

MENSTRUAL HEALTH IN EAST ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

REGIONAL PROGRESS REVIEW

KIRIBATI



COUNTRY CONTEXT

The Republic of Kiribati in the central Pacific region comprises more than 32 atolls and, as of 2021, had a population of 123,000, of which 40,000 were adolescent girls and women of reproductive age (10–49 years).¹ In 2018, 18 per cent of women aged 15–49 years had an unmet need for contraception,² and an estimated 66 per cent of schools in the country had access to basic sanitation services.³ Fewer than half of all households had access to at least basic sanitation services, while 56 per cent of households had access to basic hygiene services.⁴

OBJECTIVES

1. Document the state of policy and programming to support menstrual health. Collate lessons learned and stakeholders' insights on barriers and enablers to effective action.
2. Review the evidence for menstrual health interventions across the region. Document lessons learned and the barriers as well as the enablers of high-quality monitoring and evaluation.



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This review report assesses the progress and opportunities using five dimensions of the definition of menstrual health.⁵ Menstrual health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity in relation to the menstrual cycle. Achieving menstrual health implies that women, girls and all other people who experience a menstrual cycle throughout their life course can engage in the following five dimensions.



Access accurate, timely, age-appropriate information about the menstrual cycle, menstruation and changes experienced throughout the life course, as well as related self-care and hygiene practices.



Care for their bodies during menstruation such that their preferences, hygiene, comfort, privacy and safety are supported. This includes accessing and using effective and affordable menstrual materials and having supportive facilities and services, including water, sanitation and hygiene services, for washing the body and hands, changing menstrual materials and cleaning and/or disposing of used materials.



Access timely diagnosis, treatment and care for menstrual cycle-related discomfort and disorders, including access to appropriate health services and resources, pain relief and strategies for self-care.



Experience a positive and respectful environment in relation to the menstrual cycle, free from stigma and psychological distress, including the resources and support they need to confidently care for their bodies and make informed decisions about self-care throughout their menstrual cycle.



Decide whether and how to participate in all spheres of life, including civil, cultural, economic, social and political, during all phases of the menstrual cycle, free from menstruation-related exclusion, restriction, discrimination, coercion and/or violence.

PROGRESS: ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

Policies and plans

The Government of Kiribati has integrated menstrual health into water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) policies and plans for schools with a focus on infrastructure and education:

- **Kiribati WASH in Schools Policy (2021)** aims to increase attendance by all students (especially girls) and includes a menstrual health programme for students, provision of WASH in schools and that students are empowered, encouraged and supported by teachers, school administrators, the community and the Ministry of Education on menstrual health.
- **Kiribati WASH in Primary Schools Infrastructure Standards (2021)** outlines provisions for schools to provide adequate facilities for washing and sanitary waste disposal.
- **Healthy Living Syllabus (2018)** includes basic menstruation information and practical management information in primary school grades 5 and 6.

 Information and education	 Services and materials	 Care for discomfort and disorders	 Supportive social environment	 Non-discrimination and participation
<p>✓ The Kiribati WASH in Schools Policy (2021) includes a menstrual health programme for students. The Healthy Living Syllabus (2018) includes basic menstrual health information for grades 5 and 6 students.</p>	<p>✓ The Kiribati WASH in Schools Policy (2021) provides for WASH in Schools and menstrual health programmes. The Kiribati WASH in Primary Schools Infrastructure Standards (2021) requires schools to provide good facilities for washing and sanitary waste disposal.</p>	<p>✗ Not included.</p>	<p>✓ The Kiribati WASH in Schools Policy (2021) requires that students be empowered, encouraged and supported by teachers, school administrators, the community and the Ministry of Education on menstrual health.</p>	<p>✗ Not included.</p>



Lessons and insights: Several policy opportunities offer a way to strengthen menstrual health

The progress review found three opportunities to include menstrual health in national policies, plans or guidelines:

- **National Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Development (2019–2022)**, which has an objective on women's economic empowerment that specifies that marketplace designs incorporate appropriate, safe and hygienic washrooms with adequate lighting.
- **National Disability Policy and Action Plan (2018–2021)**, which includes a policy area on accessibility of WASH services.
- **Ministry of Health and Medical Services Strategic Plan (2016–2019)**, which calls for implementation of national Youth-Friendly Development Health Services guidelines and has a performance indicator: Number of schools having handwashing facilities.



Lessons and insights: Policy is only the first step

Review informants reported that having WASH policies in place means there is starting to be some government-led action on menstrual health in Kiribati. But they also think that these provisions could be reviewed to have a stronger menstrual health focus.

“

Menstrual health activities have been done here in the Line Islands. Policies are in place – WASH policies are in place for schools and the National Sanitation Policy. – Review informant

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Implementation arrangements

The Ministry of Education is the lead authority for WASH in Schools as set out in the national WASH in Schools Policy (2021) and WASH in Primary Schools Infrastructure Standards (2021), along with support from UNICEF. The policies require the Ministry of Health and Medical Services to deliver health promotion in schools and monitor waste disposal systems. The Ministry of Education’s Facilities Management Unit, in collaboration with the Ministry of Infrastructure and Sustainable Energy, are responsible for the provision of WASH infrastructure in schools and for ensuring that minimum requirements are met. The policy states that it is to be guided by a multisector steering group, which UNICEF is supporting the Ministry of Education to re-establish. The Line Islands also has a WASH Committee responsible for coordinating WASH services, and schools have School Improvement Plan Committees that are responsible for overseeing the maintenance of school WASH services, as outlined in the Policy.

The Ministry of Education is responsible for the national curriculum and assessment framework and for the integration of the Healthy Living Syllabus into the curriculum. The Ministry for Women Youth Sports and Social Affairs is responsible for implementation of the Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Policy, which outlines WASH services for women working in marketplaces. However, no evidence was found regarding implementation of this provision.

Responsibilities for health and care services, social support and participation components of menstrual health were not always clear in the government policies, plans and guidance documents.

 Information and education	 Services and materials	 Care for discomfort and disorders	 Supportive social environment	 Non-discrimination and participation
<p>✓ The Ministry of Health and Medical Services is responsible for health promotion in schools communities and health care facilities.</p> <p>The Ministry of Education is responsible for national curriculum development and assessment and for the Healthy Living Syllabus.</p>	<p>✓ The Ministry of Education is responsible for WASH in Schools and leads menstrual health activities, including provision of menstrual health materials and facilities.</p> <p>The Ministry of Health and Medical Services is responsible for health promotion and waste disposal in schools.</p>	<p>✗ No evidence was found.</p>	<p>✗ No evidence was found.</p>	<p>✗ No evidence was found.</p>



Lessons and insights: Working groups are driving momentum

Review informants highlighted that having cross-sectoral working groups to address issues like water, sanitation and hygiene had led to greater focus on menstrual health. They highlighted this is the right platform to be progressing menstrual health further.



[The] working group consists of health workers, WASH department, local communities and island councils. These people are helping us to set up plans and policies and roll out awareness to the public. – Review informant, Secretariat of the Pacific Community (CXI)



Financing

The review found no information on the amount of public budget allocated to menstrual health. Although menstrual health is included in the WASH in Schools Policy, there are no budget lines or policy requirements. Review informants highlighted that most funding for menstrual health was coming from United Nations agencies and the European Union.



Lessons and insights: Government funding is needed for menstrual health

Review informants highlighted that where menstrual health work has started, there needs to be government take-up and leadership, including financing, to continue the services. The informants cited budget constraints as a barrier to menstrual health implementation.



[The] Ministry should be continuing once a project is over to sustain whatever has been done. An important component of that should be increasing the budget that Ministry has to be able to support those. That would be a new thing – budget allocation built in like that. – Review informant



PROGRESS: SERVICE DELIVERY AND PROGRAMMING APPROACHES

Most menstrual health efforts in Kiribati have focused on education and WASH facilities in schools. Review informants explained the advocacy activities and current service delivery and programming approaches summarized below. There were no examples found of programmes providing for the care for menstrual-related disorders and non-discrimination and participation.



Information and education: Advocacy and awareness-raising is being carried out through Menstrual Hygiene Day; in 2022, heads of churches, head teachers from different schools, students, Girl Guide Leaders and WASH teams celebrated together. The Kiritimati Island Girl Guide Association developed a film about menstrual health in the Line Islands, Kiritimati, and the Gender Mainstreaming Team led workshops in three schools. Three initiatives have focused on menstrual health education in schools, including a European Union and UNICEF-funded WASH programme in the Line Islands, which identified menstrual health activities following a gender analysis review and advocacy for menstrual health in the school curriculum, along with teacher training. The Healthy Families Project (2015–2020) recommended a review of the national sexual and reproductive health curriculum for grades 10–12 (with support from UNFPA, the Ministry of Health and Medical Services, the Ministry of Education and the Kiribati Family Health Association). The international organization Live and Learn, together with UNICEF, developed and distributed a factsheet on puberty and hygiene that outlines body changes and the practical management of menstrual bleeding.



Services and materials: Many initiatives are supported by development partners. Through the Kiribati WASH in Schools programme, UNICEF supported the Ministry of Education from 2015 to 2017 with funding from the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade to improve WASH in 32 schools in four islands (Abaiang, Maiana, Marakei and North Tarawa). UNICEF developed sanitary survey checklists and the WASH Safety Planning Technical Toolkit for Kiribati Schools, which cover menstrual waste. In addition, WASH kits were distributed to the 32 schools, and a rapid menstrual health in schools qualitative assessment involved 92 participants.



Supportive social environment: Live and Learn developed and rolled out a Teaching WASH in Schools Menstrual Hygiene Management Guide on the importance of menstrual health education.



Lessons and insights: Menstrual Hygiene Day is a catalyst for change

Review informants highlighted the success of celebrating Menstrual Hygiene Day in 2021 and 2022 as a pivotal moment for raising awareness about menstrual health needs and issues. The informants reported that prior to these events, there was little awareness and that the events were a success because they engaged diverse groups, from the ministerial level through to girls in school.



Last year was the first time we had a celebration of Menstrual Hygiene Day. Most of the people were surprised that there's a day for this commemoration. So, people weren't aware of how important menstrual health was on the island. – Review informant



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PROGRESS: MONITORING, EVALUATION AND EVIDENCE

Monitoring, evaluation and review of menstrual health in Kiribati is limited. The WASH in Schools Policy prescribes the school WASH monitoring responsibility with the Ministry of Education, with the collection of school WASH data captured through the education management information system. The overall monitoring of compliance to the policy is led by the Ministry of Education’s Policy, Planning and Research Division. UNICEF provides technical support.

Monitoring of school WASH infrastructure is led by the Ministry of Education’s Facilities Management Unit and carried out by the Island Education Coordinator, who makes monitoring visits to schools. Menstrual health is not included in this monitoring. School Improvement Plan Committees are responsible for the daily monitoring and ongoing maintenance and operations but function on a voluntary basis. A 2018 mixed-methods study of menstrual health in schools was undertaken to inform WASH programmes in the Line Islands. In 2022 on Kiritimati Island, there was training for menstrual health participatory data collection and development of recommendations, from which a poster of findings was created. The review informants reported that a recent household WASH survey in Kiritimati Island did not include data on menstrual health. Despite these policy provisions to guide the monitoring, the informants reported that no monitoring as of yet had taken place. Indeed, the review did not find any evidence of monitoring and evaluation of programmes.



Lessons and insights: Taboos prevent monitoring

Review informants highlighted that menstruation is a highly taboo topic, which makes monitoring difficult. Some think the taboos make it difficult to get the school WASH committees to monitor progress, given that many members are men.



Menstruation is a taboo topic. Maybe it's not discussed publicly. It's more discussed privately, where only women are present. For School Improvement Plan Committees, there are men who are members, and I don't think they would discuss menstrual health on the agenda of their meetings. –

Review informant



Review methods

Regional progress review methods



7 policies reviewed across the gender, education, WASH and disability sectors

4 informants participated in interviews and surveys capturing programme and policy action

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The *Menstrual Health in East Asia and the Pacific Regional Progress Review* report is available at: <https://washmatters.wateraid.org/publications/menstrual-health-in-east-asia-and-the-pacific>

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