

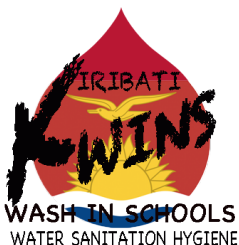


# Breaking Down Barriers

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## Coming of Age, Becoming the Change

Case study on the knowledge, attitudes and practices of  
Menstrual Hygiene Management in Kiribati Schools 2018



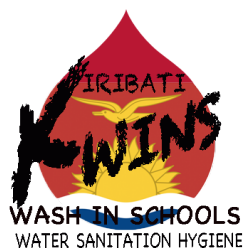
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Design: Helen Miles/Coffey International Development

Cover photo: Rianna (12) visits her old school in North Tarawa, Kiribati, talking about the improvements in sanitation and hygiene standards. UNICEF/2017/Sins

Photos: Sins/UNICEF, Lauren Amadei



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# Acronyms

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CSE	Comprehensive Sexual Education
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
IDI	In-Depth Interview
KEF	Kiribati Education Facility
KEIP	Kiribati Education Improvement Plan
KFHA	Kiribati Family Health Association
KII	Key Informant Interview
KSCCSN	Kiribati School and Centre for Children with Special Needs
KWINS	Kiribati WASH in Schools
MHM	Menstrual Hygiene Management
MoE	Ministry of Education
MHMS	Ministry of Health and Medical Services
SGBV	Sexual and Gender Based Violence
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
WASH	Water Sanitation and Hygiene

# Acknowledgements

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# Foreword

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## A message from the Honourable Minister of Education

Under the national WASH in Schools policy, the Ministry of Education committed itself to improve the water, sanitation and hygiene standards in the country. This includes menstrual hygiene management. Taking a multi-faceted approach to Menstrual Hygiene Management also aligns with the Ministry of Education's commitment to the Inclusive Education Policy, which aims to remove barriers to education to create equity in the classroom. As stated in this report, poor menstrual hygiene management can result in a normal biological process becoming a barrier to gender equality. By implementing actions that increase information and awareness; access to good quality sanitary products and ways to safely dispose of them; water and safe spaces for girls to use; positive social norms; and effective advocacy, the Ministry of Education is demonstrating our commitment to girls empowerment. Inclusive education is a key step towards Kiribati becoming a more equitable society.

Menstruation is very important in Kiribati culture and is surrounded by deep cultural traditions. First menstruation, in particular, symbolises a key transition into adulthood, where girls are expected to take on new roles and responsibilities. In Kiribati, the first three days when a girl reaches menarche are called "te katekateka", truly one of the most special times in a girls life. Menstruation it is something to celebrate and honour, a marker of the unique nature of the female experience.



Honourable Minister David Collins

Over the past few years research conducted across the globe, has suggested that it is common for women and girls to face challenges when managing their menstruation. Recent research into experiences in the Pacific has reinforced these findings. The global movement toward removing the barriers girls face when managing their menstruation in the school setting is something that the Kiribati government, and the Ministry of Education, can fully stand behind.

This study has been commissioned to investigate the situation of menstruating girls in Kiribati schools so that actions could be made to address the intersecting barriers that currently exist.

The findings in this study are both familiar and surprising. With results indicating that girls commonly lack knowledge, experience bullying, are unable to manage pain, and are impacted by behavioural restrictions, demonstrates that there is much work to be done in this area.

As a result of this study, the Ministry of Education is committing to a multifaceted action plan that will address these intersecting challenges.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this study. This report is dedicated to the girls of Kiribati; the future is theirs.

# Executive Summary

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Emerging research from the Pacific suggests that managing menstruation hygienically and with dignity can be challenging for girls in the school setting, with multiple barriers intersecting that leave girls disempowered.<sup>1,2</sup> As there has been very limited research into menstruation in Kiribati specifically, this study was commissioned to develop a set of school-based programmatic recommendations that are context specific, aiming to improve girls' experiences of menstruation in the school setting. The Ministry of Education acknowledges that good Menstrual Hygiene Management is essential for supporting the empowerment of girls by promoting dignity and reducing barriers to educational participation, thereby promoting inclusive education.

This report presents findings from research that was undertaken in Kiribati in November and December 2017. The study was led by the Ministry of Education and was funded by UNICEF under the Kiribati WASH in Schools programme.

The study was conducted in three research sites including South Tarawa, Abaiang and Abemama. South Tarawa represents the urban experience, whilst Abaiang and

Abemama are both outer islands and considered 'rural'. South Tarawa and Abemama have limited WASH activities, whilst Abaiang is a Kiribati WASH in Schools (KWINS) island. These islands were chosen to identify the gaps in KWINS' schools and to examine how, if and in what extent, the WASH in schools programme can include MHM in its activities.

This study used a mixed methods approach, with a focus on qualitative methods, including focus group discussions (FGD), in-depth interviews (IDIs) and key informant interviews (KII) with school girls, teachers, boys and mothers. The quantitative aspect included 'Menstruation Questionnaires' and WASH facility observation in relevant schools. Alongside this, a pilot of 35 Days for Girls Reusable Sanitary Pads were distributed in North Tarawa, another KWINS island.

This approach emphasized the importance of understanding the specific day-to-day needs, preferences, motivations and constraints of the target beneficiaries. By focusing on different members of the community, the study was able to understand the experience of girls, and also gain an insight into the influences in girls' lives.



UNICEF/Sins

## Key Findings

- There is a knowledge gap amongst school-aged girls related to menstruation and reproductive health more generally. This lack of knowledge also extends to the school-aged boys and mothers. This leaves girls feeling unprepared for menstruation and results in them being ill-equipped to manage their sexual and reproductive health. Whilst girls reported feeling comfortable talking to female teachers for support, their main source of knowledge and assistance was female relatives including mothers and grandmothers. This becomes a challenge when these female relatives also lack knowledge about menstruation and reproductive health.
- Some teachers interviewed indicated that they were unaware that Menstrual Hygiene Management is part of the curriculum. In addition to this, teachers expressed that they were under-resourced and under-trained to teach these subjects and manage student expectations. This results in girls receiving incomplete information related to menstruation and reproductive health in the school setting.
- Traditional beliefs and practices related to menstruation are strong in Kiribati communities, in both the urban and rural settings. These traditional beliefs affect girls' lives in a number of intersecting ways. Girls generally reported feeling happy and excited about reaching menarche the celebrating with the first period 'botaki' (party), however, other behavioural restrictions and beliefs impacted on their day to day lives such as:
  - Beliefs around menstrual blood being taboo;
  - Unwanted or potentially riskful behavioural restrictions such as changes to diet, and limiting bathing and social interactions during menstruation.
- Cultural beliefs make speaking about menstruation amongst men and boys taboo. As a result boys are not receiving information in the home about female reproductive health or menstruation. This appeared to be correlated with high rates of boys teasing and bullying girls in schools. Whilst teasing and bullying was often reprimanded, it was also reported that beliefs unintentionally reinforce negative behavior towards women and girls. Teasing and bullying left girls feeling embarrassed, afraid, reclusive and more likely to miss class or reduce participation in the classroom.
- Girls, teachers and their mothers commonly stated that absenteeism and decreased participation in class was common due to poor WASH facilities in schools, girls' unpreparedness for their period due to inability to track their period, feeling uncomfortable because of stomach pain and the threat of bullying and teasing. Teachers stated that this phenomenon is not well reported. Absenteeism and reduced participation has the potential to negatively affect girls' educational outcomes.
- A combination of 'buru' (cloth made from old materials), kimbi (diaper) and moteti (sanitary pads) were reported as the main types of materials used by girls across all three islands. Money played a large part in determining what sort of materials a girl would use, with girls often choosing the most economical option. Girls, teachers and mothers consistently stated that if schools were able to provide sanitary materials in school, or at least provide sanitary materials to girls in emergencies or who were unprepared, this would have a positive effect on girls' absenteeism and feelings of comfort in the school environment.
- Due to cultural taboos around menstrual blood, the disposal of sanitary materials in Kiribati is considered to be extremely important. Burial (in specific locations) and burning were reported as being the most common forms of disposal. Further research is needed into the environmental impacts of burying and burning sanitary materials. Participants reported that schools need to implement better procedures which allow girls to securely and privately dispose of their sanitary materials.

- Safe sanitation facilities in schools are far below standard for menstruating girls. Especially at JSS and higher, the facilities are poor. Key problems relating to WASH facilities include:
    - Most schools do not have enough toilets based on recommended student to toilet ratio;
    - Toilets are often not well-maintained or clean, with many lacking a roster for cleaning as well as cleaning products;
    - Toilets often do not have running water to flush, increasing hygiene and health risk
    - Toilets often lack doors, or have been damaged so that privacy can not be maintained;
    - No locks on toilet doors;
    - No washing/changing facility with water;
    - Lack of sanitary bins;
    - Lack of hand washing facilities providing water and soap.
  - Girls with disabilities face additional barriers when managing their menstruation. Girls with psychical disabilities reportedly needed assistance from teachers to change their sanitary items, while girls with visual impairments found disposal of sanitary items difficult.
3. Develop learning materials related to menstruation, puberty and reproductive health that will help support teachers in the classroom and promote comprehensive learning.
  4. The Ministry of Education and stakeholders to monitor more closely and implement the national WASH in Schools Policy on continuous basis. This should include:
    - Increase attention for JSS and secondary schools in the WASH in Schools programme; develop a JSS/SSS roll out approach and upscale strategy, including facilities and activities suitable for menstruating girls;
    - Ensure toilet facilities are installed with locks and holes in walls are fixed to help ensure privacy for girls;
    - Update minimum standard guidelines for MHM-friendly WASH facilities in schools in the National WASH in Schools policy;
    - Install all female toilets with green bags to dispose of sanitary pads. Concurrently, implement small-scale pilot projects to test context-specific low-cost alternative and sustainable disposable systems requiring low maintenance in schools and workplaces.
  5. Develop a ‘Kiribati Girls Empowerment Programme’ that will contribute to girls’ empowerment and gender equality in Kiribati. Specially, this will create a community of girls who feel empowered and educated about their sexual and reproductive health, menstruation, menstrual hygiene management and puberty. It can work with girls and their key influencers, namely female friends, relatives and teachers so that girls experience positive behaviour change in their educational, private and social spheres.

### Key Recommendations

1. Assess and strengthen the menstruation, reproductive health and puberty sections of the school curriculum, in particular for JSS and SSS. Further, the curricula related to these topics should be reviewed across all year levels, so that they are aligned with UNESCO’s ‘International technical guidance on sexuality education’.<sup>17</sup> This will ensure that Comprehensive Sexual Education (CSE) in Kiribati is age-and developmentally-appropriate and evidence-based. This review process should incorporate organizations from different sectors like the Kiribati Family Health Association (KFHA), the Ministry of Education (MoE), and the Ministry of Health and Medical Services (MHMS).
2. Develop teacher training on menstruation, Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) and Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) in collaboration with subject matter experts such as the Kiribati Family Health Association (KFHA) in line with UNESCO’s ‘International technical guidance on sexuality education’.<sup>17</sup> These materials should be delivered to trainee teachers (both male and female) at Kiribati Teacher’s College (KTC). Ongoing training opportunities should also be offered to teachers.
6. Advocate for community-wide MHM awareness raising that is inclusive of men, women, boys and girls across all age groups. Awareness raising should address the potentially harmful cultural taboos and beliefs and social norms associated with menstruation in a culturally appropriate way.
7. Integrate anti-bullying messaging related to menstruation into the ‘Respectful Relationships’ Curriculum as a culturally relevant example of gender stereotypes.
8. Consider the feasibility of providing free access to sanitary pads in school, preferably reusable sanitary pads.



# Introduction

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Kiribati is comprised of 32 low-lying atolls. According to the World Bank, the population of Kiribati is 114,395.<sup>3</sup> According to the 2015 Kiribati 'Population and Housing Census' there are 9849 girls between the ages of 11-19 in Kiribati.<sup>18</sup> Kiribati is ranked at 137 out of 187 on the Human Development Index, categorized as medium human development.<sup>4</sup>

South Tarawa is the capital of Kiribati, containing half the country's population. The research was conducted in three research sites: South Tarawa (urban setting), Abemama (rural outer island) and Abaiang (rural outer island). All of these islands are located in the Gilbert Islands Group. Subsistence lifestyles are the norm for families living on these outer islands. Unemployment is also high and subsistence living is also common in the urban setting of South Tarawa.<sup>14</sup>

Menstruation is a normal biological process, but the ways in which women and girls experience menstruation is shaped by gender norms. Menstruation-related beliefs and menstrual hygiene practices can vary, depending on perceptions and beliefs around how menstruation fits into gender roles. Without effective menstrual hygiene management (MHM) practices that allow girls to manage their period hygienically and with dignity, a normal biological process can become a barrier to gender equality.<sup>9,10,11,12</sup>

Poor MHM in schools has been shown in other contexts to negatively impact on girls' educational outcomes.<sup>1,2,9</sup> This study sought to explore the extent to which menstrual hygiene practices impact girls' educational outcomes and development in Kiribati.

In addition to this, Menstrual Hygiene Management is linked to a number of key human rights including the right to education, water/sanitation, health and non-discrimination/gender equality. As human rights define the relationship between a state (government) as the "duty-bearer" and the people living within the state as the "rights holders", the Ministry of Education accepts their responsibility to ensure that school girls have access to these rights in the school setting, as part of their commitment to inclusive education. By seeking to provide the means for girls to access good menstrual hygiene practices, the Ministry of Education is helping to enshrine these human rights.<sup>8</sup>

Whilst research on Menstrual Hygiene Management is growing in the Pacific, with recent studies conducted across Fiji, Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea, very limited research has been conducted into MHM in Kiribati.<sup>2</sup> This research is needed to inform evidence-based programme design by the Ministry of Education.

## Gender

Key concerns for women in Kiribati include high levels of gender inequality, gender based violence and the burden of family care responsibilities. The most recent study into sexual and gender based violence found that the majority of women believe a man is correct in beating his wife in certain circumstances and 90% of women have experienced at least one act of controlling behavior by a partner. 68% of women (2 in 3) between the ages of 15 and 49 years who have ever entered into relationships have reported experiencing sexual or physical violence, or both, by an intimate partner.<sup>6</sup> Kiribati experiences some of the highest rates of gender based violence in the world. It was found there were increased instances of intimate partner violence in South Tarawa compared to the outer islands. Sexual and reproductive rights are an issue with only 23% of women having access to modern forms of contraception.<sup>7</sup> As gender equality and gender norms shape girls' experiences of menstruation, this study will seek to understand how gender norms, specific to Kiribati, affect girls' experiences of menstrual hygiene management.

## MHM in the Curriculum

The newly released 'Healthy Living' subjects for years 5 and 6 in Primary School includes content regarding health, hygiene, puberty and gender. This subject outlines the following guidelines for menstruating girls: eat healthy food; avoid eating raw or cooked fish; drink local medicinal leaves (teberanikai); change pads regularly; dispose of pads properly; wash used cloth with soap and bleach; bathe with warm water once every day; and no swimming during menstruation. Outside of this subject, MHM is not dealt with directly, however 'Physical' Education for years 5 and 6 does explore physical and emotional changes that occur during puberty.

## Kiribati WASH in Schools

UNICEF supports the Ministry of Education with the Kiribati Water, Sanitation and Hygiene in Schools Programme (KWINS). The overall aim of the KWINS programme is to provide safe access to water, sanitation and hygiene in all schools in Kiribati. From 2015 – May 2018, all schools in Abaiang, Maiana, Marakei and North Tarawa (32 schools) received support to improve their WASH facilities and practices. KWINS is part of a broader WASH programme of UNICEF that reinforces a community-led approach by empowering children as agents of behaviour change. Other WASH projects include: WASH for Health Facilities, WASH

for Councils and WASH in Community. The rationale of the KWINS programme is to empower school students, teachers and school committees as agents of change in their wider communities. They promote better hygiene and sanitation practices and help to eliminate open defecation and improve health within the wider community. This is achieved through the 3-star approach, a model globally used by UNICEF, encompassing a step by step progress module within components of (drinking) water, sanitation and hygiene. Under the 3-star approach MHM is introduced after schools have reached the minimum level of basic safe water and sanitation (1 star).

3 Star Approach		Water	Sanitation	Hygiene	Wash Clubs	SIP Committee
Improved	<b>3 STARS Meeting National Standard</b>	Is there <b>safe drinking water available in the school</b> from an improved source (like Rainwater tank)	Is there a <b>toilet for every 50 students (1:50)</b> including separate toilets for boys and girls?	Is <b>hygiene education taught in school</b> where the WASH activities and hygiene behavior are an integral part of the curriculum and school activities	Do the children take the <b>lead</b> in implementing WASH activities?	Is the community declared <b>Open Defecation Free?</b>
	<b>2 STARS Basic Access</b>	Is there a <b>low cost water treatment</b> available at the point of use for drinking water? (sodis, boiling, filter)  And is there <b>water available for hand washing</b> and cleaning at the WASH facilities?	Is there a <b>toilet for every 100 students (1:100)</b> including separate toilets for boys and girls?  Are there sanitary bins with cover present in the toilets?	Does <b>daily supervised group hand-washing</b> takes place and is soap available at the hand-washing stations and in the toilets?  Are hygiene promotion activities conducted in schools including Menstrual Hygiene Management?	Are WASH clubs <b>implementing</b> WASH activities as scheduled and are Duty Rosters executed? Minimum supervised WASH activities: -Group hand-washing -Group pledge -Group cleaning	Is the <b>WASH ACTION plan Implemented?</b> Does the SIP actively improve/ sustain WASH activities and facilities
Unimproved	<b>1 STAR WinS in Emergency</b>	Do children bring their <b>individual water bottle</b> to the school?	Is there a <b>toilet for every 200 students? (1:200)</b> including separated toilets for boys and girls?	Is <b>water and soap</b> present near the toilets? Is <b>WASH in Schools introduced?</b>	Have WASH clubs been <b>formed</b> and Duty Rosters developed and are these and the WASH vision displayed and visible for all?	Has the <b>WASH ACTION plan been developed</b> and displayed?
<b>0 STAR</b>		No Water	No toilet	No WASH activities	No WASH club	No WASH action plan

The 3-star model used for the Kiribati WASH in School programme

The provision of WASH facilities in schools is an important factor to create a better learning environment. It addresses a reason for student absenteeism and is expected to improve student achievement - particularly for girls who may suffer because of lack of or poor WASH facilities, particularly during menstruation. KWINS provides technical and financial support to install and maintain essential and appropriate hand washing, drinking-water and sanitation facilities in schools. The involvement of the parents, teachers and school management in selecting safe and affordable drinking-water and sanitation technologies for their school communities, and attention to continued investment in maintaining facilities, is key to the approach. Behaviour change is supported through the production of learning and teaching materials, including the WASH Educational Toolkit as well as hygiene education as a precursor to infrastructure construction/upgrading. School Improvement Committees (SIP) receive training in constructing the best model of sanitation and drinking water systems, maintenance of facilities and monitoring.

In 2015 the Ministry of Education adopted the WASH in Schools Policy as one of the first outputs under the KWINS programme. After the first four islands, the Ministry intends to roll-out the programme to other islands in Kiribati. The Kiribati National WASH in Schools policy has been developed to ensure that all school aged children in Kiribati have full access to safe drinking water, suitable and clean sanitation facilities/ services and to improve hygiene practices in their schools and local communities at all times. This seeks to meet their basic human rights, educational, social, cultural, physical, emotional and learning needs.

### The WASH in Schools policy mentions the following principles:

All schools provide WASH facilities to create a safe, healthier and conducive environment for learning. All schools empower children to be agents of changes with the following definitions:



**Water** - Access to water that is safe, accessible and sufficient



**Water treatment methods** - Disinfection by heat (boiling), chemicals (chlorine) or sunlight and the Solar Disinfectant method (SODIS).



**Sanitation** - Safe disposal of excreta, use of latrine or toilet, clean and well-maintained toilet, well-lit and well-ventilated toilet, available soap and water in the toilet.



**Hygiene** - Daily group handwashing with soap, daily group tooth brushing with fluoride toothpaste, bi-annual deworming.

The National Standard for school sanitation states the following toilet/ person ratio is appropriate for the Kiribati conditions:



**1 x toilet / 40 girls (1:40)**



**1 x toilet / 60 boys (1:60)**

# Aims

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The aims of this study are:

- To understand the knowledge, attitudes and practices around menstruation in Kiribati and how this affects girls' experiences of menstrual hygiene management;
- To investigate whether girls experience challenges during menstruation – as well as the determinants of those challenges – in Kiribati;
- Determine the impact of menstrual management knowledge and practices on girls' participation in education;
- To inform a set of school-based programmatic recommendations to improve girls' experiences and reduce challenges.



# Study Design

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## Ethical Considerations

This study has been approved by the Kiribati Ministry of Health Research and Ethics Review Board. The research team assured:

- Informed consent and assent. Informed consent has been provided orally and in writing. Prior to any interview or discussion, a verbal assent was required and fully made the participants aware of their rights and the responsibility of the interviewer to maintain confidentiality and do no harm. Participants were informed that the interviews were being recorded.
- Privacy and confidentiality. The interviews have been conducted in an area that guaranteed privacy to the participants. The report does not have any identifiers that link statements to any particular participant. The data collected does not contain the name or the address of any participant.

## Study Tools

The study used a mixed methods approach. Field work took place in November and December 2017. The socio-ecological framework guided the questions, activities and themes utilized during this research. Questions were developed to investigate and understand the range of personal challenges and needs girls had during menstruation in schools, from the perspectives of the girls, their families, peers and teachers. All activities closed with a question asking participants for recommendations on what the schools can do to create environments at schools that help girls manage their menstruation with confidence.

The qualitative aspect used focus group discussions (FGD), in-depth interviews (IDIs) and key-informant interviews (KIIs) as the main methods of data collection. The questions were adapted for the local Kiribati context from UNICEFs 'WASH in Schools Empowers Girls' Education Tools for Assessing Menstrual Hygiene Management in Schools'. A review of relevant literature was also completed for this report. English question guides were translated into Kiribati language by the i-Kiribati Research Assistants and reviewed as a group to ensure accuracy. FGDs included a number of participatory activities to stimulate discussion and included: a 'before' and 'after' menstruation activity, imaging the life of a typical girl, writing story of their first menstruation and an anonymous question section.

The quantitative aspect included observations of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities. Quantitative surveys were also distributed in the schools where qualitative research was undertaken, as well as additional school in South Tarawa (urban) and North Tarawa (rural).

In addition to this a pilot of 35 'Days for Girls' reusable Sanitary Pads was undertaken in North Tarawa which is a rural setting and a KWINS island. Follow up surveys to assess the acceptability of the kits was also undertaken.

## School Selection

Data was collected from six schools across three islands, namely South Tarawa, Abemama and Abaiang, plus the Kiribati School and Centre for Children with Special Needs in South Tarawa (KSCCSN). Schools were purposively selected to ensure that a range of characteristics were represented, specifically:

Type of school: Both primary and secondary schools were included, to understand the needs and experiences of girls of different ages and grades.

Location: Rural and urban (outer islands) schools were selected to capture the differences in each context.

## Participants

### Qualitative

Method	Age Range (years)	Number of Participants			
		South Tarawa	Abaiang	Abemama	Total
Focus Group Discussion - Girls	11-18	17	10	10	37
In Depth Interview - Mothers	-	1	0	0	1
Focus Group Discussion - Mothers	29-56	5	11	10	26
In Depth Interview - Girls	11-18	3	1	4	8
In Depth Interview - Boys	16-18	4	4	4	12
Key Informant Interview - Female Teacher/Principal	-	1	2	2	5
Key Informant Interview - Male Teacher/Principal	-	1	1	1	3
<b>Total Participants</b>					<b>92</b>

### Quantitative

Method	Participants	Amount
School Facility Observation (including KWINS schools)	School	34
Menstruation Survey	Girls	73
Days for Girls Pilot	Girls	35

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
<p>Girls</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Menarchal.</li> <li>● Currently enrolled in and attending school.</li> <li>● Willing to participate.</li> </ul> <p>Boys</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Currently enrolled in and attending school.</li> <li>● Willing to participate.</li> </ul> <p>Teachers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Currently hold a position as a teacher or administrator in target school.</li> <li>● Have regular interaction with pupils.</li> <li>● Willing to participate.</li> </ul>	<p>For all groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Out-of-school children.</li> <li>● Girls who have not reached menarche.</li> <li>● Individuals who have not provided consent or willingness to participate.</li> <li>● School staff who do not interact with students.</li> </ul>

## Study Team

The Research Leader for this study was an Australian Volunteer (AVI) based at the Ministry of Education. The AVI volunteer was the Research Leader and managed the research in schools, led the training of the local research team, analyzed the results of the research and prepared the final report. Technical support was provided by an international consultant at UNICEF Pacific. Field work was carried out by a team of five Kiribati secondary school teachers under the supervision of the Research Leader and UNICEF technical support.

## Data Collection and Analysis

FGDs and IDIs were conducted and documented in Kiribati language by members of the local research team. Discussions were digitally recorded with the permission of participants. Preliminary data analysis took place during field work with the assistance of the RAs. Formal data analysis took place once the Kiribati transcripts had been translated into English by the RAs. NVivo<sup>(11.4.3)</sup>, a qualitative data management and analysis programme, was used to help manage, sort and code data. Using an inductive approach, a coding framework was developed and refined, and systematically applied to the data by the Research Leader. These codes were then organized according to overarching themes, which helped to provide a structure for communication of findings. Quantitative data (assessments of WASH facilities and scoping of menstrual hygiene products) were summarized into a narrative format.

## Limitations

The limitations to the assessment include:

- Short data collection timeframes, which were mostly conducted outside of the school term, impacted the breadth of consultations that could be implemented;
- Small sample size of six schools across three islands in the same island group means the results may not be generalizable to the national context;
- Inclusion of only one school that is a combined JSS/SSS;
- Exclusion of community members such as fathers, church leaders and key professionals in health, gender and child protection.

As this research is intended to inform programming, these design limitations are unlikely to negatively impact the utility of the findings. However, cultural and individual differences both within communities and across geographic locations (urban vs rural) should be acknowledged, and findings should therefore be considered in context and not interpreted as being representative of the population as a whole.

# Findings

This section describes study findings, presented in a narrative format.

## i Knowledge and Education

This study highlighted that many participants showed a limited knowledge of the biological process of menstruation and reproductive health more generally. Many of the young girls could only describe menstruation in terms of the observable process that happens to them every month, namely that menstruation is simply blood leaving the vagina. This limited knowledge also extended to the mothers that were interviewed.

- **“Yes, it’s about the blood that goes out from the vagina.”**  
(Girl, Abaiang)
- **“Let me explain, I don’t understand why the blood should go from women’s body!”** (Mother, Abemama)
- **“Menstruation is the thing that comes out from the inside, the bleeding.”** (Girl, Survey Respondent)
- **“Menstruation is a sin from Eve who disobeyed God.”**  
(Girl, Survey Respondent)

When asked why menstruation occurs, 48% of survey respondents said that menstruation indicates reaching maturity. Girls and their mothers largely attributed menstruation to girls reaching the next stage of ‘maturity’. This transition had strong connotations of leaving childhood behind and taking of women’s responsibilities in the family home, including cooking and cleaning, and with a strong sense that childhood play was no longer acceptable. This abrupt transition to new adult-roles and responsibilities, with limited education and knowledge, left many girls finding the transition difficult to manage and navigate. Asked about how a girl perceives reaching menarche, girls answered:

- **“My parents were excited to see me making the string<sup>1</sup>, especially they knew that I was getting mature and could help them in doing some of the house work such as washing, cooking and so forth.”** (Girl, Abemama)
- **“Sad in the sense that she would not be able to play with young children, she can’t have a childish attitude anymore.”** (Girl, Abaiang)

1 A traditional activity when a girl reaches menarche is to make a string of coconut fibre.

Most participants, including both girls and the mothers, believed that menstruation is a typical process that happens to a majority of women. Despite this, negative attitudes towards menstruation often meant that girls would describe the process as a ‘sickness’. Many could identify that menstruation was connected to fertility, a sign that a girl’s body was now able to reproduce. This was strongly linked to their ideas around reaching maturity and womanhood. Despite this, no one was able to identify the different stages of the menstrual cycle, in which times throughout the cycle women were more fertile, or reasons other than pregnancy that can cause a period to be irregular or late.

- **“Pregnancy will occur when having sex with a man.”**  
(Girl, Abaiang)
- **“It marks that their eggs are ready to fertilize where she can give birth.”** (Boy, South Tarawa)

Only 8.5% of survey respondents knew that women are most fertile halfway through their cycle during ovulation phase.

87.3% of respondents could not name other reasons for a late period other than pregnancy.

Only a very limited number of interviewees could give an accurate biological description. Of the survey respondents, only 1.5% could give an accurate description:

- **“In this school, we also learn the menstrual cycle. Menstruation is the process of releasing eggs which are not fertilized.”** (Boy, Abaiang)
- **“Because the ovary isn’t fertilized with the sperm, so it is released as the blood called menstruation.”**  
Girl, Survey Respondent)



Most knowledge that the participants could demonstrate, was related to traditional practices and beliefs around how to manage and dispose of materials according to traditional ‘tabutabu’ beliefs. They did not speak about the reproductive system or puberty. This knowledge was usually learned in the home environment from female relatives including mothers, grandmothers, aunts and sisters. While girls commonly reported feeling comfortable talking to female teachers about menstruation, this was often for assistance in emergencies when they may have forgotten sanitary pads. The girls indicated that there were not good opportunities to speak to teachers in greater depth about this topic.

- **Interviewer:** *When you menstruate, who do you talk to about it?*
- **Participant:** *“My mother, because I trust her and she can find ways to help me.” (Girl, Abemama)*
- *“Many girls prefer to seek help from a female teacher as she knows how to handle it properly.” (Girl, South Tarawa)*

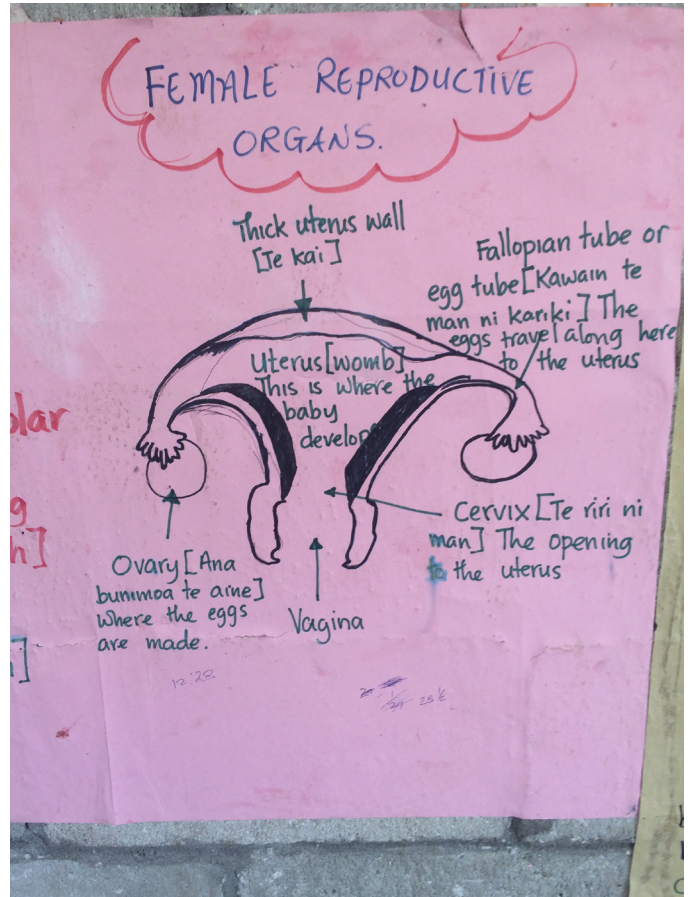
**Challenge:** Women and girls don’t have sufficient or accurate knowledge about menstruation and reproductive health as they transition into adulthood. The majority of the education they receive is related to traditional beliefs, and steeped in cultural understandings of menstruation. Despite this, strong relationships between girls and their female relatives and female teachers demonstrates how important these key influencers can be in affecting change and influencing girls’ education and knowledge around menstruation. However, these influencers must also be involved in education initiatives as they too lack knowledge and a platform to discuss this topic in an honest and open way. Furthermore, lack of resources means that the influencers in girls’ lives feel ill-equipped to support girls through this transition.

**Impact:** Girls find themselves unable to manage this transition effectively due to lack of accurate knowledge or access to information. Their keys influencers (female relatives and female teachers) also lack knowledge, making it difficult to support girls effectively as they reach menarche and go through puberty.

**Opportunity:** The research demonstrates that women and girls are quite comfortable discussing menstruation and reproductive health when they feel supported, empowered and respected. Further, older female relatives and female teachers are an essential mode of support for young girls. A girl’s empowerment programme, can be based around sexual and reproductive health education (including menstruation). It can utilize this environment and includes both girls and their female relatives which will be an effective mode of empowering and educating girls on this topic. Creating resources to support the programme will help girls and their influencers to continue the conversation at home and ensure that they have access to reliable and accessible information.

Some of the teachers who were interviewed, were not aware that menstruation is already included in the curriculum. Additionally, a number of teachers interviewed felt they did not have the resources necessary to teach these subjects well. Teachers reported that as a consequence these topics were not taught or not taught well in their schools. This subsequently makes young people reliant on the knowledge they learn in the home environment, which can be challenging as parents also demonstrated limited knowledge on menstruation and sexual reproductive health (SRH). This also means that information they learn in the home environment, is verified.

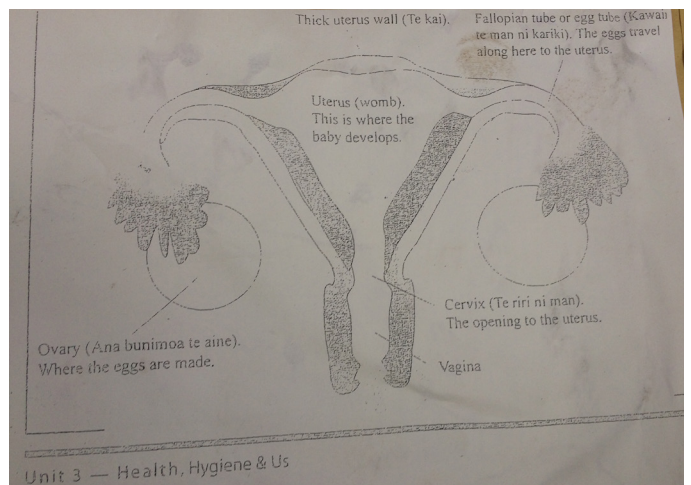
- **“Sometimes, this subject also needs more concrete resources, in order for students to learn theories and see them in reality, like the ovary and many others.”** (Teacher, Abemama)
- **“We are well prepared only for theory classes, but we can’t afford what is needed for practical classes, like pads.”** (Teacher, South Tarawa)
- **“In my point of view, there is no menstruation related education in the school, but girls who are menstruating, are always reminded to be hygienic and to take care of themselves.”** (Teacher, Abaiang)



**Challenge:** Teachers feel themselves ill-equipped to teach about menstruation and don't feel they have enough resources to teach this topic properly. Further, not all seem familiar with the current curriculum, which does include content about menstrual hygiene management.

**Impact:** Students rely on what they are taught in the home environment which may be insufficient or inaccurate with a focus on cultural beliefs. This may reinforce the idea that menstruation is taboo as it limits the amount it is spoken about publicly.

**Opportunity:** Teacher participants showed enthusiasm about the opportunity to participate in research and training which would better prepare them to teach about menstruation. and Ministry of Education can develop new and innovative resources which would assist teachers to teach these topics.



Posters of the female reproductive organs on display in a classroom in Abemama.

In particular, it was reported that male teachers were ill-equipped to teach about menstruation in school and extra training was needed. This further reinforces menstruation being a taboo topic for boys and men:

- *“Male teachers know nothing about girls’ issues in regards of menstruation.” (Girl, South Tarawa)*
- *“Well, teachers need to be provided with extra training, especially male teachers as they are the ones who need to have fully understanding about menstruation in terms of the age to menstruate (menarche) and the problems go along with menstruation.” (Teacher, Abaiang)*
- *“Because some men, especially the youngest ones and single, experience difficulty in the teaching, like they don’t know how to teach. They can’t teach, specifically in using the menstruation terms and feel ashamed to teach and maybe they can get mocked by their students.” (Teacher, Abaiang)*

**Challenge:** Male teachers in particular lack the knowledge to be able to talk to students about menstruation. Furthermore, cultural beliefs may lead them to feel ashamed about the topic.

**Impact:** Male teachers’ silence around menstruation further exacerbates cultural taboos and secrecy around menstruation.

**Opportunity:** Teacher training could incorporate specific units aimed at tackling stigma and taboos amongst male teachers.

## ii Beliefs and Attitudes

### First Menstruation

In Kiribati, menstruation is viewed as a turning point in a girl’s life and a ‘coming-of-age’, which changes girls’ perception of self, as well as their role in their family and community. First menstruation is commonly viewed quite positively, signifying the transition to adulthood, and is seen as a cause for celebration. In this way, first menstruation is not shrouded in secrecy as it can be in other cultures. A majority of interviewees reported that they would commonly follow some form of traditional practice for three days following menarche, which would culminate in a ‘Botaki’ (party/celebration) with family and friends. The scale of the ‘botaki’ often depended on the social-economic status of the family and personal beliefs.

In the three days prior to the ‘Botaki’, common activities reportedly include:

- Limiting food and water intake. Traditionally only coconut is consumed, though girls reported that this was less common nowadays and they may instead just limit their food intake to bread and water. Participants explained that if too much food is consumed during menstruation, women will have more of a tendency to gain weight throughout their life.
- Mothers commonly spoke about their experiences of placing a tie around the girls’ stomach to limit hunger during first menstruation. This practice was reported as being less common in current times.
- Undertaking traditional women’s work like rolling string from coconut fibre, weaving seating mats and learning to make flower garlands.
- Housework activities like cleaning.
- Remaining in a separate part of the house and limiting interactions with non-female relatives. It is during this isolation time that the older female relative who has been chosen as the girl’s guide, teaches her about traditional tasks and provides her with knowledge on how to manage menstruation.

These three days would often culminate in a ‘Botaki’. Common practices associated with this Botaki include:

- A celebration including family and friends, often held at the family home or the village Mwaneaba.
- A feast is often prepared, and might include slaughtering a pig (depending on family resources).
- The girl is often dressed up in a new red dress with hairclips throughout her hair.
- The eldest boy from another family is chosen as the ‘partner’ for the girl during her menstruation. This is said to bring the girl luck and resembles an engagement ceremony.

- “On my third day, I was very happy because there was a celebration for my menstruation and also I got new clothes on that day.” (Girl, Abemama)
- “On my third day, some people came for the celebration. I was very proud to have a very big celebration, hence, I was very glad to have my first menstruation, because it gave me the sign to leave my childhood stage and reached the new stage of maturity.” (Girl, Abemama)
- “Yeah, it was a big celebration because lot of people came, especially my families from both of my mother and father.” (Girl, South Tarawa)

### ‘Tabutabu’ and Behavioural Restrictions

Despite menarche being a cause for celebration in Kiribati culture, menstruation in general was often described as ‘boitin’ (position), ‘tia bwaibuaka’ (bad thing), a girl’s sickness and most commonly ‘kuraati ma namakaina’ (crash with the moon) amongst the participants. These words are strongly related to a

cultural belief that menstrual blood is ‘tabutabu’ (taboo).

Alongside this belief that menstrual blood is taboo, comes a number of behavioural restrictions which dictate how girls should behave during menstruation and how people (especially boys and men) should interact with them.

Behavioural restrictions were commonly reported amongst all groups interviewed on all islands.

### Limiting time spent outside the house and interactions with others

Many of the participants spoke about the importance of limiting the amount of time spent going out during menstruation. Participants indicated that during this time, it was better for girls to stay at home to protect both themselves and others. This was partly attributed to the belief that menstrual blood attracts evil spirits and partly to the belief that girls need to be protected from boys and men now that they are fertile.



- **Friend:** Can you come with me to the shop?  
**Me:** No problem, but we have to be quick though, because I have chores.  
**Mother:** Where are you going, don't you have a brain?  
**Father:** Just wait until you get back, I will beat you!  
(Image above - translation of the drawing by girls in the Focus Group activity 'Before and After' menarche, South Tarawa)
- “We should not play with them (menstruating girls), because they are weak.” (Boy, South Tarawa)

88% of survey respondents believe that menstrual blood attracts evil spirits.

63% of survey respondents believe that girls should not walk around at night time when they have their period.

## Exposure to water

Participants in the research indicated that there is a strong traditional belief in Kiribati culture that bathing, swimming and general exposure to water should be limited during menstruation. Reasons for this belief were mixed, but were often attributed to the body being more open during menstruation, therefore water can enter the body and cause heavier bleeding and damage the cervix. This belief is also covered in the year 6 'Healthy Living' subject, which recommends that girls should avoid swimming in the ocean for hygiene reasons during menstruation.

➤ **Interviewer:** *Okay. Any other times when you missed school because of your period?*

**Participant:** *I have missed school when it was raining during my period, I didn't want to get wet as they say that it can cause the damage to my cervix during menstruation.* (Girl, Abaiang)

➤ *"Our body is open during menstruation, so the water might get through the body easier, especially into our vagina and that would create another problem or sickness."* (Girl, South Tarawa)

➤ *"I always tell her to not bathe otherwise she would be affected. She just said that the doctors told her to have a bath to protect bacteria to get inside her vagina."* (Mother, Abaiang)

➤ *"It is bad for girls to swim in the sea as it will cause more harm to your internal organs."* (Girl, Abaiang)

85% of survey respondents believe it is unhealthy to go swimming during menstruation

## Change in diet

Participants in the research indicated that changes to their normal diet is common during menstruation. Participants highlighted the importance of girls reducing their food intake, particularly during first menstruation, with the belief that this would prevent them from gaining weight in the future. Whilst the traditional practice is to tie something around the stomach, this was reported as being less common in current times. Girls indicated that reducing their food intake often left them feeling uncomfortable, hungry and unable to concentrate.

➤ *"I felt sad when I talked to my grandmother about the issue, as I was given less food to eat and less drink when having meals during my menstruation."* (Girl, Abaiang)

➤ *"Yes, they have a feeling like they are hungry. Because in our culture, they can't eat until they reached the third day."* (Mother, South Tarawa)

➤ *"It also was during my first menstruation period that I ate less food, just like those who are fasting."* (Girl, Abaiang)

Limiting fish intake during menstruation was emphasized, as fish is believed to increase the odour of menstrual blood and cause heavy bleeding. This belief is also reinforced in the year 6 'Healthy Living' subject which states that girls should not eat raw or cooked fish during menstruation.

➤ **Interviewer:** *"Do you have to change your diet and stop eating things like fish?"*

**Participant:** *"Yeah, I eat less and am not allowed to eat the raw fish."*

**Interviewer:** *"What's your belief about raw fish?"*

**Participant:** *"Not my belief, my mother told me to not eat raw fish, as it can make my blood smelly."* (Girl, Abaiang)

➤ **Interviewer:** *"Do you have to change your diet and stop eating things like fish during menstruation?"*

**Participant:** *"Yes, in order to lessen the bad blood odour and to stay slim and healthy."* (Girl, Abemama)

50% of survey respondents stated that raw fish should not be eaten during menstruation

## Preparing or Serving Food

Due to menstrual blood being 'tabutabu' (taboo) many participants believe that girls cooking during menstruation should not be allowed, or at least limited. This would prevent other members of the family being exposed to menstrual blood.

- ***"I cooked, but I am not allowed to fetch the food from the pot. I am also not allowed to wash the dishes."***  
(Girl, Abaiang)
- ***"My brother doesn't want me to prepare the food, he also doesn't want to sit beside me, he was disgusted by the blood."*** (Girl, Abaiang)
- ***"Menstruating girls shouldn't cook for the family, otherwise they're going to be cursed, when eating the food they serve."*** (Boy, South Tarawa)

## 41% of survey respondents believe that menstruating girls should not be able to prepare food for others

Relief from normal house chores and familial obligations, however was often described as being a welcome relief.

- ***"For me, the advantage is that I have time to relax and not doing some house chores."***  
  
***"Yes, they have the time to rest from doing house chores like cooking, collecting the coconut and fetching water."***  
(Girl, Abemama)

Conversely, however, girls also expressed that they experienced negative feelings as a result of this exclusion.

- ***"The disadvantage is that it makes me uncomfortable and it creates a barrier between me and those people that are disgusted with the blood."*** (Girl, Abaiang)

## Additional behavioural restrictions

Other behavioural restrictions that emerged in the research included:

- Carrying heavy objects.

- ***"It is not good for girls when having menstruation to carry heavy objects."*** (Girl, Abaiang)  
  
***"Not to fetch the water to protect heavy menstruation."***  
(Mother, Abaiang)

- Playing with young children.

- ***"I don't play with little children."*** (Girl, Abaiang)

- Keeping menstruation a secret

- ***Participant 1: " (...) Because they said that when a girl does not admit that she's started menstruating, she will be turn out as a disobedient girl."***  
  
***Participant 2: "Yes, and sometimes she can be like a dog."***  
  
***Interviewer: "A dog? How?"***  
  
***Participant 2: "When a dog has her period, it's hanging around and chased by male dogs."*** (Mother, Abaiang)

## 90% of survey respondents state that menstruation should be kept a secret from men and boys.

**Challenge:** Cultural taboos around menstruation which dictate behavioural restrictions can have a profound effect on the lives on menstruating girls. These cultural taboos affect them in a multitude of ways including their interaction and independence during menstruation, their diet and their ability to bathe and swim.

**Impact:** Behavioural restrictions affect girls in different ways and depend on the extent to which they are practiced by the individual and their family. Some potential impact includes harmful effects to a girls' nutritional status and social isolation, further promoting shame.

**Opportunity:** Community awareness programmes that addresses behaviour change has the potential to challenge the beliefs and social norms that inform negative behavioural restrictions.

## Teasing and Bullying

Menstruation is considered to be a taboo topic amongst men and boys, with 90% of survey respondents stating that menstruation should be kept a secret from men and boys. Boys reported that they did not feel comfortable talking to their parents about menstruation and therefore had a very limited understanding of why women and girls menstruate.

➤ **“Girls start menstruating after swimming in the sea, and therefore can give birth.”** (Boy, South Taarwa)

➤ **Interviewer: “When do girls get menstruate?”**

**Participant: “I think it’s Wednesday to Thursday.”** (Boy, Abemama)

➤ **Interviewer: “Can you tell me how boys are expected to act around menstruating girls?”**

**Participant: “They are not expected to talk with menstruating girls because it’s a taboo.”** (Boy, Abaiang)

➤ **Interviewer: “Is it important for the boys to understand menstruation?”**

**Participant: “No.”**

**Interviewer: “Why?”**

**Participant: “It’s not their business.”**

**Interviewer: “Is it easy for boys to talk about menstruation?”**

**Participant: “No.”**

**Interviewer: “Why?”**

**Participant: “They won’t be allowed to talk about it otherwise they might be hated.”** (Boy, Abaiang)

The non-existence of men and boys speaking and learning about menstruation occurs in both the home and school environments. Participants expressed that not only were fathers unwilling to talk about it with their sons, but also that male teachers were uncomfortable and ill-equipped to discuss the topic at school with their students.

➤ **Interviewer: “What about your husbands? Do they have time to talk with their children especially their sons about menstruation?”**

**Participant: “They don’t talk about menstruation, as it not their job to discuss that as they think it’s not good to talk about it as they are men.”** (Mother, Abemama)

➤ **Interviewer: “Do parents talk to their children about menstruation?”**

**Participant: “No, otherwise boys might be gay.”** (Boy, South Tarawa)

The lack of knowledge and empathy appeared to be correlated to teasing and bullying that subsequently occurred. Teasing and bullying of menstruating girls was reported across all islands. Girls spoke about their paranoia that if the smell of their blood was obvious, or they bled onto their skirt then they would be mocked by fellow students, especially boys.

➤ **“I don’t want people to smell blood from my side otherwise they will tease me”** (Girl, Abaiang)

➤ **“Her friends got angry with her as she had bad smell therefore she needs to change – she feels ashamed.”** (Girl, South Tarawa)

Boys were open about the commonality of teasing and bullying they had both witnessed and perpetrated.

➤ **“Once before, I ran after one girl and took off her skirt to see whether she’s menstruating or not... I always want to know whether they are menstruating or not, otherwise they are lying to me. I would bring a stick and smack her as I played.”** (Boy, Abaiang)

Both female and male participants reported that simply pointing out menstruation and drawing attention to the girl was enough to cause embarrassment and shame.

➤ **Participant: “ (...)Like saying Miss Menstruation to menstruating girls repeatedly.”**

**Interviewer: “How did the girls react if you boys said that to them?”**

**Participant: “They were crying.”** (Boy, Abemama)

Common reasons for teasing were associated with the fact that girls were 'unclean' or 'dirty' as a result of menstruation. This is related to the fact that menstrual blood is considered to be 'tabutabu' (taboo) for boys and men, and exposure to it will make them weak.

➤ **Interviewer:** "Can you describe what comes to your mind if you hear the word menstruation?"

**Participant:** "I am vomiting. It's really disgusting to me, because it's a blood from her vagina."  
(Boy, South Tarawa)

"The boys usually tease girls when they menstruate, because they haven't experienced that. Like they can say negative comments like 'dirty girl'. They can say stuff like 'don't sit near me as you are dirty'."  
(Female Teacher, Abaiang)

"That's my friend. Like when she smells blood she stays away from me" (Girl, Abaiang)

As menstruation was associated with sexual maturity and a sign that a girl is ready to reproduce, teasing was also often associated with sexual promiscuity.

➤ "A girl from Baretoa; she attended her class and everyone in her school knew that she's already menstruating, so they teased her, saying that she already has sex with her partner and that's why she's menstruating." (Boy, Abemama)

"Yes, they started to mock me as they think that menstruating was suitable for older women"  
(Girl, Abemama)

While some teachers reported not being aware of teasing and bullying that was happening at their school, many reported being aware of the teasing and reported reprimanding students who were caught bullying. Victims of bullying commonly reported that they could report teasing to both female and male teachers with the expectation that the teacher would reprimand the perpetrator.

One-off reprimanding has not seemed to change the culture though, with girls and their mothers clearly stating that they would like firmer rules in place that would prevent teasing, as well as further education for boys to increase understanding and empathy toward menstruating girls.

While boys commonly expressed that they would like to try and be helpful toward menstruating relatives (such as sisters) in the home environment, this did not seem to translate into positive behaviour and attitudes towards girls in the school environment.

One teacher from Abaiang spoke about the difficulty in contradicting that behaviour when it was widely condoned and accepted in the broader island culture.

➤ "Maybe we have to say something to discipline that teasing, but how can I do that as this island accepts that attitude?... How can we punish our children for saying those words as they are acceptable on our island?"  
(Teacher, Abaiang)

➤ "Students should be advised during assembly meetings that respecting girls' issues is a must and to uphold girls' self-esteem." (Girl, South Tarawa)

Beyond this, sexual and gender based violence was spoken about in relation to menstruation. Two extreme negative examples were recorded:

➤ "Sometimes we want to talk to her, especially to rape her because we know that she's mature enough to have baby." (Boy, South Tarawa)

➤ **Interviewer:** "And what about men from the village?"

**Participant:** "They are raping menstruating girls."

**Interviewer:** "Has that happened here?"

**Participant:** "Yes, this happened to a girl with mental problems." (Boy, Abemama)

**Challenge:** Taboos restrict boys and men being able to speak or learn about menstruation and reproductive health more generally.

**Impact:** Male students teasing and bullying female students, additionally male teachers are ill-equipped to teach MHM related content.

**Opportunity:** Social and behaviour change communication that addresses men and boys specifically within schools and communities, has the potential to address beliefs or social norms that can negatively impact on women and girls' ability to manage their menstruation and participate fully in community life. Additionally, there is room for the Ministry to conduct further research into this area to clarify the breadth of this issue. Further research will facilitate a more targeted response.



### iii Practices

#### Materials

Girls across all three locations reported using a mix of buru (cloth), moteti (pads) and kimbi (diaper) to manage their menstrual cycle. Cloth was only slightly more common on the outer islands, as diapers and pads are available. Money played a large part in determining what sort of materials a girl would use, and diapers were often preferred over pads as they needed to be changed less as they are larger.

➤ **“Diapers because I have two pieces if I use diapers. I bought one but I cut it in half so that I will get two.”**  
(Girl, Abemama)

➤ **“Diapers are much better in terms of comfort and economical, bigger than pads.”** (Girl, South Tarawa)

Cloth too was said to be an economical option, as it was often made out of pieces of material that the girls already had at home, like lavalava (sarong).

➤ **“Cloth can be homemade, simply made from lavalava or other materials for which girls can use it when the period of menstruation comes.”** (Girl, Abaiang)

Most girls reported to have used more than one type of item depending on the circumstance. Many girls said that they would often use cloth at home, but would prefer to use pads or diapers at school.

➤ **Interviewer: “What are they? Or what sort of supplies?”**

**Participant: “Cloths and Pads.”**

**Interviewer: “Which one do you usually use?”**

**Participant: “I usually use cloth, but when I have heavy period I use the pads in the sense that I am not getting tired to wash.”** (Girl, Abaiang)

Girls, teachers and mother consistently stated that if schools were able to provide sanitary materials to school, or at least provide sanitary materials to girls in emergencies who were unprepared, this would have a positive effect on girls’ absenteeism and feelings of comfort in the school environment.

➤ **“[The school should] provide them with pads and rubbish bins so that girls could comfortably use them and that they wouldn’t have to return to their home to change and have the chance to miss their class”**  
(Girl, Abemama)

➤ **“The Ministry of Education (...) as they can easily find ways to help these kids for instance; they can provide each school with rations containing unused pads and so on.”** (Teacher, Abemama)

➤ **“In regards to missing classes, I suggest that the senior mistress would provide pads for the girls who currently having menstruating.”** (Girl, South Tarawa)

**Challenge:** Lack of sanitary materials increases girls’ absenteeism and decreases their class participation.

**Impact:** Decreased overall educational outcomes for girls.

**Opportunity:** Providing schools with stock of sanitary pads in schools is an effective measure to mitigate girls’ absenteeism and class participation. Re-usable pads such as ‘Days for Girls’ may be a one feasible/sustainable solution as girls have indicated that economic factors affect their choice in sanitary materials, reusable pads reduce cost spent over the long term. As reusable materials like cloth are already used, reusable sanitary pads positive uptake is likely, also given the result of the reusable sanitary pad distribution as part of this study.

## Disposal

The most common disposal methods that were reported for disposable sanitary materials like diaper and disposable pad were burial or burning, often after first putting in the green bag (a government funded rubbish disposal bag in Kiribati). Disposal methods were thought of as very important amongst the participants, due to the cultural importance of menstrual blood and the belief that exposure of menstrual blood to bad spirits can cause illness.

- *“Yes, I told her to dig her hole deeply and widely at the western side. I reminded her to make sure that the place should be not affected by the wave because they said it was not good when the wave reached the spot as it can carry away your materials and from that, it may affect the girl in many ways such as can be have mental sickness and no longer have a baby.” (Mother, Abaiang)*
- *“I was reminded not put my materials anywhere, otherwise I would get mental sickness.” (Girl, Abemama)*
- *“I used to bury them, but soon after I had a miscarriage then I started to burn my diapers instead.” (Mother, Abemama)*
- *“One old woman, a local midwife, told me to bury my materials along the road. I asked her why and she told me that it was to help spacing your pregnancies. I didn’t believe her, because I tried and it didn’t work.” (Mother, Abemama)*
- *“She kept her material either pad or cloth, then buried them when she stopped menstruating, but before she buried her material, she asked permission to the land owners (ghosts) and said, ‘Excuse me, may I bury my pad at your place?’” (Mother, South Tarawa)*

When cloth was used, it was reported that the girls were given instructions by their mothers and other female relatives on how the cloth should be properly cleaned and dried.

- *“Because they used cloths as well, so I always reminded them to wash them after their period to make sure there would be no stain on the material. Give them a small pocket to keep their cloths in and told them to hang that pocket separately in the room.” (Mother, Abemama)*
- *“I used a cloth for my pads, so I washed them after using them and then ready to reuse it for my next period.” (Girl, South Tarawa)*
- *“When my daughter has her period, she uses the cloth. When her period stopped, she cleaned her clothes at the sea by putting them under her feet and scrub with the sand.” (Mother, South Tarawa)*

With participants stating that there were often no bins at school, girls were often given the added inconvenience of needing to take their materials home with them to dispose of them. Participants suggested that if better disposal options were available at school, that took cultural beliefs around disposal into account, this would reduce the burden on menstruating girls.

**Challenge:** Beliefs around disposal of menstrual blood mean that girls are acutely aware of their disposal practices. However, lack of culturally appropriate disposal methods in schools means that girls are forced to manage disposal themselves outside of the school environment.

**Impact:** This creates an extra barrier for girls being able to effectively manage their periods at school.

**Opportunity:** Green bags could be installed in girls’ toilet blocks as a low cost and easy solution. Concurrently, small-scale pilot projects could be piloted to test context-specific low-cost alternative and sustainable disposable systems requiring low maintenance in schools and workplaces. Furthermore, culturally appropriate disposals methods in schools could be further explored.

## Pain and Pain Management

A number of female participants in the study spoke about stomach pain being a major issue during menstruation. This resulted in many participants feeling uncomfortable. Stomach cramps and pain was shown to be directly related to both absenteeism and decreased class participation.

➤ ***“(...) I felt so awkward to hang around as I have a stomach ache and felt really uncomfortable.”***  
(Girl, Abemama)

➤ ***Interviewer: “Did you miss any school events during your menstruation?”***

***Participant: “Yes.”***

***Interviewer: “Why?”***

***Participant: “Because I felt too tired and uncomfortable since I have a back ache as results from menstruation,”***  
(Girl, Abemama)

The main form of pain management participants spoke about, was the use of local medicine called ‘taberanikai’ (leaves consumed as a drink) as well as massaging the stomach to ease pain. Participants did not speak about painkillers such as paracetamol to manage pain. Despite this, participants identified that putting in place systems or processes that allowed girls to access effective pain relief in the school setting, would help improve girls’ experiences of menstruation during school, reducing absenteeism and increasing class participation. A single school had a ‘health clinic’ at the school compound for students to take a rest when feeling sick in general.

➤ ***“(...) Yes that’s another problem, so I may ask again the Ministry of Education incorporate with the Ministry of Health to provide the school’s clinic so it would help those who had problems like stomach cramps.”***  
(Mother, Abaiang)

➤ ***“Our school is lacks medications for personal medical needs like stomach ache, which we get when we are menstruating.”*** (Girl, South Tarawa)

**Challenge:** Girls are not able to access resources or services for pain management.

**Impact:** Girls are not able to manage their menstrual pain in the school environment. This was reported as being a contributing factor to absenteeism and decreased class participation.

**Opportunity:** Information on pain management could be integrated into a MHM learning project. Cultural understandings of pain management would need to be further explored as some participants reported that painkillers would stop menstrual blood flow.

## Tracking and Preparedness

The participants were mixed in their preparedness for their first menstruation. While some girls described having heard about it before from female relatives, most still felt unprepared and shocked when they menstruated for the first time. The girls who had learned about menstruation before reaching menarche often had knowledge limited to cultural taboos around menstruation and the importance of the first period ‘botaki’ (party).

➤ ***“I was surprised to see blood on my underwear, I couldn’t believe what I was seeing. I nearly cried, but I tried to control myself and checked again. I went to the toilet to have another look and when I knew that I had menstruated, I just cried.”*** (Abaiang, Girl)

➤ ***“I felt as nervous as I thought something was wrong to me.”*** (Girl, Abemama)

Upon menstruating for the first time, many girls reported that they were not sure how to properly track their menstruation but were aware that it happened once a month. Some girls could roughly estimate whether they would menstruate at the start, middle or end of the month. When asked for alternative words for menstruation, many of the participants described the ‘crash with the moon’. Many believed that menstruation was strongly related to the cycle of the moon, and thus some believed menstruation would occur with the new moon.

- **“Yes I am aware of that since it happens once in a month, but I am not really sure of the day whether it is the beginning or the middle or at the end of the month that I’m going to have my period.”** (Girl, Abemama)
- **“No, I wasn’t prepared for it, because I am not aware of the time of my periods”** (Girl, South Tarawa)

As explored further below, girls’ inability to track their menstrual cycle often left them unprepared each month leading to absenteeism.

**Challenge:** Girls are unaware how to track their menstrual cycle and are often not prepared for their first menstrual period.

**Impact:** Being unable to track their cycle means that girls are unable to prepare for upcoming periods. This results in their menstruation often surprising them, leading to blood stains. This can result in absenteeism.

**Opportunity:** Teaching girls to track their menstrual cycles is an affordable and simple activity that can easily be taught in school or a MHM learning project.

## Absenteeism and Class Participation

Absenteeism as a result of menarche was commonly reported across all three islands. This was associated with girls needing to stay at home for at least three days to undertake the traditional practices associated with first menstruation. Missing school during first menstruation was commonly accepted and condoned. Missing school to undertake these practices were considered an integral part of Kiribati culture and a rite of passage for young women and girls.

- **“I stayed home and I used up my three days of menstruation in doing traditional tasks which girls are expected to do when they are in the stage of womanhood.”** (Girl, Abaiang)
- **“Except when they have their very first period, they should stay home not less than three days and follow what the old ones (mother or grandmother) told them to do. As it is part of our culture.”** (Teacher, South Tarawa)

A majority of teachers made it clear that the school had the expectation that outside of first menstruation, it was an expectation that girls attend school when they have their period.

- **“Why not come to school if they menstruate? For me, I think there is no excuse for them to not come to school while menstruating.”** (Teacher, Abaiang)
- **“There is no problem when menstruating, therefore girls who are menstruating are expected to come to school but not to miss and put menstruation as their excuses.”** (Teacher, Abaiang)

Despite many teachers' expectations that girls attend school, and girls' eagerness to attend school despite menstruation, this was far from the reality reported. Girls, teachers and their mothers commonly reported that absenteeism was common due to poor WASH facilities in schools, girls' unpreparedness for their period due to inability to track their period, feeling uncomfortable because of stomach pain and the threat of bullying and teasing.

➤ **“Every month we can have some girls missing school. And this is because we don't provide them with materials in the school and we don't have safe places for them to change. Not only that, but we also don't have a bin that they can use to dump their pads or diapers. That's why some girls prefer to return or stay at home when they have period.”** (Teacher, Abaiang)

➤ **“I didn't prepare myself for that sudden menstruation and I felt so uncomfortable so I returned back home.”** (Girl, Abemama)

➤ **“Some kids returned home unnoticed because they happen to have their period at school and while there were no provided pads by the school, they had to go back home.”** (Teacher, Abemama)

➤ **Interviewer: “Did you miss any school events during your menstruation?”**

**Participant: “Yes.”**

**Interviewer: “Why?”**

**Participant: “Because I felt too tired and uncomfortable since I have a back ache as results from menstruation.”** (Girl, Abemama)

Throughout the research, girls reported that their active participation in class declined as a result of menstruation. This was due to diminished confidence as a result of experiencing stomach pain, paranoia about bleeding onto clothes and subsequent teasing and more general feelings of unease.

➤ **“I just sat there and didn't move. Sometimes I can sit on my bag so I can protect the chair from being stained.”** (Girl, Abaiang)

➤ **“For example; they can come and asked to be excused because they're menstruating. Sometimes we went out to do some games and the girls didn't want to participate, so I excused her.”** (Teacher, Abaiang)

➤ **“Because sometimes I get to dizzy in times of discussions.”** (Girl, Abemama)

**Challenge:** A number of intersecting factors lead to increased absenteeism when girls are menstruating. Some of these factors include: poor WASH facilities, lack of disposal options, unmanageable pain, unpreparedness, and embarrassment due to teasing.

**Impact:** Increased absenteeism and reduced class participation have the potential to negatively affect girls' educational outcomes. Reduced educational outcomes for girls has been shown to have a number of negative flow on effects including worse nutritional outcomes for their children, higher likelihood of teenage pregnancy, lower earning potential and higher rates of maternal mortality.<sup>13</sup>

## iv Sanitation Facilities in Schools

### WASH Facility Findings Per Island:

#### ABAIANG<sup>2</sup>

Abaiang is one of the four islands under the Kiribati WASH in Schools programme next to Maiana, Marakei and North Tarawa.

#### Junior Secondary School Ueen Abaiang

Junior Secondary School Ueen Abaiang in Wakaam village has 340 students<sup>3</sup> with 3 toilets for the 173 boys and 4 toilets for the 167 girls, which is in line with the toilet ratio according to the National Infrastructure Standard, 1:60 (boys) and 1:40 (girls). This is a big improvement compared with a few years earlier, before the KWINS programme, when the school did not have any toilets<sup>4</sup>. There was also no hygiene programme.

Although just in line with the infrastructural standards, the school plans to build more toilets, 2 for girls and 1 for boys according to the WASH Action Plan. The school also aims to rehabilitate the toilets, providing water to the toilets as part of the school renovation. Additionally, the WASH Action Plan states to improve on WASH Activities, such as group hand washing and raising funds to purchase soap.

The toilets were in poor condition during the time of the research. The MHM research revealed that students, teachers and parents believe there is much improvement to be made to WASH facilities, especially for menstruating girls to feel comfortable in the school environment.



Toilet Facilities at Ueen Abaiang JSS

Girls at Ueen reported that because the toilet facilities are located too far away from the school compound, surrounded by bushes, they felt uncomfortable visiting the toilet facility. They were reportedly afraid of ghosts and felt insecure because they could be spied on by male students.

➤ *“I feel ashamed and uncomfortable as the toilet is set up in the bush nearby on the ocean side which is too far to visit and I am afraid of ghosts.” (Girl, Abaiang)*

Students and teachers reported that water supply is an ongoing issue. There was a lack of soap and toilet paper, the facility is often left unclean, the facility is not locked and there is no proper way of disposing of sanitary materials.

➤ *“Since there is no proper place or rubbish bin to dispose those materials, she just throws them away or leave it on the ledge or inside the toilet.” (Girl, Abaiang)*

➤ *“For me, I want the implementation on the toilet policy to be strong. This is because that’s the main need of the students the toilet with the water. Sometimes they want to wash and clean themselves but the problem is the toilet and the water.” (Teacher, Abaiang)*

➤ *“They feel uncomfortable that why they prefer to use the bush and the teacher’s toilet”. (Teacher Abaiang)*



<sup>2</sup> The MHM study and facility observation in Abaiang took place in the week of 20 November 2017, when most schools were already closed for the long end of year school break. During a revisiti in January 2018, the school was under renovation.

<sup>3</sup> Data provided by UNICEF, School Profile 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Baseline data for KWINS UNICEF (July 2015).

## Tanimaiki Primary School

Tanimaiki Primary School in Tanimaiaki village has 60 students<sup>5</sup> with 1 toilet for the 36 boys and 2 toilets for the 24 girls, which is in line with the toilet ratio according to the National Infrastructure Standard, 1:60 (boys) and 1:40 (girls). This is a big improvement compared with a few years earlier, before the KWINS programme, when the school did not have any toilets<sup>6</sup>. The only available water at the school, was the water from the well at the teacher's compound. There was also no hygiene programme.

The school plans to build permanent toilet facilities according to the WASH Action Plan. Other planned WASH improvements include the construction of a group hand wash facility, improve the waste management, build a fence around the new Rainwater Harvesting Tank (provided under the KWINS programme) and improve cleaning of the school compound.



Toilet Facilities at Tanimaiaki Primary School, Abaiang

During the time of observation of Tanimaiaki Primary School, the local toilets had rubbish strewn around. The toilet bowls were clean. In the girls' toilet, however, there was a large hole in the wall which could lead to girls feel uncomfortable using the toilet or changing during menstruation. The toilets lacked the availability of soap and cleaning tools.

- ***“Toilet must be in good condition, water system should be implemented for better showering and going to the toilet” (Girl, Abaiang)***
- ***“It’s good, but sometimes students leave it dirty. They will clean it up if they find it as that.” (Boy, Abaiang)***
- ***“We have problems on water. We tried our best to provide water but sometimes there is a blockage so it couldn’t reach some areas. For this, I requested if the Ministry can provide the water tank as we have only 2 water tanks and that is not enough, because when we have more than 2 tanks, then we never experienced the water shortages.” (Teacher, Abaiang)***

5 Data provided by UNICEF, School Profile 2017.

6 Baseline data for KWINS UNICE.

## ABEMAMA<sup>7</sup>

### Boutoka Te Baretaiti Junior Secondary School

Boutoka Te Baretaiti JSS counts 181<sup>8</sup> students and has two permanent sanitary facilities of each 4 pit toilets. One facility did not comply with the minimum standard of safe sanitation, given its hygiene status and is not used. The other building was more accessible, but lacked doors, locks, cleaning tools and had peep holes in the wall. It also lacked water. The study team was told that the students used to make use of the two facilities, but nowadays only one facility is used, both boys and girls. A few students –mainly the female students- make use of the teacher’s toilets and some students use the bush, as the team was told.

- *“The toilet is blocked and has many holes on the wall. Like my daughter told me that she used the teacher’s house to change her pad because she felt uncomfortable to use the toilet.” (Mother, Abemama)*
- *“They must construct more toilets.” (Girl, Abemama)*
- *“Mainly the problem is that the toilet is very dirty and there are no provided pads or diapers from the school so girls should return home for their comfort.” (Girl, Abemama)*
- *“Since we use a solar pump, it is possible for us to face the consequences of not having enough water due to sun rays if there is a climate change, but there are also wells that are being made for kids to use especially when they use a toilet, they would probably need water afterwards for washing and cleaning their hands. Also they all have a Tippy Tap and lessons on how to use water properly.” (Teacher, Abemama)*



Left: Toilet Facilities at Boutoka Te Baretaiti JSS, Abemama.

Right: An old compost toilet construction was disbanded.

<sup>7</sup> Abemama was visited during the first week of December 2017, the official start of the long end of year school break.

<sup>8</sup> Data provided by school at day of research.



### Tetongo Primary School, Tekatirirake village<sup>9</sup>

Tetongo Primary School has 152 students with two toilets for the 80 boys and 2 toilets for the 72 girls. The boys' toilet has doors and a lock, but lacks water. The girls' toilet had broken doors, it provided sinks, but there was no water. The tippy taps (hand wash stations) outside of the toilets, in the school compound, were not maintained. Green bag for waste disposal were present. Although the toilets were not in an optimal state, due to lack of water, the school had increased attention for WASH and Health. The school had a 'health clinic', a local construction with WASH posters. There was also a 'hand wash house'. The study team was told that the students have a roster to maintain WASH activities, such as filling the tippy tap bottles. Due to school holidays, the facilities were not maintained properly, as the team was told.



*Toilet facilities and hand wash house at Tetongo Primary School, Abemama*

<sup>9</sup> Data provided by school at day of research.

## SOUTH TARAWA

### Tabontemaneaba Primary School, Bikenibeu

Tabontemaneaba PS counts 603 students<sup>10</sup> and has 4 toilets for the 312 girls and 4 toilets for the 291 boys, which is not enough according to the national standards of 1 toilet per 40 female students and 1 toilet per 60 male students. The toilet blocks are permanent constructions. Water is available in the toilet blocks. Both blocks lack privacy as there were no doors. There is also one toilet for teachers that has a door and lock. There is one toilet for the SIP committee members. The study team was told that for the girls, privacy is more important especially when girls start menstruating. There are about 10 girls having their period, who can make use of the teacher toilet if they like.

➤ *“Sometimes it’s a toilet that needs to be improved for the toilet has no door, it’s unsafe and uncomfortable to use. The students make it disgusting even though there is the awareness on how to use it properly.”*  
(Boy, South Tarawa)

### St Louis High School, Teoraereke

St Louis High School counts 762 students<sup>11</sup> and has 2 permanent sanitary building for the Senior Secondary school students, one block for girls and one block for boys. The sanitation block for boys was locked and not accessible during the research. The study team was told that all students use the other block, as there is no other option for students. The other block housed 5 flush toilets. There was no water and the toilets were blocked with paper, excretion and blood. Apart from meeting the sanitation facility standard of 1 toilet per 40 girls/ 60 boys, the toilets were far from being safe:



The toilets for the Junior Secondary School students are far located from the SS toilets. It provides 3 toilets without running water, no doors and some without walls. The toilet bowls were clean and the Green Bag was outside. The septic tank outside had a hole in the concrete cover:



<sup>10</sup> Data provided by school at day of research.

<sup>11</sup> Data provided by MOE/ KEIP.

**Challenge:** The WASH facilities differ per island, but in general it can be concluded that the schools in outer islands, although more basic, maintain the WASH facilities better than South Tarawa schools. The sanitation facilities of the KWINS schools under this research are not much better than those that have not received direct support. This shows that KWINS is reaching beyond the initial 32 schools in building awareness around the importance of WASH in Schools. The advocacy of the Ministry of Education and its National WASH in Schools policy will have contributed to this. However, given the outcome of this research, it also shows that implemented WASH facilities and activities in school require continuous attention and advocacy to sustain a reached level.

Some schools in outer islands have received support from foreign donors to improve their schools, but most schools have 'local' constructions; classrooms made of local material with thatched roofs. These thatched roofs do not cater for rain water harvesting. The sanitation facilities are usually constructed with local available material. Most schools in outer islands have poor flush toilet. These have a pit (often an old oil drum) and once full, the local housing construction is moved away and a new pit is dug. An upgraded sanitation model has also been observed at schools in outer island; a flush toilet with water and a septic tank made of concrete.

Compared to 2015, especially the primary schools have made progress in WASH. A bottleneck analysis made in 2016 of primary schools showed that only 10 out of the 94 primary schools in Kiribati had access to functional water supply and 15 percent per cent of schools had toilets. There was no hygiene promotion and educational materials available yet. A WASH club was established only in 1 out of the 94 primary schools.

**Impact:** Poor WASH facilities risks girls' absenteeism during menstruation and lead girls to feel uncomfortable in the school environment. Poor WASH facilities undermine the school's learning environment.

**Opportunities:** WASH in Schools to improve in a number of key areas to meet the needs of menstruating girls. These include:

- Increase attention for JSS and high schools in the WASH in Schools programme; Develop a JSS/SSS roll out approach and upscale strategy, including facilities and activities suitable for menstruating girls.
- Ensure toilet facilities are installed with locks and holes in walls are fixed to help ensure privacy for girls.
- Update minimum standard guidelines for MHM-friendly WASH facilities in schools in the National WASH in Schools policy.
- Install all female toilets with green bags to dispose of sanitary pads. Explore culturally acceptable disposal of pads. Concurrently, implement small-scale pilot projects to test context-specific low-cost alternative and sustainable disposable systems requiring low maintenance.

# Special School Case Study

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In addition to the research carried out across the three islands, a FGD with girls, facility observation and interviews with teachers were also conducted at the Kiribati School and Centre for Children with Special Needs (KSCCSN). This aim of including KSCCSN was to identify whether girls with disabilities face any unique or additional barriers that prevent them from managing their menstruation hygienically and with dignity, and subsequently whether additional programming recommendations need to be made.

The research at the KSCCSN demonstrated that while the normal Kiribati cultural taboos and barriers are faced by girls with disabilities, additional barriers also arose which stemmed from their disabilities. This is in line with international findings.<sup>15,16</sup>

Teachers interviewed at the school identified that their students, especially those with physical disabilities and visual impairments, needed assistance in the bathroom to change their sanitary items. Teachers of students with visual impairments also reported that their students often found it difficult to locate the Green Bag to dispose of their sanitary items and would subsequently leave their materials lying on the floor for the teacher to later dispose of. This made students more reliant on teachers for assistance. Teachers reported that they needed further training, information and support to be able to properly and appropriately support their students.

According to teachers, it is common for the menstruating girls to miss 1-2 days of school each month as they were unable to manage their menstruation at school due to heavy bleeding. When asked, teachers reported that education about menstruation and comprehensive sexual education is not included in the curriculum at KSCCSN.

Observations of facilities showed that in many ways toilet facilities were better equipped for menstruating girls than most schools. The toilets included:

- A lock
- A green bag to dispose of sanitary pads
- A functioning toilet
- Water and soap to clean hands
- Toilet paper

More could be done to keep the toilets clean, to reduce odour and make the toilet more comfortable for use. Further, the toilets were not segregated by sex, which is a recommendation of the Kiribati WASH in schools' policy.

**Challenge:** Girls with disabilities face additional barriers when it comes to managing their menstruation hygienically and with dignity. It was reported that girls with physical disabilities found it difficult to change their sanitary items and girls with visual impairments were often not able to locate the green bag to dispose of their sanitary items. In addition to this, girls with disabilities were receiving no education on menstruation or sexual education in the school setting.

**Impact:** These additional challenges meant that students required additional assistance from teachers. Teachers felt that they were ill-equipped to deal with this additional assistance and needed more assistance, training and education to fulfil this.

**Opportunities:** KSCCSN needs to seek advice on incorporating appropriate comprehensive sexual education, including menstruation into the curriculum. Further, teachers from KSCCSN should be included in any additional teacher training that takes place on this topic. Girls from KSCCSN would also benefit from taking part in the Kiribati Girls Empowerment Programme.

# Reusable Pad Test

In November 2017, thirty-five Days for Girls reusable sanitary pads were distributed at Eutan Tarawaieta Junior Secondary School in Abaokoro, a village in North Tarawa. North Tarawa is a Kiribati WASH in schools (KWINS) island. Post-distribution surveys were conducted on the 1st of March 2018. Of the 35 kits distributed, data was only collected from 25 girls as the remaining girls had not yet started to menstruate and had therefore not used the kits.

The response to the Days for Girls kits was overwhelmingly positive. 100% of the girls reported that Days for Kits were easy to use, comfortable to wear, and easy to clean. 96% of girls said that they preferred Days for Girls Kits to the products they have used in the past like buru (cloth), kimbi (diaper) and moteti (pads).

Girls reported that they liked to use the kits for a variety of reasons including ease of use, affordability, the fact they are more environmentally sustainable and they like it.

The girls' answers indicated that they were washing the kit properly, namely in a basin with soap, then rinsing and hanging to dry in the sun. However, many of the girls expressed that they preferred to wash the kit in a separate basin and hang it in a private place. This most likely is related to menstrual blood being taboo. This indicated that girls who are unable to find a private place to wash and dry may face difficulty using the kits into the future.

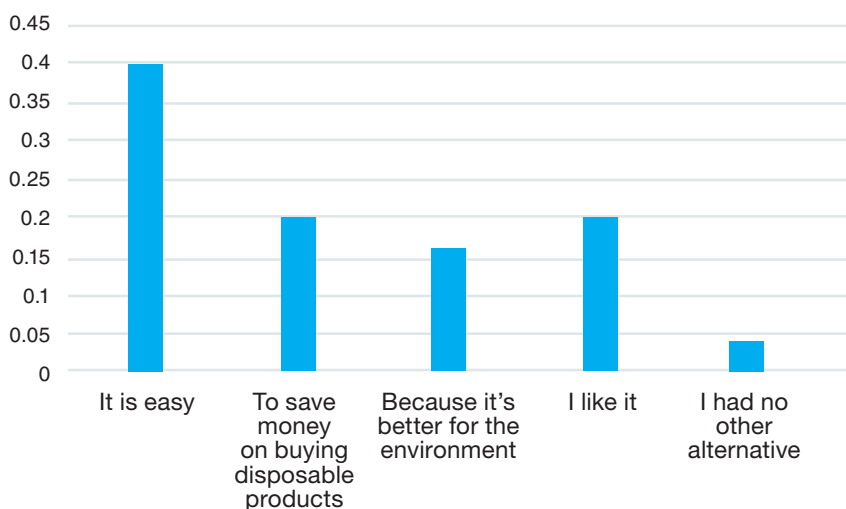
64% of girls expressed that more inserts should be included in the Days for Girls kit. Some girls expressed that this was because they experienced heavy bleeding and needed to use multiple inserts at once. These girls found that they then had nothing to use when washing and drying the existing inserts.

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**100% of girls expressed that they would continue to use the Days for Girls kit.**

## Why do you choose to use the Days for Girls Kit?



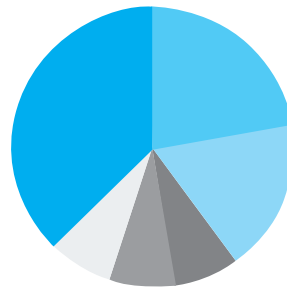
Alongside the distribution of Pads, a small booklet called 'Growing Healthy' was also distributed. This booklet was distributed by UNICEF and included information on the reproductive system, puberty, tracking the menstrual cycle and FAQs. The booklet was written in English.

Survey results showed that 67% of the girls claimed to have read the booklet. Importantly though, 96% of survey respondents said that they would prefer for the booklet to be translated into Kiribati language rather than English. Survey responses also indicated that some girls did not in fact understand the information included in the booklet. For example, when asked what they have learned from reading the booklet, 12.5% girls indicated that they learned that menstrual blood is evil and they should not eat fish during menstruation. This information was not included in the booklet.

Aside from this, girls indicated that they learned the following from 'Growing Healthy':

When asked what they would like to learn, the girls responded that they would like to learn more about reproductive health, how to manage pain during menstruation, what to eat during menstruation and how to stay hygienic. Additionally, girls indicated that they preferred a mix of photos, pictures and stories, but liked the main focus to be information.

### What did you learn from reading 'Growing Healthy'?



- That menstruation is a sign of normal growth
- That menstruation blood is evil
- The menstrual cycle
- How to wash or dispose of pads
- That you should not eat fish during your period
- That it is normal to feel pain during your period
- How to track your period using a calendar

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