

Scaling Climate Resilience through Menstrual Health and Dignity

Featuring Good Practices from Angola and Comoros

Virtual Side Event

Meeting summary

Overview:

The Side Event focused on the intersection of menstrual health, climate adaptation, and WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) goals. This ARFSD-12 virtual side event gathered government, civil society, and youth representatives from Angola and Comoros. The session served as a platform for sharing strategies to embed menstrual health into National Policy Frameworks.

Core Themes & Discussion Points:

- **Sustainable Production:** Participants explored the balance between immediate humanitarian relief and long-term local manufacturing. A primary focus was the use of eco-friendly materials, such as cotton, to produce reusable pads.
- **Youth & Community Engagement:** Discussions emphasised the role of youth as behavioural change "champions" and the necessity of empowering local communities to lead production efforts.
- **Integrated Strategy:** Panellists stressed the importance of cross-sectoral collaboration and the economic empowerment of women to ensure program longevity. Participants also discussed the need for policy integration and strategic partnerships to ensure sustainability and scale-up of menstrual health programs across the region.

Moderated by Julius Otim, UNFPA Regional Adviser for Intergovernmental Affairs, the session opened with a warm welcome to participants of this ARFSD-12 virtual side event in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The dialogue centred on the intersection of health, gender equality, and climate change, with a specific lens on water and sanitation (WASH) priorities.

The session brought together a diverse panel from Angola and the Comoros, comprising government bodies, civil society, and UN agencies, to share insights on menstrual health initiatives.

Menstrual Health Climate Integration Initiatives:

This segment of the meeting examined the integration of menstrual health into national climate adaptation and humanitarian response strategies. This engagement outlined a multi-country strategic approach to climate resilience, positioning Menstrual Health (MH) as a critical cross-

sectoral nexus between environmental sustainability, public health, and economic empowerment. By transitioning from plastic-based disposables to locally manufactured reusable solutions, regional partners are demonstrating how grassroots climate adaptation can simultaneously drive gender equality and community leadership.

Country Spotlights:

- **Angola:** Maria Helena Quino detailed a strategic shift toward decentralisation, highlighting the expansion of menstrual health programs across five provinces. Supported by NGOs and provincial social action departments, these initiatives focus on restoring dignity to young women while fostering community resilience during climate-driven disasters, such as floods.
- **Comoros:** Haina Keke, co-founder and president of Imara, addressed the critical trade-offs forced by water scarcity. She illustrated how limited resources often compel girls to choose between hydration and hygiene.

Key Advocacy Points:

The discussion transitioned into a call for **Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)** to champion water and sanitation as non-negotiable human rights. Panellists argued that these essentials must be prioritised within global climate discourse to ensure that menstrual hygiene remains a fundamental part of the humanitarian response.

The Menstrual Health-Climate Nexus:

Members argued that menstrual health is not merely a hygiene issue; it is a fundamental component of Climate Resilience. The regional discourse, led by delegates from Comoros, Angola, Ethiopia, and Malawi, emphasized:

- **Environmental Impact:** Reducing plastic waste by promoting reusable menstrual products as sustainable alternatives to conventional non-biodegradable options.
- **Climate-Induced Vulnerability:** Addressing water scarcity and service disruptions in rural areas that disproportionately affect women's reproductive health during climate shocks.
- **Cross-Sectoral Integration:** Positioning MHM at the center of education, environment, and health policies to ensure no girl is sidelined by environmental instability.

Recommendations:

- Use **evidence to co-design gender-responsive WASH interventions** that are led by women and youth, grounded in lived experience, and tailored to the needs of marginalised groups, and to embed gender-responsive WASH within SRHR policies so that national standards guarantee safe, accessible, and dignified water and sanitation services for women, girls, and adolescents in all public institutions, backed by dedicated budgets and accountability mechanisms.

- **Climate-Resilient WASH Infrastructure:** Partnering with governments to ensure that water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) facilities in schools and displacement camps are built to withstand floods and droughts.
- **Early Warning & Pre-positioning:** Including "Dignity Kits" (pads, soap, underwear) in pre-positioned supplies for climate-prone areas so that menstrual needs are met immediately after a disaster hits.
- **National Adaptation Plans (NAPs):** Member states to explicitly include MHM in their NAPs to secure funding and policy attention.
- **Share outcomes** of the upcoming high-level forum in Johannesburg (focusing on reusable sanitary pads and innovations) with relevant stakeholders and inform the production of climate-friendly and environmentally friendly menstrual health products.