The inception of a political movement for MHM in Niger

Niger has made considerable progress in recent months in promoting sanitation and hygiene for women and girls.

Two workshops were held in December 2016 and February 2017 on the integration of menstrual hygiene in national policies and strategies. In his opening statement, the Minister of Water and Sanitation of Niger, His Excellency Barmou Salifou, said it was time to break the silence on the importance of good menstrual hygiene and commit to work in favour of integration (of MHM) in public policies.

High-level officials from various ministries (water and sanitation, health, education, environment) took part in activities led by the Ministry of Water and Sanitation, which was chosen by the participants to play a leading role in mobilising decision-makers on MHM.

Improving cooperation
The growing number of actors for MHM must work out how to cooperate more effectively. During the two workshops, participants agreed to work with elected officials, including those outside Niamey (in regions, departments and towns) and to involve the network of elected female officials in the implementation of MHM activities.

It is time to break the silence.

Barmou Salifou,
Minister of Water and Sanitation of Niger

Continued on page 2
They also decided to set up an intersectoral platform to exchange information and created a joint working group from various sectoral ministries to compile an information sheet and promote menstrual hygiene, in order to help integrate MHM in public policies.

The number of MHM labs and information sites on menstrual hygiene is increasing. Tents were set up in various regions and communities, as well as in refugee camps. These MHM labs helped raise awareness of the issue. There is huge demand for more information and adequate facilities.

Last May in Dosso, Niger, five ministers and sixty young men and women spent several hours in the MHM lab on International Women’s Day receiving basic information on menstrual hygiene.

Community leaders were also trained: 144 in the Maradi region, and some 200 others are expected to be trained. New information tools should also be available soon including an awareness caravan which will specifically target men, reports on menstrual hygiene and a documentary on the subject.

Actors in the MHM movement reflected on the adaptation of infrastructure to enable good menstrual hygiene. The management of infrastructure is also being considered, including such as: Which business model should be used? Can a model management contract be drawn up? Do neighbouring countries have models that Niger could copy?

Although key work is still to be done to formalise this initiative, the movement for menstrual hygiene is well underway.
CSW 61 Side event: Poor WASH creates barriers for women in the workplace

The Commission on the Status of Women is one of the largest annual gatherings of global leaders, NGOs, private sector actors, United Nations partners and activists from around the world focusing on the status of rights and empowerment of women and girls. The theme of this year’s meeting was “Women’s economic empowerment in the changing world of work”.

See more at: http://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw61-2017#sthash.TYVn3pbS.dpuf

The long-neglected issue of WASH in the workplace was highlighted at a special side session at the 61st meeting of the Commission on the Status Women (CSW61) in New York on 20 March 2017

Organised by WSSCC and co-hosted by the Permanent Missions of Niger and Singapore to the United Nations, the event brought together several prominent speakers who underlined the serious economic and social barriers confronting women in the informal sector due to inadequate sanitation and hygiene infrastructure. Speakers also called for improved WASH policy, programming and monitoring measures to address the issue.

While all three Joint Programme countries (Cameroon, Niger and Senegal) are already taking steps to improve WASH in schools and the home environment, little attention has been given to the workplace and the impact of poor WASH on women working outside the home. With more than 80% of the labour force in Sub-Saharan Africa employed in the informal sector, including a high proportion of women in low-paying jobs such as street food vending, market stall retail and rubbish collection, inadequate WASH creates additional socio-economic barriers that restrict women’s equitable access to work and contribution to society.

Elbàck Zeinabou Tari Bako, Minister of Women’s Empowerment and Child Protection of Niger, spoke about the steps

Singapore: sanitation success story shows progress is possible

Singapore’s transformation –within the space of 50 years– from a developing country with a poor sanitation and hygiene record, and widespread open defecation, to one of the world’s cleanest countries, underpins the country’s leadership role in the global sanitation movement. Singapore has played an instrumental role in destigmatizing toilets and sanitation and promoting global and national discussion through its support for the World Toilet Organization (2001), UN Resolution A/RES/67/291 on ‘Sanitation for All’ (2013) and the designation of World Toilet Day (19 November).
Niger has taken to formalise inter-sectoral and inter-ministerial collaboration on menstrual hygiene management, while acknowledging that more needs to be done to monitor ministerial actions and differentiate the needs in urban and remote rural areas.

The scarcity of adequate public sanitation facilities has an adverse impact on women’s safety, dignity and health. New research conducted by Joint Programme partners in Cameroon, Niger and Senegal reveals that around half of women curtail their usual economic activities during menstruation due to inadequate sanitation facilities and other associated health and psycho-social constraints. This exacerbates the social and economic difficulties of women in the informal economy who face regular loss of earnings and usually rely on an average daily income of USD 3.00 to meet their basic human needs for food, housing, clothing and health care (ILO 2012).

Ambassador Burhan Gafoor, Permanent Representative of Singapore to the UN in New York, recalled the key role improved sanitation and hygiene played in Singapore’s remarkable progress since the 1960’s (see Box). He stressed commitment to improving sanitation globally and the responsibility of men, as well as women, to solve the problem.

“The informal sector contributes 55% of Sub-Saharan Africa’s GDP and accounts for 89% of the labour force. It is a primary employment source for women, most working in low-paying jobs.

The research findings also show that even when facilities exist, women are reluctant to use them due to the poor quality of construction, management, and maintenance. Compounding their reluctance to use dirty, unsanitary toilets, women also expressed concern for their personal privacy, safety and security due to the predominant lack of separate public toilets for men and women, and doors that can be locked from the inside.

Concluding the side event, Dr. Chris Williams, Executive Director of WSSCC, called for the inclusion of WASH-related barriers for women and girls in the workplace in the main agenda of CSW62 (2018) and for the issue to be tackled as a cross-cutting rather than solely a gender issue. He also noted the need to improve monitoring in order to assess the extent to which ministries translate actions into reality on the ground. Read the full report here.

Investing in good toilets in the workplace and schools so that women and girls have clean, separate facilities to maintain their dignity, and to manage menstruation or pregnancy safely, can boost what is often referred to as the ‘girl effect’: maximising the involvement of half the population in society (Girl Effect 2015).


Check List: Gender-Sensitive Toilets

- Are there sufficient numbers of toilets?
- Are they working, clean, lockable?
- Are there separate facilities for men and women?
- Is there running water for people to wash their hands or for women to manage menstruation safely?


Relevant agreed conclusions of CSW61

Improve the security and safety of women on the journey to and from work... through gender-responsive rural development strategies and urban planning and infrastructure including...separate and adequate sanitation facilities, so as to facilitate women’s access to places, products, services and economic opportunities.

THE JOINT PROGRAMME ON GENDER, HYGIENE AND SANITATION

Rockaya A. @ARockaya
Lovely to see Ambassador @BurhanGafoor wearing the MHM bracelet!!! 😊

WSSCC @WSSCCouncil
“We must put WASH issues and women’s access to sanitation & hygiene at the center of our policies” - Ambassador @BurhanGafoor at #CSW61.

Huru International @hurukiets
Good #MenstrualHygiene involves a woman’s ability to use & dispose of sanitary napkins, change her underwear & wash hands
@WSSCCouncil #CSW61

Burhan Gafoor Retweeted
Singapore Mission UN @SingaporeUN - 20 Mar 2017
Replying to @SingaporeUN
When sanitation is neglected, other #development goals suffer @BurhanGafoor @UN_Women @WSSCCouncil @UN_CSRN #WorldWaterDay #WorldWaterDay

ARCHANA PATIKAR @archanakas Twitter
Sans safe sanitation, hygiene & water, the 2030 agenda will be jeopardized @BurhanGafoor @SingaporeUN #NigerPermanentMission @unwomenAfrica

Wanimbi Kosha @WanimbiKosha - 20 Mar, 2017
Involve women in design of WASH structures to ensure menstrual related needs 4 disposal, collection & treatment are met. @WSSCCouncil #CSW61
Testimonies of side event attendees

I appreciated the content, scope and delivery of the event. The content of this event is high value and I hope can be shared more widely beyond this session. The session highlighted for me the tremendous work being done around the world to address WASH including women’s menstruation. The knowledge, experience, expertise of the panellist and participants made a direct contribution to advancing the human rights WASH agenda. The research study is truly a wealth of information that can be used strategically to build support for WASH. I would encourage this study to be shared widely. The data/findings can be used for future education and awareness campaigns that build support globally. The country and NGO representatives in the room yesterday were clearly committed to the WASH agenda. The session could have easily been a day long! Outreach over the next year will be vital. There are critical partners from civil society that can support this call including the labour movement, and the NGO sector. The call to action for member states to support a future resolution is vital to move this issue forward at the UN.

— Dianne O’Reggio, Columbia University student

My experience with WSSCC at CSW 61 was incredibly impactful. Through this opportunity, I attended the WSSCC’s side event for menstrual hygiene in Niger. As my first experience with the UN, I was particularly impressed with the ability of delegates and advocates from around the world to come together and speak to this issue. I saw firsthand what global leadership is and WSSCC is spearheading an essential and necessary movement. I have an entirely new appreciation for international advocacy and hope to continue to work in this capacity. I want to thank WSSCC for the fantastic experience and encourage others to serve at future CSW conferences, as it was one to remember.

— Michelle Chouinard, Columbia University student

The role of government is important – but we need a multi-stakeholder approach that brings in private foundations, the private sector and encourages local communities to take action on their own.

Ambassador Gafoor
Design of WASH facilities adapted in two refugee camps of Cameroon

Hygiene and sanitation installations are often a problem in refugee camps. Those in Minawao in the far north of Cameroon and Ngam in the east of the country are no exception.

Opened in 2014 to welcome Nigerians fleeing the conflict in their region (Minawao) and the victims of inter-community violence in the Central African Republic (Ngam), the camps face problems with water and inadequate sanitary installations; women are particularly affected.

In the Minawao and Ngam refugee camps in Cameroon, new dedicated spaces for women are now fitted with sanitary installations. From solar panels, waste incinerators to appropriate facilities for disabled persons, everything has been done to meet everyone’s needs and provide a welcoming environment.

A similar space for women in Minawao opened in May 2017 – the Ngam area will follow. These spaces have provided an opportunity to build toilets specifically adapted for the needs of women and girls. This initiative of UN Women Cameroon, aims to provide a safe and comfortable space for refugees who are often victims of sexual violence. In the vast camp at Minawao around 30,000 women have benefitted from these services.

Toilets in these spaces are adapted to the needs of all women. They are separated from men’s toilets with clear signage and have lighting and lockable door.

Sources:
http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Profile_Camp_Mi
nawao_Fevrier_2017.pdf
http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/57866.pdf
Facilities include bins for throwing away used sanitary towels and ensuring good menstrual hygiene. Each area (men and women) is adapted for people with reduced mobility: the doors are wider, and handles and switches are at the right height.

Basic standards regarding the building of sanitary installations have been met. The installations are built more than 30 metres from wells and water sources, and at least 1.5 metres above the water table. The toilets are also equipped with handwashing facilities, soap or other cleaning products. In addition, a hand pump ensures that water is available.

Electricity supply is guaranteed by solar panels and incinerators have been installed for waste management. Efforts have also been made to make women feel welcome. A dozen mango trees have been planted to improve air quality and provide shelter from the sun.

A management committee has been appointed to carry out the cleaning and maintenance of these areas.
New study on menstrual hygiene management in Niger highlights the need for more facilities and better maintenance

Half of women exhibited poor MHM practices; this figure rose to 98% among nomadic populations.

The results of the first of three action research studies on menstrual hygiene management among sedentary and nomadic populations reveal the most urgent needs of women and girls in four regions of Niger (Maradi, Tahoua, Tillabéri and Zinder) and supplement the body of information available from Joint Programme studies conducted in previous years.

Commissioned by the Joint Programme and undertaken by the Institut de formation et de recherche de demographiques (IFORD) in Yaoundé, Cameroon, the research aimed to examine and analyse the behaviours and practices related to MHM and their impact on the living conditions of women and girls in Niger, as well as the potential implications for public policy.

More than 1300 women, girls, men and adolescent boys took part in the study which combined quantitative and qualitative approaches. The findings confirm the results of earlier studies concerning taboos and myths surrounding menstruation as well as women’s and girls’ limited understanding of why they menstruate and the links between the menstrual cycle and reproductive health.

Key recommendations to address research findings

1. **Increase the level of WASH infrastructure** in communities and households and strengthen measures for the cleaning and maintenance of existing infrastructure.

2. **Construct gender-separated** latrines in educational establishments and public places especially those frequented by economically active women, most of whom work in the informal sector.

3. **Strengthen evidence-based advocacy** to promote the integration of MHM into public policies and national and local development strategies.

A quarter of women and girls reported an infection during menstruation, a consequence of poor hygiene practices.

Menstruation is largely missing from sectoral policy documents and women lack a forum to express their MHM needs and concerns.

Poor WASH infrastructure leads to lost hours of work for menstruating women and 40% of girls miss school during their period.
MHM integrated in two national strategies in Cameroon.

The promotion of menstrual hygiene management (MHM) made significant progress in Cameroon with two recently adopted national strategies explicitly including MHM in their goals.

The National Community-Led Total Sanitation Strategy, validated in 2016, relies on the commitment of United Nations Member States to set up measures in favour of sanitation for all and on the sustainable development goals, which aim to provide all households access to sustainable and affordable sanitation by 2030.

Signed by the Ministry of Energy and Water and the Ministry of Public Health, the strategy aims to end open defecation throughout the country by 2035. There are four strategic arms, including one (A2.3) involving the establishment of a national marketing programme for rural sanitation, which will include menstrual hygiene management.

Some towns, such as Ntui in the Centre province, have already taken steps and allocated a budget for the creation of equipment suited to the needs of women. “The town council has earmarked 10 million CFA (approximately 20,000 USD) for the building of toilets that ensure good menstrual hygiene,” announced Mveimba Oumarou, deputy mayor of Ntui. “They will be models for other towns”.

Signed in 2016 by the Ministry of Basic Education, the second strategy to include MHM, concerns a key area for the country’s future and the adoption of sound and sustainable hygiene practices in schools. The National Strategy for the Promotion of Drinking Water Supplies, Hygiene and Sanitation in schools in Cameroon covers all primary schools in the country, and focuses mainly on schools in priority education zones in four impoverished areas (Adamaoua, East, Far North and North) with a total of 3,907 schools.

In the assessment of access to sanitation and hygiene infrastructures in schools, the document reveals that ‘most of the toilets available to pupils are not gender-sensitive,’ which discourages girls in puberty from using them during their periods and results in girls being absent during their periods.

The document addresses the question of menstrual hygiene education remains taboo in priority education zones. However, it also states that girls are increasingly free and calls for regular educational conversations on this topic.

GIRLS MUST BE MADE TO FEEL SAFE

To promote menstrual hygiene, the authors of the strategy believe that girls must be made to feel safe by making separate toilets available, as well as appropriate toilet kits (sanitary towels, paper, cloths if possible, soap) and a health centre in or near the school to help girls manage painful periods.

These new ministerial policies have been welcomed by parliamentarians, who have asked to be further involved. “I’ve realised that menstrual hygiene management and even sanitation, is a huge problem,” admitted Cameroon Senator Emma Eno, “I’ll be more aware when voting for laws and reviewing Cameroon’s public policies”.

Training session and sensitization of Government agents on MHM, for its integration into National policies, held in Yaoundé. 02/06/2016. UN Women.
In 2015, an online platform was established for West and Central African MHM trainers in order to combine information, documents and lessons learned in one place and make them available to members, as well as to promote discussion among trainers. This community of trainers reinforces the commitment and work of WSSCC in terms of equality and non-discrimination.

Thanks to the diversity of the members, countries and sectors represented, the platform promotes a multi-sectoral approach, a key component of the Joint Programme. Improving members’ understanding of the existing links between the management of menstrual hygiene, socio-economic and health-related developments, and the integration of these results in the Post-2015 Agenda is also a vitally important component of the platform.

A large number, awareness and training activities are conducted in the field, without the direct involvement of agencies responsible for implementing the Joint Programme. The training of an initial group of 130 officers has therefore provided awareness-raising and/or training for more than 13500 people throughout West and Central Africa over a two-year period (June 2015 to June 2017), through various local, national and/or regional activities.

VIDEO - WASH for women in the informal economy

Testimony of women working in the market of Mbirkelane, Kaffrine (Senegal)

WSSCC and UN Women’s Joint Programme on West and Central Africa works with the governments of Niger, Senegal and Cameroon to highlight sanitation and hygiene issues for women. In this video, women in a street market explain the challenges they face and their coping mechanisms.

Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J__i6d9bEwc

Acknowledgements

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