

## FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION (FGD) SUMMARY

### Review of RCRC Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) actions in Cox's Bazaar August 2018

#### 1. PURPOSE OF FGDs

- To get feedback from women and girls on the use of, appropriateness and satisfaction with hygiene and dignity items distributed by Red Cross/Red Crescent.
- To understand which facilities and mechanisms women and girls use to manage their menstruation – including for bathing, and changing, washing, drying and disposing of menstrual materials.
- To get an insight into the practices, beliefs, restrictions and challenges faced relating to menstruation and menstrual hygiene for Rohingya women and girls in Cox's Bazaar.

The overall objective was to use this information to identify key actions to improve MHM support for women and girls in Cox's Bazaar.

#### 2. DETAILS OF FGDs CONDUCTED

	Camp	Date	Age group	No. of participants
1	Camp 18 Balukhali 2 (Widows block)	Monday 6 <sup>th</sup> August	Approx. 18 to 50 years	12 women
2	Camp 19 (Block C and D) – with women also from Camp 11	Tuesday 7 <sup>th</sup> August	Approx. 18 to 50 years	9 women <sup>1</sup>

The FGD in Camp 19 was held in the Danish RC supported PSS centre, and the FGD in Camp 18 held in a community shelter at the edge of the Widows block. No males were nearby or in sight of the rooms during discussions.

Translation often was from English to Bengali to Rohingya (and back again). The female IFRC staff who led FGD 1 in Camp 18 understood and spoke basic Rohingya but all other staff and volunteers either spoke English and Bengali or Bengali and Rohingya. This made discussions time consuming and it was challenging to go into detail or ask a number of in-depth questions. However, after both FGDs the team visited a number of shelters and spoke to individual women (who were in the FGD) again, to clarify or probe on points from the discussion, to observe the WASH facilities they use and the dignity kits/menstrual hygiene items they received and use, etc. This was invaluable to 'triangulate' data from the FGDs; this information is incorporated into the summary below.

#### 3. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Ref. <sup>2</sup>	Question / Information	Key discussion points
A	Introduction / ice-breaker (What type of pad did you use before in Rakhine?)	In Rakhine, women reported using a mix of different sanitary materials: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Most common was cotton cloth or cut up old clothes (either in underwear or held in place with an elastic band or cotton rope).</li><li>• Women also reported using disposable pads when they had money to buy them (usually held in place with elastic band).</li><li>• Sometimes they would wear underwear over the elastic band pad to feel more secure.</li></ul>

<sup>1</sup> Three older ladies (ages approx. 60 to 70 years old) were also present. They did not contribute to discussions and declined to leave when asked.

<sup>2</sup> Refer to the Focus Group Discussion Guide for full questions and probing questions.

B	Distribution (including items received)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When they first arrived at the camp, they received family hygiene kits with disposable pads.</li> <li>Dignity kits (with 'red shalu' menstrual cloth) were distributed to Camp 18 in early June 2018<sup>3</sup> [approx. 2 months prior to FGD], in Camp 19 in July (?) and Camp 11 from December 2017.</li> <li>Other agencies have also distributed different types of kits and sanitary materials to them at various times (and continue to do so).</li> </ul> <p><i>For the dignity kits specifically:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Items women reported receiving include: maxi, lungi, light/torch, red cloth, sandals, clippers, soap, and toothpaste.</li> <li>Many reported having received 1 or 2 kits per household (not 1 per female).</li> <li>Only the women and girls who went to distribution site that day got kits. As it wasn't possible for all women and girls to go, not everyone got a kit and some have had to share items within their households.</li> <li>Distributions done at the BDRCS distribution site where other food, shelter and NFIs are distributed also.</li> <li>Reported getting information on what they would receive, but not a demonstration on how to use, wash, dry and dispose of menstrual cloth or practical information on how to stay healthy or where to access other services (e.g. SGBV).</li> </ul>
C	Use of and satisfaction with dignity kits (overall)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overall women expressed satisfaction and gratefulness for dignity kits.</li> <li>Many said especially the clothes and torches were useful.</li> <li>The large red bucket is mainly used for water storage or storing household items.</li> <li>Several women reported selling NFIs to be able to buy laundry soap. They receive bathing soap but no laundry soap.</li> </ul>
D	<u>Use of 'red shalu' menstruation cloth</u>  (What do you use to manage your menstruation?)	<p>FGD 1 (Camp 18) – dignity kits distributed in early June (2 months prior):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some women have used the 'red shalu' cotton cloth from dignity kits; others have not used it yet (currently they are using disposable pads that another agency recently distributed to them (local brand, held in place with elastic band not underwear)).</li> </ul> <p>FGD 2 (Camp 19/11) - dignity kits distributed from 7 months ago:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Women have already used up 'red shalu' menstrual cloth. Received one-time distribution of dignity kit and nothing since.</li> <li>Now they use old torn cloths. Reported receiving 6 pieces of cloth per kit; this was used up (e.g. became worn-out) in 2 months.</li> </ul> <p><i>Coping mechanisms when no disposable pads or cloth available:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Women reported using old children's clothes (as a makeshift pad), or</li> <li>Wearing nothing and sitting inside their shelters for the days they bleed [severely restricted mobility, impacting access to services, distributions etc. Contradicting objective of dignity kit.].</li> <li><i>Quote: "I don't move. Somebody might see my blood."</i></li> <li>Several women reported using unused clothes (scarf, dress) from the dignity kits as menstrual cloth (after the 'red cloth' had become worn out and discarded).</li> </ul>
E	<u>Satisfaction with and detailed feedback on 'red shalu' menstruation cloth</u>	<p><u>Quantity:</u> Women reported that the cloth lasts for around 2 to 3 months. Because the cloth is not that absorbent, women reported having to use at least 4 cloths a day; then factoring in washing and drying time.</p>

<sup>3</sup> Distribution records from BDRCS/IFRC: Dignity kits were distributed to Camp 18 on 6<sup>th</sup> & 7<sup>th</sup> June 2018.

		<p>Several women reported sharing the cloth with their sisters or daughters (these were women who only received 1 or 2 kits per household but there were more females of reproductive age).</p> <p><u>Quality and comfort:</u> Both groups reported that fabric is quite 'hard', is not very absorbent; and some reported it being uncomfortable (caused chaffing and rubbing). Preferences: A specifically manufactured pad made out of soft, absorbent fabric<sup>4</sup>, or a softer, 100% cotton cloth (similar to the soft scarf that is included the dignity kits).</p> <p><u>Colour:</u> Both groups said they would prefer a darker colour cloth (black or dark blue). Some women reported that red colour is 'transparent' and that you 'cannot see the blood'.</p>
F	Washing and drying	<p><u>Washing (including wastewater):</u> Most women reported changing and washing their menstrual cloth in the bathing areas or bathroom. Some women [<i>confirmed during observations</i>] have created make-shift bathing areas either in a corner inside their shelters or at the back of their shelters along the outside (using tarpaulin for privacy). [<i>Note: this is causing problems with erosion and drainage of wastewater downhill into other people's shelters/areas.</i>] Bathing areas and latrines are not near to their shelters. They reported having to go far to collect water and to use facilities, which makes them feel shy and scared. Women reported feeling scared about others seeing 'red tinge' in water from washing used cloth. Depends on the type and standard of facilities they use (some observed had covered drainage but others did not). Reported they do not wash cloth at night.</p> <p><u>Drying:</u> Most women reported drying cloth inside their shelters because of the lack of privacy and concerns around men seeing drying cloth in bathing areas (approximately 5 households per bathing area). In their shelters, washed cloth was typically placed behind bamboo on the wall or underneath a mat or something similar, so that family members do not see it). In female bathing areas, some women had hung ropes up to dry cloth. <i>Quote: "I feel shy if my children and husband see the cloth hung up to dry."</i></p> <p>Both groups reported not using WASH facilities at night, because:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Negative spirits or supernatural powers would come after or attack them.</li> <li>Felt unsafe and risk of violence from men and others.</li> </ol>
G	Disposal	<p><u>Cotton cloth – becomes worn out (around 2 months) and is discarded:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Most commonly was that women dig a hole in the ground and bury the old the cloth. Some women also throw worn cloth into the latrine pit. A few women reported throwing in into the drain or on the ground (tied inside a plastic bag).</li> <li>Used menstrual cloth is usually buried near to the latrines, or in other flat land.</li> <li>Burying menstrual waste was also a common practice in Rakhine.</li> <li>Around half [<i>show of hands</i>] reported that they sometimes bury the cloths</li> </ul>

<sup>4</sup> A number of samples of reusable menstrual pads were shown including ones manufactured in Nepal, Vanuatu and Uganda. Women and girls preferred the 'AfriPads' cloth due to its softness and thickness (perceived higher absorbency?) compared to the other samples shown. More detailed feedback on preferences, and why, is needed from women and girls.

		<p>at night so that no one can see them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Several women reported the 'best time' to bury used menstrual cloth was just after sunset, when there is a little bit of light left (not pitch dark) but still dark enough so it's harder for other people to see.</li> </ul> <p><u>Disposable pads:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At the beginning would throw used pads into the latrine pit<sup>5</sup>. Now, they reported throwing disposal pads outside (not into the latrine pits) because they know it 'fills or collapses' the latrines.</li> <li>• Several younger women reported washing used disposable pads with water (to get the blood off), wrapping it in tissue or other paper bag, and throwing it into a big drain near the access road. If the pad is not washed and covered, they believe a bird might come and pick it up and drop it in someone else's yard (or land). This was what they had been told/instructed to do [unclear by whom].</li> </ul> <p><u>Strong taboos and secrecy around throwing items with blood.</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women reported feeling a strong 'embarrassment' and need for privacy, because the cloth has blood on it and this is something that should never be seen by others. So they do not throw the used cloth on the ground or into rubbish pits.</li> <li>• <i>Quote: "We don't throw used pads away [on the ground or rubbish pits]. Children can see or touch the blood."</i></li> <li>• <i>Quote: "A baby comes from this blood. We have to respect this blood and no one can see it."</i></li> </ul> <p>Household waste (e.g. kitchen or other rubbish) they throw away on the ground or in rubbish pits, or burn it (for cooking).</p>
H	What are the main challenges you face in managing your menstruation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No private space for drying.</li> <li>• Do not have laundry soap.</li> <li>• Need more cloth.</li> <li>• Being able to dry cloth in rainy season.</li> </ul>
I	Conclusion	<p>Women expressed that they were very happy someone had talked to them about menstrual hygiene and these issues. They would like more sessions and information.</p>

**Notes from brief discussion with 5 adolescent girls (10 and 11 years old) – Camp 19 (7<sup>th</sup>/08/2018):**

- 1 girl had seen a dignity kit in her household; but none of them had received one.
- All reported not yet having experienced their periods [need to factor in a lot more time; first build trust and discuss something that is not so personal before moving on to menstruation].
- Boys (brothers or neighbours) go with them to protect them at the bathing areas and latrines. If they need to go at night, a family member goes with them (e.g. mother, brother, sister).
- They attend a 'learning centre' 5 days a week (not school). They do paper cutting, play, stitch embroidery etc. No latrine facilities at the learning centre.
- Some were scared about getting their period; but had been to one session with Red Cross Youth volunteers on MHM which helped a lot.
- They would like to continue sessions on MHM for all girls.

<sup>5</sup> Confirmed during discussion with Faecal Sludge Treatment site team – this was a big problem at beginning of operation when latrines would fill up very quickly, and a lot of menstrual pads needed to be strained from the faecal sludge (subsequently burnt in incinerator at FSM site).