



Breaking the menstrual taboo together

Menstrual health and hygiene
as part of feminist development policy



[www.bmz.de/en/issues/
feminist-development-policy](https://www.bmz.de/en/issues/feminist-development-policy)

We want to break down the stigma

The Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) is committed to ensuring that menstruation is recognised worldwide for what it is: a normal thing. For around 600 million girls and women that is not the case. This is something we want to change as part of our feminist development policy and we are therefore engaged in efforts to

- strengthen the rights of girls and women,
- improve gender-equitable, inclusive, and sustainable access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH),
- support awareness-raising campaigns on menstruation, including in schools and other educational institutions,
- increase access to contraceptives and menstrual products,
- and provide period-friendly toilets and washing facilities, for example in schools and health care facilities.

The “3Rs” of feminist development policy

With our feminist development policy, we are working to build just and strong societies worldwide. Women and girls make up half of the world’s population. They should also have half the power, especially as they are important actors for sustainable development.

That is why we are promoting the “3Rs”:
rights, resources and representation.

This also includes fighting – at all levels – against the discrimination experienced by women and girls during their menstruation, whether social taboos, political restrictions or practical obstacles such as the lack of hygiene products or toilets.

We also encourage people of all ages, including boys and men, to think and talk openly about the needs of women and girls during their menstruation.



← Svenja Schulze, Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development, and members of German civil society wearing the Menstruation Bracelet to show their joint support for breaking the taboos surrounding menstruation. From left to right: Judith Ringlstetter, Thorsten Kiefer, Carolin Studemann, Svenja Schulze, Alexia Knappmann, Mathias Mogge, Thilo Panzerbieter

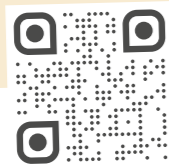
Examples from our work carried out by GIZ on behalf of the BMZ

ALBANIA, NEPAL, PHILIPPINES
#LetsTalkPERIOD reaching millions via social media



The new media are a good way of breaking the taboo surrounding menstruation. In the past three years, #LetsTalkPERIOD has reached more than ten million people in Albania, Nepal and the Philippines: female influencers have significantly increased the number of clicks.

www.giz.de/en:
› <https://bit.ly/3yA2JYL>



PROJECT DURATION:
2020–2024

UGANDA
Better hygiene for all



A school in northern Uganda demonstrates how to break the taboos surrounding menstruation. It openly addresses the subject – benefiting from the Ugandan government’s cooperation with the global Sanitation for Millions programme.

akzente.giz.de/en:
› <https://bit.ly/3pKvtvM>



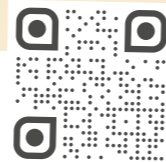
PROJECT DURATION:
2016–2025

MALAWI
Small cup, big impact



A pilot project on menstrual health in rural Malawi is empowering women in the agricultural sector through the distribution of menstrual cups and various workshops. The project is helping to improve working conditions in rural areas.

foodfortransformation.org:
› <https://bit.ly/458qQvy>



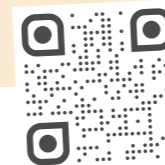
PROJECT DURATION:
2018–2024

ETHIOPIA
Overcoming stigma, creating jobs



In order to create more jobs, the BMZ has launched the Special Initiative “Decent Work for a Just Transition”. The initiative also includes the Invest for Jobs programme, which commissioned a study from Dalberg revealing that the menstrual hygiene sector can create jobs in the priority countries of the study (Côte d’Ivoire, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Morocco, Rwanda, Senegal and Tunisia).

dalberg.com:
› <https://bit.ly/3v6f5J4>



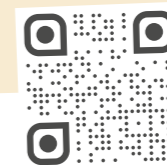
PROJECT DURATION:
2018–2026

NEPAL
Movement for dignified menstruation



More than 80 organizations and activists are already part of the Menstrual Health and Hygiene Management Partners Alliance (MHM PA), an important partner for a BMZ-funded health project on the ground. The project works to improve menstrual health in Nepal and break the silence through awareness-raising measures and campaigns.

health.bmz.de:
› <https://bit.ly/3IcJ6dq>



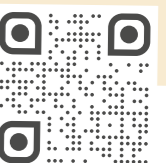
PROJECT DURATION:
2018–2024

PHILIPPINES
Period-friendly toilets for learners



The regional Fit for School programme supported the Philippine Department of Education from 2011 to 2022 in its efforts to improve water, sanitation and hygiene in schools nationwide. This significantly improved access to usable toilets. The information and communication materials developed for this purpose have now reached more than 27 million Filipino pupils. Building on this campaign, targeted activities on MHH and knowledge management will be continued until 2024 via a fund for students, and these approaches are now also being adapted and continued in some African partner countries.

gender-works.giz.de:
› <https://bit.ly/44Jh6bh>

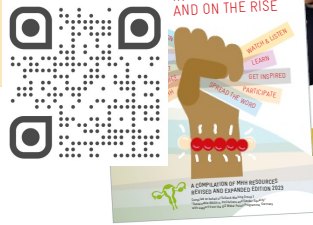


PROJECT DURATION:
2011–2024

Development Minister Svenja Schulze:

“Many girls and women are isolated and prevented from participating in normal life when they have their period. That is unfair. It harms their health and well-being – and that of society as a whole!”

Extract from „Menstrual Health and Hygiene: Relevant, Intersectoral and on the Rise“, Sustainable Sanitation Alliance (SuSanA)
 › <https://susana.org/S3nByU>



The Menstruation Bracelet – a global symbol:

Launched by the International Menstrual Hygiene Day (May 28), the bracelet consists of 28 elements – five red and 23 white – which represent the average cycle and period length. Those who wear it spread a clear message: menstruation is not taboo. Let's talk about it and fight stigmatisation.

› www.menstrualhygieneday.org/materials/the-menstruation-bracelet

← Open Day 2023 at the BMZ Berlin with Federal Minister Svenja Schulze and members of the GIZ employee initiative MenstruAction



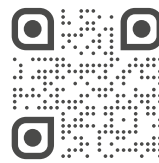
Talk about it and make a difference!

Every month, 1.9 billion girls and women around the world have their period. However, hundreds of millions of them have no way of dealing with their menstruation in a dignified and healthy way. They are marginalised, sometimes even isolated and stigmatised. This is a structural problem in many countries.

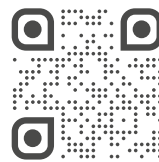
But this exclusion has consequences: Girls miss school – on average four days a month – or in the worst case drop out of school altogether, and women cannot go to work or even get a job. This is not just a health issue, it is also unjust, harmful to society as a whole and it contradicts the principle of equality.

That is why breaking this taboo is so important. Schools are an essential place for breaking down stereotypes and removing taboos around the topic of menstruation. This is where both girls and boys are taught how to deal with the topic in a healthy way. Social media, educational campaigns and information material must also be used to draw attention to the fact that menstruation is not a reason to be excluded from everyday life. Rather, girls and women have special needs during this time: they need affordable hygiene products, access to gender-appropriate toilets and washing facilities.

Every girl and woman who receives this access benefits directly from it. But the effects go far beyond the individual person: educational opportunities for girls and employment prospects for women in general improve. The result is a systemic change towards greater participation and equality, which is not only necessary in terms of human rights, but is also economically sound and convincing in terms of development policy.



Promoting menstrual health and hygiene therefore makes a significant contribution to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



Discrimination and oppression of women and girls should be a thing of the past. Since 2023, the BMZ has been pursuing a new development policy action plan for gender equality, with a key component being sexual and reproductive health and rights. Societies will only be peaceful and stable if all people can participate equally in political, economic and social life – including during menstruation.

Published by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)

As at August 2024

Contact publikationen@bmz.bund.de
www.bmz.de

BMZ Berlin
Stresemannstraße 94
10963 Berlin, Germany
Tel. +49 (0) 30 18 535-0

BMZ Bonn
Dahlmannstraße 4
53113 Bonn, Germany
Tel. +49 (0) 228 99 535-0

Edited by

Deutsche Gesellschaft für
Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
Registered offices Bonn und Eschborn, Germany

Friedrich-Ebert-Allee 32 + 36
53113 Bonn, Germany

Sector Programme Water Policy
– Innovations for Resilience
Climate Change, Environment, Infrastructure Division
Sector and Global Programmes Department

Tel. +49 (0) 228 4460-1625
menstruaction@giz.de
www.giz.de

Photo credits

BMZ (p. 1), GIZ (p. 2, 3, 4), Barbara Flesch (p. 3 centre)