

## MENSTRUAL HEALTH AND HYGIENE



## BY THE NUMBERS

**BUDGET:** \$1.67 million**PARTICIPANTS:**

- » 44,762 children
- » 1,225 teachers trained
- » 292 master teachers trained

**EDUCATIONAL SITES:** 150**DONOR:** Dubai Cares, Clean Water Here, and other private donors**LOCATION:** Zimbabwe (expanding to Honduras, Guatemala, and Kenya)**PROJECT TIME FRAME:** November 2017 to present (ongoing)**PARTNERS:** Sesame Workshop, Consultancy Africa (evaluation partner), and Education Development Center (evaluation partner)

## Overview

Through World Vision's partnership with Sesame Workshop, the WASH UP! Girl Talk program empowers pre-adolescent and adolescent girls and boys (ages 9-14) to practice and promote healthy water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) behaviors, particularly around menstrual health and hygiene. The program builds on the strong foundation of WASH UP!, which is a child-focused, play-based hygiene behavior change curriculum, targeting children ages 5-9. The groundbreaking WASH UP! Girl Talk initiative creates environments that demystify periods and help keep girls in school. Designed for both girls and boys, it provides an interactive and fun educational experience focusing on puberty, health, menstrual health and hygiene, and girls' empowerment. Engaging boys is critical in building comprehensive and accurate knowledge, as well as fostering healthy and supportive relationships between boys and girls. World Vision's role is to ensure the schools have appropriate infrastructure for girls to practice healthy menstrual hygiene, as well as to support program continuity, monitoring, and scale-up.

The Girl Talk program was initially implemented in Zimbabwe in 2017 and has since reached more than 26,000 girls and more than 14,000 boys in 150 schools. It works to foster healthy sociocultural systems and norms around menstrual hygiene and other aspects of puberty by addressing gaps in education. In 2022, Girl Talk programming will be expanding to three new countries—Guatemala, Honduras, and Kenya—which will reach and empower many more young people.

## Program Focus

The overall goal of Girl Talk is to empower young girls and boys in schools with information and skills to understand puberty and for girls to meet their menstrual health and hygiene needs, which are key building blocks to reproductive health. It also provides them with resources, opportunities, and life skills to complete their education and succeed in life. This is accomplished through four main program focus areas: 1) Girls' empowerment, 2) Fostering accurate knowledge about menstrual health, 3) Building self-confidence, and 4) Supporting healthy relationships.

In many low-income countries around the world, lack of access to WASH infrastructure, inadequate menstrual hygiene knowledge, and limited resources to manage menstrual hygiene (i.e., pads) are compounded by a lack of access to accurate information about menstruation and a culture of silence on this topic. As a result, many girls begin menstruating without knowing what is happening to them, which causes fear, pain, and shame.

Through Girl Talk programming, World Vision's local presence in hard-to-reach schools is combined with the power of Sesame Workshop's beloved characters and child-friendly

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messaging. Schools are equipped to protect girls' privacy while also making space, physically and socially, to discuss menstrual health issues. Transformational practices range from simple techniques like allowing students to use latrines during class, to engaging both girls and boys in addressing period-related stigma. With these practices, girls become more comfortable at school and empowered to pursue their goals. Boys are equipped with accurate knowledge to become strong supporters of their female peers.

### Girls' Empowerment

A key priority of Girl Talk programming is girls' empowerment. Girl Talk strives for every girl to understand they are not limited by their gender, and to feel proud of being a girl. The project also highlights boys as critical partners, and encourages their active participation to support girls' empowerment. With increased empowerment, girls know their rights, are able to advocate for themselves, and can participate in celebrating and supporting other girls.

### Fostering Accurate Knowledge about Menstrual Health

Girl Talk programming aims to enhance knowledge of adolescent health and dispel commonly held myths about menstruation, helping both boys and girls to be aware of and understand the biological, emotional, cognitive, and social development that takes place during puberty. It encourages positive attitudes toward puberty and menstruation and fosters understanding around the appropriate personal hygiene and self-care practices related to puberty. It also empowers students to feel comfortable discussing puberty and menstruation with trusted peers and adults.

Particularly for girls, Girl Talk fosters conversations and increased understanding about the menstrual cycle and menstrual hygiene management. Girls learn the symptoms of and how to care for themselves during menstruation; the importance of using safe, clean absorbents; how to manage reusable pads hygienically and dispose of used sanitary wear responsibly; and how to build a strong network of peers and trusted adults who support menstrual health.



Part of the Girl Talk curriculum is teaching students how to make reusable pads.

## EVALUATION

In May 2019, the Education Development Center and the Zimbabwean Consultancy Africa, conducted an evaluation of the impact of WASH UP! Girl Talk on participating students and educators. The results found that overall, Girl Talk had a significant impact on students' knowledge about puberty and menstruation.

- The average knowledge score about puberty rose 23%.
- The share of participating students who believed common myths about menstruation decreased by 30-45%.
- Girl Talk improved young women's practical knowledge of their menstrual cycles; the percent of girls in the program responding correctly to questions about this topic after Girl Talk lessons increased by 30-40%.

The research also highlighted areas for program improvement, including continuing to refine the nuance of language to ensure clear and effective messaging.

Reference: [Light, D. et. al., 2021](#)



One objective of Girl Talk is menstrual health- and hygiene-friendly WASH facilities and infrastructure in schools. This picture shows a school sanitation facility constructed in Zimbabwe.

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### Building Self-Confidence

GirlTalk helps to protect the bodily integrity of girls and build their confidence on menstrual health and hygiene, thereby strengthening their sexual and reproductive health and well-being. The focus on overall puberty education—not only menstrual health—promotes the overall well-being of vulnerable girls. The project promotes lifelong skills for girls to manage their menstruation safely, hygienically, and with dignity and privacy.

### Supporting Healthy Relationships

Girl Talk seeks to address social norms and behaviors, such as cultural taboos on menstruation, which often restrict girls' mobility, spread fear and stigma, and result in the social exclusion of girls. The project establishes support systems for girls with parents, teachers, and male peers, helping address negative social norms and dispel common myths about menstruation. It creates a more supportive environment where girls feel more comfortable seeking support and can speak up and seek help whenever they have questions about puberty or menstruation. Boys are equipped with accurate knowledge to become strong supporters and champions of their female peers.

Meaningful participation is enhanced by providing Girl Talk lessons in a dignified and appropriate way, with some sessions provided to girls and boys together, and some provided separately, to ensure space for safe and candid discussion. Attitudes and norms on the menstrual cycle can negatively impact how girls participate in school and their community, in learning, sports, and other extra-curricular activities. The project supports, encourages, and empowers girls to participate in all school activities, even and especially when going through their menstrual cycle.

### Expansion Plans

Starting in 2022, WASH UP! Girl Talk will be expanded to Guatemala, Honduras, and Kenya through the Strong Women, Strong World: Beyond Access program. This three-year, \$12 million program provides strategic funding to target transformative WASH and economic empowerment programs for a sustainable impact on the lives of millions of women and girls. This program seeks to help the entire sector become more effective at empowering women and girls through transformative WASH and economic empowerment programming.

The desired impact of the Beyond Access program is that women and girls experience an increased sense of self-worth, ability to determine their own choices, and right to influence social change for themselves and others. Expanding Girl Talk programming is an important part of successfully reaching and impacting women and girls to lead equal and prosperous lives.



Joyline Rushwaya, a schoolteacher, shows a student how to use a cycle bracelet to track her menstrual cycle.

### GIRL TALK HELPS TEACHER SUPPORT STUDENTS

Zimbabwean schoolteacher Joyline Rushwaya explains how WASH UP! Girl Talk helped her better support her students.

"I grew up with little knowledge on issues of puberty and menstruation. I remember the first time when I got my period ... I did not understand what was going on. As a teacher, I realized that parents were not free to discuss issues of puberty with their children, and it created a gap between the parents and their children. Even at the school level, as teachers we did not know how to deal with these issues.

"The WASH UP! Girl Talk program came to bridge the gap. As we conducted WASH UP! Girl Talk sessions during the health club ... students were empowered with knowledge to understand puberty and related body changes. It also improved their knowledge on myths and misconceptions surrounding menstruation.

"I began to notice changes in how my WASH UP! Girl Talk students conducted themselves around school. Cases of soiling uniforms among girls fell significantly. Girls were now confident and free to approach me for help with a smile on their face compared to tears as was the case before WASH UP! Girl Talk sessions. On the other hand, boys also learned to respect and support girls.

"I would like to thank the government and its partners World Vision and others for this intervention to prepare our children for adolescence."