Collaboration on menstrual hygiene between WASH and sexual reproductive health actors: Timor-Leste

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TIMOR-LESTE, PAPUA NEW GUINEA
WASH context

Drinking water

Sanitation

2015 – Service Levels

Coverage (%)
Sexual and reproductive health context: Timor-Leste

• Only 10% of girls aged 15-19 have used contraception¹
• While 18% of 19-year-olds have begun childbearing¹

“...when the first time [I] didn’t know, I thought I was going to die. I asked my mother why all of my clothing was red. Then my mother told me ‘you are old enough and this is now your time’... And my mother said that “don’t have shower and wash your hair.” – 26 yr old woman, Liquica, Timor-Leste
- BESIK study 2015

Sexual and reproductive health context: Papua New Guinea

- Adolescent pregnancy is a leading cause of death and disability for girls aged 15-19\(^2\)
- 22% of girls have had at least one child\(^2\)

“[T]hose girls if they have their ... period during the day, in the school exactly when they are in the class, then we don’t keep them back in the class, we just send them to go home, because there’s no pad...” – Teacher; urban, PNG

- Last Taboo study 2017

The need for holistic menstrual health solutions

- Disparate and siloed approaches to addressing menstrual health
- A focus on the biological aspects of menstrual health and product use in educating girls in school
- ‘influencers’ (such as parents) often not included in menstrual health programming
- Sanitation actors lack specific training on adolescent girls’
- Lack of framing menstrual health within broader SRH efforts

(geertz a, iyer l, kasen p, mazzola f, peterson k. an opportunity to address menstrual health and gender equity. fsg, 2016.)
In Timor, between 2012-2016 WaterAid led MHM education in schools. We:

- Developed information education and communication materials in collaboration with MoE and MoH
- Delivered MHM education sessions which addressed cultural and social taboos

What we learned:

- WASH and hygiene are only one part of addressing MHM holistically
- WASH teams were unable to answer girls’ questions about reproductive health, poor knowledge themselves
- Health staff consider menstruation taboo
- Needed a more holistic approach to MHM
Keeping girls in school through improved reproductive & menstrual health: Timor-Leste, Papua New Guinea

- Menstruation: entry point to improve SRH services
- Holistic MHM solutions: information, education, sanitation facilities, hygiene practices, product access
- Improve WASH staff knowledge of SRH

Three-year collaboration (2016 – 2019) between WaterAid and Marie Stopes International in PNG and Timor-Leste

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About the project

An integrated health and WASH project that aims to contribute towards increased school retention in girls through reducing unintended pregnancies and improving menstrual health, in Timor-Leste and PNG while strengthening women-led business for the manufacture of accessible hygiene products in Timor-Leste.
Outcomes

1. Increased awareness and uptake of sexual and reproductive health/family planning (SRH/FP) services, and MH practices amongst adolescent girls

2. Improved availability of appropriate and affordable MH products through strengthened sustainable business models for local women-led entrepreneurs.

3. Strengthened knowledge of and attention to the importance of SRH/FP and MH in Timor-Leste, PNG, Asia Pacific and through cross-collaboration, learning and an established community of practice.
Achievements to date

• A 2017 inception workshop in Timor Leste, with Timor-Leste’s First Lady speaking at the launch

• Workshops between MSI and WA to facilitate learning about MHM and SHR; share resources and approaches

• MOU’s in place with government

• Consultation with school students and local disabled people organization on inclusive toilet designs.

• MSI using the MHM IEC materials in 12 municipalities, to provide feedback to improve the quality of messaging

• Community of practice established and discussion paper being drafted
What we hope to learn

- How existing knowledge about MHM and SRH applies in Timor-Leste and PNG
- Lessons for developing an integrated MHM/ SRH approach
- Culturally appropriate ways to engage with young girls in each context
- How best to operate in partnership
- Building and sharing evidence and best practice within the development sector