



## Menstrual Hygiene Day 2020

Select examples of CARE programs that address menstrual barriers

**OVERVIEW** For many women and girls around the world, menstruation has negative effects on their health and restricts their participation in work, school and social activities. Three main causes are: 1) taboos and stigmas, 2) limited access to water, menstrual products and privacy, 3) limited knowledge about reproductive health and menstruation. Menstrual hygiene programs have the potential not only to allow women and girls to manage their menstruation with comfort and dignity, but also to strengthen their independence, mobility and confidence. Integrating menstrual health and hygiene management in CARE programming offers a valuable opportunity to shift gender norms and empower women and girls to lead and participate in their communities.

### Madagascar

As part of its comprehensive strategy to strengthen water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) systems and promote sustainable behavior change, RANO WASH works with small-

scale entrepreneurs to produce and sell reusable sanitary pads in their villages. Program staff and local community-based promoters receive training on menstrual health and hygiene and other gender-related barriers to increase awareness, reduce taboos and increase demand for safe and reusable sanitary pads.

### India

CARE India, under the Women and Water Alliance, is working to empower women through six-month learning groups, facilitating discussions on menstrual hygiene, improved WASH practices, communication, problem-solving, confidence and local advocacy. Menstruation is a taboo topic; however, these discussions inspire women to speak up about menstruation and teach other women about menstrual health and hygiene. Women have found innovative solutions to their challenges, such as negotiating with sanitary pad distributors so they can sell pads to women in their community at a lower cost.

**"Making washable sanitary pads has become a hobby, a job, and a source of income for my family" explains Rabary, a father in Madagascar.**

## Ghana and Malawi

In Ghana and Malawi, CARE conducted studies to understand how women are affected by menstruation. Findings showed that when menstruating, women do not tend to certain crops, because it is believed by some that yields will be compromised. This affects women's ability to earn income. Restrictions on collecting water limit their ability to care for their families during menstruation. In Malawi and Ghana, CARE organizes discussion groups of men and women, and youth separately, to promote dialogue around menstruation. Previously, communities did not discuss menstruation, sex, reproductive health and taboos. Now, there is high energy to share and learn -- by adults, youth, health and traditional authorities.

## Ethiopia

In Ethiopia, school WASH programs have established Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) clubs to train girls and boys about MHM. There is a room where girls can rest, access sanitary pads, and ask questions to the MHM-trained teacher. Parents and teachers report that since the project began, they have noted a decrease in drop out rates among girls and improvement in girls' academic performance.

## Cox's Bazar

In Cox's Bazar (the world's largest refugee settlement) women report needing to hide their menstrual cloths, unable to allow them to dry properly. In order to wash in private they were washing their cloths in the latrines. CARE Bangladesh piloted a new laundry facility that provides an easily and private place for washing and drying menstrual cloths. Watch here: [1](#), [2](#).

## Uganda

In the Imvepi Refugee Settlement, girls and women did not have enough money to buy

disposable pads. Many could not access adequate water and soap to wash cloth pads. Girls were forced to engage in transactional sex to buy pads, while some married women reported cases of intimate partner violence after cutting blankets for makeshift pads. To address these needs, [Ruby Cup](#) and [WoMena](#) worked with CARE to distribute and promote the use of menstrual cups. Menstrual cups use much less water than reusable pads, reduce stress around leakages, stains and chafing (particularly when cloths or alternative absorption items are used). Women reported that before cups they often skipped food distribution days when menstruating.

## Malawi

When flooding caused by Cyclone Idai forced communities to evacuate their homes, CARE Malawi engaged women and girls to discuss their greatest needs and concerns. One simple result of those conversations was a private washing facility that was designed to allow women to wash stained clothes and sanitary materials with privacy.

## Somalia

CARE Somalia was recently awarded two separate projects to address MHM barriers for school-age girls. These projects integrate MHM solutions with other educational improvements to encourage girls to attend and stay in school.

## Looking Forward

CARE integrates menstrual hygiene into many types of projects: WASH-specific, agriculture, education, and humanitarian response. Across all contexts, the goal is to increase women and girls' mobility, productivity, health, dignity, comfort and confidence. Menstruation is a natural process - and one that deserves attention, and respect.

For more information and additional resources:  
[Kelly Alexander](#)  
Senior Learning and Influencing Advisor  
[Kelly.alexander@care.org](mailto:Kelly.alexander@care.org)  
<http://www.care.org/water>

CARE USA  
151 Ellis Street  
Atlanta, GA 30303  
[www.care.org](http://www.care.org)

