COUNTRY CONTEXT

Solomon Islands is a Pacific Island country made up of six main islands and over 900 small islands, and has a total population of 721,000 people. In 2021, there were approximately 211,000 adolescent girls and women of reproductive age and there is no national data on their unmet need for contraception. Only 17 per cent of schools in Solomon Islands has access to basic sanitation services, and 12 per cent to hygiene services. Only 35 per cent of households has access to at least basic sanitation services.

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.
This review report assesses the progress and opportunities using five dimensions of the definition of menstrual health. 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.

**PROGRESS: ENABLING ENVIRONMENT**

**Policies and plans**

Overall, the Government of Solomon Islands has integrated menstrual health into water sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in schools, with a focus on infrastructure and education. National standards and guidelines in Solomon Islands that address menstrual health are:

- **Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene Standards for Education Facilities in the Solomon Islands (2018)**, which contains eight criterion for menstrual hygiene management, including support and guidance from teachers, provision of products, adequate infrastructure that is sex-segregated, and private and proper disposal systems.

- **Strategic Plan Rural Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (2015-2020)**, which outlines provisions for menstrual health in school WASH infrastructure (4.16) and cites requirements for menstrual hygiene management using monitoring criteria from the WHO and UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene.
Lessons and insights: Opportunities to link existing policies to menstrual health

The review identified six opportunities to strengthen the linkages between national policies and guidelines and menstrual health in Solomon Islands:

- **National Healthy Settings Policy (2021):** Recognizes the importance of creating healthy villages, schools, marketplaces, workplaces, health facilities and towns through access to proper sanitation and hygiene. It also defines a ‘healthy school’ (page 10) and acknowledges that more attention must be directed towards gender equality. Menstrual health could be linked to these commitments.

- **National Health Strategic Plan (2022-2021):** Sets health priorities for the Solomon Islands including sexual and reproductive health, of which menstrual health is one aspect (though not explicitly referenced).

- **National Gender Equality and Women’s Development Policy (2015-2020):** Outcomes 6 and 7 outline access to education and providing a supportive school environment; improving women’s right to sexual and reproductive health. Menstrual health could be linked to this right.

- **National Education Strategic Framework (2016-2030):** Specifies the need for WASH in education to be piloted by 2020, and fully delivered by 2030. This will support menstrual health in schools.

- **National Education Action Plan (2022-2026):** Provides for WASH facilities to ensure school environment is safe, including sex-segregated sanitation facilities. This is supportive to menstrual health.

- **National Youth Policy (2017-2030):** Defines youth improved health and holistic well-being with a ‘youth-to-youth strategy for health and well-being’ (including for youth with disabilities) and better understanding of sexual and reproductive health.

Lessons and insights: Policy dialogue is needed before policy change will be enacted

Stakeholders reported there had been limited progress on menstrual health in policies in Solomon Islands and that policy conversations were just starting to happen. Some felt that the government needed a better understanding of menstrual health before policy changes would happen, and that menstrual health changes in policy to date had been strongly influenced by development partners.

We need to be clear on whose policy we are implementing. We are implementing on an ad hoc basis, but what policy drives us? – Review informant, Non-governmental organization (NGO)
Implementation arrangements

The Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development have overall responsibility for policy, strategy and standards setting for WASH in Schools, including monitoring as well as inclusion of WASH into school curriculum. The WASH Standards for Education Facilities in the Solomon Islands (2018) outline the roles of the Environmental Health Department and the Rural WASH Department within the Ministry of Health and Medical Services to advocate for school WASH and ensure compliance with health-based standards. However, the complexity of implementation was noted by stakeholders, with six departments involved in the delivery of WASH alone. Other aspects of menstrual health – health care, supportive social environment and participation – were not clear in government policies, plans and guidance documents.

Some coordination between sectors was happening through the Community-Led Total Sanitation Technical Working Group and the WASH in Schools Technical Working Group, which both address aspects of menstrual health. However, stakeholders noted that coordination on menstrual health needed to be further developed and that coordination and leadership needed significant strengthening.
Financing

The amount of public budget allocated to menstrual health is not known for Solomon Islands. Though menstrual health is included in the WASH Standards for Education Facilities in the Solomon Islands (2018) and Strategic Plan Rural WASH (2015–2020), there were no budget lines or policy requirements for financing found during the review. However, the WASH in Schools Guidance for Designs and Bills of Quantities does include costs for a menstrual hygiene-friendly toilet cubicle in schools. This can assist government to develop budgets for facilities for menstrual health at the school level.

Review informants reported that the government expressed willingness to commit budget to WASH in schools, but that most funding of menstrual health came from development partners.

Lessons and insights: Influencing policies will influence government funding

Government funding is determined by priorities established in policies and strategies. Review informants from civil society noted that they are advocating to relevant ministries to strengthen menstrual health in the policy framework and enable greater funding.

“The national budget is decided according to the national development strategy. Across the Ministries of Women, Health and Education there is no prioritization of menstrual health. Therefore, there is no real budgeting. Government needs to be aware of policy and priority objectives.” – Review informant, NGO

PROGRESS: SERVICE DELIVERY AND PROGRAMMING APPROACHES

Government-led service delivery has focused on WASH in schools. Non-government WASH actors have integrated menstrual health into school programmes, with a focus on school education and infrastructure. No examples of care for menstrual discomfort or disorders, non-discrimination and participation, or a supportive social environment were found. Current service delivery and programming approaches are:

Information and education: Outside of government efforts, external support agencies are providing support. The NGO Live and Learn delivered menstrual health awareness sessions across 13 communities, reaching 2,000 people and 10 schools in Honiara. Collaboration between the NGOs Plan International and Live and Learn and the social enterprise Kaleko Steifree Solomons led advocacy and awareness raising of menstrual health in 30 communities in three wards.
Responsibility for monitoring menstrual health is assigned in two policies, and review informants reported that government-led WASH in schools monitoring was working well. The WASH Standards for Education Facilities in the Solomon Islands (2018) established an annual reporting mechanism for each school, using a form from the Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development to report on compliance. The Strategic Plan Rural WASH (2015-2020) includes two indicators on menstrual health: (1) output indicator on the number of schools and clinics with WASH facilities constructed or rehabilitated; and (2) outcome indicator on the number of girls and female teachers with access to basic menstrual hygiene management facilities.

Review informants noted that government monitoring menstrual health at the household level was a gap due to challenges in understanding what should be monitored and the tools that could be used. At the project level, some international NGOs and civil society organizations (CSOs) used a ‘ladder of confidence’ tool with students to assessment the effectiveness of menstrual health education. However, informants noted their own limited capacity to monitor well, and some felt they lacked the right monitoring tools. Some informants also noted the logistical challenges and high costs associated with monitoring geographically remote locations.

Services and materials: The implementation of the WASH Standards for Education Facilities in the Solomon Islands (2018) are supported by two resources: technical requirements manual for school WASH facilities, and the Three Star Approach for WASH in Schools. Most of the implementation has been supported by development partners. In partnership with the government under the Solomon Islands Better Learning Environment project (2016-2022), UNICEF supported 42 schools in five wards in Guadalcanal Province aimed at reaching 6,500 students and 280 teachers which included functional girl-friendly WASH facilities and services. The NGOs Plan International, Live and Learn and Kaleko Steifree Solomon delivered training on the use and facilitation of menstrual hygiene management through a school WASH programme in West Guadalcanal reaching 22 schools, 60 communities and 8 rural health clinics, and reached approximately 14,575 people. In humanitarian response, CARE Australia’s Humanitarian Partnerships programme ‘Disaster READY’ provided menstrual health supply kits to 200 at-risk women and adolescents who had experienced abuse.
Right now, where menstrual health is being implemented, it is because of support from donors and partners. Something that is really needed now is to see menstrual health coming out in national development plans and policies. If they start implementing, then monitoring systems will be established to monitor the achievement of the required enabling environment for menstrual health including tracking of progress in improving menstrual health services and practices in the country. Like what the Ministry of Human Resources Development have done for their WASH in schools programme and the recently completed assessment done for WASH in healthcare facilities. – Review informant, UNICEF
Review methods

Regional progress review methods

- Advisory group guidance
- Desk review of policy and systematic review of evaluations
- Survey of expert stakeholders
- Stakeholder interviews and group discussions
- Country and region draft reports
- Final reports and recommendations

9 policies reviewed across the gender, education, health and WASH sectors
3 informants participated in interviews and surveys capturing programme and policy action

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- Live and Learn, Ladder of Confidence (monitoring tool), 2020.

Endnotes