

Perceptions and Barriers to Menstrual Hygiene Management in the Province of Bié in Angola

**Knowledge,
attitudes and practices
of adolescents and adults
in the municipalities of Kuito,
Nharea and Camacupa**

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary.	5	3.3 Knowledge about menstruation	17	3.5 Practices.	25
1 Introduction	7	3.3.1 Knowledge about the source of the menstrual blood.	17	3.5.1 Type of menstrual hygiene materials used by women and girls	25
2 Study timing and methodology	8	3.3.2 Knowledge about the existing types of menstrual hygiene materials.	17	3.5.2 Cleaning and drying of menstrual hygiene materials	27
2.1 Interview guides, data collection and analysis	8	3.3.3 Awareness of the age of first period	17	3.5.3 Frequency of changing menstrual hygiene materials	27
2.2 Quantitative methods: KAP survey	10	3.3.4 Meaning of first menstruation	18	3.5.4 MHM practices at school	27
2.2.1 Sampling procedure and size	10	3.3.5 Awareness of the duration of menstruation	19		
2.3 Qualitative methods: FGDs	11	3.3.6 Awareness of the symptoms that might appear during menstruation	19	4 Conclusions and Recommendations.	30
2.4 Ethical considerations.	12	3.3.7 Calculation of menstrual cycle	20	5 Annexes	31
2.5 Limitations.	12	3.3.8 Calculation of fertile days	20		
3 Findings	13	3.4 Attitudes and beliefs	21		
3.1 Sociodemographic characteristics	13	3.4.1 Menstruation as a source of shame	21		
3.2 Menarche: preparedness, advice and reactions.	13	3.4.2 Attitudes towards activities during menstruation: cooking, going to school and sexual relations	22		
		3.4.3 Attitudes towards foods during menstruation	24		
		3.4.4 Attitudes towards menstrual hygiene and health	24		

List of graphs

Graph 1	Adult women and girls reaching menarche aware and prepared	13
Graph 2	Adult women and girls who reached menarche aware by municipality	14
Graph 3	Adult women, girls and boys aware that the first menstruation appears during adolescence.	17
Graph 4	Proportion of girls using the school toilets during their periods (<i>n</i> = 167).	28

List of tables

Table 1	Survey and FGDs summary table	8
Table 2	Planned and actual sample size of KAP survey among adolescents and adult women	10
Table 3	Sample size of KAP survey with adolescent boys and girls disaggregated per target schools	11
Table 4	Sample size of KAP survey with adult women disaggregated by villages	11
Table 5	FGDs with adult women and men disaggregated by village	11
Table 6	FGDs with adolescents disaggregated by municipality	12
Table 7	Age of menarche	13
Table 8	Sources of information for women and girls about first menstruation	15
Table 9	People women and girls currently talk to about menstruation	15

Table 10	Women and girls' reaction on their first menstruation experience	16
Table 11	Reasons why women and girls were scared when they had their first period (<i>n</i> = 262)	16
Table 12	Source of menstrual blood	17
Table 13	Types of menstrual hygiene materials known by women, girls and boys	17
Table 14	Awareness of the meaning of first menstruation	19
Table 15	Awareness of the usual duration of menstruation in a healthy woman.	19
Table 16	Awareness of symptoms that might appear during menstruation (adult women, girls and boys)	19
Table 17	Number of correct menstruation symptoms identified by respondents (adult women, girls and boys)	20
Table 18	Adult women, girls and boys who could correctly identify how to do the calculation of the menstrual cycle	20
Table 19	Adult women, girls and boys who could correctly identify how to calculate the fertile days	20
Table 20	"Menstruation is something dirty that comes out of the body"	21
Table 21	"Menstruation is a topic that should not be discussed with men."	21
Table 22	Boys' sources of information about menstruation	22
Table 23	Activities that cannot be done if the girl/woman is menstruating.	22
Table 24	"Girls should not go to school if they are menstruating." & "If a girl goes to school and stains her clothes, boys will tease her"	23

Table 25	"Girls should not have sexual intercourse during menstruation."	23
Table 26	"Women can never get pregnant if they have sex during menstruation".	24
Table 27	Foods women / girls believe they should not eat during menstruation.	24
Table 28	"It is sufficient to change the cloth or pad only once a day"	24
Table 29	"Used (disposable) pad should be disposed of into the latrine".	25
Table 30	"Menstrual blood dirties the interior of the vagina, so it should be washed"	25
Table 31	Type of menstrual hygiene materials used by women and girls	25
Table 32	Cloths' washing and drying practices	27
Table 33	Frequency of changing menstrual hygiene materials (adult women, <i>n</i> = 208)	27
Table 34	School attendance during menstruation (<i>n</i> = 187)	28
Table 35	Reasons why girls are not using school toilets during their menses (<i>n</i> = 126)	28
Table 36	Number of times girls change their pads at school (out of the girls that go to school during menses, <i>n</i> = 167)	28
Table 37	Number of times girls change their pads at home (<i>n</i> = 187)	28
Table 38	Pads disposal at school (out of the girls using disposable pads and going to school, <i>n</i> = 55)	28
Table 39	Problems faced at school by girls during their periods (<i>n</i> = 187)	29
Table 40	Suggestions on what can be done at school to improve girls' lives when they are on their periods	29

List of acronyms

CLTS	Community Led Total Sanitation
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
JMP	Joint Monitoring Programme
KAP	Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices
MHM	Menstrual Hygiene Management
MoE	Margin of Error
SEA	Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

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Glossary

Menstruation/ menses/period	cyclic discharge of blood and tissue from the uterus through the vagina that occurs approximately on a monthly basis in non-pregnant women.
Menarche:	first menstruation that normally occurs during puberty.
Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM)	as per WHO and UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP)'s definition, MHM means that "[w]omen and adolescent girls are using a clean menstrual management material to absorb or collect menstrual blood, that can be changed in privacy as often as necessary for the duration of a menstrual period, using soap and water for washing the body as required, and having access to safe and convenient facilities to dispose of used menstrual management materials"
Menstrual hygiene materials	products/materials used to absorb menstrual blood (e.g. sanitary pads, cloths, tampons, menstrual cups).

¹ WHO/UNICEF (2021) *Consultation on Draft Long List of Goal, Target and Indicator Options for Future Global Monitoring of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene*. Available at <https://washdata.org/sites/default/files/documents/reports/2017-06/JMP-2012-post2015-consultation.pdf>

Executive Summary

Main findings are summarized below. Recommendations based on findings can be read at the [Recommendations](#) section.

Preparedness & Knowledge

- Average age of **menarche was 13.9 years**.
- **Girls and women remain unaware of menstruation until they reach menarche** (70%, 61% respectively).
- **63% of women and 70% of girls reported having felt scared when they experienced their first menstruation**; yet, among the women/girls who knew about menstruation before, the proportion of women/girls who reported having felt scared dropped to 42%. Out of those, 45% said they were scared because they **thought they were hurt** and 42% because they did not know what was happening.
- Adult women first heard about menstruation mainly from their aunts while girls heard from their sisters/cousins.
- **Only 3% of women/girls and 6% of the boys could correctly identify that the menstrual blood comes from the uterus**. 58% of the girls openly said they did not know.
- **Most respondents incorrectly identified bladder pain as a symptom that might occur during menstruation** (78% women/girls, 26% boys). This is a result of 'lower abdomen pain' and 'bladder pain' being used interchangeably on a daily basis. This was also visible when 8% of respondents said that menstrual blood comes from the bladder. **Only 11% of girls and 4% of boys could correctly identify more than one symptom**.
- 25% of boys are not aware of any menstrual hygiene material and 36% did not know or incorrectly identified the normal duration of menstruation
- **The proportion of respondents who know how to correctly calculate a menstrual cycle or fertile days is low across all the groups** (28%, 11% respectively).

Attitudes (Beliefs, perceptions)

- **Knowledge and curiosity to learn are perceived as naughtiness** by older women.
- **Teaching about menstruation to girls before they attain menarche is something older women disapprove of, because they believe girls are not mature enough** to digest the information, and fear them spreading the message to other girls and causing them to panic.
- Menstruation is perceived as a **transition to adulthood**, which brings bigger responsibilities to the girl (e.g. she should no longer "play with boys" because she can get pregnant). The association of menarche with being ready for marriage was found mainly among adult men and boys.
- **Considered as a taboo, menstruation is traditionally seen as something dirty and a source of shame. Examples include:**
 - o 82% of girls and 75% of boys think **menstruation is something dirty**
 - o **Common use of euphemisms** to refer to menstruation ("regra", "selling wine")
 - o When girls need money to buy sanitary pads, no one (neither girls nor caregivers) ever mentions the actual purpose of the money
 - o **Staining clothes** is often seen by older women as a source of shame and a sign of carelessness, suggesting blaming and judgement on younger girls who let it happen. Consequently, adults find that girls who do not know how to "take care of themselves" skip school during menses.
- **Identified myths and beliefs include:**
 - o women **should not cook** when they have their periods (women do not find it hygienic and they believe men will get sick if they eat that food);
 - o women **should not eat sweet foods** during their period, (women believe it will cause heavy menstrual bleeding and cramps);
 - o women **should not have sexual intercourse** (they believe infections can be transmitted to the men);
 - o women **cannot get pregnant** on their period;
 - o women **should not do physical exercise** during menstruation (found mainly in Kuito)
 - o **menstruation blood smells**
- **Menstruation is traditionally seen as a women's issue:**
 - o **59% of boys (and 44% of girls) think menstruation is a topic that should not be discussed with men;**
 - o **Fathers believe they should not learn about the menstruation of their daughter directly**; rather it is their preference to receive information (or to provide advice) through the girl's aunt or mother.
- **Boys believe that girls should not come to school during their period** (65%) and suggest they should be excused from school during their periods.
- **Girls say boys use menstruation as an excuse to tease them.**
- **Drying underwear / cloths in non-private spaces faces social stigma** as it is considered disrespectful. Girls reported feeling embarrassed that their fathers or older brothers could see it.
- **Disposable pads** are not well perceived by older women, as they allow women to wear any type of clothes (including pants, shorts and short skirts), which might increase the odds of getting noticed in case of a blood stain (and then bring shame to the girl). On the other hand, younger women associate disposable pads with freedom of movement and to the opportunity of wearing any kind of clothes.

Practices

- Girls (83%) and boys (88%) think douching (i.e. washing the interior of the vagina) is a correct practice.
- 89% of the girls think pads should be disposed of into the latrine.
- **Adult women prefer cloths while girls prefer disposable pads.** However, **disposable pads are more accessible in urban and peri-urban areas.**
- **Nearly all interviewed women and girls said they wash their cloths with soap and water.**
- Women and girls (73% and 86% respectively) **dry their cloths in the bedroom**, which increases the chances of bacteria growth.
- **13% of girls reported skipping school at some time during menses.** However, FGDs with all groups suggested the proportion might be higher, as in fact it was mentioned that **girls are highly likely to skip school in the first days of menstruation, due to heavy menstrual bleeding and cramps.**
- Out of the girls who continue going to school, **75% do not use school toilets during their periods.** 63% reported that this is due to poor hygienic conditions with 40% claiming a lack of privacy (e.g. cracks or the inability to close the door).
- **When girls are at home, most of them (83%) change their pads three or more times a day. When they are at school, almost 60% of girls are not changing at all.**
- **When at school, 39% of the girls are concerned of staining their clothes if they are menstruated and 33% feel embarrassed or uncomfortable.**



1 Introduction

The promotion of good hygiene and sanitation practices has been in the core of PIN's Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) programme in Angola since 2009. From the first project in Cuemba municipality, to the consolidation of Communities and Schools-Led Total Sanitation (C/SLTS) programme in Bié province, PIN has been working together with partners to increase access to safe water, eliminate open-air defecation and, as a result, help communities to become healthier and more resilient.

Menstrual hygiene and health have become a global concern over the last years, based on growing evidence that many girls are not able to manage their periods with dignity, due to deprivation of appropriate materials and low access to adequate knowledge. The very recent pilot study on Menstrual Management in Angola (May 2021)² showed that most of the girls have their life limited during their periods and that many boys were not comfortable interacting with girls during their periods.

At the same time, menstrual hygiene is still barely reflected in national guidelines or policies, and further scientific evidence is still lacking. Trying to respond to this gap, this study was developed in the scope of the Partnership Agreement between PIN and UNICEF, within the 2020/21 "CLTS 6 – Integrated CLTS programming towards independent and resilient population and stronger local ownership". One of the intervention's outcome was focused on the improvement of MHM awareness and attitudes in target municipalities (Kuito, Nharea and Camacupa – Bié province), which has also included training of women on how to produce hand-made sanitary pads and hand soap.

The study's main goals were to 1) understand the local perceptions on menstruation, including knowledge, attitudes (beliefs, perceptions, myths) and practices and 2) identify barriers that might prevent women and girls from properly managing their menstrual hygiene, such as knowledge, ability, resources, family/community support.

The main findings will thus support Government of Angola, main stakeholders and PIN to tailor its actions to better respond to girls and women's needs and promote gender equity and women empowerment in Angola.

² conducted by Be Girl, UNFPA Angola and Government of Angola, available at: https://angola.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/be_girl_unfpa_angola_relatorio_de_impacto_1.pdf

2 Study timing and methodology

The study combined both quantitative and qualitative methods, in order to capture different perspectives and reduce bias through triangulation.

It focused on two main groups: **1) female and male adolescents (14-18 years) attending selected target schools** and **2) adult women and men (25-45) living in target communities**.

As for the first group, the adolescents, age range was defined taking into consideration the regular age range at schools, and the assumption that younger girls and boys are usually less comfortable and open to discuss these topics (which was indeed confirmed during FGDs). Regarding adults, we wanted to capture the voices of parents and grandparents who were more likely to have (had) adolescents under their care.

Adolescents and adult women responded to the KAP survey and also participated in FGDs. Adult men only participated in FGDs; given the existing taboo and stigma, the implementation team concluded that the KAP survey's content might not have been adequate for them.

Table 1 Survey and FGDs summary table

Group	KAP survey	FGDs	
		No. of FGDs	Total No. of participants
Adult women (25-45 years)	<i>n</i> = 208	11	108
Adult men (25-45 years)	N/A	12	96
Female adolescents (14-18 years)	<i>n</i> = 187	6	33
Male adolescents (14-18 years)	<i>n</i> = 189	5	37
TOTAL	584	34	274

2.1 Interview guides, data collection and analysis

Questionnaires and interview guides: Survey's questionnaire and FGDs guides (see in the annexes) were developed based on desk review of available MHM guidelines and studies³, firstly in English and then translated into Portuguese. Some interviews were conducted in Umbundu, especially among adult women, which were translated *in loco* from Portuguese by data collectors.

Data collection: The authors of the study, alongside project implementation team, trained a team of 12 hired external data collectors (6 male and 6 female) during 3 days (7-9 April 2021). The training program included: the context of the project and its intervention

logic, basic principles of MHM, interview techniques, detailed explanation of survey questions and PIN's Code of Conduct. The survey was piloted on the 3rd day and adjustments to the questionnaires were made according to the identified gaps. Based on the performance and tests results, 5 data collectors were selected (3 female and 2 male), who then received a refresher training based on the identified needs.

In a first phase, data collection took place between 16th and 23rd of April, when FGDs with adult women/ men and questionnaires with adult women were conducted simultaneously. In a second phase, questionnaires with adolescents at schools were completed between 27th of

May and 8th of June. Finally, based on the previous findings, FGDs with adolescents were concluded between 27th of July and 2nd of August.

Data analysis: Quantitative data was analysed through Excel (via pivot tables) and FGDs through coding.

³ Enzler, Daniela Maria (2018). Knowledge, attitudes and practices concerning Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) of adolescents in rural primary schools in Malawi, available at <https://www.isglobal.org/documents/10179/7339333/MFP+Daniel+Enzler/4565e949-c2d2-48d9-b1c5-52fb30571a39>; UNICEF (2019) Guidance on Menstrual Health and Hygiene, available at <https://www.unicef.org/media/91341/file/UNICEF-Guidance-menstrual-health-hygiene-2019.pdf>; UNICEF (2013) WASH in Schools Empowers Girls' Education – Tools for Assessing Menstrual Hygiene Management in Schools, available at <http://www.wins4girls.org/resources/2013%20UNICEF%20Emory%20Tools%20for%20Assessing%20MHM%20in%20Schools.pdf>; Save the Children (nd). Menstrual Hygiene Management: Operational Guidelines, available at https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/sites/default/files/documents/menstrual_hygiene_management_operational_guidelines.pdf



Data collectors training in Kuito (photo: Edson Malongo/PIN)

2.2 Quantitative methods: KAP survey

2.2.1 Sampling procedure and size

The study used a stratified random sample of the population of interest (i.e. adolescents from 14 to 18 years of age and women from 25 to 45 years of age in the three target municipalities). The population size was based on the latest national Census (2014) and the sample included a proportional representation of the gender and target municipalities. Out of the 30 target villages⁴, 11 were randomly selected through the RAND function (=RAND()) in Excel. The study used a confidence

level of 95% and a margin of error (MoE) of 5% for the adolescents' group, and a margin of error of 7% for the adult women group. In total, 376 adolescents (189 girls, 187 boys) and 208 adult women responded to the survey.

The number of interviews was slightly lower than expected among girls (particularly in Camacupa) because of low adhesion caused by the school vacation period.

Table 2 Planned and actual sample size of KAP survey among adolescents and adult women

	Popula- tion size 15-19 years ⁵		Planned sample size				Actual sample size			
		%	TOTAL sample size	Kuito (62%)	Nharea (17%)	Camacupa (21%)	TOTAL sample size	Kuito	Nharea	Camacupa
boys	34,709	49%	186	115	32	39	187 (MoE 7%)	121	31	35
girls	36,562	51%	196	121	34	41	189 (MoE 7%)	117	38	34
Total adolescents	71,271	100%	382	235	66	81	376 (MoE 5%)	238	69	69
adult women	54,003	100%	201	124	35	43	208 (MoE 7%)	128	45	35

Survey with adolescent boys and girls in schools

Based on the criteria of being within the project's intervention area and ensuring that both rural and peri-urban areas were represented, the implementation team selected 7 schools to be included in the study (3 in

Kuito, 2 in Nharea and 2 in Camacupa). Survey took place with boys and girls in those schools among randomly selected students.

⁴ The project has foreseen 30 villages in total to conduct MHM related activities

⁵ Census divided the age group between 15 and 19 years, which was considered for this study.

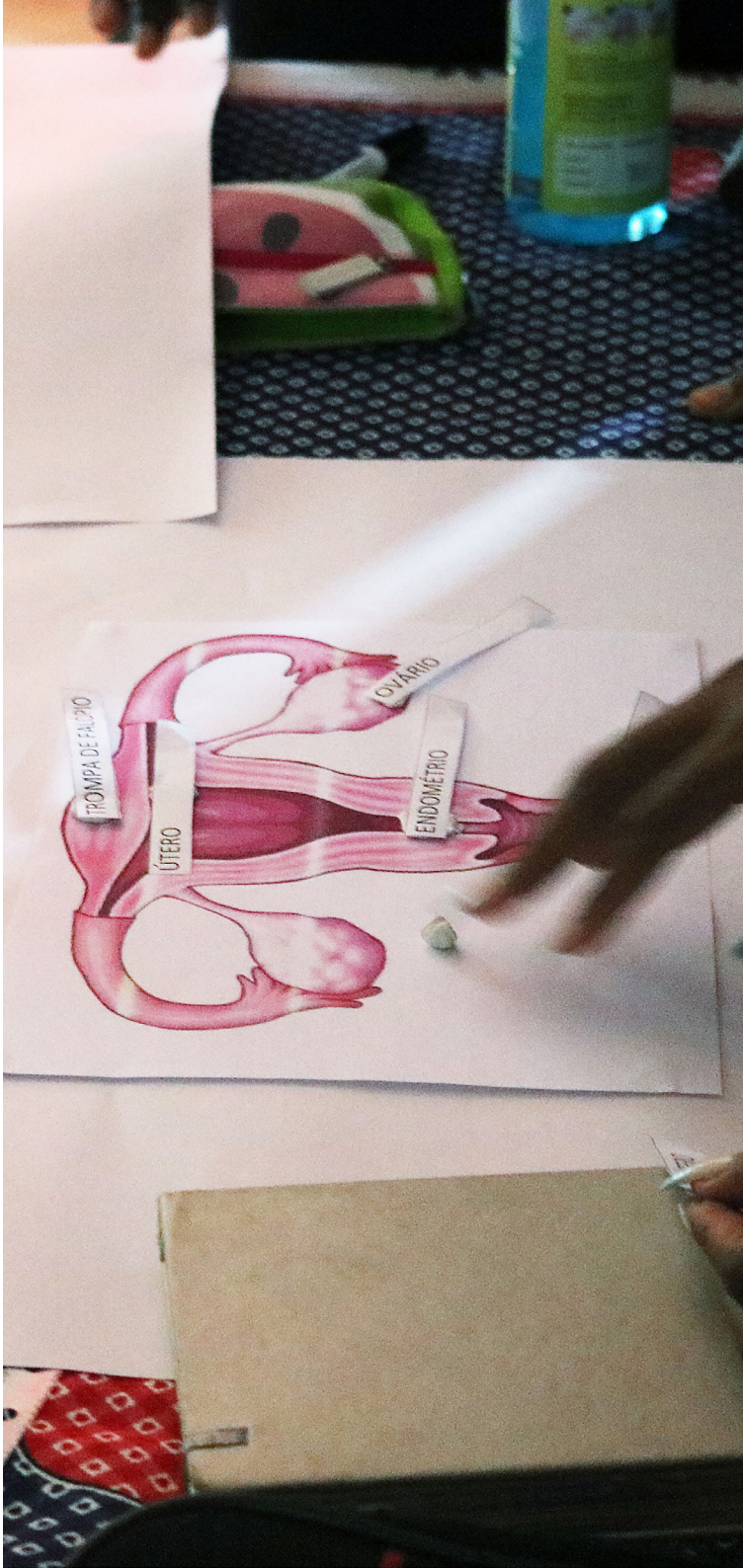


Table 3 Sample size of KAP survey with adolescent boys and girls disaggregated per target schools

	Total	Kuito				Nharea			Camacupa		
		Total	Complexo Escolar No. 16 Felizberto gunga	Primary School No. 8 Hoja Ya Henda	Complexo Escolar No. 9 Clemente Vinimbo	Total	Primary School of Chimbuio	Primary School of Lonjonjo	Total	Primary School of Embala Cambovo	Primary School of Chitangua
girls	187	121	41	40	40	31	16	15	35	17	18
boys	189	117	40	39	38	38	21	17	34	12	22
Total	376	238	81	79	78	69	37	32	69	29	40

Survey with adult women in communities

Target communities were previously sensitized by traditional authorities and local activists to participate in the study. Then, women within the age range were randomly selected to be interviewed.

Table 4 Sample size of KAP survey with adult women disaggregated by villages

Municipality	No. of questionnaires
Kuito	128
Bairro 11 de Novembro	25
Banje	26
Canganda	16
Samununga 2	37
Valódia	24
Nharea	45
Chapua	15
Sapessi	12
Waleca	18
Camacupa	35
Caifena 1	5
Capepula 2	15
Chiteque	15
Total	208

2.3 Qualitative methods: FGDs

FGDs with adult women and men took place, in total, in 7 different villages. The groups were separated according to the age range, i.e. groups of older adults and groups of younger adults. Women and men older than 45 years were also invited to participate in the FGDs.

FGDs with adolescents took place later and given the annual holidays season the number of included adolescents was lower than expected.

Table 5 FGDs with adult women and men disaggregated by village

Municipality	Village/Neighbourhood	FGDs adult women		FGDs adult men	
		No. FGDs	No. Participants	No. FGDs	No. Participants
Kuito	Bairro 11 de Novembro	3	37	1	8
	Samununga 2	2	21	3	24
	Canganda	-	-	1	8
Total Kuito		5	58	5	40
Nharea	Sapessi	1	8	2	16
	Tchapua	3	26	2	16
Total Nharea		4	34	4	32
Camacupa	Caifena 1	1	7	1	8
	Capepula 2	1	9	2	16
Total Camacupa		2	16	3	24
Total 3 municipalities		11	108	12	96

Table 6 FGDs with adolescents disaggregated by municipality

Municipality	Location	FGDs with girls		FGDs with boys	
		No. FGDs	No. Participants	No. FGDs	No. Participants
Kuito	Kuito City	2	8	1	6
Nharea	Lonjonjo Primary School	2	12	1	8
	Chimbuio Primary School	2	13	2	16
Total Nharea		4	25	3	24
Camacupa	Chitangua Primarily School	-	-	1	7
Total Camacupa		-	-	1	7
Total 3 municipalities		6	33	5	37

2.4 Ethical considerations

- Authorizations to conduct the study were sought from the Education and Health Provincial Offices, as well as from target the Municipal Administrations and schools.
- Respondents were interviewed by enumerators of the same sex as theirs and consent was always asked in advance; collected data did not enable to identify respondents' identity.
- Data collectors training included a session on PIN's Code of Conduct (which comprehends safeguarding, SEA, etc).

2.5 Limitations

- **Losses due to translation:** language barrier prevented the facilitator of the FGDs with adult women to directly interact with them, who was then dependent on the translated information.
- **Changes on school calendar due to Covid-19 restriction:** survey with adolescents took place during trimestral exam period and FGDs during big holidays season, which affected their availability to participate.
- **Menstruations as a taboo:** girls in the rural areas (Nharea and Camacupa) were shy to discuss this topic, which limited the level of discussion and plurality of ideas within the group. Besides, girls selected to participate in the FGD in Camacupa said they had not reached menarche yet and, for this reason, were not included in the study. Girls in Kuito were more open and more articulated to answer in-depth questions, which might bring some misrepresentation of some girl's voices from rural areas.

Training in the manufacture of sanitary towels and soap for women (photo: Edson Malongo/PIN)



3 Findings

3.1 Sociodemographic characteristics

- **Average age:** 15.5 years for girls, 15.8 for boys and 32.9 for adult women
- **Children:** 99% of adult women, 9% of girls and 3% of boys had children
 - **Average number of children:** 4.5 among the adult women and 1 among both girls and boys
- **Schooling of adult women:** 29% had no schooling; the majority (45%) completed between the 1st and 4th grade of school
- **Schooling of boys and girls:** 57% completed between the 5th and 9th grade
- **Number of household members:** 7.1 people
- **Owning a latrine:** 99% in Nharea, 98% in Kuito and 91% in Camacupa

3.2 Menarche: preparedness, advice and reactions

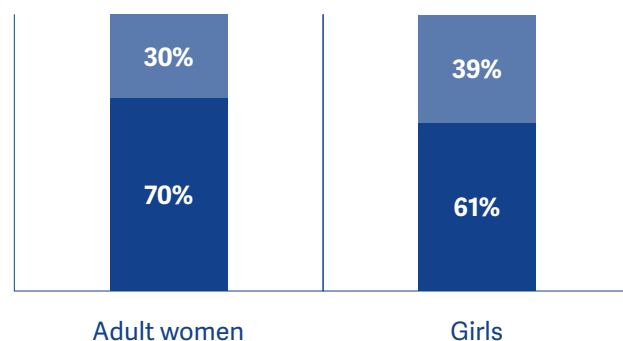
Girls are reaching menarche at 13.9 years of age on average and adult women reached at 14.3 years of age,

with 18 years being the maximum and 10 the minimum reported ages.

Table 7 Age of menarche

	Average age of menarche	Maximum age	Minimum age
Adult women	14.3	18	10
Adolescent girls	13.4	17	11
Total	13.9	18	10

Preparedness for menarche

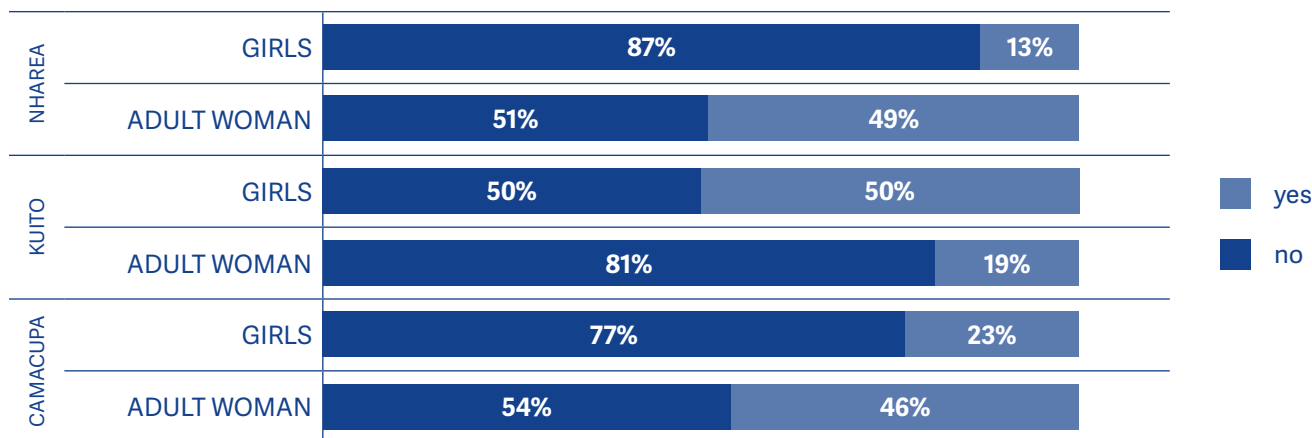


■ yes
■ no

Graph 1 Adult women and girls reaching menarche aware and prepared



Only 3 in each 10 interviewed women/girls knew what was happening when they had their first period. Despite different generations, the knowledge gap is still high among younger girls, who mostly reached menarche unaware (61%). These data have been confirmed during FGDs with women and adolescents: girls generally do not know what the blood is, unless they have older female friends or learn at school.



Graph 2 Adult women and girls who reached menarche aware by municipality

Exceptions were found among some mothers who said they were talking to their daughters once they start observing the first puberty signs in their bodies, such as breast development. However, we found that **mothers, and especially grandmothers, often associate knowledge with "naughtiness":** "young girls are naughtier now, their friends already instruct them so they already know what it is. And as a mother you won't notice [that she is already menstruating], because she already knows how to manage [her period]."⁶

Hiding menarche from adult women seems to be a perception across different communities. If not from the aunts, mothers seem to find out their daughters started menstruating when they found their stained clothes at home or when girls ask their mothers a cloth ("pano") and so they start getting suspicious. The change in the way of dressing, particularly the use of cloths, is a sign:

"She can no longer dress how she used to dress before?"

Girls say that talking to their mothers about this topic is embarrassing, it is usually easier to talk with the aunt who is "more open-minded" or with friends: "I think many girls are afraid, they think 'how am I supposed to tell [my mom]?' Unless the mother has previously given some advice, it's very unlikely the girl will directly talk to her".⁷

Older women perceive girls as not being mature enough to be taught about menstruation before they reach menarche: "we only give advice after [the first menstruation appears]. If we get ahead of them, they start talking to the other [girls] and thus spread fear".⁸ Girls share this perception "they think girls are too young, they'd rather wait".¹⁰

Sources of information about first menstruation

Differences were found between the two generations of daughters and mothers in regards to who has firstly talked to them about menstruation. **Whereas most of adult women had their aunts doing so (44%), adolescent girls had their first information about menstruation primarily from their sisters or cousins (47%)** – which seems to confirm adult women's perception that some of the young girls know first about menstruation from their peers. According to the adult women: "aunts are the ones who have the right to speak with the girl. Only if there is no aunt, the mother speaks"¹¹; "When the girl has her aunt, she will explain to the girl how she is supposed to take care of herself now, and that now she has a new responsibility coming from menstruation. Only if there is no aunt, the mother talks to her daughter"¹².

In Kuito, the aunt does not have a role as significant as in the rural areas. Looking at the data, only 11% of girls had their first information about menstruation from their aunts, comparing to 40% in Camacupa and 36% in Nharea. Girls in Kuito explained "we don't have our aunts here; they are in other provinces; so we talk to an older sister or to the mother".

Although it was not visible in the survey, the **church** was mentioned in two FGDs as a place where menstruation is discussed. In Kuito, one of the girls mentioned she first heard about menstruation in the church group and, in Nharea, one of the elderly women shared that church used to organize, in the past, separate groups for young girls and mothers to have discussions around menstruation.

⁶ Free translation from the original: "As novinhas estão mais malandras, as amigas já as instruem e já sabem. E como mãe não vais dar conta [que ela já está a menstruar], porque ela já sabe como gerir [o seu período]". FGD with adult women in Bairro 11 de Novembro, (Kuito)

⁷ FGD with adult men, Bairro 11 de Novembro (Kuito)

⁸ FGD with girls, Kuito

⁹ FGD with older adult women in Samununga 2 (Kuito)

¹⁰ FGD with girls (Kuito)

¹¹ FGD with adult women, Bairro 11 de Novembro (Kuito)

¹² FGD with adult women, Tchapura village (Nharea).

Table 8 Sources of information for women and girls about first menstruation

	adult women				girls			
	Camacupa	Kuito	Nharea	Total	Camacupa	Kuito	Nharea	Total
sister/cousin	9%	6%	10%	7%	47%	46%	52%	47%
mother	22%	33%	22%	28%	27%	50%	24%	42%
aunt	31%	48%	44%	44%	40%	11%	36%	20%
school	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	9%	12%	8%
another female friend	13%	10%	22%	13%	0%	8%	8%	6%
grandmother	31%	5%	7%	10%	10%	3%	0%	4%
others	0%	3%	0%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%
father	3%	1%	0%	1%	0%	1%	0%	1%

Current sources of information about menstruation

Nowadays, adult women continue relying mainly on their aunts in case they need some advice related to menstruation. Interestingly, the husband was also found in some answers among adult women in Kuito and Nharea. As for the adolescent girls, in Kuito they mostly turn to their mothers and sisters, whereas in the rural areas they prefer their aunts and sisters or friends.

Information and advice given to the girls

Once aunts and mothers find out girls reached menarche, they advise ***“she shouldn’t play with boys, otherwise she will get pregnant”***. This was present across all FGDs, even among men: *“it’s a concern for the family, because if she gets involved with a man she can get pregnant”*¹³.

Other advice is related to hygiene, such as not bathing in the same basin as other girls during menstruation¹⁴, or teaching that she *“has to shower and change the pad, she cannot stay with the same pad the entire day, or even two days”*¹⁵. Both women and men also mentioned advice related to tasks girls must not do during menstruation, such as cooking or playing with other children for too long, which are further analysed under 3.5.2 Activities / tasks during menstruation.

Table 9 People women and girls currently talk to about menstruation

	adult women				girls			
	Camacupa	Kuito	Nharea	Total	Camacupa	Kuito	Nharea	Total
mother	17%	14%	7%	13%	26%	51%	13%	40%
sister / cousin	14%	9%	13%	11%	34%	45%	13%	37%
aunt	43%	41%	36%	40%	46%	17%	39%	26%
another female friend	0%	8%	11%	7%	11%	12%	32%	16%
grandmother	20%	2%	0%	4%	0%	2%	0%	2%
father	3%	1%	0%	1%	0%	2%	0%	2%
nobody	2%	6%	13%	7%	0%	1%	2%	1%
school	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	0%	1%
boyfriend / husband	0%	7%	2%	5%	0%	0%	0%	0%

¹³ FGD with adult men, Samununga 2 village (Kuito) and Capeputa 2 village (Camacupa)

¹⁴ FGD with adult women, Bairro 11 de Novembro (Kuito) and Sapessi village (Nharea)

¹⁵ FGD with adult women, Bairro 11 de Novembro and Samununga village (Kuito)

The father's role

During FGDs, when we asked adult women whether the father would know that his daughter started menstruating, all of them reacted with laughter: **"fathers cannot know!"** Some women also mentioned that **some fathers get upset when they learn this information**: *"this is only a women's issue; the father cannot know. (...) There are some [men] that when you tell them, they will get upset and ask 'what am I supposed to do with this information? That is a women's issue'¹⁶"; "There are fathers who give mothers a dressing down [if they tell them]; they say this is mothers' responsibility, they are the ones supposed to advise, not the fathers'¹⁷."*

However, some women, especially younger mothers, disagreed. They feel they have to share it with the fathers, otherwise *"if the girl gets pregnant, they will blame the mother that she kept it a secret'¹⁸."* Another interesting intervention said *"the husband has to know. In case I'm not at home and the father has to stay alone with her, he will know how to advise her'¹⁹."*

Overall, men seem to agree that this is mainly a women's issue and they must not learn this directly from their daughters, "it would be shameful'²⁰!" Instead, mothers and aunts are the ones who will let the fathers know, and any advice they would like to give to their daughters will always be given through them. Once again, the aunt emerges as the main figure and bypassing her would be considered disrespectful.

Nonetheless, even if they see it as a women's issue, men said that **as fathers they had the responsibility of giving money to buy soap, pads and cloths.** Either they would give it to the mothers or *"to the daughter, saying the money is meant to help her, but without mentioning [the real] purpose'²¹."*

Reactions around first menstruation experience

Women and girls reported they were scared when they attained menarche (63% and 70%, respectively). The percentage is even higher among adolescent girls in the rural areas (91% in Camacupa and 81% in Nharea), which is expectable considering the reported unawareness. In fact, **a correlation was found between not being aware and being scared**: women and girls who were not aware when they reached menarche were more scared (79%, $n = 260$) in comparison to girls who already knew what the period was (42%, $n = 135$).

When asked why, respondents said they were scared because they thought they were hurt (45%) and did not know what was happening (42%) – see table 11.

Table 10 Women and girls' reaction on their first menstruation experience

Reaction	General			Camacupa			Kuito			Nharea		
	Total	Adult women	Girls	Total	Adult women	Girls	Total	Adult women	Girls	Total	Adult women	Girls
I was scared	66%	63%	70%	71%	51%	91%	67%	73%	61%	59%	44%	81%
I was shocked	8%	7%	9%	9%	11%	6%	8%	6%	11%	5%	4%	6%
I was embarrassed	10%	12%	7%	13%	14%	11%	7%	7%	7%	17%	24%	6%
I felt as usual	21%	24%	18%	13%	23%	3%	22%	20%	24%	26%	36%	13%
I was excited/happy	2%	1%	3%	0%	0%	0%	3%	2%	4%	0%	0%	0%

Table 11 Reasons why women and girls were scared when they had their first period ($n = 262$)

Reason	General			Camacupa			Kuito			Nharea		
	Total	Adult women	Girls	Total	Adult women	Girls	Total	Adult women	Girls	Total	Adult women	Girls
I was afraid I was sick / going to die	16%	19%	12%	10%	0%	16%	20%	25%	14%	7%	10%	4%
I thought I was hurt	45%	48%	42%	34%	44%	28%	47%	46%	49%	49%	60%	40%
I didn't know what was happening	42%	34%	50%	54%	44%	59%	38%	32%	45%	47%	35%	56%
I was afraid I had to manage it by myself	4%	4%	4%	2%	6%	0%	5%	3%	7%	2%	5%	0%
I was afraid I could get pregnant	5%	9%	2%	6%	17%	0%	4%	5%	3%	9%	20%	0%
I was afraid I would have to get married	2%	2%	1%	0%	0%	0%	2%	2%	1%	2%	5%	0%

16 FGD with adult women, Samununga 2 village (Kuito)

17 FGD with adult women, Tchapura village (Nharea)

18 FGD with adult women, Bairro 11 de Novembro and Samununga 2 village (Kuito)

19 FGD with adult women, Samununga 2 village (Kuito)

20 FGD with adult men, in Tchapura village (Nharea).

21 FGD with adult men, in Canganda village (Kuito)

3.3 Knowledge about menstruation

This section intended to assess the knowledge of adult women, girls and boys about menstruation.

3.3.1 Knowledge about the source of the menstrual blood

Only 3% of women and girls and 6% of boys could tell that menstrual blood comes from the uterus. Most of interviewees did not know the answer, which was

especially high among girls in school (58%). Vagina and bladder were the most given answers.

Table 12 Source of menstrual blood

	adult women				girls				boys			
	Camacupa	Kuito	Nharea	Total	Camacupa	Kuito	Nharea	Total	Camacupa	Kuito	Nharea	Total
Doesn't know	34%	55%	27%	45%	57%	58%	58%	58%	29%	26%	29%	28%
Vagina ✖	54%	26%	58%	38%	37%	33%	35%	34%	59%	56%	47%	55%
Bladder ✖	11%	11%	13%	12%	6%	4%	3%	4%	9%	4%	13%	7%
Uterus ✔	0%	5%	0%	3%	0%	2%	3%	2%	3%	9%	0%	6%

3.3.2 Knowledge about the existing types of menstrual hygiene materials

Pieces of cloth were the menstrual hygiene material most known among the adult women, while adolescents know disposable pads better, especially in the peri-urban areas. Panties/shorts were still found among the answers, especially from adult women (7, and 1 from girls). There was a significant proportion of

boys who was not aware of any material, particularly in Camacupa and Nharea. Findings around management of menstrual hygiene materials are analysed under section 3.6.1 Type of menstrual hygiene materials used by women and girls.

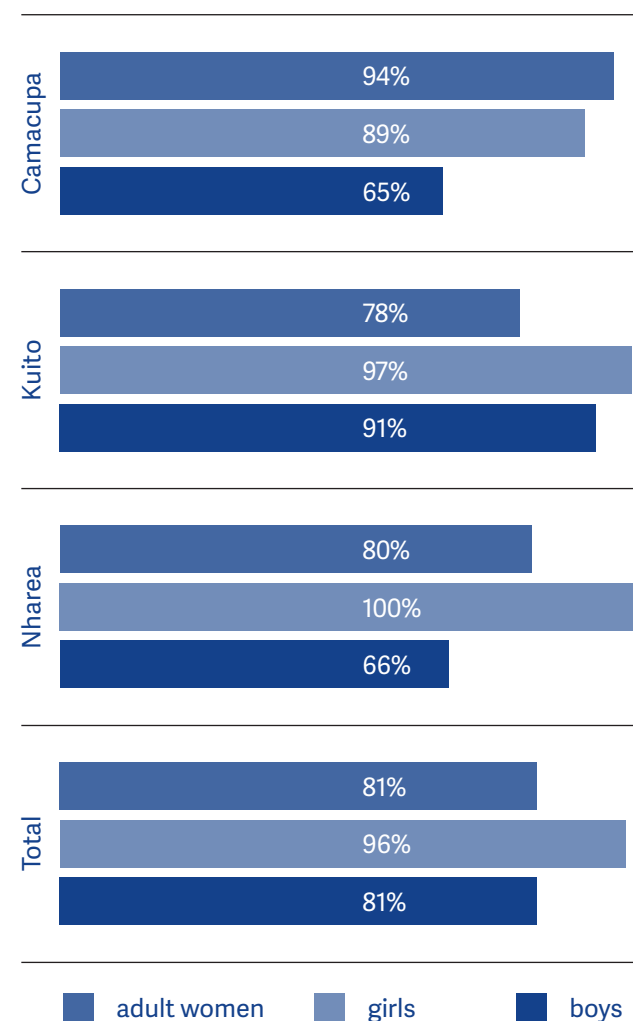
Table 13 Types of menstrual hygiene materials known by women, girls and boys

	adult women				girls				boys			
	Camacupa	Kuito	Nharea	Total	Camacupa	Kuito	Nharea	Total	Camacupa	Kuito	Nharea	Total
Disposable pads	74%	58%	73%	64%	54%	97%	35%	79%	44%	77%	18%	59%
Piece of cloth	100%	80%	98%	87%	69%	59%	48%	59%	18%	20%	37%	23%
Reusable pads	23%	30%	22%	27%	37%	66%	48%	58%	0%	24%	0%	15%
Doesn't know	0%	4%	0%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	35%	16%	42%	25%

3.3.3 Awareness of the age of first period

Overall, interviewees are aware that menarche normally appears during the adolescence (11-16 years) in a healthy a girl. Yet, many boys do not know, especially in Camacupa and Nharea.

Graph 3 Adult women, girls and boys aware that the first menstruation appears during adolescence



3.3.4 Meaning of first menstruation

Most girls and adult women are aware that the first menstruation means that a pregnancy is possible (59% and 66%, respectively). Only 23% of boys could correctly identify the meaning of first menstruation, which reflects the low level of knowledge and the presence of some misconceptions, such as the association of menarche with sexual activity (7% of boys answered that it means the girl had sex – 10% in Kuito, 3% in Camacupa and Nharea).

The **association of menarche with marriage**, even if not representative, was still found particularly among boys and adult men. Across the three municipalities, adult men shared that after the first menstruation the girl is “*an adult now, so she is ready to get married*”. However, men (and also women in Nharea) suggest marriage should not take place immediately, but rather in a few years (when she is 17-20). On the other hand, people who live in target rural areas reported outside FGDs that girls can get married at a very young age, even before they had reached menarche²².

Overall, **menstruation seems to be seen as a transition to adulthood**, which brings bigger responsibilities to the girls, who therefore shall not behave like children anymore.

²² One of the interviewed adult women reported to the data collector she was already married when she reached menarche and her husband was the one explaining her about menstruation. One more case like this was found among a family member of the project team.



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(photo: Edson Malongo/PIN)

Table 14 Awareness of the meaning of first menstruation

	adult women				girls				boys			
	Camacupa	Kuito	Nharea	Total	Camacupa	Kuito	Nharea	Total	Camacupa	Kuito	Nharea	Total
Sign of fertility ✓	94%	48%	62%	59%	60%	67%	68%	66%	3%	27%	29%	23%
The girl is ready to get married ✕	3%	6%	9%	6%	11%	5%	0%	5%	18%	20%	5%	16%
Doesn't know	3%	41%	29%	32%	29%	27%	32%	28%	76%	39%	55%	49%

3.3.5 Awareness of the duration of menstruation

With a few exceptions, women and girls are aware that the usual duration of menstruation in a healthy woman is between 3-8 days.

Yet, a high percentage of boys do not know, again with higher incidence in rural areas.

Table 15 Awareness of the usual duration of menstruation in a healthy woman

	adult women				girls				boys			
	Camacupa	Kuito	Nharea	Total	Camacupa	Kuito	Nharea	Total	Camacupa	Kuito	Nharea	Total
3-8 days ✓	100%	96%	91%	96%	97%	98%	100%	98%	41%	62%	58%	58%
2 weeks ✕	0%	2%	9%	3%	0%	1%	0%	1%	0%	10%	11%	8%
doesn't know	0%	2%	0%	1%	3%	0%	0%	1%	59%	18%	29%	28%

3.3.6 Awareness of the symptoms that might appear during menstruation

Most respondents, at both communities and schools, incorrectly identified “bladder pain” as a symptom that might appear during menstruation (see table 16). On a daily basis, bladder pain is popularly used to identify any pain in lower abdomen, which results in misconceptions, such as the belief that menstrual blood comes from

the bladder (see above in section 3.3.1). It is important to insist in the correct use of the terminology, especially at schools, enabling adolescents to have a solid knowledge. The proportion of respondents who could correctly identify more than one symptom is significantly low (as shown in the table 17).

Table 16 Awareness of symptoms that might appear during menstruation (adult women, girls and boys)

	adult women				girls				boys			
	Camacupa	Kuito	Nharea	Total	Camacupa	Kuito	Nharea	Total	Camacupa	Kuito	Nharea	Total
bladder pain ✕	77%	74%	89%	78%	80%	82%	58%	78%	9%	32%	21%	26%
abdominal cramps ✓	17%	26%	7%	20%	29%	21%	32%	25%	6%	10%	8%	9%
back pain ✓	20%	25%	13%	22%	17%	11%	0%	10%	0%	6%	0%	4%
head-ache ✓	11%	2%	22%	8%	3%	4%	3%	4%	3%	14%	5%	10%
fatigue ✓	3%	5%	2%	4%	0%	8%	0%	5%	0%	4%	0%	3%
breast pain ✓	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%	0%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%
mood swings ✓	0%	2%	0%	1%	0%	7%	0%	5%	0%	3%	0%	2%
swelling ✓	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	1%	0%	3%	0%	2%
doesn't know	11%	13%	9%	12%	11%	12%	26%	14%	79%	45%	71%	57%

Table 17 Number of correct menstruation symptoms identified by respondents (adult women, girls and boys)

	Doesn't know / incorrect answer	1 symptom	2 symptoms	3 or more symptoms
girls	63%	26%	9%	2%
Camacupa	63%	26%	11%	0%
Kuito	62%	24%	11%	3%
Nharea	65%	35%	0%	0%
boys	78%	19%	2%	2%
Camacupa	91%	9%	0%	0%
Kuito	71%	23%	3%	3%
Nharea	87%	13%	0%	0%
adult women	54%	37%	9%	0%
Camacupa	57%	34%	9%	0%
Kuito	51%	39%	9%	1%
Nharea	62%	31%	7%	0%

3.3.7 Calculation of menstrual cycle

Knowledge on how to calculate the menstrual cycle is significantly low across all interviewed groups. During FGDs with women, we tried to understand whether any of the advice given to girls when they reach menarche included how to avoid pregnancy through the calculation of menstrual cycle, but nothing was found: all the advice to avoid pregnancy meant to stay away from the boys.

Table 18 Adult women, girls and boys who could correctly identify how to do the calculation of the menstrual cycle

	correct answer	doesn't know	incorrect answer
girls	28%	67%	5%
Camacupa	17%	83%	0%
Kuito	30%	62%	8%
Nharea	31%	69%	0%
boys	29%	52%	19%
Camacupa	17%	54%	29%
Kuito	36%	51%	13%
Nharea	19%	52%	29%
adult women	28%	67%	5%
Camacupa	18%	76%	6%
Kuito	33%	61%	6%
Nharea	18%	79%	3%

3.3.8 Calculation of fertile days

Likewise, the knowledge on how to calculate the fertile days is low. Most respondents did not know or gave an incorrect answer (see in the table below).

Table 19 Adult women, girls and boys who could correctly identify how to calculate the fertile days

	correct answer	doesn't know	incorrect answer
girls	5%	85%	10%
Camacupa	3%	97%	0%
Kuito	5%	78%	16%
Nharea	4%	96%	0%
boys	11%	81%	7%
Camacupa	6%	94%	0%
Kuito	15%	78%	7%
Nharea	3%	81%	16%
adult women	17%	80%	3%
Camacupa	9%	91%	0%
Kuito	22%	74%	4%
Nharea	11%	89%	0%

3.4 Attitudes and beliefs

This section intends to analyse adults and adolescents' attitudes towards menstruation, including how they perceive menstruation, how they see the practice of certain activities during menstruation and what they consider to be the correct menstrual hygiene practices.

For this purpose, we have presented a set of questions and asked respondents whether they agreed or disagreed with them. The answers have been triangulated with FGDs findings and are discussed below.

3.4.1 Menstruation as a source of shame

Menstruation is popularly known as "regra" or "selling wine"²³, expressions used to describe when women are menstruating. Euphemisms are used to reinforce taboos, contributing to the idea of avoidable topic and thus preventing open public discussion. In this sense, **menstruation is traditionally seen as dirty and shameful**. *"If people notice you are on your period, it can bring you problems. For us, who have a husband, it is somewhat normal, but actually not so normal. No man, or even woman, can know or realize you are menstruating. That will bring you shame"²⁴.* **There is a general judgement, especially from the adult women, on the girls who stain their clothes:** *"back in our time, we just used little cloths and we did not stain our clothes"²⁵* (see more under school section). In one of the individual interviews, when asked if a girl would be teased at school in case she would hypothetically stain her clothes, the woman repeatedly denied that could ever possible happen with their daughters, suggesting it would be shameful for the girl and her mother.

The study showed that 82% of girls and 85% of boys believe that menstruation is something dirty. In

several circumstances, mainly adolescents referred to menstruation as "garbage coming out of the body" and suggested menstruation having a specific (bad) smell that is detectable by others, which is a common myth²⁶.

Table 20 "Menstruation is something dirty that comes out of the body"

	agrees X	dis- agrees ✓	doesn't know	refuses to answer
adult women	77%	19%	4%	0%
Camacupa	74%	20%	6%	0%
Kuito	81%	15%	4%	0%
Nharea	69%	29%	2%	0%
girls	82%	16%	2%	0%
Camacupa	86%	11%	3%	0%
Kuito	79%	18%	2%	0%
Nharea	90%	10%	0%	0%
boys	85%	11%	3%	1%
Camacupa	85%	9%	3%	3%
Kuito	92%	6%	2%	0%
Nharea	63%	29%	8%	0%

Men's involvement

Boys were the ones who most agreed with menstruation being kept only between women (59%). However, among those who think men should know about menstruation some explained they should know because *"in case a man wants to have sexual intercourse and he doesn't know about menstruation, he will get involved, which must not be done"²⁷* – see more about perceptions of sexual relations during menstruation in the section below.

The study indicates **boys learn about menstruation mainly from school** (see table 22) and this topic is barely discussed among their household members. Only in Kuito, we found boys whose sources of information were their parents.

In fact, **most adult men ruled out any responsibility around this topic**, adding there was nothing they would like to know as it would be inclusively "wrong". With a few exceptions though, some men mentioned they would be interested to know if there is something wrong with their daughter so they could support her (e.g. the duration of their daughters' period, because *"if it lasts more than 7 or 8 days it is not normal and it would require treatment"²⁸*).

Table 21 "Menstruation is a topic that should not be discussed with men."

	agrees X	dis- agrees ✓	doesn't know	refuses to answer
adult women	35%	63%	2%	0%
Camacupa	20%	80%	0%	0%
Kuito	43%	55%	2%	0%
Nharea	22%	76%	2%	0%
girls	44%	55%	1%	0%
Camacupa	63%	37%	0%	0%
Kuito	39%	60%	1%	0%
Nharea	45%	52%	3%	0%
boys	59%	37%	3%	2%
Camacupa	82%	6%	3%	9%
Kuito	50%	49%	1%	1%
Nharea	66%	26%	8%	0%

²³ Free translation from "estar de regra", "está a vender vinho"

²⁴ FGD with adult women in Tchupua village (Nharea).

²⁵ FGD with adult women in Bairro 11 de Novembro (Kuito).

²⁶ Blood is odorless. Odor can be caused by bacteria in the vagina and genital region.

²⁷ FGDs with boys in Kuito and Camacupa

²⁸ FGD with men in Samununga 2 village (Kuito)

Table 22 Boys' sources of information about menstruation

	Cama cupa	Kuito	Nharea	Total
school	38%	49%	55%	48%
male friends	26%	17%	37%	23%
female friends	29%	18%	8%	18%
girlfriend / wife	15%	12%	16%	13%
cousins / sister	12%	11%	8%	11%

	Cama cupa	Kuito	Nharea	Total
father	0%	11%	0%	7%
mother	0%	4%	0%	3%
grandmother	3%	2%	5%	3%
other	0%	0%	3%	1%

3.4.2 Attitudes towards activities during menstruation: cooking, going to school and sexual relations

It was among adult women where we found most respondents correctly identifying there is no activity women should not do during menstruation (33%).

However, **almost all respondents agreed that there are activities**, mainly cooking, having sexual relations and, mainly according to the boys, going to school.

Table 23 Activities that cannot be done if the girl/woman is menstruating

	adult women				girls				boys			
	Camacupa	Kuito	Nharea	Total	Camacupa	Kuito	Nharea	Total	Camacupa	Kuito	Nharea	Total
there's no activity ✓	29%	31%	40%	33%	29%	7%	29%	15%	15%	12%	3%	11%
doesn't know	0%	11%	4%	8%	23%	12%	29%	17%	38%	5%	24%	15%
have sexual relations	66%	30%	51%	41%	17%	41%	26%	34%	29%	24%	34%	27%
cooking / household chores	17%	24%	20%	22%	43%	46%	29%	43%	6%	18%	24%	17%
talking to boys	9%	2%	7%	4%	3%	10%	0%	7%	0%	3%	0%	2%
physical activity	0%	5%	2%	4%	3%	26%	0%	18%	0%	46%	5%	30%
touching plants / go to the field (agriculture)	3%	2%	4%	3%	17%	13%	3%	12%	0%	0%	11%	2%
going to school	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	1%	9%	10%	16%	11%
walking barefoot	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	5%	0%	3%	9%	4%	3%	5%

Cooking: across all FGD with adult women, we found that they believe it is not hygienic to cook during the

same time as they are washing their bloody cloths: *"Nowadays, we hear in some churches that, when*

women are in those days, they cannot cook, because they are dirty²⁹." Not letting women cook for them during this period is something men also advise boys about: *"the woman cannot cook for him. She might touch the blood and might get the food dirty³⁰."* It is believed that if men eat their food, they will get sick. In regards to other household chores, they are considered "light" so unless the girl or woman has severe pain, they can do anything.

Physical activity: Adult women mentioned that girls should limit their playtime with other children, to prevent staining their clothes³¹, advice which was also confirmed by young girls in Nharea. Whilst practicing moderate physical exercises might help reducing period pain, 46% of boys and 26% of girls in Kuito believe that girls should avoid physical activities during their periods. Staying quiet and not interacting with other colleagues at school was also noted by girls as signs that generally enable colleagues to realize the girl is on her period: *"she is afraid to move a lot because she can stain her clothes³²"* or *"girls tend to be isolated, in their corner, and people start talking and teasing³³."*

Going to school: most adult women and girls disagree that girls should skip school if they are menstruating, yet roughly 2 in each 10 women/girls are in favour of girls staying at home. The highest percentage was found amongst **boys: 65% think their female classmates should not go to school**. In Nharea (Chimbuio), boys said *"girls can't go to school because it's as if they are sick"* (which can somewhat explain boys' suggestions on taking girls to the health centre during their periods – see more at the Recommendations from adolescents section)

29 FGD with adult women in Bairro 11 de Novembro (Kuito)

30 FGD with adult men in Barro 11 de Novembro (Kuito)

31 FGD with adult women in Bairro 11 de Novembro (Kuito)

32 FGD with girls in Nharea (Lonjonjo)

33 FGD with girls in Kuito

It seems to be an accepted fact that, among all interviewees, boys will most likely tease a girl who stains her clothes at school. That also seems to be part of the reasons why boys are in favour of girls skipping school during menstruation: “*she should not go to school,*

*if the blood leaks out and stains the chair, her classmates will laugh at her*³⁴.” Yet, as previously mentioned, staining clothes does not seem to be the only excuse used by boys to tease girls. According to the latter, if boys notice a girl more quiet than usual they come and

start teasing: “*oh that’s not good! See, being a woman suck!*³⁵”. Other girls (Kuito) shared that boys would provoke them by following them to the bathroom and peeking through the window.

Table 24 “Girls should not go to school if they are menstruating.” & “If a girl goes to school and stains her clothes, boys will tease her”

	“Girls should not go to school if they are menstruating”				“If a girl goes to school and stains her clothes, boys will tease her”		
	agrees ×	disagrees ✓	doesn’t know	refuses to answer	agrees	disagrees	doesn’t know
adult women	23%	76%	1%	0%	87%	13%	0%
Camacupa	9%	91%	0%	0%	91%	9%	0%
Kuito	27%	71%	2%	0%	83%	16%	1%
Nharea	20%	78%	2%	0%	96%	4%	0%
girls	20%	80%	0%	0%	83%	17%	0%
Camacupa	29%	71%	0%	0%	94%	6%	0%
Kuito	12%	88%	0%	0%	83%	17%	0%
Nharea	45%	55%	0%	0%	74%	26%	0%
boys	65%	29%	3%	3%	88%	10%	2%
Camacupa	62%	24%	3%	12%	88%	9%	3%
Kuito	62%	36%	2%	1%	90%	10%	0%
Nharea	76%	13%	8%	3%	84%	11%	5%

Sexual relations: there is no scientific evidence that having sex when a woman has her period is harmful or unhealthy. However, the association of menstruation with dirtiness and the belief that it is a women’s issue that should be kept away from men, is most likely contributing to the disapproval of sexual intercourse during period. During some FGDs and interviews, women asked what they should do when their husbands

disregarded their periods and still asked to have sexual relations, showing discomfort with this request. On their side, **men said they advise boys not to get involved with women if they are on their periods** because “*it causes the ‘weak legs disease’*³⁶.” In general, it seems to exist judgment of the men and women who do not mind having sex during menstruation.

Table 25 “Girls should not have sexual intercourse during menstruation.”

	agrees ×	dis- agrees ✓	doesn’t know	refuses to answer
adult women	73%	27%	0%	0%
Camacupa	77%	23%	0%	0%
Kuito	66%	34%	1%	0%
Nharea	89%	11%	0%	0%
girls	72%	26%	2%	0%
Camacupa	77%	23%	0%	0%
Kuito	72%	26%	2%	0%
Nharea	68%	29%	3%	0%
boys	86%	11%	3%	1%
Camacupa	88%	6%	3%	3%
Kuito	85%	12%	2%	1%
Nharea	84%	11%	5%	0%

Whereas the odds are lower, a woman can still get pregnant if she has sexual relations during her period³⁷. Adult women, in general, seem to be more aware of this, while **girls (43%) and particularly boys (58%) do believe that there are no pregnancy risks coming from an unprotected sexual relation if the woman is on her period.**

34 FGD with boys, Nharea (Chimbuio)

35 FGD with girls, Kuito

36 FGD with adult men, Tchapura village (Nharea) and Capepula 2 (Camacupa).

37 This might happen for very different reasons, but can include irregular fertile cycles associated with long survival periods of spermatozooids inside female reproductive system (up to 5 days).

Table 26 “Women can never get pregnant if they have sex during menstruation”

	agrees ✕	dis- agrees ✓	doesn't know	refuses to answer
adult women	39%	55%	6%	0%
Camacupa	31%	54%	14%	0%
Kuito	36%	59%	5%	0%
Nharea	53%	44%	2%	0%
girls	43%	47%	10%	0%
Camacupa	60%	31%	9%	0%
Kuito	40%	50%	10%	0%
Nharea	39%	48%	13%	0%
boys	58%	36%	5%	2%
Camacupa	82%	9%	3%	6%
Kuito	45%	50%	5%	0%
Nharea	74%	18%	5%	3%

3.4.3 Attitudes towards foods during menstruation

Only a small proportion of interviewees is aware that there is no particular kind of food a woman should not eat during her period. Particularly girls (64%) **believe they should not eat sugar or sweet foods**. It is believed that if they eat sugary foods, it will result in heavy menstrual bleeding and cramps. Whist women and girls should ensure a balanced diet during menstruation, increased menstrual flow is related to hormonal changes and pathologies, not to sugar intake.

Even if not representative, a few respondents mentioned women should not eat beans (14), fish (10) and meat (13). Considering that women should increase their intake of iron-rich foods during menstruation, messages should be included reinforcing that avoiding these types of foods is not correct.

Table 27 Foods women / girls believe they should not eat during menstruation

	adult women				girls				boys			
	Camacupa	Kuito	Nharea	Total	Camacupa	Kuito	Nharea	Total	Camacupa	Kuito	Nharea	Total
there's no food ✓	34%	27%	31%	29%	26%	11%	16%	14%	9%	24%	18%	20%
doesn't know	17%	31%	7%	24%	26%	17%	26%	20%	76%	19%	39%	33%
sweets ✕	40%	36%	56%	41%	49%	71%	55%	64%	15%	38%	42%	34%

3.4.4 Attitudes towards menstrual hygiene and health

Washing hands and frequency of changing pads

With the exception of 4 respondents (2 adult women who didn't know, 1 adult woman and 1 girl who disagreed), all agreed with the affirmation “Girls and women should always wash their hands after changing the pad.”

Both adult women and girls strongly disagree with changing a pad once a day is enough. This mostly overlaps with the actual practices, where most adult women and girls change their pad three or more times a day, except when girls are at school (where 58% of girls do not change their pad).

Table 28 “It is sufficient to change the cloth or pad only once a day”

	Agrees ✕	Disagrees ✓
adult women	15 (7%)	193 (93%)
Camacupa	0	35
Kuito	15	113
Nharea	0	45
girls	13 (7%)	174 (93%)
Camacupa	0	35
Kuito	10	111
Nharea	3	28
Total	28	367

Pads disposal into the latrine

With the exception of Kuito municipality, where we found some women and girls disagreeing with this practice, almost all respondents think throwing the used pads into the latrines is correct. This disposal of sanitary products is unsafe and can cause serious environmental hazards. Therefore, it is relevant not only to include this message into future campaigns, but to assess safe disposal options locally available.

Table 29 “Used (disposable) pad should be disposed of into the latrine”

	Agrees ✕	Disagrees ✓	Doesn't know
adult women	98%	1%	1%
Camacupa	100%	0%	0%
Kuito	97%	2%	1%
Nharea	98%	0	2%
girls	89%	10%	1%
Camacupa	100%	0%	0%
Kuito	83%	15%	2%
Nharea	100%	0%	0%

Douching

The so-called douching (washing or cleaning out the vagina with water or a mix of fluids) is a harmful practice that is not recommended by doctors, since it can potentially affect the natural PH balance that prevents infections and irritations³⁸. The study indicates young girls (83%) and women (87%) agree with such practice. Boys also agree (88%), which should be taken into consideration for future behaviour change campaigns, considering their role as potential influencers.

Table 30 “Menstrual blood dirties the interior of the vagina, so it should be washed”

	agrees ✕	dis- agrees ✓	doesn't know	refuses to answer
adult women	87%	10%	3%	0%
Camacupa	86%	11%	3%	0%
Kuito	88%	8%	3%	1%
Nharea	84%	13%	2%	0%
girls	83%	14%	3%	0%
Camacupa	89%	9%	3%	0%
Kuito	79%	17%	3%	0%
Nharea	90%	10%	0%	0%
boys	88%	6%	4%	1%
Camacupa	88%	3%	3%	6%
Kuito	91%	7%	3%	0%
Nharea	82%	8%	11%	0%

3.5 Practices

3.5.1 Type of menstrual hygiene materials used by women and girls

Table 31 Type of menstrual hygiene materials used by women and girls

	girls				adult women			
	Camacupa	Kuito	Nharea	Total	Camacupa	Kuito	Nharea	Total
disposable pads	17%	84%	26%	62%	20%	39%	24%	33%
reusable pads	29%	38%	48%	38%	0%	10%	4%	7%
piece of cloth	69%	34%	48%	43%	91%	88%	96%	90%
shorts/legging shorts	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	7%	0%	4%

Disposable pads: liberty vs libertinism

Whereas a piece of cloth seems to be the most used menstrual hygiene material by adult women, girls seem to prefer disposable pads (popularly called “modex”). However, disposable pads are more accessible in urban and peri-urban areas, which is reflected into girls’ practices.

Interestingly, the use of disposable pads appeared to represent a conflict between the two generations. Older women say they used to protect themselves with legging shorts (“colãs”), long skirts and cloths (“panos”), suggesting they were doing everything possible not to be noticed in case of leaking. Nowadays, “girls cover themselves less, wear short skirts or legging shorts

38 See, for instance <https://www.womenshealth.gov/a-z-topics/douching>

when they're menstruating; in the past, we used more clothes, more cloths³⁹"; "now they use disposable pads, can wear short skirts, if she bends down men can see she is in those days (laughs)⁴⁰."

Additionally, girls explained that the use of cloth is also an opportunity for mothers to test girls' washing skills: "sometimes [mothers] tell us to wash the cloths to see if we're hygienic", "this way, it's possible to know if the girl knows how to properly wash or not, the cloth has to come out clean⁴¹."

On the other hand, **younger adult women seem to be happy with the freedom brought by the disposable pad**: "now with 'modex' we can wear pants, legging shorts, short skirts, no one will find out we are on our periods⁴²"; "you can wear pants without being concerned to stain⁴³."

At last, women who do not use any adequate material, only underwear, were still found even if not representative. Although the survey did not show this practice among girls, some FGDs conducted in rural areas confirmed this was still reality for some of them.

Affordability and sources of money for disposable pads

Cheapest disposable pads are costing approximately 350-400 kwanzas per pack of 12 units. Considering that a woman needs approximately 20 pads per menstrual cycle, that represents an actual cost of 9,600 kwanzas per year (and almost 4% of the annual income based on the minimum wage). **In case girls need money to buy pads, it seems to be consensual that neither girls nor mothers will openly say it.** "If the girl needs money to buy pads, she will ask her mother but won't tell

what [the money] is for⁴⁴"; "there is no courage to say it directly, it's hard to talk about these things with the elders⁴⁵." In Nharea, however, especially elder women seem to be reluctant to give girls money to buy dispos-

able pads: "mothers won't give any money, girls will do their own businesses⁴⁶"; "if they have avocado in their yards, they will sell them to make money⁴⁷."

44 All FGDs with adult women

45 FGDs with girls, Kuito

46 FGD with adult women in Tchapura (Nharea)

47 FGD with adult women in Sapessi (Nharea)



Reusable pads production training held in Kuito, as part of CLTS 6 project (photo: Edson Malogo/PIN)

39 FGD with adult women in Capepula 2 village (Camacupa)

40 FGD with adult women in Samununga 2 village (Kuito)

41 FGD with girls, Kuito

42 FGD with adult women in Samunga 2 (Kuito)

43 FGD with adult women in Bairro 11 de Novembro (Kuito)

3.5.2 Cleaning and drying of menstrual hygiene materials

Table 32 Cloths' washing and drying practices

	Washing			Drying ⁴⁸		
	Soap and water ✓	Only water x	Refuses to answer	In the bedroom x	Outside ✓	In the bathroom x
adult women	100%	0%	0%	73%	30%	4%
Camacupa	100%	0%	0%	54%	43%	3%
Kuito	100%	0%	0%	80%	25%	4%
Nharea	100%	0%	0%	67%	33%	4%
girls	97%	3%	1%	86%	20%	5%
Camacupa	97%	3%	0%	100%	6%	3%
Kuito	95%	4%	1%	79%	28%	7%
Nharea	100%	0%	0%	94%	6%	0%

With some exceptions among interviewed girls, **women and girls said they wash their cloths with water and soap.**

There is a social stigma related to drying intimate clothes outdoors, where it can be visible to other people, especially men. The study indicates bedroom is women's and girls' preferred place to dry their cloths. Girls reported feeling embarrassed in case their fathers or older brothers would see their intimate clothes.

Adolescent boys were unanimous: *"we would feel bad!"* and would tell them to hang it in their bedroom, *"it's disrespectful⁴⁹."* Some adult women mentioned they were drying their cloths in the room, hung in a nail between the bed and the wall hidden from their husbands: *"this is a women's issue only, the husband must not see⁵⁰."* Others mentioned they hang their cloths far from other people's eyes in the field.

Drying clothes in the bedroom, however, usually prevents direct sunlight, which can increase the chances of bacteria growth. Girls in Kuito seemed to be aware of this: *"the most correct way is to hang it on the rope to receive sunlight. If they're kept inside, it can create fungus"*. Yet, social stigma frequently makes women and girls to cover their intimate clothes with a thinner cloth if they dry it outside.

3.5.3 Frequency of changing menstrual hygiene materials

The study indicates women and girls are changing their pads three or more times a day when they are at home (83%). However, when girls are at school the frequency of change significantly drops. Read more in the section below.

Table 33 Frequency of changing menstrual hygiene materials (adult women, n = 208)

	once a day	twice a day	three or more times a day ✓
Camacupa	6%	26%	69%
Kuito	5%	13%	82%
Nharea	2%	11%	87%
Total	5%	14%	81%

3.5.4 MHM practices at school

3.5.4.1 School attendance during menses

Out of the 187 interviewed girls, 20 said they are not going to school and 4 said they're going to school sometimes when they have their periods. The proportion is even higher in the rural areas (Camacupa and Nharea). When asked about the reasons why they were missing school during this period (out of 24), 14 girls mentioned they felt embarrassed, 5 that they were in pain/feeling sick and 5 mentioned both.

However, findings from FGDs suggest numbers might be higher, as shame and embarrassment might have prevented adolescents to openly say it. In fact, across all groups **it was mentioned girls would most likely miss school during the first days of their period, due to heavy menstrual bleeding and pain.**

During FGDs, girls firstly mentioned **period pain** as the reason why they are missing school: *"some girls feel lots of pain; she will not be able to get up [from bed]⁵¹."* As a matter of fact, girls were curious to know the reasons behind period pain. In Kuito, girls also shared that some would go home sooner and not attend the full school shift. In rural areas, women and girls pointed **heavy flow** and consequent pain as the main reasons preventing girls to go to school.

However, if adults apparently understand why girls would skip school, there seems to be an underlying judgment, particularly among the elders, on the girls who do it. In other words, there is a general perception from adults that only girls who do not know or are incapable to manage their periods, miss school: *"some girls don't know how to take care of themselves, don't want go to school because they'll stain their clothes and the classmates will laugh at them⁵²;"* *"she can go to school*

48 More than one option allowed in the survey

49 FGDs with boys, Nharea and Camacupa

50 Woman in Kuito

51 FGD with girls in Kuito

52 FGD with adult women in Samununga 2 (Kuito)

if she can take care of herself⁵³. Boys also seem to reproduce this rationality. According to them girls can go to school if they use pads and are “hygienic”.

Table 34 School attendance during menstruation (n = 187)

	not going	going sometimes	going
Camacupa	7 (20%)	4 (11%)	24 (69%)
Kuito	2 (2%)	0	119 (98%)
Nharea	11 (35%)	0	20 (65%)
Total	20 (11%)	4 (2%)	163 (87%)

3.5.4.2 Use of sanitation facilities at school

The study indicates most girls (75%) are not using school toilets during their periods, especially in Camacupa and Kuito. 63% reported that this is due to **poor hygienic conditions** with 40% claiming a **lack of privacy** (e.g. due to cracks or inability to close the door). Although not representative, the **fear of leaving the bathroom dirty with blood** (due to lack of water) was mentioned by four girls in the survey and also by some girls in the FGDs.

Graph 4 Proportion of girls using the school toilets during their periods (n = 167)

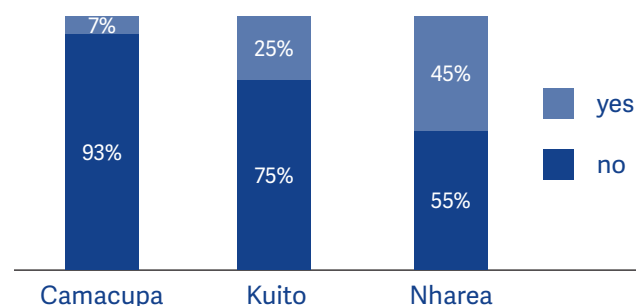


Table 35 Reasons why girls are not using school toilets during their menses (n = 126)

	Camacupa	Kuito	Nharea	Total
toilets are not clean	31%	71%	73%	63%
there's no soap/water	4%	2%	9%	3%
there's no privacy (e.g., cannot lock)	58%	34%	45%	40%
there's no toilet / out of order	12%	9%	9%	10%
other reasons	0%	9%	0%	6%

3.5.4.3 Frequency of changing menstrual hygiene materials at school

When girls are at home, 83% change their pads three or more times a day. When they are at school, the proportion decreases to 13%. In fact, the study found that almost 60% of girls do not change their pads at school, with the proportion being even higher in rural areas (96% in Camacupa, 70% in Nharea).

Table 36 Number of times girls change their pads at school (out of the girls that go to school during menses, n = 167)

	doesn't change	once a day	twice a day	three or more times a day ✓
Camacupa	96%	0%	0%	4%
Kuito	47%	15%	24%	14%
Nharea	70%	0%	10%	20%
Total	58%	11%	18%	13%

Table 37 Number of times girls change their pads at home (n = 187)

	doesn't change	once a day	twice a day	three or more times a day ✓
Camacupa	0%	11%	17%	71%
Kuito	2%	1%	10%	88%
Nharea	0%	0%	19%	81%
Total	1%	3%	13%	83%

3.5.4.4 Disposal of menstrual hygiene material at school

Girls are **disposing their menstrual hygiene materials unsafely**. Out of the girls using disposable pads and still going to school during their periods (n = 55), we found that most of them are keeping used disposable pads in their bags (e.g. wrapped in a plastic bag) until they reach home, or throw them into the latrine. It is also important to remember that girls tend to agree that pads should be disposed of into the latrine (89%), showing that it is not only a matter of waste bins availability, but also a belief that this practice is harmless.

Table 38 Pads disposal at school (out of the girls using disposable pads and going to school, n = 55)

	keep it until home ✓	latrine ✓	waste bins ✓	other
Kuito	23	19	8	2
Nharea	2	1	0	0
Total	25	20	8	2

53 FGD with adult men in Tchapura (Nharea)

3.5.4.5 Challenges faced at school by girls during menses

The concern with staining clothes when they have their period is a challenge that 39% of interviewed girls face at schools (even higher in the rural areas – see table 39), which might explain the feeling of shame, fear and discomfort reported by 33% of them. Whereas 19% mentioned facing no problem, 11% still referred not having enough privacy in the toilet.

“We have to be honest, boys use this topic to bully us”, said one of the girls in Kuito.

Even though it has not been directly identified as a challenge by them, as mentioned in sections above, girls still face a hostile environment to be open about menstruation at schools. Boys tend to tease girls if they are too quiet and it is likely that boys will tease them if they get their clothes stained at school.

Table 39 Problems faced at school by girls during their periods (n = 187)

	Camacupa	Kuito	Nharea	Total
I'm afraid to stain my clothes	57%	32%	45%	39%
I feel ashamed/scared/uncomfortable	54%	26%	35%	33%
I face no problem	0%	25%	19%	19%
I have no privacy in the toilet	3%	16%	0%	11%
There's no water/soap	9%	5%	23%	9%
I'm teased by the boys	0%	3%	0%	2%
Refuses to answer	0%	3%	0%	2%
I do not have enough time to use the toilet	0%	2%	0%	2%
I have no materials to manage my period	0%	2%	0%	2%

3.5.4.6 Recommendations from adolescents to support adequate MHM at schools

Both boys and girls are willing to know more about menstruation through session talks organized at schools (30% and 39%, respectively). Willingness to know more suggest the timing is right to raise awareness and promote discussion on this topic. Girls also suggest more toilets (27%) and availability of water/soap (22%). In addition, boys suggested, particularly in Kuito, that girls should be excused from school (9% in

Kuito) and a few more suggested girls should be sent to the health centre (which might suggest they associate menstruation with sickness). Reminding that **65% of boys think girls should not go to school during their periods, it shows the need to promote a message of inclusion among adolescents, emphasizing that girls continue owning their space at school and, therefore, schools should offer conditions to prevent menses to be a reason for school dropout.**

Table 40 Suggestions on what can be done at school to improve girls' lives when they are on their periods

	girls				boys			
	Camacupa	Kuito	Nharea	Total	Camacupa	Kuito	Nharea	Total
doesn't know	29%	20%	32%	24%	56%	23%	79%	40%
organize session talks / lectures	20%	50%	19%	39%	35%	34%	13%	30%
have water / soap	6%	21%	42%	22%	0%	6%	0%	4%
more toilets	43%	24%	23%	27%	0%	8%	0%	5%
distribute pads	3%	18%	3%	13%	3%	3%	8%	4%
separated female/male toilets	17%	7%	19%	11%	0%	3%	3%	2%
send girls home / allow them to rest at home	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	9%	0%	6%

4 Conclusions and Recommendations

Identified barriers	Recommendations
Girls with knowledge are perceived as naughty.	Emphasize positive outcomes seen by more knowledgeable girls among community members, especially mothers, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o girls being less scared when they reach menarche; o girls being less likely to hide their first periods from their caregivers; o girls being more prepared to manage their periods (e.g. having menstrual hygiene materials in case menarche happens away from home); o girls being able to take informed decisions about their menstrual hygiene.
Menstruation is a taboo and is perceived as something dirty and shameful.	Promote normalization and positive messages around periods , including the elimination of euphemisms and the use of terms like “garbage” to refer to menstruation, by stimulating open session talks and proper approach at schools . This includes, for example, more training and supervision of teachers, preventing them from skipping topic-related modules in their classes or stimulating partnerships with local civil society organizations and groups.
Menstruation is perceived as a “women’s issue”	Promote the message that menstruation rights are human rights . When girls cannot manage their periods with dignity, they face risks of being discriminated at school and work, and of developing infections due to poor menstrual hygiene practices. Additionally, more knowledgeable boys will be more prone to empathize with girls resulting in decreased bullying levels at schools.
Adolescents have low levels of knowledge about menstruation	Guarantee access to adequate and scientific-based knowledge, not only at schools but also at the community , as low levels of knowledge feed taboos and myths. Main topics should include identified myths and harmful practices, and modules on female reproductive system, management of period pain and foods to eat during menstruation.

Identified barriers	Recommendations
Girls face poor sanitary conditions at school and are teased by boys due to menstruation	Encourage schools to promote safe and hygienic spaces in order to prevent girls from compromising their menstrual hygiene practices when at school and from skipping school . This includes female-friendly latrines ⁵⁴ and a bully-free school environment.
Girls are afraid to stain their clothes	Diversify the menstrual hygiene materials locally available, by investing in sanitary pads manufacturing trainings, so that girls can have materials suitable to their needs .
Drying intimate clothes outside faces social stigma	Promote private places for drying menstrual cloths that enable direct sunlight and ensure girls’ privacy .
Church as an influencer	Women and girls reported that some churches organize women’s groups where menstruation is discussed, whilst others promote women’s segregation during menstruation. Considering their strong level of influence, churches can be an ally to promote girls’ awareness of menstruation before they reach menarche and adequate menstrual hygiene practices, especially in rural areas.
Willingness to know more	Willingness to know more amongst both girls and boys suggests the timing is right to raise awareness and promote discussion around the topic. Rural areas should be particularly targeted, where knowledge levels were proven to be significantly lower.
School as a source of information	Boys’ first source of information about menstruation was school. Whereas families tend to keep boys away from this topic, schools can not only increase adolescents’ knowledge, but also promote menstruation as an issue which impacts everyone. Therefore, it is important to understand whether there are any other barriers than the taboo itself preventing teachers and schools to properly approach this topic.

54 See, for example, WaterAid/WSUP/UNICEF (2018), *Female-friendly public and community toilets: a guide for planners and decision makers*. Available at <https://washmatters.wateraid.org/sites/g/files/jkxooof256/files/female-friendly-public-and-community-toilets-a-guide.pdf>

5 Annexes

Annex I – KAP Survey

Question	Options ⁵⁵	Condition/
Consent: Hello! My name is _____ and I'm working on behalf of the NGO PIN Angola. We're doing a study on the knowledge, attitudes and practices round hygiene management, which will help us to improve our program. Your participation is voluntary, which means you only participate if you wish, you can stop the interview at any moment and you can decide not to answer the questions. As well, if you decide to participate, no kind of direct compensation will be given to you. The questionnaire is anonymous, which means at no moment will your name be recorded, neither will it be shared in a way your answers can be recognized. The questionnaire will take approximately ____ minutes. Do you accept to participate?	a) yes b) no – stop interview	
I. Data collector	List	
II. Type of questionnaire	a) schools (boys and girls) b) communities (adults)	
III. Municipality	a) Kuito b) Nharea c) Camacupa	
Village / Neighbourhood	List	If II. Type of questionnaire = communities
School	LIST	If II. Type of questionnaire = schools
Sex	a) male b) female	

Question	Options ⁵⁵	Condition/
I. GENERAL INFO		
1. What is your age?	–	Number Condition ≥ 14 ; ≤ 45
2. What is the highest year of schooling you have completed?		
3. Can you tell me how many people live in your house?	–	Number
4. Do you have children?		
4.1 If yes, how many?		
5. Could you please tell me if your house has a latrine?	a) yes b) no c) doesn't answer	
5.1 If no, where do you go?	a) bush b) neighbour's c) school's/ church's d) other – specify e) doesn't answer	If previous = no
II. INTRODUCTION PREPAREDNESS		
<i>Now I'd like to ask you some private questions about menstruation.</i>		
6. Have you heard about menstruation (other names)?	a) yes b) no – stop interview	
7. Could you please confirm you already had your first menstruation?	a) yes b) no – stop interview	If I. Type of questionnaire = a) school
8. Could you please confirm you still regularly menstruate?	a) yes b) no – stop interview	If I. Type of questionnaire = b) adults If female
9. Do you remember at what age you started your menstruation?	a) yes b) no	

⁵⁵ If there is correct answer, it is indicated in bold font.

Question	Options ⁵⁵	Condition/
10. At what age did you start your menstruation?	–	If previous = yes Condition ≥ 8 ; ≤ 18
11. When you first had your period, did you know what that was?	a) yes b) no	Condition female respondents only
12. What was your reaction to your first period? (Do not read the options)	a) I was shocked b) I was embarrassed c) I was upset/ tensioned d) I was disgusted e) I felt as usual f) I was scared g) I was excited/ happy h) other – specify i) doesn't want to answer	Select several Note: train data collectors to be sure they don't select, for example, option e) and option d) (ie options that contradict each other. Test during pilot and adapt)
12.1 Could you tell me what you were scared? (Do not read the options)	a) afraid I was sick/ going to die b) afraid I was hurt c) that I would have to manage that by myself d) that I could get pregnant e) that I would have to marry f) that I would have to drop school g) that people would tease me h) other – specify i) doesn't want to answer	If previous = f) scared
13. Do you remember who gave you information on menstruation?	a) yes b) no	If question 8 = yes

Question	Options ⁵⁵	Condition/
14. From whom did you get information on menstruation? (Do not read the options)	a) mother b) grandmother b) aunt c) sister/cousin d) school e) another female friend f) other – specify g) doesn't want to answer	Probe more answers Select several If previous = yes
15. Who can you talk to about or ask for advice on menstruation?	a) mother b) aunt c) sister/cousin d) school e) friend f) other – specify g) doesn't want to answer	Probe more answers Select several
II. KNOWLEDGE		
16. Do you know where menstrual blood comes from?	a) yes b) no	
17. Where does menstrual blood come from? (Do not read the options)	a) uterus b) vagina c) bladder d) other – specify e) doesn't want to answer	If previous = yes
18. Do you know what can be used to absorb the blood during menstruation?	a) yes b) no	
18.1 What can be used? (Do not read the options)	a) disposable pads (modex) b) reusable pads (pensos) c) menstrual cup d) tampon e) piece of cloth f) paper g) others – specify	If previous = yes Select several

Question	Options ⁵⁵	Condition/
19. Do you know when menstruation usually appears for the first time in a healthy woman?	a) yes b) no	
19.1 When does menstruation usually start in a healthy woman? (Do not read the options)	a) after the first pregnancy b) when starts to be sexually active c) during adolescence (10-15) d) when girls get married e) other – specify f) refuses to answer	If previous = yes
20. Do you know what it means when a girl starts to have her period?	a) yes b) no	
20.1 What does it mean? (Do not read the options)	a) something has gone wrong with the girl b) the girl is ready to married c) fertility (the girl can get pregnant if she has sex with a men) d) the girl had sex e) other – specify f) refuses to answer	If previous = yes
21. Do you know how long menstruation usually lasts in a healthy woman?	a) yes b) no	
21.1 How long does it last? (Do not read the options)	a) 3-8 days b) two weeks c) other – specify d) doesn't want to answer	
22. Do you know what symptoms may appear during menstruation?	a) yes b) no	

Question	Options ⁵⁵	Condition/
22.1 What symptoms may appear?	a) abdominal cramps b) headache c) fatigue d) mood swings e) bladder pain f) Other – specify g) doesn't want to answer	Select several
23. Do you know how to calculate when your / a woman's next period should come?	a) I don't know b) approximately 28 days after the first day of the last period c) other	
24. Do you know how to calculate when your fertile days are?	a) yes b) no	
24.1 How do you calculate?	a) I don't know b) approximately 14 days before the next period c) other	
25. Do you think there are activities that should be avoided when women are menstruating?	a) yes b) no	
25.1 Which activities should be avoided? (Do not read the options)	a) going to school b) walking barefoot c) having sexual relations d) washing body e) washing hair f) cooking/household chores g) touching plants/going to the field (ir à lavra) h) talking to boys i) other - specify	If previous = yes Select several

Question	Options ⁵⁵	Condition/
26. Do you think there are any foods that should be avoided when women are menstruating?	a) yes b) no	
26.1 Which foods should be avoided?	a) sweets others	
III. ATTITUDES		
<i>Now I am going to read a few sentences and I would like you to tell me if you agree or disagree.</i>	–	note
27. Girls and women should always wash their hands after changing the pad.	a) agree b) disagree c) doesn't know f) refuses to answer	Select one If sex= female
28. The used pad should be disposed into the latrine.	a) agree b) disagree c) doesn't know f) refuses to answer	Select one If sex= female
29. Menstrual blood makes the inside of the vagina dirty and it should be washed inside after menstruating.	a) agree b) disagree c) doesn't know f) refuses to answer	Select one If sex= female
30. Menstruation is something dirty that comes out of the body.	a) agree b) disagree c) doesn't know f) refuses to answer	Select one
31. Girls should not have sexual relations during menstruation.	a) agree b) disagree c) doesn't know f) refuses to answer	Select one
32. Women can never get pregnant if they have sexual relations during menstruation.	a) agree b) disagree c) doesn't know f) refuses to answer	Select one
33. It is enough to change the pad once a day.	a) agree b) disagree c) doesn't know f) refuses to answer	Select one If sex= female

Question	Options ⁵⁵	Condition/
34. Menstruation is a topic that should not be discussed with men.	a) agree b) disagree c) doesn't know f) refuses to answer	Select one
35. Girls should not come to school when they have their periods.	a) agree b) disagree c) doesn't know f) refuses to answer	Select one
36. If a girl comes to school during menstruation and stains her clothes, she is likely to be teased.	a) agree b) disagree c) doesn't know f) refuses to answer	Select one
IV. PRACTICES		
IV. 1 Female respondents only		
37. What do you use to absorb the blood during menstruation?	a) disposable pads (modex) b) reusable pads (pensos) c) menstrual cup d) tampon e) piece of cloth f) paper g) others – specify h) doesn't want to answer	Select several
38. During menstruation, do you attend school as usual?	a) yes, I go as usual b) I skip school sometimes c) I never attend school during menses d) refuses to answer	Select one II. Type of questionnaire = girls' school

Question	Options ⁵⁵	Condition/
38.1 Why do you miss school when menstruating?	a) my family doesn't allow me to go to school b) I don't feel well (pain, exhaustion) c) there's no latrine at school/latrine's not working d) I feel embarrassed e) I don't have menstrual materials f) other – specify g) refuses to answer	
39. How many times a day do you change the absorbent cloth if you're at home?	a) doesn't change b) once a day c) twice a day d) three times or more a day e) doesn't want to answer	Select one
40. How many times a day do you change the absorbent cloth during a school day?	a) doesn't change at school b) once a day c) twice a day d) three times or more a day e) doesn't want to answer	Select one
41. What do you do with the used disposable pads at school?	a) I get rid of in the field/bush b) I put it into the latrine c) I use waste bins d) I leave on latrine's floor e) other – specify f) doesn't want to answer	If question 33 = a) disposable pads II. Type of questionnaire = girls' school

Question	Options ⁵⁵	Condition/
42. How do you wash your reusable cloths/pads?	a) water only b) soap and water c) other d) doesn't know e) doesn't want to answer	If question 37 = b) reusable pads
43. How/where do you dry your reusable cloths/pads	a) in the sun outside b) in the shade outside c) in the sun inside d) in the shade inside e) hidden under other cloths f) hidden elsewhere g) doesn't know h) doesn't want to answer	If question 37 = b) reusable pads Select one
44. How often do you bathe/wash your body during period?	a) don't wash b) once or more a day c) twice during menstruation d) three times during menstruation e) when menstruation finishes f) refuses to answer	Select one
45. Do you use the latrines at school to manage your period?	a) yes b) no	II. Type of questionnaire = girls' school
45.1 Why not?	a) not clean b) no water/soap c) no privacy (e.g.) cannot lock d) out of order e) there's no light f) not enough toilets (long queue) h) others- specify h) refuses to answer	

Question	Options ⁵⁵	Condition/
46. What are the problems you face in school to manage your period? <i>Keep probing</i>	a) there's no water/ soap b) no privacy c) not enough time in the toilet d) afraid to stain my clothes e) teased by boys f) feel ashamed/ scared/ uncomfortable g) I have no materials to manage my period h) others – specify i) refuses to answer	Select several II. Type of questionnaire = girls' school
47. What do you think could be done at school to support girls managing their periods?	a) I don't know b) more toilets c) gender disaggregated toilets d) water/soap e) session talks f) distribute pads g) other - specify	
end		
Thank you for your participation, we arrived to the end of the questionnaire. Do you have any question for us?	–	text

Annex II – FGDs with adult women

Imagine that your friend Florencia, who lives here, found out that her 13-year-old daughter Maria has had her first period. I'm going to ask you some questions and I'd like you to respond taking into consideration what you think the most common situation would be here.

Question	Probing questions
How do you think Florencia found out?	Did her daughter tell her? Or someone else?
What will Florencia do?	Will Florencia talk to her daughter? Will Florencia ask other women in the family to talk to her? (e.g. Grandmother, cousins, aunts)
What do you think they will say to Maria?	Is there anything Florencia will tell Maria she cannot do during her period? She cannot eat during her period? Any advice around pregnancy?
Do you think that Florencia has talked before with her daughter about menstruation?	Did Maria know anything about menstruation before?
Will Florencia tell that Maria had her period to anyone in the family?	(probe what about the father?)
How do you think Maria's life will change?	Is she going to be treated/seen differently by Florencia, her father, brothers, community? (Probe: any rituals, ceremonies? Perceived as being ready to get married?)
Do you think Maria will continue going to school normally? Will she drop school?	
How different do you think it is from when Florencia first had her period?	In terms of: 1. Access to information 2. The people she would/could talk to 3. The materials available to manage their periods
How do you think Florencia can support Maria in managing her period?	(e.g. materials, giving money to buy pads, ensuring privacy)?
Is there anything you would like to know more about this topic?	

Annex III – FGDS with adult men

Imagine that your friend Albino, who lives here, finds out that his 13-year-old daughter Maria has had her first period.

Questions	Probing questions
1. How would Albino find out that Maria had her first period?	Who probably told him?
2. Does this have any meaning for the family?	Does it bring anything different/new to the family? Any changes? Any concerns?
3. And for Maria? Does it bring any change to her life?	For example, marriage? Would she no longer be able to go to school? Would the community look at Maria differently?
4. Who in the family would give Maria advice?	Advice on menstruation, how to manage it, what to do, what not to do, etc.
5. Do you think the father would support his daughter in any way?	For example, any advice? Give more money to buy clothes?
6. Do you have any advice that is given to younger boys about what they can and cannot do when girls start menstruating?	
7. Is there anything you think Albino would like to know?	Any information?

Annex IV – FGDS with girls

Questions	Probing questions
1. Let's suppose that Maria, 13, had her first period. Do you think it was a surprise for her?	Did she know anything about menstruation before? Did she tell anyone? Did she hide it? Why?
2. Did she receive some advice? From whom?	Which kind of advice?
3. Do you think she will continue going to school?	Will she skip school at any time? Why?
4. How does she feel at school?	Does she feel comfortable? Does she have adequate conditions to manage her period? Do boys tease? Why?
5. What could be done at school so she feels better?	
6. In case she has any period related 'emergency' at school (e.g. needs pads) who does she talk to?	
7. What kind of materials does she prefer to use?	Disposable? Cloth? Why? Who gives money for disposable pads?
8. Where do you dry your cloths/underwear? Why?	Any information?
9. Do you have any question for us?	

Annex V – FGDS with boys

Question	Probing questions
1. Did you have someone to talk to about menstruation? Who?	
2. What kind of advice did you receive?	
3. How do you feel about girls coming to school during menstruation?	Do you think they should come? Why?
4. If the girl comes to school and stains her clothes she will likely be teased. Do you agree? Why?	
5. In a discussion around menstruation, someone says that this is a girls' issue, boys should not talk about it. Do you agree? Why?	
6. Imagine that you are at home and happen to see your sister's underwear or cloth hanging on the dry rope or in the bathroom. How would you feel?	
7. Do you think there is any activity girls should not do during menstruation?	Ask for examples.
8. Do you think there is any kind of activity school should organize around menstruation?	Ask for examples. Should the activity target everyone or just girls?
9. Do you have any questions for us?	





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