

# Campaign to End Period Poverty in Schools

## "Breaking Barriers: A Qualitative Exploration of Students' Perspectives on Menstrual Hygiene in Garowe, Puntland, Somalia"

### Qualitative Survey Report

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### 1.1 Background

Menstrual hygiene management is an integral aspect of reproductive health, well-being, and gender equality (UNICEF, 2012). In Garowe, Puntland, Somalia, as in many parts of the world, the experiences and challenges faced by girls regarding menstrual hygiene management in schools demand immediate attention (WaterAid, 2019). The issue of period poverty, which is the inability to access essential menstrual hygiene products due to financial constraints, persists, and its implications are far-reaching. It disrupts the education and daily lives of those affected, particularly girls (Sumpter & Torondel, 2013)

### 1.2 Rationale

The rationale for conducting a qualitative survey on menstrual hygiene management in schools in Garowe, Puntland, Somalia, is deeply rooted in the pressing need to address the existing disparities and challenges surrounding this critical issue. While menstruation is a natural biological process, the stigma and lack of access to necessary resources have profound implications for gender equality, education, and overall well-being (Sinha et al., 2015). By understanding the experiences, awareness, perceptions, and attitudes of girls in this context, we can develop targeted interventions to combat period poverty and promote menstrual equity (Hennegan et al., 2020).

### 1.3 Objectives of the Survey

The primary objectives of this qualitative survey are:

1. To explore the experiences of school going girls in Garowe, Puntland, Somalia, related to menstrual hygiene management.
2. To assess the awareness and perceptions of students regarding menstruation and menstrual hygiene.
3. To understand the attitudes of students towards gender equality and the role school going girls in menstrual hygiene management.
4. To identify the impact of menstrual hygiene management on the educational and psychosocial well-being of students.

## 1.4 Scope of the Survey

This qualitative survey will be conducted in selected schools in Garowe, Puntland, Somalia. The focus will be on students, school going girls, as they play a central role in menstrual hygiene management. Additionally, teachers and parents may be included to provide a holistic perspective on this issue.

## 1.5 Methodology

The methodology for this survey will employ qualitative research methods, including:

- **In-depth Interviews:** One-on-one interviews will be conducted with selected students, teachers, and parents to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences and perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
- **Focus Group Discussions:** Focus group discussions will be organized with students to encourage open conversations and group dynamics that can reveal shared perceptions and attitudes (Krueger & Casey, 2015).
- **Thematic Analysis:** Qualitative data collected from interviews and focus group discussions will be analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

## 1.6 Ethical Considerations

This survey will adhere to ethical guidelines, ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, and the protection of participants' privacy and dignity (American Psychological Association, 2020). All participants will be informed about the purpose of the survey, and their participation will be entirely voluntary (World Medical Association, 2013).

### 2.1 Menstrual Hygiene Management

Menstrual hygiene management (MHM) is a critical component of public health and gender equality, encompassing the practices and resources needed to absorb, contain, and manage menstrual blood (UNICEF, 2012). MHM involves access to menstrual hygiene products and facilities, accurate information, and societal support for menstruating individuals (WaterAid, 2019). Inadequate MHM is a widespread challenge in low and middle-income countries, impacting the health, education, and dignity of girls and women (Sumpter & Torondel, 2013).

### 2.2 Menstruation-Related Stigma

The stigma surrounding menstruation is a pervasive issue worldwide, negatively affecting the well-being of girls and women (Jewitt, 2021). Stigma arises from a lack of understanding, misinformation, and harmful cultural beliefs, leading to discrimination against menstruating individuals (Tegegne et al., 2014). In many societies, menstruation is considered impure, leading to girls' and women's isolation and silence about their experiences (Sinha et al., 2015).

### 2.3 Impact on Education

Menstrual hygiene challenges often result in girls missing school days each month. This absenteeism hinders their academic performance and overall educational attainment (Hennegan et al., 2020). Research has shown a correlation between menstrual hygiene and school attendance, suggesting that girls who do not have access to adequate MHM facilities are more likely to experience disruptions in their education (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Inadequate MHM can lead to embarrassment, discomfort, and a lack of confidence, further discouraging girls from attending school during their periods.

### 2.4 Menstrual Equity and Gender Equality

Promoting menstrual equity, defined as equal and comprehensive access to menstrual hygiene products and education (UNFPA, 2018), is crucial for advancing gender equality. Achieving menstrual equity requires addressing period poverty, promoting gender-inclusive practices, and reducing stigma around menstruation. When girls and women have the necessary resources and support for managing menstruation, it contributes to their overall empowerment and equal participation in society.

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

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### 3.1 Data Collection

The methodology for this survey will use qualitative research methods, which allow for an in-depth exploration of the experiences, awareness, perceptions, and attitudes of girls towards menstrual hygiene management in Garowe, Puntland, Somalia.

#### 3.1.1 In-depth Interviews

In-depth interviews will be conducted with selected participants, including students, teachers, and parents. These interviews will provide a platform for participants to share their personal experiences and perspectives related to menstrual hygiene management in schools. A semi-structured interview format will be utilized, allowing flexibility in probing for detailed responses (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

#### 3.1.2 Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions will be organized with groups of students to encourage open dialogue and to explore shared perceptions and attitudes regarding menstruation and menstrual hygiene management. These discussions will facilitate the emergence of group dynamics and consensus on certain topics.

### 3.2 Sampling

The survey will employ a purposive sampling to select participants who could provide rich and relevant information regarding the research objectives (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Students from different age groups will be included to ensure a comprehensive understanding of experiences and attitudes. Additionally, teachers and parents will be included to provide diverse perspectives.

### 3.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis will use thematic analysis, a well-established method for identifying patterns, themes, and meanings in qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis process includes data coding, theme development, and interpretation. Through this process, emerging themes that reflects the experiences and attitudes of girls concerning menstrual hygiene management in schools will be cross examined and documented.

### **3.4 Ethical Considerations**

The survey adhered to ethical guidelines to protect the rights and dignity of participants.

Informed consent will be obtained from all participants. They will be informed about the purpose of the study, and participation will be entirely voluntary. Confidentiality will be ensured, and identifiers will be used to protect the identities of participants.

## CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

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### 4.1 Experiences of School Going Girls

In our qualitative survey conducted at Horseed Primary School in Garowe, Puntland, we explored the experiences of school-going girls regarding menstrual hygiene management. We conducted in-depth interviews with a total of 6 girls from Class 7 and 8. These interviews shed light on several key challenges faced by these young students.

A significant issue that emerged was the lack of adequate toilet facilities for disposing of used sanitary towels. Many girls reported having to wear the same sanitary pad for long durations during school hours, as they lacked a suitable place to change and dispose of used sanitary pads. This not only led to discomfort but also disrupted their focus during lessons. Additionally, some students lived far from the school, and the absence of proper facilities forced them to return home during the day, causing them to miss lessons.

### 4.2 Attitudes of Students Towards Gender Equality and Menstrual Hygiene

An important aspect of our research was to understand the attitudes of students towards gender equality and the role of school-going girls in menstrual hygiene management. We observed that both the girls and their teachers showed a strong commitment to addressing this issue.

Teachers played a pivotal role in supporting the girls in their menstrual education. They went beyond traditional teaching by ensuring that girls who experienced menstrual stains on their clothing were assisted discreetly. Teachers would arrange for a taxi to take the affected students home to change, removing the stigma associated with menstruation in the society and community.

### 4.3 Impact on Education and Psychosocial Well-being

Our discussions with the school headmaster revealed a positive outlook on the impact of menstrual hygiene management on education and psychosocial well-being. The headmaster expressed a willingness to include menstrual education as part of the school curriculum, even proposing a weekly lesson dedicated to this important topic. The intention was not only to educate the girls but also to provide them with educational materials related to menstrual management.



This change signifies a significant step toward empowering the students, enhancing their confidence, and eradicating the stigma associated with menstruation. Education on this subject will not only promote gender equality but also ensure that all students can participate fully in their educational journey.

## **CHAPTER 5: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

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### **5.1 Recommendations**

Based on the findings of our qualitative survey at Horseed Primary School, we propose the following recommendations:

#### **5.1.1 Provision of Adequate Menstrual Hygiene Facilities:**

- Schools should be provided with adequate toilet facilities for girls to change and dispose of used sanitary products.
- The availability of separate, clean, and well-equipped restrooms for girls is essential to ensure their comfort and hygiene during menstruation.

#### **5.1.2 Inclusion of Menstrual Education in the Curriculum:**

- The school should integrate menstrual education into the curriculum, with a specific focus on menstrual hygiene management.
- Weekly lessons, as proposed by the school headmaster, should be dedicated to this topic.

#### **5.1.3 Access to Free Menstrual Products:**

- There is need to ensure that girls have access to free menstrual hygiene kits within the school premises.
- The availability of menstrual hygiene kits is not only a matter of hygiene but also a fundamental right to education.

#### **5.1.4 Empowerment of Student Council:**

- Student councils should take an active role in managing the disposal of used sanitary products.
- Responsible groups can be formed to ensure the cleanliness and hygiene of the disposal bins.

## 5.2 Conclusion

In conclusion, our qualitative survey at Horseed Primary School has revealed important insights into the experiences and attitudes of school-going girls in Garowe, Puntland, Somalia, regarding menstrual hygiene management. The challenges they face, such as inadequate facilities and limited access to menstrual education, have significant implications for their education and well-being.

The proactive role of teachers in supporting girls during menstruation and the headmaster's commitment to including menstrual education in the curriculum are encouraging steps toward creating a more inclusive and equitable learning environment.

In implementing the above proposed recommendations, we can work together to break the barriers of period poverty, enhance gender equality, and ensure that all students, regardless of their gender, can pursue their education with confidence, dignity, and opportunity.

## END NOTES

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### a) Interview Guide for Girls: Students' Perspectives on Menstrual Hygiene Management

#### *Introduction:*

- Introduce yourself and the purpose of the interview.
- Explain the importance of their input in improving menstrual hygiene in schools.
- Emphasize confidentiality and the voluntary nature of participation.
- Request their consent to proceed with the interview.

#### **Section 1: Personal Experiences**

- How do you feel about discussing menstruation and menstrual hygiene?
- Can you describe your personal experiences with menstruation in school?
- What challenges have you faced in managing menstruation while at school?
- Have you ever missed school days due to menstrual issues? If so, how often and why?
- How do you feel when you can't manage your menstruation effectively at school?
- Do you have any specific stories or situations related to your experiences with menstrual hygiene in school?

#### **Section 2: Awareness and Knowledge**

- What do you know about menstrual hygiene and the importance of proper hygiene during menstruation?
- Have you received any education or information about menstrual hygiene in school?
- How do you access information about menstrual hygiene, and what sources do you trust?
- Do you think there should be more education about menstrual hygiene in schools? Why or why not?

### **Section 3: School Environment**

- Can you describe the facilities and resources available for menstrual hygiene management in your school?
- Do you feel comfortable using these facilities and resources? Why or why not?
- Are there any changes or improvements you would suggest to make menstrual hygiene management in school better?

### **Section 4: Impact on Education and Well-being**

- How has managing menstruation impacted your attendance and performance at school?
- In your opinion, how can improving menstrual hygiene management positively affect your education and well-being?
- Are there any additional comments or suggestions you'd like to share regarding menstrual hygiene in schools?

b) Photos of the school visit, interviews and sanitary pads distribution





