

# Ethiopia Menstrual Health Strategy Design Report

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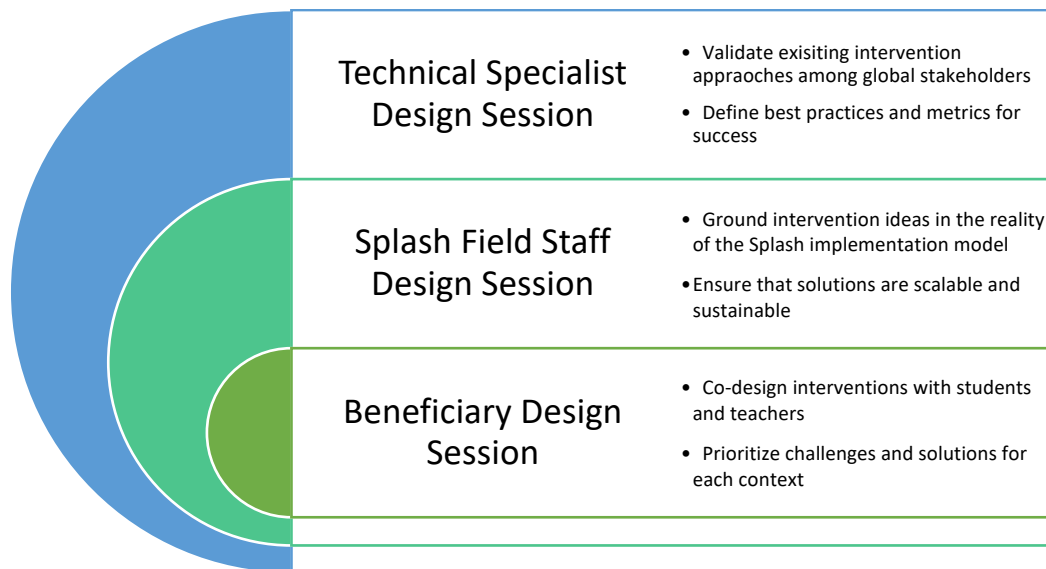
## 1. Overview

Splash, a leader in providing urban water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) at scale has a clear intervention goal to improve the lives and health of children living in urban environments. Splash's anchor project, WASH in Schools for Everyone (Project WISE) intends to reach 1,200+ government schools in Kolkata and 450 schools in Addis Ababa over the next 5 years with its holistic school-based model consisting of quality WASH infrastructure, innovative menstrual health solutions, and hygiene behavior change programming.

In 2019, Splash undertook a formative research effort to investigate avenues for optimizing our menstrual health approach under Project WISE. Our formative research focused on uncovering critical menstrual health related barriers and motivators, gaps in existing menstrual health programming, as well as mapping social systems that impact how girls experience menstruation.

In addition to the formative research conducted by Splash, there was also a series of human-centered design sessions conducted to ground the research findings in reality. Three design sessions with three discreet groups of stakeholders have ensured a comprehensive view of the range of opportunities available to improve the menstrual experience of girls in Kolkata, India and Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Figure 1. Menstrual Health Design Approach



## 2. Beneficiary Design Session

To gather insights directly from beneficiaries Splash conducted a human-centered design (HCD) session with female students in schools across Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The HCD sessions we structured in such a way that girls were able to share their experience of menstruation and to voice their opinions around how to address menstrual health (MH) in schools. The HCD session was formatted in three parts, 1) the Menstrual Health Narrative, 2) Rapid Ideation, and 3) Ideal Toilet Exercise. By hearing directly from female students, Splash hopes to co-design a menstrual health program that is culturally relevant, comprehensive, and sustainable.

### 2.1. Menstrual Health Narrative

During the Menstrual Health Narrative activity, girls were asked to develop a story line of two characters – Hikma and Haimi - that covered the topics that they felt were the most critical for a menstruating girl to be aware of. The stories were from the girls' perspective and highlighted a multitude of experiences such as:

- How they talk to a friend about menstruation
- How they could tell a trusted adult about their menstrual experience
- Learning about products and where to buy them/access them
- Getting support when having a menstrual leak at school or helping a friend
- Managing pain

While constructing the stories of two girls who had just started their periods, participants used visual cues and icons to trigger creative thinking. There were two groups that developed the narratives separately and it was incredibly surprising to find that the narratives between the groups were very different.

The girls developed two stories of girls who started their periods while at the school. Their stories tell us of different challenges the girls faced such as menstrual blood staining on their uniform, abdominal pain and cramps, feeling shame, confusion and embarrassment, teasing by other students, missing class, and different restrictions imposed by their families such as not being allowed to participate in sports or religious activities. Through the narrative, the girls indicated that female teachers, friends, sisters, and mothers are a primary source of support and information during menstruation. Their stories also highlighted the importance of having access to pain medication during menstruation.

#### **Hikma's Story**

One day Hikma started to feel abdominal pain during class. When she stood up from her desk she found menstrual blood had stained her uniform. Her classmates noticed and started to tease her. Hikma was so embarrassed. She felt confused and went to a female teacher for advice. The teacher taught her about menstruation and gave her a sanitary pad to use. She went to a toilet and put on the sanitary pad and washed her hands with soap as she was told by her teacher. When Hikma got home she told her sister the situation. Her sister helped Hikma by giving her pain medication. Once her mother found out that Hikma started her period she restricted her



from playing with her friends. Instead, Hikma started spending her time reading books and watching TVs alone. She was very sad.

### **Haimi's Story**

Haimi was feeling unwell in the morning before she went to school but was unsure why. Later in the day, during the class break her friends told her that she had a menstrual blood stain on her uniform, she felt ashamed, but her friends encouraged her to seek help from a female teacher. Haimi followed her friend's advice and went to a female teacher. The teacher gave her a sanitary pad and showed her how to use it. However, Haimi was experiencing painful menstrual cramps and asked to go home. When Haimi got home, she told her mother about the pain and her mother gave her pain medication. Later that evening, Haimi felt better and start playing with her siblings as she normally would.

## 2.2. Rapid Ideation

After conducting the Menstrual Health narrative activity, the Splash facilitator challenged the students to think through solutions for some of the key challenges they referenced in their narratives.

Using prompts around education, engaging parents, peer mentoring, and solutions based outside of the school setting girls were asked to develop program activities and interventions that could improve the menstrual experience of girls like them.

Participants wrote down as many ideas as possible over a ten-minute period on sticky notes. The participants categorized their suggestions into domains such as: curriculum, school clubs, outside of school activities, and parent/mentor/teacher interventions.

### 2.2.1. Curriculum

- Participants reported they would like to change the starting grade level for menstrual health/puberty education
  - Starting menstrual health/puberty education at grade 2 or at age of 8 years old
- Include additional information that they feel is a “gap”:
  - Information on how to use sanitary pads and how often to change pads
  - Lessons specifically for boys to reduce stigma and teasing
  - Information about menstrual pain and pain remedies
  - Guidance on how to talk to parents freely about menstruation
  - Information on how to maintain personal hygiene during menstruation
- Participant reported they would enjoy the MH education if it delivered in an entertaining story format
  - Secondary level students reported they would enjoy MH education supported by visual aids and activities such as role play



### 2.2.2. School Clubs

- Participants reported they learn about menstrual health from Gender and Hygiene clubs in their schools
  - Participants recommend promoting this club and developing more school activities that engage students in the club content

### 2.2.3. Outside of School Engagement

- Girls hangout with their friends at neighborhoods and religious places like churches and mosques outside of the school
  - Participants recommend messaging to be placed in these popular areas that provide information about menstruation to break the taboo
- Participants reported they get information about fashion, culture, and social events from their friends, TV, social media (Facebook), and Radio.
  - Participants recommend using these channels to disseminate information related to menstruation

### 2.2.4. Parent/Teacher/Mentor

- Program activities that build the knowledge, empathy, and self-efficacy of parents:
  - Participants reported that they are not comfortable talking to their parents, specially fathers, about menstruation
  - Participants ask for advice mostly from their mothers, sisters and friends and sometimes from their teachers
  - Participants mentioned things will be easier for them to seek advice from their parents and teachers about menstruation if their parents and teachers will be able to initiate free discussion, motivate the girls to talk freely about menstruation and support their ideas.

## 2.3. Prototyping Exercise

### 2.3.1. Girl Friendly Sanitation Facilities

Participants designed their ideal toilet for the management of their menstruation at school. The table below states some of the key recommendations. Of particular note is the desire for there to be a shower in the toilet block, a pad vending machine, and the provision of a bidet within each stall. When they were asked to prioritize these additions, they reported a desire to have a pad vending machine over any other sanitation accessory.

*Table 1. Ideal Toilet Recommendations*

<b>Ideas</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Location of the toilet</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Located at reasonable distance from the classrooms</li><li>- Separate latrine block for girls</li></ul>
<b>Improve overall structure of the latrine</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Ceramic wall and floor</li><li>- Compartments with adequate space</li><li>- Clean without bad odor</li><li>- Adequate lighting and ventilation</li></ul>



	- Adequate number of stalls
<b>Hand washing amenities</b>	- Hand washing facility with soap at the toilet block
<b>Privacy</b>	- Stall doors and inside locks
<b>Accessories</b>	- Trash bins, - Mirrors - Pad vending machine/pad stock box - Tissue paper
<b>Water Supply</b>	- Water tap - Bidet shower (sprayer) - Water bucket with cup
<b>Changing room with Shower</b>	- Inside toilet block

### 2.3.2. Menstrual Health/ Gender Club Design

Participants were asked to design the Gender Club and its functions. They put themselves in the mindset of the club administrators and developed the following structure, function, and purpose for a Gender Club as follows:

- The club will meet every two weeks
- Members will include students (boys and girls) from all grades voluntarily
- Members will need to assure their active participation and commitment by signing a club agreement
- The club will meet in a school administrator’s or teacher’s office
- The club will be responsible for organizing awareness creation events including school programs, community events, and mini media spots
- The club members will have vests/badges as an identification of their membership in the club
- The club will have its own stock of sanitary materials to give to students who need them
- Topics to be covered by the club through club meetings and awareness events include how to access and use sanitary pads, how to properly utilize toilets, where to access menstrual pain medications, how to support peers who are menstruating

## 3. Splash Field Staff Design Session

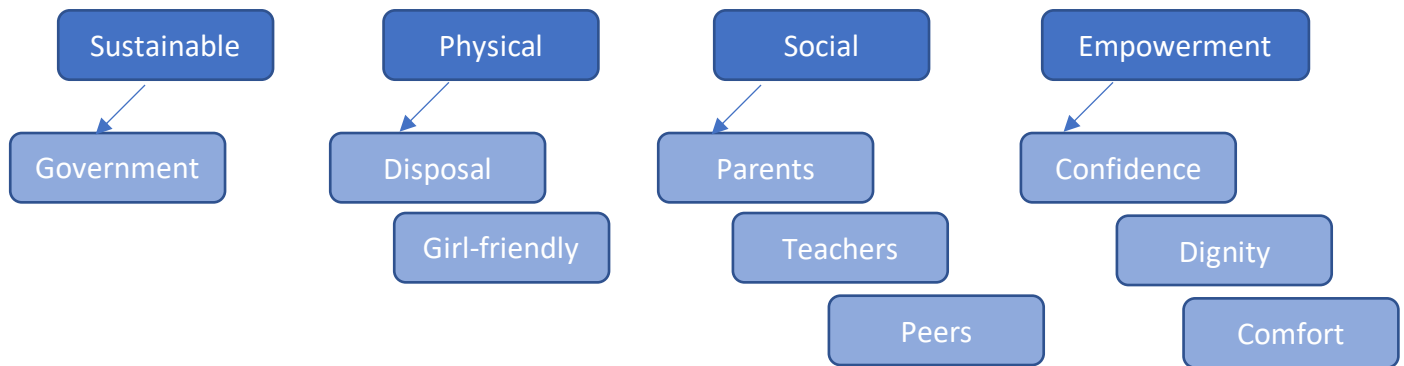
### 3.1. Visioning exercise

#### 3.1.1. Key Considerations for Menstrual Health Vision

While discussing the Splash menstrual health program vision, there were some core domains that the team felt needed to be represented in the vision statement. Below is a figure demonstrating the ‘parent’ domains and the subdomains that comprise them.

*Figure 2. Vision Statement Domains*





**“Splash’s vision is to create a sustainable MH program that transforms the physical and social environment to empower girls so that they can manage their menstruation with dignity.”**

### 3.2. Rapid Ideation + Star-bursting

After the visioning exercise, Splash team members were asked to participate in a “Rapid Ideation” session to answer the question: How do we disseminate our solutions to everyone so that there is maximum potential for impact?

During the Rapid Ideation activity, teams came up with as many ideas as they could around the following three topics:

- Topic 1: Student to student dissemination strategies
- Topic 2: Teacher to student dissemination strategies
- Topic 3: Outside of school to student dissemination strategies

The team used the “Starbursting” approach which is a form of brainstorming that focuses on generating questions rather than answers. This approach can be used iteratively, with further layers of questioning about the answers to the initial set of questions. Asking iterative questions about a proposed intervention is a valuable way of understanding a new idea, and of challenging it to ensure that all of the relevant aspects of it have been considered before moving forward with piloting.

#### 3.2.1. Student to student dissemination ideas

The first group was asked to ideate around approaches to disseminate information about menstruation from student to student. After developing as many ideas as possible the team then used the starbursting method to ask questions related to the actualization of the approaches produced.

#### **Key Ideas + Starbursting Considerations**

- Peer Mentoring



- Where is the time and space for students to meet?
  - Who/how will this be managed?
  - How often will students meet with their mentor?
  - How can we make this program sustainable with mentors graduating/not attending school anymore?
  - Does this need to include specific grades? (4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>)
  - How many will be grouped? 1:1, 3:1, etc.
  - How can we orient/train the older grades to be mentor?
  - Would this only be primary? 1-8 or would it expand beyond to include secondary?
- MH Week
    - How often should MH week occur? Not too much or schools and students would get fatigued and lose interest
    - Should we use the 16 days of activism?
    - What is the best delivery of these activities during the week? Mini media? Classroom by classroom?

### 3.2.2. Teacher to teacher dissemination ideas

The second group was asked to ideate around approaches to disseminate information about menstruation from teacher to teacher. After developing as many ideas as possible the team then used the starbursting method to ask questions related to the actualization of the approaches produced.

#### **Key Ideas + Starbursting Considerations**

- Job aids for teachers
  - What would the content be of the job aids?
  - How can we ensure they are sustainable and don't get lost/stolen/damaged?
  - What format would the materials be? Posters, books, pamphlets, etc.
  - What type of information would be the most helpful?
- In-class orientation through homeroom teachers
  - How would we reach all homeroom teachers?
  - How many homeroom teachers are at each school? Is the number too high for the large schools?
  - How would we select the focal teacher from each school that would train the other homeroom teachers?
  - Would we still train the Gender Club?
  - How can we ensure the quality of the delivery of information for each homeroom teacher?
  - a. How often would teach discuss MH? Only during MH week?





### 3.2.3. Outside of school to student dissemination ideas

Lastly, the third group was asked to ideate around approaches to disseminate information about menstruation outside of the school setting. After developing as many ideas as possible the team then used the starbursting method to ask questions related to the actualization of the approaches produced.

#### **Key Ideas + Starbursting Considerations**

- Celebrity Engagement
  - Which celebrities?
  - How can we finance this?
  - Would it be a song or a radio spot?
  - How do we develop the creative components of their song/spot?
  - Can we use celebrities as marketing material instead of them creating a song “X celebrity believes in Menstruation with dignity” etc.
    - Video of their support to be aired at MH day or another event
- Parents’ Day
  - How do we mobilize the parents?
  - How can we get them to engage actively?
  - Should we leverage the start, semester break, and end of school periods for this since parents will already be at the school?
  - KG parents are easy to reach but what about the parents of the older students (our focal audience)?

### 3.3. Final Splash Field Staff Recommendations

The Splash Field Staff were asked to prioritize five intervention approaches to be included in the ultimate Addis Ababa Menstrual Health Program. The top five ideas included:

- 1) Leveraging homeroom teachers
- 2) Parent’s Day Engagement to kick start parent behavior change program
- 3) Use of social influencers and celebrities
- 4) Job aids for teachers
- 5) Peer Mentoring

## 4. Technical Specialist Design Session

To disseminate our formative research findings, pilot results, stakeholder landscape insights, and beneficiary-level inputs Splash hosted a virtual Menstrual Health Strategy Summit. The Summit was conducted in two parts: the first, pre-summit component leveraged human-centered design principles through the engagement of beneficiaries in ideation activities to develop an intervention framework and ground the global and regional strategies in reality. Second, Splash brought together government stakeholders, technical specialists, thought leaders, and implementing organizations to:



1. Define a menstrual health program strategy for Ethiopia and India including actionable and contextually bound recommendations for program interventions
2. Obtain buy-in from critical stakeholders including beneficiaries, government, and implementing partners
3. Define global best practices for MH Programming in schools

The consortium of Summit participants that Splash brought together represent some of the brightest minds in the menstrual health space. This report is an effort to share all that was discussed during the virtual MH Summit so that everyone working in the sector can benefit.

After the virtual presentation of the Splash formative research findings, pilot results, and stakeholder insights, participants were asked to collaborate on an online brainstorming worksheet to define intervention approaches for a given audience and geography. Brainstorming prompts were presented as “How might we...” statements and were oriented around three channels for intervention: built environment, felt environment, and policy.

#### 4.1. Adult Audiences: Parents, Teachers, School Administration

Collaborators on prompts related to parent, teacher, and school administration audiences included experts from a government-level technical committee, menstrual health education-focused implementers, behavior change researchers and specialists, and representatives from leading menstrual health and equity-focused donor organizations. This broader range of technical experts collaborated to bring together intervention approaches that span the social economical model to drive not just individual-level behavior change but also systems change.

##### 4.1.1. How might we empower teachers and parents to have sensitive conversations with girls?

Built	Felt	Policy
Digital tool to engage parents remotely (SMS program, WhatsApp Group, radio program, short videos, community events with theatre and skits).	Leverage “Parent’ Day” at schools to promote MH awareness	Include menstrual health indicators in the City level Education Bureau and Sub-city Education department level supervision checklists
Enabling environment for parent to engage in MH/WASH activities at schools (parent volunteer events)	Increase awareness of the importance of menstrual health among school administration through targeted trainings and capacity building exercises	
	Training Cascade for Menstrual Health- train gender club focal teachers to deliver menstrual health curriculum to gender club and broader student body	
	Start menstrual health education earlier, prior to grade 5	



	Empower menstrual health focal teachers to lead and organize student-level peer mentoring program	
	Integrate menstrual health modules into other discreet school subjects: physical education, biology, health, etc.	

4.1.2. How might we facilitate access to menstrual health tools and services for teachers, school administration, and parents?

<b>Built</b>	<b>Felt</b>	<b>Policy</b>
Constructing facilities using WASH Institutional Construction Design manual for health institutions and schools	Engage Social and Popular Media	Work with the Ministry of Education to integrate Menstrual hygiene and health as part of education curriculum
Support to encourage and promote regional production hubs for sanitary pads production		

4.1.3. How might we increase teachers', school administrators', and parents' menstrual health knowledge?

<b>Built</b>	<b>Felt</b>	<b>Policy</b>
Constructing facilities using WASH Institutional Construction Design manual for health institutions and schools	Student take-home assignments to do with parents to increase their levels of knowledge together	Work with Ministry of Education to integrate Menstrual hygiene and health as part of education curriculum
Support to encourage and promote regional production hubs for sanitary pads production	Training Education Government officials and officers using Ministry of Health National Training of Trainers manual	
	Providing TOT for the School WASH management committee	
	Training Health Extension Workers on MH	
	Awareness raising to the community by Health Extension Workers	
	Involve media to brake the silence and promote MH	



## 4.2. Student Audiences: Pre-Menstruating and Menstruating Girls

### 4.2.1. How might we decrease anxiety and isolation and increase confidence and belonging for girls?

Built	Felt	Policy
Girl-friendly Sanitation	Menstrual Health education in homeroom for all girls ten years and older	Advocate to change education standard around the age of exposure to puberty and menstrual health education. Currently, it starts at grade 5 but it should be introduced earlier, starting at grade 2
Access to menstrual hygiene products- vending machine, pad stock	Age appropriate education regarding menstrual health for pre-menstruating students	Advocate for a counselor or doctor to visit each school for one day each week
Extra uniform for girls in schools, mandate that skirts be of a dark color for older girls	Educating both boys and girls about menstruation during fun, de-stigmatizing menstrual health event days	Advocate for the development of a free hotline that students can call for free advice related to sensitive matters such as menstruation
Provision of reading materials covering menstrual health and puberty in school libraries	Strengthen Gender Clubs within schools and include male members	
	International Menstrual Hygiene Day	
	Taboo and Myth busting activities	
	Available school counselling for students	

### 4.2.2. How might we help girls manage pain?

Built	Felt	Policy
Include a stock of pain medication to be administered to students who report extreme or persistent pain due to menstruation	Training gender club members on menstrual health pain-management, symptoms, and products	Advocate for the inclusion of a menstrual pain module in the government approved puberty curriculum
Establish referral linkages between schools and nearby healthcare centers		Work with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health to include physician referrals for students who report unusual or persistent menstrual pain to school counselors

### 4.2.3. How might we facilitate access to menstrual health tools and services for girls?

Built	Felt	Policy
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Constructing facilities using WASH Institutional Construction Design manual for health institutions and schools	Use of School clubs under (WASH, GILR,) to manage the promotion of Menstrual hygiene and Health in the school	Work with Ministry of Education to integrate Menstrual hygiene and health as part of education curriculum
Promote national Standards for menstrual pads- both disposable and reusable		Work with Ministry of Health and other implementing partners on Luxury tax removal for menstrual health products

#### 4.2.4. How might we increase girls' menstrual health knowledge?

<b>Built</b>	<b>Felt</b>	<b>Policy</b>
Display IEC materials throughout school with information regarding menstruation and its management	Use of life skill education curriculum for students as part of the education curriculum	Work with Ministry of Education to integrate Menstrual hygiene and health as part of education curriculum
	Use The 'Grow and Know' puberty booklet	
	Use of girls' empowerment TV series "Yegna", in the schools through extra curricular session	
	Use of school clubs	
	Use of life skill education curriculum for students as part of the education curriculum	



## 5. Recommendations for Pilots

Pilot Concept	Recommended By				Notes
	Beneficiaries	Splash Staff	Technical Specialists	Priority	
Peer Mentoring Program		X		3	
Parent Engagement	X	X	X	1	
Job Aids for Teachers		X		3	
Social Influencers		X		3	
Homeroom Engagement		X	X	2	
Gender Club Development	X		X	2	
SMS Program for MH Awareness			X	3	
School Counselling Services			X	3	
Hardware Provision: Pad Vending Machine	X		X	2	
Community IEC Materials	X			3	
MH Awareness Events		X	X	2	
National Menstrual Health Policy		X	X	2	

