

INNOVATION DAYS - Experience sheet

Name and function of the person completing the form: **AKPO Justin, AGIR-BENIN Project Manager**

1. Name of the innovation	Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM), an approach to keeping girls in the education system
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2. Context and issues

In what context was this innovation developed? What issues or needs was it trying to address?

The management of menstrual hygiene is one of the sexual phenomena observed in schools in Benin and around the world. Indeed, many girls who have just experienced menstruation are often confronted with difficulties: they are often ill-prepared, with little or no information on this subject considered taboo. This leaves them unaware of the appropriate behaviour to adopt when menstruation occurs. According to a report by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), one in ten girls in sub-Saharan Africa do not attend school during their menstrual cycle, which, according to some estimates, corresponds to 20% of the school time lost over a year. As a result, they may drop out of school completely each month when they begin their menstrual cycle, where menstrual management becomes a constraint and a problem for them due to lack of information, infrastructure and readily available hygiene products.

The strategy to address this is school-based menstrual hygiene management (MHM). It involves adequate preparation and support to enable girls to manage their menstruation hygienically, with dignity and in safety through the provision of adequate facilities and staff to accompany and guide first-time menstruating girls in schools.

The overall objective of the AGIR-BENIN project is to contribute to the improvement of the educational offer in response to the needs of girls and boys, and of children with disabilities and/or in emergency situations in Benin. To achieve this, the project has chosen certain strategies and actions, including the management of menstrual hygiene in the intervention schools for the benefit of girls in CE2, CM1 and CM2 classes

3. Type of innovation (tick the relevant box)

Technological or practical innovation (tool, practice, technique, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Institutional, organisational or methodological innovation (processes, organisational models, partnerships between actors, project management etc.)	X
Policy innovations (new policy or regulatory measures, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>

4. Description of the innovation

What did the innovation consist of? How does it work? What is the method?

The intervention strategy of the GHM component is organised around the following activities Involvement of school administrations and communities (local authorities, deconcentrated services, APE, AME, CRF, religious leaders, elders and notables, parents) in the planning and execution of activities, the construction of hygiene and sanitation infrastructures adapted to GHM for schools that do not have them (block of handi-sexo specific latrines equipped with a protective wall and a grid); training (briefing) of resource persons (women identified by the girls in the school and willing to accompany them), awareness-raising for all girls in classes from CE2 to CM2, provision of a kit of washable and reusable cloth sanitary towels, support and advice, and monitoring and evaluation. In addition, a system for collecting data and documenting good practices and lessons learned has been put in place to capitalise on the achievements of this part of the project.

Three aspects of the approach can be distinguished: the availability of infrastructure, the provision of free towels to targeted girls, the support of resource persons and the correct use of towels by schoolgirls.

The main steps of the strategy are as follows:

Preparatory activities :

- Present the project and the GHM concept to the deconcentrated State services (Education, Health, Family and Social Affairs depending on the context)
- Present the project and the GHM concept in schools (teachers, professors, PTA office and mothers of girls in CE2, CM1 & CM2 classes in primary and all classes in general secondary)
- Presenting the GHM project and concept to girls in CE2, CM1 and CM2 classes, without distinction.
- Practicing the internalization of the strategy by the operational teams (Aide et Action and/or NGO Operators)
- Train facilitators (WATSAN and/or NGO) to conduct talks with girls
- Organising pairs (this is still a taboo subject. Therefore the facilitators must be organised differently. When a facilitator is assigned to the school, he or she should be assisted by a female facilitator who will lead the talks with the girls and parents because it is culturally more acceptable for a woman to talk to girls and women about the subject.

Deployment of the strategy :

- Make the inventory of latrines in the schools covered (EPP and CEG): *make an analysis (are the latrines gender specific?), make the link with the search for protection / safety of girls at school, take the opinion of girls on the state of latrines and the 05 days of menstruation?*
- Identification of girls who have already had their first menstrual period: *it is important to have a database, to have a rate of absenteeism of girls at the beginning in order to measure progress at the end, to listen to the girls on the constraints relating to the follow-up of the courses during these 5 days per month in order to better take into account their needs and to ensure educational continuity, to listen to the girls on the contents of the kits which they would like*
- Identification of resource persons among teachers: *usually one identified resource person per school group, with strong involvement of the children. This gives the girls confidence and freedom to choose their mentor*
- Briefing of resource persons on their role in accompanying children in the GHM and on the use of washable and reusable sanitary towels: *make a presentation of the expected role of the resource person and the behaviour to adopt with regard to girls in general and those who come to confide in her, draw the attention of the resource person to the importance of providing the facilitator with a monthly review of the cases received and the observations made (e.g. absence of girls from the course). This monthly update will focus on the following aspects: number of girls received in the month, major concerns raised by the girls, etc.*
- Present the washable and reusable cotton sanitary napkin kit and how to use it;
- Training of project leaders and girls in the manufacture of washable sanitary towels and in the maintenance and cleanliness of latrines
- Distribution of sanitary towels to girls.
- Monitoring of towel use
- Evaluation of the girls' feelings

Sustainability scheme

Like any project, AGIR-BENIN has a lifespan and it is important to make provisions for continuity and preservation of achievements in the post-project period.

To this end, members of the deconcentrated state services in the communes covered by the project were involved from the start of the project. These are the state officials assigned to the social promotion centres. They participated in the training of the project team on the theme and the roles and responsibilities were shared in the planning of the implementation of the activity. In addition, local resource persons (women teachers, school vendors or female role models in the community) were identified and trained in the different stages of the activity. Since the start of the activity in the communes, they have actively participated in the census of girls who have already had their first menstruation. They have become confidants to whom the girls confide in order to receive advice on how to better manage their menstrual cycles and on all matters relating to reproductive health.

The other aspect of this sustainability strategy concerns the fabric model chosen to make the sanitary pads. These are the ordinary fabrics usually used by the community. They are available and accessible to all. The next step is to train resource persons and girls to make the pads themselves.

5. Results/changes achieved

What were the effects of this innovation? What changes did it produce in the actors?

The activity was actually launched in 2021 and the first sanitary napkin kits were distributed to girls in the last quarter of 2021.

But we can share some intermediate results:

- The enrolment of 901 girls aged between 9 and 16 who had already begun menstruating
- Identification of 128 resource persons in schools. They are made up of teachers, shop assistants or members of mothers' associations
- Training of 128 resource persons on their support role
- 3840 mothers of schoolgirls sensitised to the GHM concept

Some effects observed

- Improved menstrual hygiene management practices among girls and even personal hygiene resulting in a sense of physical and mental well-being during menstruation
- Existence of adapted sanitary facilities (models that guarantee the protection and safety of users, separate for girls and boys, with ramps for the disabled, easy to maintain),
- The beginning of a dialogue between mothers and daughters (testimonies)
- Beginning to learn the method of calculating the menstrual cycle for girls.
- Girls develop self-confidence that allows them to better express themselves on menstrual hygiene issues among themselves and with resource persons
- Increased awareness of girls about their own body hygiene

6. Elements to capitalise on

Strengths :

- *Taking into account the right to health of girls, taking gender into account, reducing the taboo of menstruation within communities,*
- *Existence of adequate infrastructure to ensure protection, safety and privacy of girls*
- *Strong involvement of decentralised State services in the deployment of the strategy*

Some weaknesses

- *Taboo nature of the issue of menstruation: very little or no mention of it at school and at home. Menstruating people are considered dirty and unclean*
- *Low coverage of target schools with adequate hygiene and sanitation infrastructure (latrines and water points) despite the project's contribution*

To be completed after the presentation

7. Who to contact for more information

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SUMMARY OF THE MAIN STEPS OF THE GHM STRATEGY

Preparatory activities:

1. Present the project and the GHM concept to the deconcentrated services of the State (Education, Health, Families and Social Affairs depending on the context)
2. Same in schools (teachers, professors, APE office and mothers of girls in CE2, CM1 & CM2 classes in primary and all classes in general secondary)
3. The same applies to girls in CE2, CM1 and CM2 classes, without distinction.
4. Practicing the internalization of the strategy by the operational teams (Aide et Action and/or NGO Operators)
5. Train facilitators (WATSAN and/or NGO) to conduct talks with girls
6. Organise the pairs (this is still a taboo subject. Therefore the an imatrices should be organised differently so as to cover all localities) of facilitators

Activities	Strategies	Responsible for	Objectives	People involved	Comments
0. Make a presentation of the strategy (NGOs Deconcentrated state services	Presentation of the elements of the strategy to all the deconcentrated State services and TFPs in the project area Presentation of the elements of the strategy to the traditional custodians	Project Manager	Obtain their comments and permission to proceed (especially if the area proves to be taboo conservative) Study with the deconcentrated services, in particular the heads of the social promotion centres, the possibility of sending a letter to the schools covered to authorise the deployment of the strategy) Obtain materials (if possible from the RCSPs): Parent-Child Dialogue Guide or other materials deemed useful	NGOs operating in the TEEB project area, Decentralised state services	Organise talks with the heads of the social promotion centres
1. Make a presentation of the strategy to Teachers, CCEA, BAPE, SMC, AME,	Presentation of strategy elements	Project Manager	Explain to stakeholders and parents the objective and the need to take it into account to keep girls in the system and improve completion rates Obtain their comments and permission to proceed Take into account their fears and readjust/adapt the strategy Listen to them about the causes of girls' dropout/ look for the link with the 5 days of girls' menstruation per month Establish the link with the sociology of the environment	NGOs involved in the area Teachers, CCAE, BAPE, COGES, AME,	Organise talks with the heads of social promotion centres and decentralised state services
2. Carry out an inventory of latrines in covered schools (EPP and CEG)	Organising the inventory	Project Manager	Conduct an inventory of the latrine situation and provide an analysis (are latrines gender specific?) Linking to the search for protection/safety of girls in schools Take the opinion of the girls on the state of the latrines and the 5 days of menstruation?	NGOs involved in the area Teachers, CCAE, BAPE, COGES, AME,	Building on what already exists If the mapping already exists

3. Identifying girls who have already started menstruating	In collaboration with the managers of the social promotion centres, the teachers and the project facilitators, organise talks with the girls on the importance of menstrual hygiene and lead to the identification of girls who have already begun menstruating	Managers of social promotion centres Project Leaders	Having a database To have the rate of girls' absenteeism at the start in order to measure progress at the end Listen to the girls about the constraints of attending classes during these 5 days per month in order to better take into account their needs and ensure educational continuity Listen to them about the content of the kits they would like	NGOs working in the area Headmasters, school teachers, CPS, project facilitators, girl students, learners' mothers' associations,	This activity should be conducted by facilitators The presence of a man/boy can be a barrier Take this into account in order to get the most out of the girls during the talks
4. Identification of resource persons among teachers: one per school group, with strong involvement of children	<p>Definition of criteria for identifying the resource person (who the girls trust: taking the girls' opinions) This will be a teacher on the staff of the school group.</p> <p><i>Ask the student to identify the teacher in her school group (secret choice on paper) with whom she would feel comfortable talking about her period or related problems;</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The facilitator collects the slips of paper and counts them;</i> • <i>It summarises and communicates the results to the director;</i> • <i>It negotiates with the support of the director the agreement of the identified resource person.</i> • <i>If they refuse, they negotiate with the next person on the list.</i> 	Animators Projects	Building girls' confidence Allow the girls concerned to choose their guardian	NGOs working in the area Headmasters, school teachers, girls' students	
5. Briefing of resource persons on their role in accompanying children in the GHM and on the use of washable and reusable sanitary towels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Make a presentation of the project;</i> • <i>Present the expected role of the resource person and the behaviours to be adopted towards girls in general and those who would come to confide in her;</i> 	Project Leaders	Building the capacity of resource persons	Identified resource persons, directors	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draw the attention of the resource person to the importance of providing the facilitator with a monthly update on cases received and findings (e.g. absence of girls from class). This monthly update will focus on the following aspects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of girls received in the month ; - The major concerns raised by girls. • Present the washable and reusable cotton sanitary napkin kit and how to use it; • Establish a schedule of briefing sessions for girls on the correct use and management of sanitary towels. 				
6. Training of project leaders and girls in making washable sanitary towels and keeping latrines clean	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify a contact person • Organising the training • Putting together the kits by girl <p>(Towels, Soap, Powder, etc.... / in accordance with the proposals retained during the talks)</p>	Project Leaders	Build the capacity of project leaders and girls to make washable sanitary towels Teaching girls to make their own sanitary towels Ensure that latrines in schools are available and gender specific	Identified resource persons, directors	Depending on budget availability
7. Distribution of sanitary towels to girls.	Give one set of three (3) sanitary towels per girl. To be renewed 2 or 3 months later. N.B.: distribute the kits during the briefing session. Make the briefing continuous (resource persons and/or Facilitator).	Project Leaders	Provide girls with kits to enable them to spend the day at school without	Identified resource persons, girls.	
8. Monitoring of towel use	Develop monitoring tools	Project Manager	Provide girls with kits to enable them to spend the day at school without being worried	Identified resource persons, girls.	
9. Evaluation of the girls' feelings	Developing evaluation tools	Project Manager	Collecting shortcomings and adjusting to needs	NGOs working in the area	

			Re-collect completion rates and analyse them in relation to the start-up period to identify changes and added value of the activity Have the analyses and lessons learned validated by the decentralised services of the State	Aide et Action Decentralised state services	
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