

Menstrual hygiene management in Nigeria: Strategy for multi-sectoral collaboration

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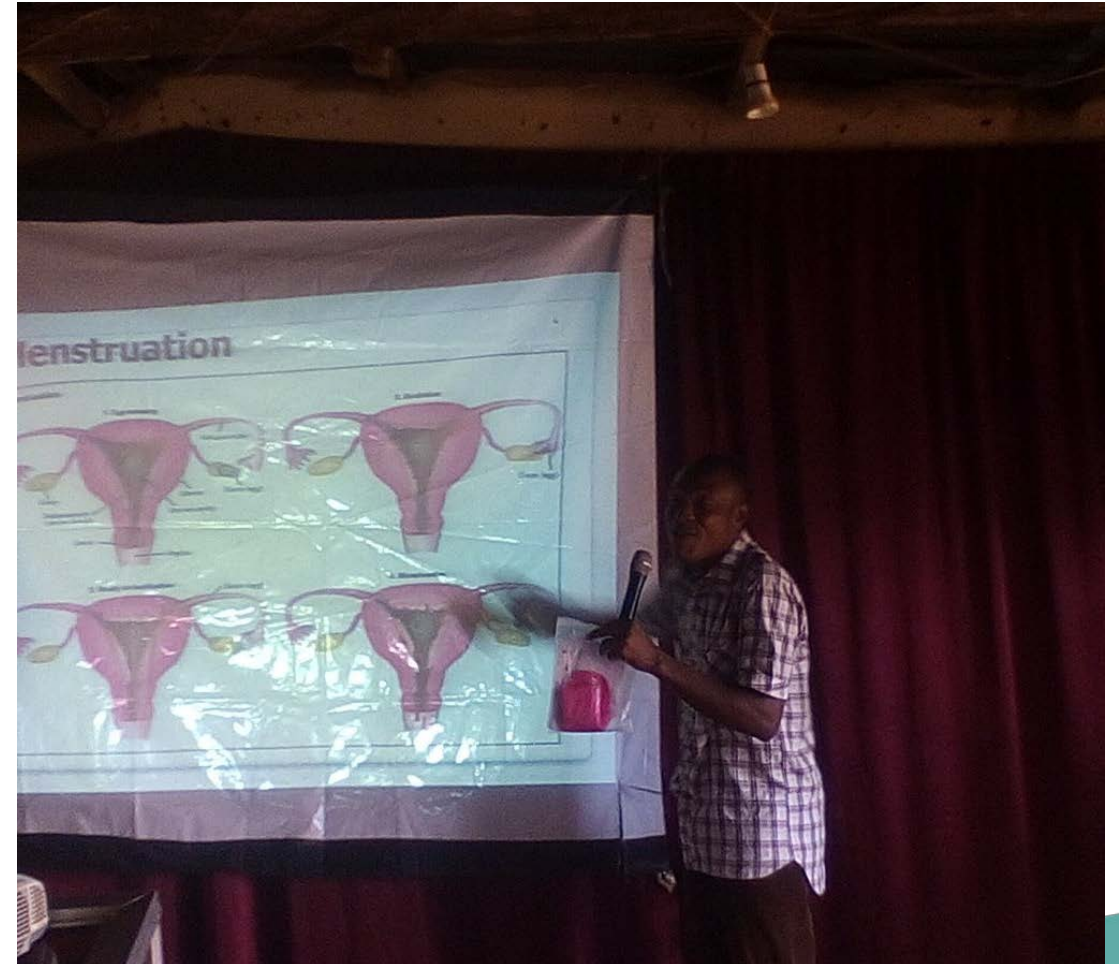
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Menstruation in South-East Nigeria

- In South-East, Nigeria, menstruation is a very sensitive issue that is not publicly discussed.
- It is associated with sexual impurity and this notion is the cause of the culture of silence and shame that pervades sexuality and menstruation in the region.
- The scale of the initiative is South East Nigeria reaching over 30 different women, youth and traditional leader's groups and still on-going.



Menstrual health education breaking the silent surrounding Menstruation

MHM link to other health and WASH programmes

The **menstruation issues** and **menstrual hygiene management** programme activities is linked to;

- ❖ Sexual and reproductive health and rights
- ❖ Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) promotion
- ❖ Sanitary waste disposal
- ❖ Girls child education
- ❖ Women empowerment through production of reusable sanitary pad/napkins
- ❖ Viral hepatitis A, D and E



Community focus group discussion (FGD) on menstruation and handwashing



Women groups

- The women of South Eastern Nigeria, through their '*Women August Meetings*' and other women-focused group meetings have influenced certain social norms, as well as militated against the restrictions and taboos surrounding the female gender in the region.



Women focus group discussion on menstrual hygiene management (MHM)



- “I used to perceive menstruation as unclean but now I’m better informed”
- “I perceive menstruation as a punishment from the gods but my perception has changed after the group discussion”
- “Menstruation is not a taboo..I can now openly discuss and break the silent on menstruation”
- “When I hold a knife or my fingernails turn red I know that am menstruating”
- “I used to assume that menstruation is a curse because of the pain but I now know that it is a biological process”
- “I used to think that a girl child who accidentally stains her uniform during menstruation is misbehaving but I now have a better understanding and accurate information”

Iroegbu Daniel Ifegwu

Traditional Leaders

- As custodians of the rich African cultural heritage, indigenous knowledge, customs and traditions, traditional leaders/rulers play a pivotal role in sustaining and safeguarding the norms and values of the community
- Initiate and champion developmental activities.
- They also provide spiritual and cultural legislations and leadership on social issues.

“In Amaebia Idembia, Ezza South Local Government Area Ebonyi State menstruation is a taboo and a sensitive issue but our advocacy promotes breaking the silent as older women take turns to discussed their menarche and menstrual experience with the younger girls”

“A traditional leader in Owakande I Ububra Local Government Area promise to champion safe menstrual hygiene mnagement”

Religious Leaders

- Religious and faith-based leaders, in their own right, constitute the largest organised civil institution that **mediates social transformations to the society**.
- As a result of these, help create supportive environment and public policy that protect women and behavioural change against negative practices surrounding safe menstrual hygiene management

“The work has influenced open discussion and breaking the silent around menstruation in some reached faith-based organisation”

“Increased girls and women support to manage menstruation”

Approaches used

- Focus group discussions (FGDs)
- Advocacy visits and consultative meetings
- Community mobilizations on menstrual health educations (MHE)
- Collaborations with religious, youths and women groups
- Dialogue and sensitization to generate honest feedback
- Capacity building trainings
- Integrated MHE, sexual and reproductive health, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) educations
- Reusable sanitary pad promotion

Engagement of youth on breaking the silent menstruation and hygiene management



Conclusion

- This paper identifies the **strengths** and **contributions**;
- Examines the **socio-cultural influence** of traditional and religious leaders and **older women** in social transformation and breaking the widespread cultural misconceptions and religious taboos and restrictions' militating against safe menstrual hygiene practices with respect and dignity, and in **privacy**.
- This paper also **expand gender social inclusion and relations, collaboration and coordination mechanism** in meeting the specific WASH needs of women and girls and as well reduce gender-based violence.

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