USING FORMATIVE RESEARCH TO INFORM ENTERPRISE: MHM IN THE SOLOMON ISLANDS

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PAPUA NEW GUINEA, SOLOMON ISLANDS, FIJI
‘Last Taboo’ formative research aims

i. Understand how women & girls manage menstruation

ii. Explore the barriers/challenges in managing menstruation

iii. Determine the impact of menstrual management practices on participation in education & income generation

iv. Identify opportunities to improve women’s & girls’ ability to manage menstruation effectively & with dignity

NATOLI 2017
Methodology

308 participants
Ecological framework for MHM
Qualitative (small quant component)
National ethics approvals
Purposive sampling
Local teams collected data
Thematic analysis

Limitations
Cultural diversity
Sample size & breadth
Sampling bias
Age
1. Knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, behavioral restrictions
2. Menstrual hygiene product access & availability
3. Water and sanitation access at work and school
4. Changing and disposal of used materials
1. Knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, behavioral restrictions

“One of the difficulties the teachers face- they have the knowledge to teach in class, but they need training in how to teach it” - Solomon Islands; KII teacher; rural.

“One challenge is that when menstruating we are not allowed to attend church. I don’t feel very good about it....” - Solomon Islands FGD Women, informal work; rural.
1. Knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, behavioral restrictions

**Challenge**
- ↓ basic knowledge of the menstrual cycle and how to chart it from month to month
- Social norms, attitudes & some beliefs → stigma

**Impact**
- Unprepared for monthly period
- ↓ understanding of fertile periods once sexually active
- Exclusion from religious, social or cultural activities

**Opportunity**
- (Fiji): education system can help bridge knowledge gaps
- Specific resources/training for teaching (disability inclusive)
- Social/behaviour change communication has potential to address beliefs/norms
2. Menstrual hygiene practices

“[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...” (PNG: KII Teachers; urban).

“...if someone gives me money, that’s the first thing I do. I buy my own pads. Because I know that every month I have my menses so I have to look forward to buying them. I don’t want to have my menses...and then there is no pad around” Fiji: IDI, women w disability
2. Menstrual hygiene practices

**Challenge**
- ↓ access to effective/affordable menstrual hygiene materials
- Especially: SI; adolescent girls dependent on their parents; vulnerable women with no or little income; rural areas

**Impact**
- Distraction from school, work and day to day activities
- Skin irritation/rashes if reliant on cheap/poor quality products

**Opportunity**
- Re-usable pad designs- ? more feasible/sustainable where quality/affordability/disposal is a challenge
- Stocking of pads in schools- simple/effective measure to mitigate girls’ need to go home if they don’t have pads
Solomon Islands: Sanitary pad enterprise
The operation to date

• Seed funding, then transitioned to an enterprise
• Home-based operation
• 6 production staff
• Production of nearly 2000 kits
• Sold over 1000 kits (plus others we donated to generate demand and awareness)
• 11 trainings (Honiara, Guadalcanal and Central Province)
• Kits distributed to Guadalcanal, Malaita, Isabel, Western, Central provinces
Key challenges

1. Availability, access and production of raw materials
2. Contextualised education on MHM to tackle traditional taboo’s and beliefs
Looking ahead

• Work in collaboration with other partners (currently Plan International and the Pacific Rise under Spark Strategy)

• Government National leaders as entry points / champions

• Need more learning on methods to for best approach to communities, schools and churches.

• Identify people who worked within MHM area and start identifying ways to partner and to work together to deliver both trainings and kits in rural Solomon Islands.