



Terms of Reference

Research Consultancy on Menstrual Hygiene Management and Absenteeism in Schools in South Africa

Background

Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) has only recently begun to receive attention even though puberty and menstruation is not a choice; menstrual health is directly linked to the fulfilment of human rights and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 3 and 4; and maintaining health and hygiene during menstruation is important for health, well-being, mobility and dignity.ⁱ

A holistic definition of MHM emphasizes three essential dimensions, effective in combination:ⁱⁱ

- Articulation, awareness, information and confidence to manage menstruation with safety and dignity using safe hygiene materials
- Adequate water, agents and spaces for washing and bathing
- Disposal of used materials with privacy and dignity

Attention is increasingly focusing on the barriers posed towards girls' education in low–middle income countries by inadequate MHM information, education, facilities, products and support to girls, together with poor WASH infrastructure in schools.ⁱⁱⁱ

On the one hand, a growing number of interventions/campaigns and evidence cites the inability to afford sanitary towels as a barrier to girls' participation in education and a risk to health and hygiene. Examples are: the June 2017 Equal Education Colloquium Declaration, Project Dignity, and Sanitary Dignity Campaign. On the other, the Youth Risk Behaviour survey of 2011, estimated that an average of 72.9% of female learners in grades 8-11 in school have easy access to sanitary towels.^{iv}

In South Africa, the impact of menstruation on school attendance, the reasons for menstruation-related absenteeism, and sanitary provisioning options are not fully understood and need further investigation before long-term system-wide fiscal commitments can be advocated for and made.

There is also uncertainty about the degree to which girls across a range of local cultures have relevant knowledge at an appropriate age and are able to manage their menses safely, comfortably, and knowledgeably within the school context. Even though menstruation appears in ISHP health education in Intermediate Phase (IP) (grades 4-7), it is not clear whether, what and how it is taught and whether boys are included. Puberty is first mentioned in the school curriculum in the grade 7 Life Orientation learning area. Considering early onset puberty (due to declining age of menarche at 9 years) and the many over-age learners in schools, this is fairly late, something borne out by Equal Education's study

findings.^v “While 93% of female learners surveyed in this study indicated that they had been taught about menstruation, 81% of these learners stated that they were taught about menstruation after they experienced their first period.” Menstruation education for learners needs to be integrated into the school curriculum before rather than after menarche.

As part of a holistic four-year programme being implemented in one sub-district in each of Eastern Cape, Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal in support of improved health and wellbeing toward improved education outcomes, MIET AFRICA (working in partnership with UNICEF and the Department of Basic Education (DBE), wishes to commission research to better understand the impact of menstruation on school attendance in South Africa. Additionally, to identify needs and inform programme planning as well as subsequent impact assessment, the scope includes working with partners to develop baseline, mid- and end-term assessment tools to explore learners’ knowledge, practices and experiences around menstruation at school and home. As households and communities may be reached through their children, the programme aims to shift social norms and cultural taboos surrounding MHM.

Purpose of this Consultancy

MIET AFRICA seeks the services of an experienced researcher/research team to conduct research that responds to the first priority in *MHM in Ten*: to build a strong cross-sectoral evidence base for MHM in schools for prioritization of policies, resource allocation and programming at scale. The primary aim of the research is to better understand the impact of menstruation on school attendance in South Africa. Additionally, for the purpose of locating the research within the broader programme goals, and identifying programme planning needs as well as impact assessment, the scope includes working with the implementing team to help develop tools to conduct a baseline, mid- and end-term assessment to explore learners’ knowledge, practices and experiences around menstruation individually, at school and home.

Objectives:

- To determine the impact of menstruation on school attendance and participation
- If relevant, to understand the various factors associated with menstruation-related absenteeism
- To determine the knowledge, cultural norms, and perceptions of MHM amongst male and female IP learners in ordinary, full service and special schools
- To determine MHM practices and knowledge sources amongst female learners in the Intermediate Phase in ordinary, full service and special schools
- To determine teacher and school community knowledge, cultural norms, and perceptions of MHM
- To audit school’s sanitation facilities against agreed upon indicators (e.g. DBE minimum standards / SDG indicators)

Methodology

The work will use varied methodologies including a literature review, and quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

Interested consultants should submit a proposal addressing:

- A suitable methodology for collecting primary and secondary data to meet objectives; the design should address quantitative and qualitative data collection

- The quantitative data collection methodology that will be used to gather information using existing data sets and surveys
- The baseline and impact assessment tools and identify a suitable approach for reaching targeted school community members (surveys, focus group discussions with target audience groups and key informant interviews [senior officials])

Example questions/ focus areas

- Verifiable and reliable data school absenteeism amongst both males and females from grade 4 – 12 and the reported reasons for absenteeism
- MHM standards for school sanitation facilities and status of school-level sanitation facilities and water sources (availability, cleanliness, convenience, privacy) and girls' comfort with school facilities (i.e., their reports of privacy of school toilets) and whether it influences their attendance
- Levels of social support (such as advice and assistance) received at home (older female relatives) and whether this impacts knowledge and practices
- IP female learners' knowledge and understanding about menstruation and the source of that knowledge
- IP female learners' experiences of menstruation over time in the school environment
- Learners' academic achievement and motivation to study and attend school and its association with menstruation-related absenteeism
- Boys, teacher and other stakeholders' knowledge, understanding, attitudes and cultural norms around menstruation

Tasks, Deliverables and Timeframes

The successful consultants will be required to:

- 1) Draft a **comprehensive research plan** which addresses research methodology, data sources, data collection instruments and timeframes
- 2) Conduct a **literature review and analyse absenteeism data** e.g. available national data (NHS, SA-SAMS, published studies, reports) on absenteeism amongst male and female learners
- 3) **Work with MIET AFRICA to develop baseline, mid-term and impact assessment tools** for focus group discussions and surveys with IP female and male learners, teachers, school management, general assistants, SGBs and parents. This component will be undertaken by MIET AFRICA in selected schools in Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng
- 4) In consultation with MIET AFRICA programme team, develop a user-friendly **data base** for MIET AFRICA to capture findings from the school-level focus groups and to enable analysis
- 5) **Analyse data emerging from all above sources and develop a report and provide recommendations**

This assignment will take a maximum of 30 working days over a four- month period (March – June 2019).

Activities		Responsibility	Deliverables
1	Hold inception meeting with partners to present proposal and discuss scope, objectives, research plan, approach, methodology, tools, data sources and timeframes	All partners and consultant/s	Consultant/s submit Minutes
2	Review all relevant data sources and prepare a research plan comprising: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • objectives • methodology • data sources • tools (e.g. questionnaires) • data base components • workplan/schedule of activities • timelines 	Consultant/s	Consultant/s submits draft research plan
3	Partner review the research plan	Partners	Partners hold a Skype call with consultant to feedback and discuss way forward
4	Submit final research plan with all comments integrated	Consultant/s	Consultant/s submits final research plan
5	Conduct literature review of available documents and published studies relevant to the scope of this assignment	Consultant/s	Partners hold progress update Skype call with consultant/s
6	Collect and analyse existing data (e.g. National household surveys, SA-SAMS)	Consultant/s	
7	Hold interviews with key stakeholders	Consultant/s	
8	Meet with MIET AFRICA team to discuss and finalise school-level baseline survey, focus group discussion tools and data capturing	Consultant/s	Consultant/s submits minutes
9	Conduct school-level survey and focus group discussions and capture data	MIET AFRICA	MIET AFRICA submits captured surveys (data base populated) to consultant/s
10	Analyse data and prepare draft report (excluding school-level activities [step 9 above])	Consultant/s	Consultant/s submit draft report
11	Partners review the draft report	Partners	Partners hold a Skype call with consultant/s to feedback and discuss way forward
12	Develop second draft of report incorporating findings from step 9, using the agreed format including relevant info-graphics	Consultant/s	Consultant/s submits draft 2
13	Partners review the draft report	Partners	Partners hold a Skype call with consultant/s to feedback and discuss way forward
14	Finalise report	Consultant/s	Consultant/s submits final report
15	Partners approve report	Partners	Partners approve report
16	Disseminate the final report and share with stakeholders and donors	Partners	Partners share final report

Responsibilities

The consultant(s) will:

- abide by all contractual arrangements, conduct all activities in accordance with professional practice, department protocols and child safeguarding practices
- submit deliverables within timeframes and to the required standard
- communicate effectively (including submitting ongoing progress updates and engaging with partners in progress consultations)
- report to the designated MIET AFRICA contact person and work in collaboration with all programme partners
- be responsible for all costs related to completing the assignment, excluding flights and accommodation (if required) to attend meetings

MIET AFRICA will be responsible for quality assurance and authorising payment after partner approval.

Qualifications and Experience

In order to apply, consultants must have

- At least a Masters' degree or equivalent in a relevant field
- A minimum of five years' proven experience
- Excellent report writing, communication, interviewing and computer skills

In their application, consultants should include the following:

- Description of competencies to meet the requirements of the assignment
- A detailed discussion of project plan including research objectives, approach, methodology, data sources, workplan and timeframes
- Daily rate and total cost to complete the task (30 days maximum)
- Starting date availability
- CVs and copies of qualifications
- Evidence of similar work undertaken recently (not older than five years) and contactable references

Application Evaluation Criteria

- Meeting requirements (qualifications, competencies, experience, references)
- Demonstrating a clear understanding of the nature and scope of work
- The quality, fresh approach and efficiency of the proposed project plan

Submission Details

- Submit any queries to mariza@miet.co.za
- Submit applications to applications@miet.co.za

- Incomplete applications will not be considered
- The closing date for applications is 17.00 on 8 March 2019

ⁱ UNFPA ESARO (2018) "Rapporteurs: Menstrual Health and Management Symposium, 10 May 2018". Viewed 20 June 2018: <http://esaro.unfpa.org/en/vacancies/rapporteurs-menstrual-health-and-management-symposium>

ⁱⁱ WHO/UNICEF 2013:3

ⁱⁱⁱ Sommer M & Sahin M (2013) "Overcoming the taboo: advancing the global agenda for menstrual hygiene management for schoolgirls". *American Journal of Public Health*.

Sommer M, Caruso BA, Sahin M, Calderon T, Cavill S, Mahon T & Phillips-Howard PA (2016) "A time for global action: addressing girls' menstrual hygiene management needs in schools". Viewed 20 May 2018: journals.plos.org/plosmedicine/article?id=10.1371/journal.pmed.1001962

^{iv} HSRC (2013) *National Youth Risk Behaviour Survey 2011*. Viewed 14 June 2018: <http://www.hsrc.ac.za/en/research-data/view/6874>

^v Equal Education (2016) *Equal Education Menstrual Hygiene Report May 2016*.