods. He noted that the social stigma and taboos that surrounded menstruation, prevented women and girls from attending work and school.

"Even when they do attend while menstruating, the lack of access to menstrual hygiene products, lack of sanitation infrastructure such as separate toilets with changing rooms and hand washing facilities and inadequate menstrual hygiene education can prevent women and girls from reaching their full potential in the classroom, in the workplace and at home," Dr Prempeh said. Touching on the theme, he underscored an urgent need for individuals and institutions to empower women and girls to unlock their educational and economic opportunities.

Anne-Claire Dufay, Country Representative of United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), said that there was the need for quality data to support education

on menstruation hygiene. She said few studies had plausibly identified the role of menstrual hygiene interventions in reducing school absenteeism.

Ms Dufay said that where absenteeism was inevitable, as is the case with the current COVID-19 pandemic, interventions for increased MHM awareness that interfaced poverty, gender and education needed to move beyond individual social variables.

Director for the School Health Education Programme (SHEP) Unit of Ghana Education Service (GES), Nana Esi Inkoom, promised her outfit would collaborate with non-governmental organisations to equip schools with non-sanitary facilities to help females maintain good menstrual hygiene.

### **Recommendations**

The dialogue generated the following clear and strong learning points and recommendations for demystifying myths on menstruation:

- The need to generate quality data for evidence to better understand how MHM can improve girls' education outcomes
- Produce biodegradable sanitary materials to support girls even during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Standardizing reusable sanitary materials
- Advocate for provision of toilet facilities which are age specific,

disability and gender friendly with changing rooms

- Identify ways of demystifying myths and taboos connected with menstruation
- Create awareness: menstruation which is hardly discussed; processes, safety/hygiene; use open dialogues to change practices
- Empower women economically through production of reusable sanitary pads- livelihoods, filling a gap, educating the young and old
- Distribution of reusable sanitary pads to schoolgirls (timely introduction, education)
- Schools provided with gender-friendly WASH facilities to promote good MHM

The National Technical Committee on MHM coordinates the commemoration. The Committee is Chaired by the Director of the SHEP Unit. The members include representatives from the Ghana Education Service, Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health / Ghana Health Service, the Ministry of Sanitation and Water Resources. Other partners are UNICEF, Greater Accra Metropolitan Area (GAMA) Sanitation and Water Project, World Bank, World Vision Ghana, WaterAid Ghana, Days for Girls, Right To Play Ghana, Global Communities and USAID, CONIWAS.

***NLLAP is a WASH sector multi stakeholder platform with the overall goal of improving sector learning and dialogue. It is hosted by the Ghana WASH Resource Centre Network (RCN). The platform offers learning and sharing opportunity for sector players as one of the practical approaches to improving sector engagements/sharing with the long term aim of achieving a knowledge driven WASH sector that delivers quality and sustainable services in Ghana. NLLAP meetings take place on the last Thursday of every month (with modifications when necessary) and are open to all interested parties. The discussions of each NLLAP meetings can be found on the RCN website [www.washghana.net](http://www.washghana.net).***

If you are interested to propose a topic for a meeting please contact us on,  
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