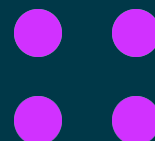


# Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) Policy 2019-2030 Awareness in Nairobi County

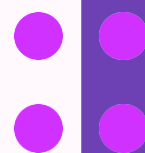
July 2023

A SURVEY REPORT

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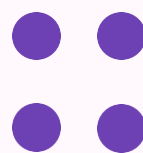


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## Executive Summary.

This survey report aimed to assess the awareness levels of the Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) Policy in Nairobi County, Kenya. The survey employed a dual approach, combining an online survey and focus group discussions (FGDs) to capture diverse perspectives from. The findings highlighted significant challenges faced by women and girls in Nairobi County, including limited access to affordable menstrual hygiene products and information inadequate sanitary facilities, and cultural stigmas surrounding menstruation. The lack of awareness and understanding of the MHM Policy further contributed to the difficulties encountered. The report proposes a set of comprehensive recommendations to improve menstrual hygiene management in Nairobi County. Key recommendations include promoting comprehensive menstrual hygiene education, ensuring free and accessible menstrual products, establishing clean and private sanitary facilities, breaking stigmas through community engagement, and empowering women and girls in decision-making processes. Collaboration with stakeholders and advocating for MHM-friendly policies are also crucial components of the proposed interventions. Nairobi County can significantly enhance menstrual hygiene practices and promote the well-being and dignity of women and girls by addressing identified gaps and implementing the proposed measures.



# Introduction

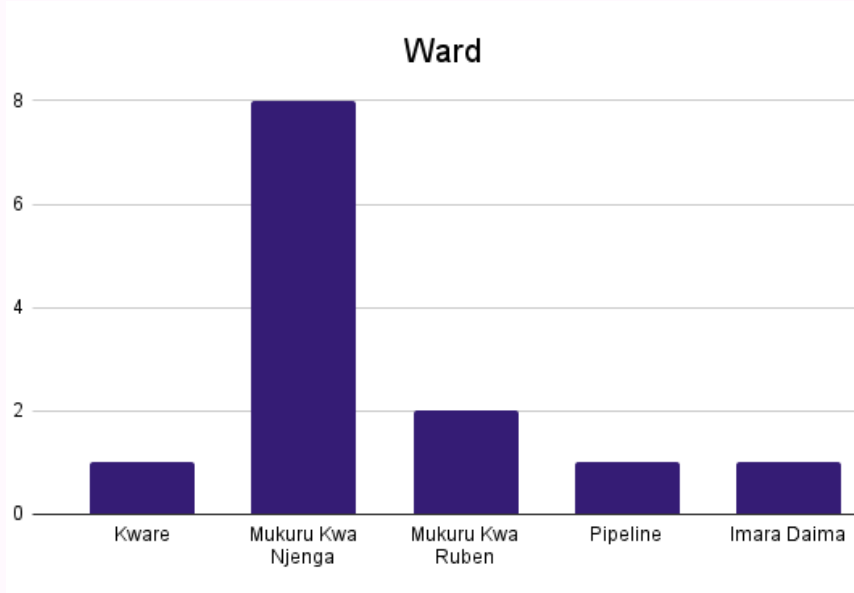
Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) is a critical aspect of sexual and reproductive health, impacting the well-being and dignity of women and girls worldwide. A significant number of women and girls in Kenya menstruate every month, but they face challenges with inadequate sanitation and hygiene facilities. This leads to negative impacts on their health, well-being, and the environment. Insufficient guidance on Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) and lack of proper facilities in schools leave girls with limited options for personal hygiene. Some girls resort to using unhygienic materials or even engage in transactional sex to buy menstrual products.

In Nairobi County, the 2019-2030 MHM Policy has been put in place to address the challenges and disparities surrounding menstrual hygiene. To assess the community awareness levels and knowledge of the Policy in Embakasi South, the NivalishePad Initiative under the MHM Matters Period! project conducted a survey using a dual approach, which included an online survey and physical focus group discussions (FGDs). The survey conducted in Nairobi County covered various crucial aspects related to menstrual hygiene management (MHM). These included awareness of the MHM Policy, knowledge of menstrual hygiene practices, access to menstrual hygiene products, educational influences, and cultural and social factors affecting MHM.

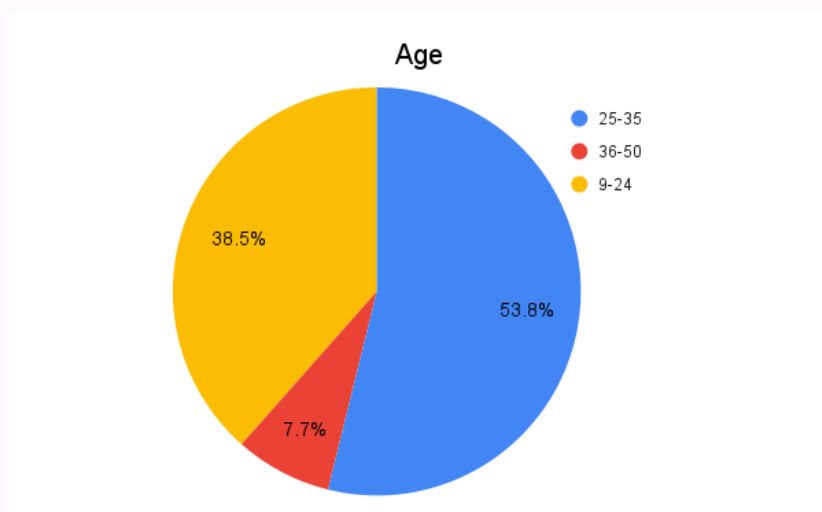
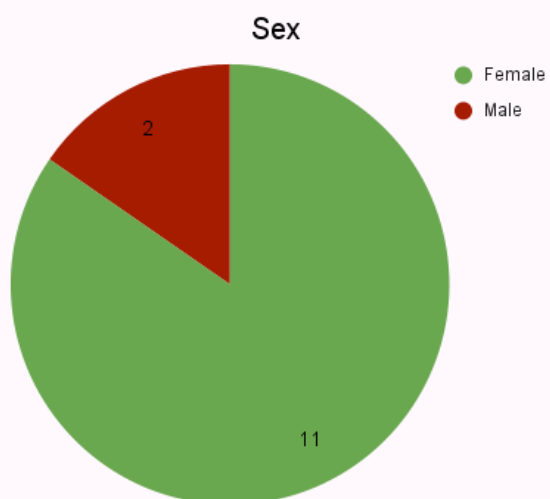
The focus group discussions (FGDs) provided more in-depth insights into the policy's objectives, progress of implementation, challenges faced, community capacity building, and recommendations for project activities. The main goal of the survey report is to highlight the current level of awareness and understanding of the MHM Policy in the county, pinpoint gaps, and identify opportunities for enhancing menstrual hygiene practices and policy implementation. The report will offer a comprehensive overview of the survey findings, incorporating key insights from both the online survey and FGDs, and will conclude with valuable recommendations to improve menstrual hygiene management through community practice and policy implementation.

# Survey Methodology

The online survey gathered demographic information from a total of randomly selected 13 respondents drawn from different wards within Embakasi South sub-county., Nairobi County. These demographic details provide a comprehensive overview of the respondents involved in the survey, reflecting a diverse range of ages, genders, and representation from various wards in the target region.



The survey intentionally encompassed respondents below 18 years of age, including underage adolescents who participated in the online survey under the supervision and guidance of their guardians. The data collection process comprehensively adhered to all appropriate procedures for handling respondents of this age group. These participants consisted of young adolescents affiliated with a group that collaborates closely with the NivalishePad Initiative, where they serve as young champions of adolescent sexual reproductive health.

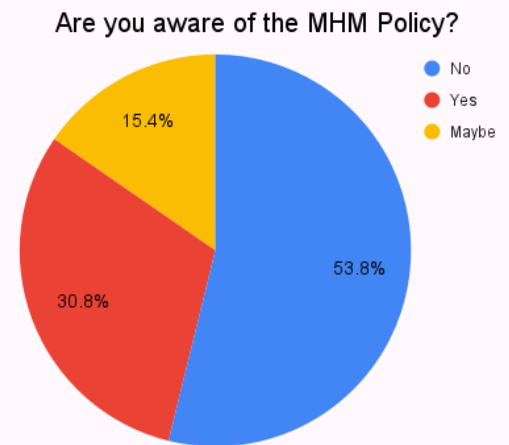




# Online Survey Insights and Findings

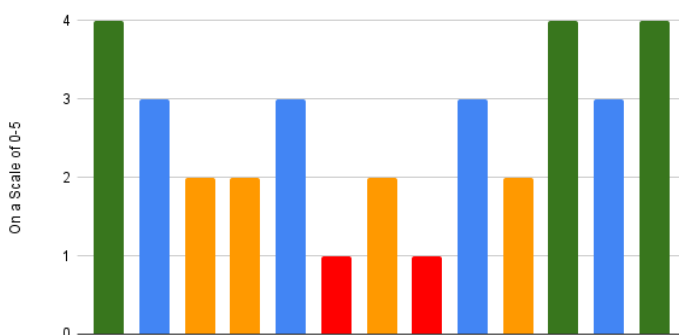
A significant portion of the respondents (30.8%) indicated that they were aware of the MHM Policy. However, a larger number (53.8%) stated that they were not aware of its existence. Additionally, 15.4% of the participants were unsure whether such a policy was in place or not.

When asked about how they became aware of the policy and their level of understanding, respondents cited various sources. Some mentioned learning about it through friends, while others mentioned encountering the policy during menstrual hygiene management and Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) sessions and community meetings. Notably, one respondent mentioned being involved in the policy's development and being part of the National Youth Council. The survey findings also revealed that all (100%) the respondents expressed a keen interest in knowing more about the MHM Policy, indicating the significance of disseminating information and raising awareness about the policy among the target population.



When the respondents were asked to rate their knowledge and understanding of the MHM Policy on a scale from 0 to 5, the ratings varied. It ranged from 2 to 4, demonstrating that while some respondents had a moderate understanding of the policy, others were less informed.

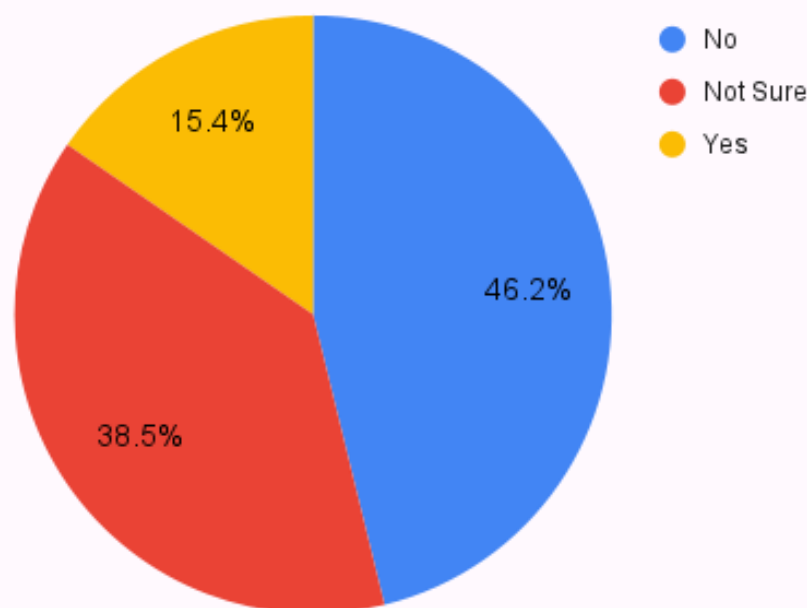
How would you rate your overall knowledge and understanding of the MHM Policy?



Access to the full text or detailed information about the policy proved to be a challenge for some respondents. Approximately 53.8% of them mentioned that they did not know where to find it, while 46.2% knew where to access the policy. The cited sources for the policy included Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), social media, hospitals, and government domains.

The same variation in responses was noted in the respondents' levels of awareness of specific rights and provisions outlined in the MHM Policy. Around 46.2% of the participants were not aware of these provisions, while 15.4% were unsure. In contrast, 38.5% of the respondents were aware of the policy's provisions. Some of the mentioned provisions included access to sanitary towels and affordable menstrual products, provision of sanitary facilities, menstrual health education, support for girls in schools, elimination of stigma and taboos, waste management, targeting vulnerable groups like girls from low-income families, refugees, and people with disabilities, as well as involving local communities.

### Are you aware of any specific rights/provisions outlined in the policy?



All the respondents correctly identified the department/ministry responsible for the MHM Policy, recognizing it as the Department of Gender or the Ministry of Health. The survey provided valuable insights into the awareness and understanding of the Menstrual Hygiene Management Policy among respondents in Embakasi South sub-county. While some were aware of the policy and its provisions, others lacked knowledge and required further information. This underscores the importance of ongoing awareness campaigns and easily accessible information to ensure effective implementation and impact of the MHM Policy 2019-2030.

# Knowledge of Menstrual Hygiene Management

Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) was defined as the practices and actions taken by individuals to maintain good hygiene during menstruation. It encompasses a range of measures and considerations aimed at promoting the physical, emotional, and social well-being of menstruators. The main goal of MHM is to ensure that women and girls can manage their menstruation in a safe, dignified, and healthy manner. Respondents highlighted the following reasons as to why proper menstrual hygiene practices are important.

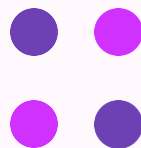
- ✓ Preventing personal infections
- ✓ Boosting self-esteem in young girls
- ✓ Bringing dignity into society,
- ✓ Earning respect for menstrual hygiene within the community,
- ✓ Preventing infections and itchiness,
- ✓ Avoiding period shame,
- ✓ Enabling girls to educate others about periods and understand their bodies,
- ✓ Avoiding staining clothes,
- ✓ Preventing burning skin around the private area,
- ✓ Proper preparation and planning by knowing what is needed for self-care,
- ✓ Ensuring proper disposal of menstrual products, and maintaining general cleanliness during menstruation.
- ✓ It is a fundamental aspect of human rights, promoting health, well-being, and gender equality

Regarding the impact of menstrual hygiene on a person's health and well-being, respondents emphasized that maintaining proper menstrual hygiene can prevent infections, relieve stress, and maintain overall cleanliness, leading to better health. However, there were also concerns about the negative impact of community misinformation and mismanagement of menstrual hygiene, leading to potential infections, depression due to stigmatization, trauma, and reduced self-esteem. Proper menstrual hygiene practices were seen as crucial in preventing diseases and itchiness, maintaining reproductive health, and enabling individuals to recognize irregular menstrual patterns that may require medical attention.

Menstrual hygiene management plays a significant role in promoting health and well-being by preventing infections, fostering dignity and empowerment, reducing school and work absenteeism, and supporting social inclusion and gender equality. It is essential to educate and provide resources to girls and women to ensure they can manage their menstruation safely and hygienically. By doing so, we contribute to their overall physical and emotional well-being, enabling them to participate fully in education, work, and social activities.



# Access to Menstrual Hygiene Products and Education



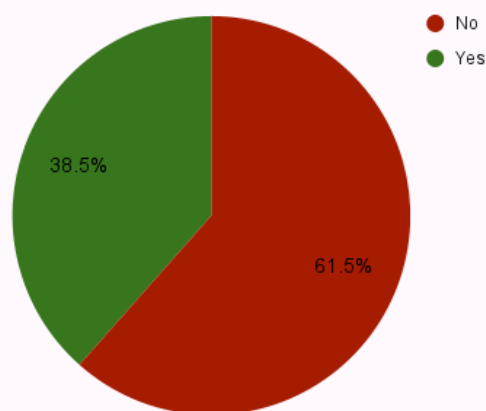
The survey findings indicate that women and girls in Embakasi South communities are facing significant challenges when it comes to accessing affordable menstrual hygiene products.

**100%**

**Of the respondents stated that women and girls in their communities DO NOT have access to affordable menstrual products**

The data from the participants reveals a significant concern regarding the accessibility of menstrual hygiene products. With 61.5% of respondents indicating that these products are not readily available, it underscores a potentially widespread issue in ensuring the availability of essential hygiene items for menstruating individuals.

Are menstrual hygiene products readily available in your community?



The contrasting figure of 38.5% mentioning that such products are accessible suggests a notable gap between those who experience ease in obtaining these items and those who face challenges in doing so. The findings underscore the importance of addressing this accessibility gap, possibly through collaborations between the private sector, the CSOs, the government and any other relevant stakeholders to ensure that menstrual hygiene products are consistently available to all individuals, regardless of age or background.

# Challenges in Accessing Menstrual Hygiene Products and Information

The specific challenges faced by girls and women in accessing menstrual hygiene products are multifaceted and revolve around the issue of poverty and financial constraints.

- Poverty is a major problem, leading to a lack of funds to purchase sanitary pads and other period products. Inadequate finances force some girls to resort to desperate measures, such as engaging in activities they may not want to do, like engaging in sexual relations with others, just to obtain money to buy period products. This not only compromises their dignity but also puts them at risk of early pregnancies and transmission of diseases like HIV.
- Availability and affordability of menstrual products: Many parents lack the money to buy the products for their children, making it difficult for girls to manage their menstruation properly, especially at school. Consequently, some girls might experience embarrassment and discomfort due to the lack of proper sanitary facilities and supplies.

In addition to addressing the lack of access to menstrual hygiene products, the survey findings also shed light on the importance of menstrual hygiene education and information. Although 61.5 percent of the respondents had received education or information about menstrual hygiene management, there is still a significant proportion (38.5 percent) who have not been adequately informed on this topic. Various sources were identified as providers of menstrual hygiene education, including community menstrual health champions, mentors from CSOs (Civil Society Organizations), teachers in school, community health workers, and community trainings.

100%

**Respondents expressed interest in attending or participating in menstrual hygiene education programs, awareness campaigns, or workshops, indicating the desire for more information and knowledge on this critical aspect of women's health.**

These findings accentuate the urgent need to address the challenges related to the accessibility and affordability of menstrual hygiene products, particularly for women and girls in underserved communities. There is a clear demand for comprehensive menstrual hygiene education and information to empower women and girls with the knowledge and tools to manage their menstrual health effectively. Addressing these issues guarantees the promotion of better health, dignity, and overall well-being for women and girls, enabling them to participate fully in their daily activities and reach their full potential.

# Cultural and Social Factors Affecting MHM

A significant majority of respondents, 76.9%, believe that cultural and social norms have a profound impact on the perception and management of menstruation within their community. Among the reasons cited are that periods are seen as a sign of maturity among girls and a qualification for marriage. Additionally, menstruation is viewed as unclean, leading girls to feel dirty during their periods. Some cultural practices prohibit menstruating girls from sharing a bed with their sisters or interacting with others due to fears of bringing a curse. In some communities, there is a reluctance to share information about menstruation with girls, while others consider it a normal occurrence and fail to understand the pain and discomfort experienced by girls and women during menstruation.

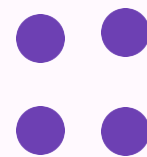
Various stigmas and taboos are associated with menstruation in the community, contributing to challenges faced by women and girls in relation to menstrual hygiene management. Periods are often considered shameful, and specific beliefs, such as in Kisii culture, prohibit menstruating girls from engaging in certain activities like climbing a camel, as it is believed they will not be able to bear children. Other misconceptions include the belief that girls on their period should not attend school or that early menstruation indicates early sexual activity. Such traditional beliefs can limit the participation of girls and women in daily activities, such as cooking, visiting religious sites, or taking part in social events while menstruating.

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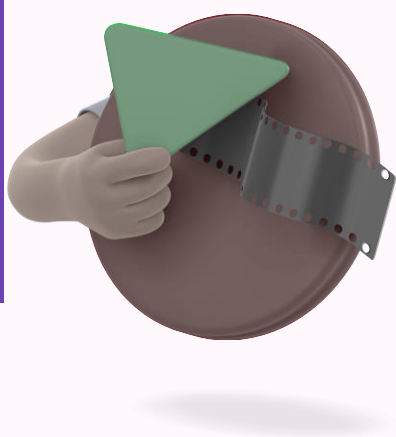
## Challenges faced by women and girls in managing menstrual hygiene as a result of cultural and social factors include:

- Lack of resources and money to purchase sanitary pads. Access to adequate and affordable menstrual products is also a major concern.
- Insufficient access to clean water and proper waste disposal facilities further compound the difficulties faced by women during menstruation.
- Affordability of menstrual products, leading to girls being forced into early marriages where their spouses would be expected to provide for their needs.
- Inadequate knowledge on menstrual hygiene management and the absence of guidance aggravates the challenges women and girls encounter during their periods.
- The social stigma surrounding menstruation can lead to shame, embarrassment, and isolation, impacting self-esteem, self-confidence and mental well-being.

# Existing Facilities and Services for Menstrual Hygiene Management.



All respondents expressed that their community lacks adequate resources that provide services related to MHM. This includes clean and private toilets, reliable water supply, and proper waste disposal facilities. The absence of these essential amenities makes it challenging for women and girls to maintain proper hygiene during menstruation. In response to the existing challenges, various initiatives and organizations have taken up the cause of menstrual hygiene management in the target community.



- ✓ DREAMS
- ✓ NivalishePad Initiative
- ✓ Sauti Afrika
- ✓ Binti Plus
- ✓ Hope WorldWide Kenya
- ✓ Zana Foundation
- ✓ Real Talkers
- ✓ AMREF
- ✓ Youth Ventures Initiative.

These organizations aim to address the issues related to menstrual hygiene by providing resources, education, and support to women and girls in the community. Cultural and social factors play a significant role in shaping the perception and management of menstruation in the target community. The prevalence of stigmas and taboos surrounding menstruation presents numerous challenges for women and girls in effectively managing their menstrual hygiene. The lack of adequate facilities and resources further compounds the difficulties faced by menstruating individuals. Efforts by various initiatives and organizations are commendable, but there is still a need for comprehensive and sustained interventions led and initiated by the government to address these issues and ensure better menstrual hygiene management for all women and girls in the community.

# Identified Gaps in Policy Implementation

The survey identified the following gaps in the implementation of MHM Policy 2019-2030 that need to be addressed to ensure effective implementation:

**Lack of Community Awareness:** There is a need for widespread awareness campaigns to inform the public about the MHM policy and its significance.

**Implementation Challenges:** Difficulties in translating the MHM policy into practical actions at the community level, often due to limited resources and lack of support from government officials.

**Inadequate Data and Monitoring:** Improving data collection and monitoring mechanisms is necessary to assess the impact of MHM interventions effectively.

**Marginalized and Vulnerable Groups:** Specific needs of marginalized or vulnerable groups, such as girls with disabilities or refugees, must be adequately addressed in MHM programs.

**Lack of Inclusivity:** Ensuring inclusivity in MHM initiatives to address the **unique** challenges faced by different communities and individuals in Nairobi County.

**Budget Allocation:** Adequate funding should be allocated for MHM programs and utilized efficiently to address the menstrual health needs of the community.

A multifaceted approach is required to enhance menstrual hygiene management in Nairobi County. Educating the community, providing access to affordable menstrual products, improving sanitation facilities, breaking stigmas, and empowering women and girls are all critical components of an effective MHM strategy. Collaborating with stakeholders and advocating for supportive policies will further strengthen efforts to promote better menstrual hygiene practices.



# Focus Group Discussions Insights and Findings



The focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted to gather insights and information on the Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) Policy 2019-2030. Three FGDs were organized involving 30 respondents. The first and second groups were made up of community health volunteers, nurses, menstrual hygiene champions, and representatives from civil society organizations (CSOs). The third group consisted of youth. The key objectives of the discussions were to understand the MHM policy, seek community interventions to support its implementation, assess the community's awareness of the policy, build on research related to MHM, reduce period stigma and shame, and understand stereotypes around MHM in the community and among men.

# MHM Policy Overview

The MHM Policy 2019–2030 aims to guide the provision of resources and facilities to facilitate menstrual hygiene among women and girls in the country. Key provisions of the policy include the distribution of menstrual products and promotion of menstrual hygiene in schools, increasing awareness on menstrual hygiene, safe disposal of used sanitary pads, addressing period stigma, facilitating access to hygienic menstrual pads, integrating technology for menstrual health, ensuring sustainability, and establishing indicators to measure the policy's success.

## Insights and Information from the FGDs

**Lack of Awareness:** A majority of participants, especially in the youth group, were not aware of the MHM Policy's existence, and few understood MHM beyond sanitary towels.

**Government Initiatives:** Respondents mentioned limited government activities related to MHM, with some recalling distribution of sanitary towels during the COVID–19 period. However, there was no proper civic education, and some officials used the pads for campaign purposes.

**Policy Differentiation:** Some participants found it challenging to differentiate the MHM Policy from the Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) Policy.

### Community Involvement & Accountability

There was a lack of community involvement in policy formulation and implementation, leading to inadequate accountability and feedback mechanisms for the distribution of sanitary towels.

**NGO Dominance:** MHM initiatives were primarily carried out by NGOs and CSOs, with limited involvement from the government.

### Coordination and Implementation

Participants highlighted the lack of proper coordination of MHM programs, and the policy's implementation varied in different areas, resulting in uneven awareness and implementation.

# Interventions to Improve Menstrual Hygiene

## Management

Based on the FGD insights, the following interventions are proposed to enhance MHM implementation:



1. **Affordable Menstrual Products:** The government should subsidize menstrual products to make them more affordable for all.
2. **Collaboration:** The Ministry of Health should collaborate with other departments, ministries, NGOs, and grassroots organizations to provide menstrual hygiene resources.
3. **Community Involvement:** Involve the community, grassroots organizations, and men in MHM initiatives and conversations to act as allies and champions.
4. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Implement a robust monitoring and evaluation mechanism to track policy implementation effectively.
5. **Comprehensive MHM:** Focus on more than just pad distribution; address MHM related to the environment, health, and sanitation facilities.
6. **Media and Men Engagement:** Engage men and the digital and mainstream media to fight stigma and stereotypes associated with periods through education and advocacy.
7. **Awareness and Sensitization:** Increase awareness and sensitization efforts to combat period shame.
8. **Data Utilization:** Use the database from Community Health Volunteers to distribute menstrual pads according to community needs.
9. **Facility Standards:** Prioritize MHM, ensuring clean and safe facilities in all public spaces, including pad dispensers in academic institutions (private and public )and public places.



# Community Views on MHM 2019-2030 Policy Implementation

The community highlighted the importance of civic education, a simplified MHM module, and exhaustively addressing conditions associated with menstruation in the policy. Involvement of the community in policy formulation and implementation was deemed vital for successful interventions.

## Capacity Needs

Participants expressed the need for more training and capacity building to be centered and focused on the following skills:

1. Policy and budget advocacy
2. Communication on gender equality
3. Social accountability
4. Menstrual hygiene knowledge
5. Research: data collection and analysis
6. Leadership and Governance

## Observations from the FGDs

- Limited awareness of the MHM Policy
- Lack of government initiatives on MHM
- Need for community involvement and accountability.
- The community expressed the desire for more information and empowerment on MHM.



# Recommendations for Improving MHM

- **Comprehensive Menstrual Hygiene Education:** Implementing comprehensive menstrual health education programs targeting women, girls, and the entire community. These programs should dispel myths, address stigmas, and promote healthy menstrual hygiene practices.
- **Accessible Menstrual Hygiene Products:** Ensuring affordable, easily accessible and eventually free menstrual products for all menstruating individuals in Nairobi County. County government collaborating with organizations like NivalishePad Initiative to make pads more affordable and available as they work towards making the products free as is stipulated in the MHM Policy 2019-2030.
- **Improved Sanitary Facilities:** Establishing clean and private toilets and washing facilities in schools and public spaces to enable women and girls to manage their menstruation effectively.
- **Waste Management:** Promoting proper disposal of menstrual waste to reduce environmental pollution. Exploring eco-friendly alternatives for menstrual products to minimize waste.
- **Community Engagement:** Involving and capacity building community members, local leaders, and organizations in MHM initiatives and advocacy for community ownership and relevance of the programs.
- **Break Stigmas:** Conducting public campaigns and community engagement activities to challenge cultural taboos surrounding menstruation and reduce shame and discrimination.
- **Women and Girls Empowerment:** Empowering women and girls to actively participate in decision-making processes related to MHM and address their specific needs effectively.
- **Partnerships:** Collaborating with NGOs, government agencies, and private sectors to leverage resources and support MHM programs for a more comprehensive and sustainable impact.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Establishing robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the impact of interventions and identify areas for improvement continually.





## Conclusion

The survey report on Menstrual Hygiene Management Policy Awareness in Nairobi County, Embakasi South sub-county, highlighted the importance of addressing menstrual hygiene challenges faced by women and girls and actively involving the community in policy implementation. Inadequate access to affordable menstrual products, limited sanitary facilities, cultural stigmas, and the lack of awareness about the MHM Policy were identified as significant barriers. To overcome these challenges, comprehensive recommendations have been proposed, emphasizing the importance of menstrual hygiene education, accessibility of menstrual products, improved sanitary facilities, community engagement, women's empowerment, and partnerships with stakeholders. Advocacy for MHM-friendly policies and robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are essential for effective implementation. Once these recommendations are implemented and the identified gaps addressed, there will be a supportive environment that ensures the well-being, dignity, and full participation of women and girls in education, work, and social activities. Improved menstrual hygiene management will contribute to better health, gender equality, and overall empowerment in the community. Collaborative efforts from the government, NGOs, community leaders, and individuals are crucial to achieving lasting positive change in menstrual hygiene practices in Nairobi County.

# Nivalishe♀Pad Initiative

## About Us

NivalishePad Initiative is a youth led Community Based Organization in Mukuru Kwa Njenga advocating for Sexual Reproductive health and Rights, Mental health, Research, Policy Advocacy and development for Adolescents and young people.

### Our Vision

A society that promotes, upholds, respects sexual reproductive health and rights and challenge existing harmful norms and practices

### Our Mission

To advance advocacy on policies and guidelines that enrich and inspire society through dissemination of information and championing reproductive health and rights for young people at all levels

### Our Goal

