BEST PRACTICES OF THE JOINT PROGRAMME ON GENDER, HYGIENE AND SANITATION
WSSCC was founded in 1990, following General Assembly Resolution (A/RES/45/181). Its aim was to complete the work left unfinished at the close of the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade (1981-1990), given the slow rate of progress during that period and the significant number of poor people in urban and rural areas without suitable and sustainable services in water and sanitation. Since its inception, WSSCC has helped intensify national efforts and international cooperation to provide safe and sustainable sanitation and hygiene for all, especially for the most marginalized.

UN Women was created by the General Assembly in July 2010 to support inter-governmental bodies in their formulation of policies, global standards and norms; to help Member States to implement these standards; to provide suitable technical and financial support to countries that request it; to forge effective partnerships with civil society; and lead and coordinate the UN system’s work on gender equality as well as promote accountability, including through regular monitoring of system-wide progress.

The Joint Programme builds on the complementary roles and comparative advantages of WSSCC and UN Women. WSSCC brings expertise on water, sanitation and hygiene seen through an equity lens as well as expertise on equality and non-discrimination in WASH. UN Women provides expertise on gender equality and women’s empowerment, and more specifically on the following thematic areas: political participation, economic empowerment, humanitarian and global norms. In accordance with UN Principles and Rules, a Joint Programme is considered as a relevant approach as it identifies and builds on corresponding strengths and brings together the added value of the partners in addressing complex development challenges. 

The Joint Programme on Gender, Hygiene and Sanitation is designed and implemented by the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) in West and Central Africa. The Programme supports governments in the formulation of evidence based and inclusive policies that address the fulfilment of women’s and girls’ human rights to water and sanitation.

Joint Programme on Gender, Hygiene and Sanitation

- **Year:** 2014 to 2017
- **Countries:** Cameroon, Niger, Senegal
- **Budget:** $1.595 million
- **Duration:** 3 years (initial period)

Building on the Development Goals, the Human Rights Framework and on previous WSSCC and UN Women programmes, the Joint Programme on Gender, Hygiene and Sanitation was designed to support Governments in putting in place measures that will significantly improve women’s and girls’ access to, and enjoyment of, sanitation and hygiene services everywhere. With a budget of 1.595 million USD budget for a period of 3 years, the programme is implemented in three pilot countries: Cameroon, Niger and Senegal, and works with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).
The human right to water and sanitation was adopted by the General Assembly Resolution A/RES/64/292 on 28th July 2010. Through this resolution, the General Assembly explicitly recognized the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as a human right that is essential for the full enjoyment of life and all human rights.

On December 2015, recalling the understanding by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, that the rights to safe drinking water and sanitation are closely related, but have distinct features which warrant their separate treatment in order to address specific challenges in their implementation, and that sanitation too often remains neglected if not addressed as a separate right, while being a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, the General Assembly adopted another Resolution A/RES/70/169 which separates and therefore reinforces the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation.

The resolution calls upon States to promote women’s leadership and their full, effective and equal participation in decision making on water and sanitation management and to ensure that a gender based approach is adopted in relation to water and sanitation programmes, including measures, inter alia, to reduce the time spent by women and girls in collecting household water, in order to address the negative impact of inadequate water and sanitation services on the access of girls to education, and to protect women and girls from being physically threatened or assaulted, including from sexual violence, while collecting household water and when accessing sanitation facilities outside of their home or practicing open defecation.

...THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY EXPLICITLY RECOGNIZED THE RIGHT TO SAFE AND CLEAN DRINKING WATER AND SANITATION AS A HUMAN RIGHT...
FOCUS ON: CAMEROON, NIGER AND SENEGAL

A long-neglected area in development, the sanitation sector has progressively gained visibility thanks to many years of effective advocacy. It is worth noting that at their adoption, the Millennium Development Goals did not mention sanitation and hygiene, and that in 2002, WSSCC had spearheaded a WASH campaign for the inclusion of sanitation among the targets of the MDGs.

Today, the situation has changed. Member States adopted the SDGs in September 2015, with goal 6.2 focusing explicitly on sanitation and hygiene for women and girls. Goal 6.2 states: By 2030, achieve access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and end open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations. This specific goal defines a framework of action for the Joint Programme.

The human right to sanitation entitles everyone, without discrimination, to physical and affordable access, in all spheres of life, to sanitation which is safe, hygienic, secure, socially and culturally acceptable, provides for privacy and ensures dignity. However, WASH interventions have often failed to include all voices, particularly women and girls.

The Joint Programme uses menstrual hygiene management, a specific need of women and girls, as an entry point to address their rights to water and sanitation. According to Catarina de Albuquerque, the former Special Rapporteur on the human right to water and sanitation, menstrual hygiene has been routinely ignored by professionals in the water sector and in the health and education sectors too.

Cameroon did not achieve the sanitation MDG target. The country has registered limited progress with 62% of the population using improved sanitation facilities in urban areas and 27% in rural areas. According to the Human Development Report 2015, the adolescent birth rate was 115.8 per 1000, for women and young girls between the age of 15 and 19 years. Women held 27% of seats in Parliament. Data from UNICEF statistics (2008-2012) show secondary school participation rates at 48.7% for women and 52.9% for men. The labor force participation rate was 63.8% for women aged 15 and older, and 76.8% for men.

Similarly, Niger did not achieve the MDG sanitation target. The country has registered limited progress with 38% of the population using improved sanitation facilities in urban areas and 5% in rural areas.

Senegal has achieved better results with 65% of the population using improved sanitation facilities in urban areas and 34% in rural areas.
and 5% in rural areas. In 2015, the adolescent birth rate was 204.8 per 1000, aged between 15 and 19 years. Women held 13% of seats in Parliament. Data from UNICEF statistics (2008-2012) show secondary school participation rates of 8.4% for women compared with 13.4% for men. The labor force participation rate was 40% for women aged 15 and above, compared with 89.7% for men.

In Senegal, the MDG sanitation target was also not achieved. The country has registered moderate progress with 65% of the population using improved sanitation facilities in urban areas and 34% in rural areas. In 2015, the adolescent birth rate was 94.4 per 1000 among women and young girls aged between 15 and 19 years. Women occupied 42.7% of seats in Parliament. Data from UNICEF statistics (2008-2012) show secondary school participation rates of 32.3% for women and 34.9% for men. The labor force participation rate was 66% for women aged 15 and above and 88% for men.

These data show similarities as well as disparities between the three countries. Firstly, all three countries belong to the group of 47 countries in which under 50% of the population is using improved sanitation facilities in urban areas and 34% in rural areas. In recent years, attention has been drawn to inequalities in access to drinking water and sanitation between rural and urban areas, rich and poor, and other groups and the general population. This is particularly true in Cameroon, Niger and Senegal where inequality in access depends on the region. In addition, disparities persist between rich and poor minorities, among some ethnic groups and in relation to gender.

The situation of women is also particularly critical. Attempts have been made to include gender in WASH programming but not at scale in West and Central African region. The Programme has found that WASH programmes are often designed by men for healthy men. Yet not all segments of the population are men in good health who can move, walk and wash with ease. The section below on the results and achievements of the programme shows how the Joint Programme has contributed to highlighting these differences with the ministries responsible for sanitation in Cameroon, Niger and Senegal.

Women’s participation in decision making bodies is limited in Niger while Cameroon and Senegal have made important progress in the last five years. According to Absa Wade, the Senegal Director of Gender, Equity and Equality (Ministry of Women, Family and Children), the more women in decision making positions, the more the issues that affect their lives will be addressed. This has been noted in the Senegalese Parliament where greater attention has been given to women and children during the last few years. However, it is important to note that women’s access to Parliament is not always translated into positive changes in women’s lives and that some issues are not voiced. For instance, menstrual hygiene management was never addressed in the Parliaments of Cameroon and Senegal despite the large number of women Members of Parliament (MPs). Furthermore, it is worth noting that capacity strengthening of women MPs remains high on the agenda of a number of civil society organizations, UN Women and the OHCHR.

THE JOINT PROGRAMME RECOGNIZES THAT PARLIAMENT IS AN IMPORTANT INSTITUTION FOR THE ACHIEVEMENT OF POLICY CHANGE
The Joint Programme recognizes that Parliament is an important institution for the achievement of policy change and works towards the inclusion of menstrual hygiene management in the political sphere, building on support from Sanitation Ministers in Niger and Senegal as well as the Chair of the Parliament of Senegal.

Women’s participation in the labor force is significant in Cameroon and Senegal and average in Niger. The majority of women are active in the informal sector. They face barriers to access to sanitation and hygiene facilities, including where they work. The suitability of the infrastructure is not addressed in many WASH programmes. The location and design of facilities, as well as women’s and girls’ need for privacy, are often dismissed by programme implementers.

As stated in the General Assembly Resolution A/RES/70/169, women and girls often face particular barriers in accessing water and sanitation and shoulder the main burden of collecting household water in many parts of the world, restricting their time for other activities such as education and leisure, or earning a livelihood. The lack of access to adequate water and sanitation services, including for menstrual hygiene management, especially in schools, contributes to reinforcing widespread stigma associated with menstruation, negatively affecting gender equality and women’s and girls’ enjoyment of human rights, including the right to education.

The Joint Programme places a deliberate focus on women and girls. It fills critical knowledge and information gaps, building on research results and recommendations as well as on training tools and methodologies for government officers, policy makers, communities and professionals from within and beyond the WASH sector. Information is primarily available in French given the significant volume of existing knowledge on WASH in English compared with French. The programme will also develop tools in local languages to ensure sustainable results at the community level.
After two years of implementation, the Joint Programme has contributed to filling knowledge gaps on sanitation and hygiene for women and girls living in West and Central Africa.

Research conducted in Cameroon, Niger and Senegal revealed that:

- Studies in the Kye-Ossi region of Cameroon show that only around 1 in 10 girls in primary school, and 4 in 10 at secondary level, had heard of the menstrual cycle and less than a fifth of girls had a good understanding of it.

- Girls are unprepared for the onset of their first period. Information focuses on fertility, available sanitary materials and myths and taboos about menstruation.

- More than a third of girls surveyed in the Louga region of Senegal said they often miss school during menstruation due to the lack of water, soap, and handwashing facilities, as well as the poor state of the toilets. In Kye Ossi, Cameroon, 90% of toilets are shared by both boys and girls and a fifth of toilets have no doors.

- Only 20% of girls surveyed in Kye Ossi found their school toilet to be clean and easy to use. In Kedougou, Senegal, the 4 schools visited either had no toilets or the toilets did not work.

- Women working in markets in Kedougou miss days of work during menstruation due to the lack of facilities.

- More than a fifth of working women surveyed in areas of Cameroon said they were less active during menstruation. The lack of public facilities to wash or change is their main concern.
Complementary strategies to change policies and practice in favour of women and girls human rights to water and sanitation

Through its partnership with the African Research Institute, IFORD, the Joint Programme aims to further explore the issue of targeting specific groups. The next round of research will focus on refugee women and girls living in camps in Cameroon; women and girl victims of genital mutilation in Senegal; and nomads in Niger.

Research improves understanding of behaviors and practices when managing menstruation in different settings. It also enables the review of facilities, levels of cleanliness and suitability for women and girls. By putting a spotlight on specific and often marginalized groups, the Joint Programme aims to contribute to the design of meaningful and inclusive policies acknowledging that these groups are also important users of public facilities. Recommendations from the research will help improve the design of facilities, taking into consideration women’s and girls’ wishes.
2 CHANGING POLICIES FOR THE REALIZATION OF WOMEN’S AND GIRLS’ HUMAN RIGHTS TO WATER AND SANITATION

Since the end of the Millennium Development Goals, countries have reported back on progress and are in the process of developing new policies and strategies for the implementation of sanitation programmes. Inequality was a key unresolved issue during the MDG period. As West and Central African countries are designing new sanitation policies, there is a unique opportunity to eliminate inequalities and work towards the better inclusion of women’s and girls’ human rights to water and sanitation.

Using menstrual hygiene management as an entry point, the programme has supported the Government of Senegal in mainstreaming women’s and girls’ needs into the new Rural Sanitation Strategy as well as into the Sectoral Policy Letter. The Government of Niger is in the process of reviewing its sectoral strategy. It has requested support from the Joint Programme. This starts with technical workshops for officers from relevant ministries followed by several rounds of review of policies and strategies.

In each country the challenges are different. In addition to the scarcity of resources, both human and financial, countries are affected by climate change (including enhanced water scarcity), significant waves of refugees and displaced populations, as well as poverty and structural gender inequality. These create a disproportional burden on Government systems, and therefore a constant risk of deprioritization of sanitation and hygiene.

As recognized by the mid-term review of WSSCC, the Joint Programme embeds several strategies to promote national ownership and accountability. These strategies have been successful in raising national awareness and policy debate around gender issues in sanitation and hygiene. There is evidence of a shared vision and internal coherence among the Joint Programme partners, suggesting that the programme is supporting national governments to assume ownership and adopt a normative approach to gender work in sanitation and hygiene.

However, in order to translate policies into action, budgets are critical at both the national and local level. Therefore, the Joint Programme collaborates closely with parliamentarians and local authorities in the three countries to advocate and raise budgets for sanitation.

It has also successfully advocated at the national, regional and global level. In Senegal, H.E. Mansour Faye, the Water and Sanitation Minister, declared sanitation for women and girls a priority in the next generation of sanitation programmes. Speaking at the 4th Conference of African Ministers responsible for sanitation AfricaSan, Wassalke Boukhari, the Minister of Water and Sanitation for Niger, said: “Taboos are accompanied by ignorance which results in high risk practices endangering women and girls. We must raise awareness and conduct advocacy to break taboos and replace ignorance with information.” Today, Minister Boukhari is the Minister of Environment and continues to support the Programme’s implementation in Niger.

At the global level, since its inception, the Programme has systematically engaged in the Commission on the Status of Women. Two side events hosted by the Governments of Senegal and Singapore were held in 2016 and 2015 addressing Menstrual Hygiene Management and Gender Equality in WASH. At the 60th CSW side event, Anne Lammlia, Finland’s Ambassador for Global Women’s Issues Gender Equality said: “I hope that the CSW can contribute in a very meaningful way to the implementation of these targets in order to ensure that these rights are realized for women and girls, to ensure that no one is left behind. To honor our commitment to leave no one behind, we have to identify the root causes and barriers behind these inequalities and design specific interventions to address exclusion and marginalization.”

“TABOOS ARE ACCOMPANIED BY IGNORANCE WHICH RESULTS IN HIGH RISK PRACTICES ENDANGERING WOMEN AND GIRLS. WE MUST RAISE AWARENESS AND CONDUCT ADVOCACY TO BREAK TABOOS AND REPLACE IGNORANCE WITH INFORMATION.”

WASSALKE BOUKHARI, THE MINISTER OF WATER AND SANITATION FOR NIGER
One of the approaches of the programme is the training of trainers workshop for government officers who will act as agents of change and play a catalytic role in transforming sanitation, health and education policies to include women’s and girls’ rights.

These professionals participate in training of trainers workshops on menstrual hygiene management delivered by the Joint Programme. The training aims to strengthen their capacities in sanitation and hygiene for women and girls in order for them to transform programmes and conduct awareness raising sessions at both the institutional and the community level. To date, more than 120 professionals from eight countries in West and Central Africa have been trained: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Togo.

In turn, they have helped train more than 3500 people including boys and girls in schools. In addition, policymakers in the WASH sector constitute a specific target of this programme as they have the ability to bring about transformative change. Following policy and research carried out in Senegal and disseminated to decision makers, the last call for proposals for the new generation of sanitation programmes in Senegal included menstrual hygiene management. It is a significant result for the Joint Programme as it lays the foundation for new inclusive policies in the sector and beyond.

Nevertheless, this raises a question about the design of infrastructure. To date, no research has been carried out in West and Central Africa on this topic. Women and girls preferences are not taken into consideration. Through its research and the development of prototypes, the Programme will provide recommendations linked to users’ preferences as outlined during data collection for the three studies from Cameroon, Niger and Senegal. Furthermore, tools and methodologies are developed with governments to ensure the inclusiveness of future WASH programmes.

3 STRENGTHENING NATIONAL AND LOCAL CAPACITY ON MENSTRUAL HYGIENE MANAGEMENT
Over the last few years, the interconnectivity of sanitation with other sectors has become more and more evident. To achieve sanitation and hygiene for all, everywhere, it is critical to collaborate with other sectors, to develop new tools, systems and mechanisms for the delivery of WASH services in schools, markets, work places, public spaces, etc.

While recognizing the progressive realization of these rights, the General Assembly has also urged States to approach the sanitation issue in a much broader context, taking into account the need to pursue integrated approaches. The inter-ministerial platform set up in Senegal under the leadership of the Water and Sanitation Ministry enhances cohesion among the ministries. It also reinforces advocacy efforts for the inclusion of sanitation and hygiene for women and girls everywhere.

The partnership between UN Women and WSSCC is one of a kind. It paves the way for more inter sectoral collaboration in the SDG era. While implementing the Joint Programme, both organizations collaborate closely with the education, health and environment sectors in Cameroon, Niger and Senegal.
CONCLUDING REMARKS

In 2015, WSSCC undertook a mid-term review of its programmes, including the Joint Programme on Gender, Hygiene and Sanitation as a case study.

The evaluation recognizes the Joint Programme as an innovative partnership. Some key results of the review are as follows:

- Research studies produced by the programme have contributed to the evidence base on menstrual hygiene practices in the region and have been instrumental in raising awareness among policy makers on the gender barriers in accessing improved sanitation and hygiene. However, implementation delays, particularly in Niger and Cameroon, suggest that the design was perhaps unrealistic in its assessment of the operating context, risks therein and partner capacity for implementation.

- Experiences from gender programming broadly suggest that tackling deep rooted and systemic gender disparities on multiple dimensions requires a considerable investment of time and resources. Likewise, addressing systemic disparities in sanitation and hygiene is a complex matter particularly in contexts such as Africa where sanitation has yet to be prioritized and resourced. MHM will likely be competing with other national priorities even within sanitation or gender.

- National Government commitment to accountability is usually demonstrated in the extent of national ownership of the gender agenda and the extent to which government departments assume responsibility for programme management and coordination. (...) In order to consolidate efforts to promote national ownership, it is also necessary to formulate coordination mechanisms for systematically engaging national partners who are critical for achieving and sustaining change.

As the Joint Programme begins its 3rd year of implementation, the focus remains on the policies and practices in the three countries. Thanks to efforts by the various stakeholders involved, it has achieved significant results, but a lot remains to be done. The prototype for the design of facilities and the development of tools for sanitation programmes will be an important milestone. This will bring coherence once the policies are adopted and norms are in place to protect the rights of women and girls and eliminate inequalities in WASH.

A lot of learning has also happened between the three countries, reinforced by knowledge platforms set up since 2015. The trainers will be actively involved in the dissemination of research findings expected in early 2017, together with policymakers and decision makers.

Lastly, collaboration with other sectors will be strengthened and sustained to enable better access to and improved quality of education, employment, etc. for women and girls.

A final evaluation of the programme will assess the achievements of the expected outcomes. In the meantime, the Joint Programme will continue supporting Governments until the inclusion of MHM into policies, design, standards and budgets. It will use findings from research to inform policies, working in close collaboration with researchers, policymakers, WASH programme implementers and parliamentarians; and continue supporting inter-sectoral collaboration in Cameroon, Niger and Senegal.

ENDNOTES
1. Definitions and Considerations for Choosing and Initiating Joint Programmes, Guidance Note on Joint Programmes, UNDG, August 2014.
2. General Assembly, Resolution on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation, adopted on 17 December 2015.
4. Eliminating Discrimination and inequalities in access to water and sanitation, UN Water.
5. Human Development Report 2015, Gender Inequality Index.

Cover photo: Refugee camp in Gado, Cameroon. Woman participating in a consultation on MHM and the state of the facilities in the camp.

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