

cocoon mini

Limited access to sanitary pads, washing supplies, and safe, private, spaces for menstrual hygiene management (MHM) is a pressing problem for women and girls in humanitarian crises. Together with young women and girls, the Cocoon Mini project sought to design safe spaces for managing menstruation among displaced populations.

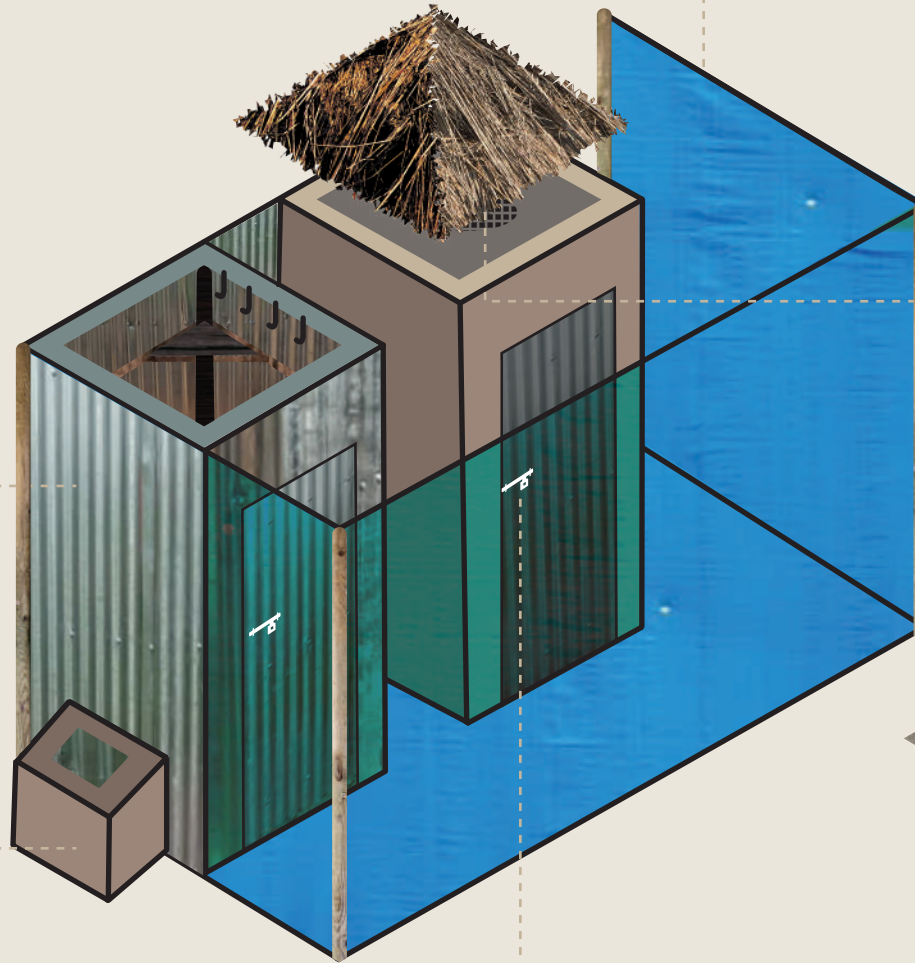
KEY COMPONENTS

BATH SHELTER

The bath shelter features a 1.7 meter iron sheet wall surrounding the unit and a sturdy concrete slab. Within the bath shelter, hooks, shelves, and a platform for bathing/laundrying increased the utility of the space for menstruators by providing places to store pads, kitenge (cloth wraps), clothes, and hygiene products.

DISPOSAL BIN

For waste disposal options to be effective, women and girls need to feel sure that any waste product they throw away is unable to be accessed. Locks were included on the disposal bin to ensure menstruators that their disposable pads would not be tampered with by children and community members. The bin serves as a drying area for used disposable pads so that after a few days, the bin's contents may be taken for burning.



PRIVACY WALL

The wall stands at 1.7 meters high (higher than the local standard) and spans the length of both the bath shelter and latrine for increased user privacy. Plastic tarps were used for their cost effectiveness and availability, however, iron sheets would be superior at withstanding material and elemental wear and tear.

SOLAR LIGHT

Portable solar lights were provisioned to Cocoon Mini supervisors. Permanent fixtures were avoided, as beneficiaries warned of the increased likelihood of theft of solar panels. Lighting enables menstruators to use the Mini site at their convenience beyond daylight hours. For increased safety, it is recommended that solar lighting solutions be able to last longer than 6 hours and have high luminosity.

WATER SOURCE

Water has been the most impactful feature of the Cocoon Mini as its usage extends beyond the needs of menstruators to the community at large to use for domestic tasks. Trenches were dug by local laborers, main water lines were exposed, and pipes were laid and tapped to each Mini site. Increased water access points aided greatly with the site's adoption and popularity.

LOCKS ON DOORS

Stronger door frames and locks were fitted on all doors in the Cocoon Minis. Users of the bath shelter and the latrines reported increased ease in using the facilities knowing they would not be intruded upon.

Project Learnings

These learnings were gathered over a three-month pilot period with a sample of 193 participants in Zone 5 (Ariwa I and Ariwa II) of the Bidi Bidi refugee settlement in Uganda. Qualitative interviews were conducted by Kuja Kuja and YLabs with both male and female community members to assess feasibility and acceptability of the Mini spaces. Additionally, 20 women in the community were interviewed and served as supervisors for the 20 Cocoon Mini spaces.

LEARNINGS ABOUT THE SOLUTION

- The Cocoon Mini provided women and girls with the flexibility to bathe more frequently and at more hours of the day or night at their convenience.
- Increased water access points benefited all community members as it removed the need to search for and fetch water from afar, saving valuable time and energy.
- Women and girls require not only privacy within the physical space, but also discretion and secure disposal of their used and discarded feminine products, which can be used to bring shame and social degradation to women. The Mini allows for easier access to discreet disposal points, which improves sanitation and provides a dedicated option for used products instead of discarding them in the bush or latrine.
- Women and girls typically lack access to private laundering settings in the settlement. The enclosed space of the Cocoon Mini allows women and girls to easily and privately wash and dry underwear and reusable products.
- Women feel that being seen or having their menstruation status known puts them at risk, both physically and psychologically. Door locks, privacy walls, and disposal bins with locks were key features of the Cocoon Minis that addressed women's spatial requirements for safety and privacy. Users reported an increased perception of safety when using the Cocoon Mini.
- Involving local masons and community members in the construction and maintenance of the Minis was important to instill a sense of ownership of the space. This helped shift the narrative of the Mini being a humanitarian actor-run to a community-run space.
- If a structure is to survive in a humanitarian context, it has to remain functional without partner activity. Teaching local masons about the construction process and using familiar materials were key in ensuring and preserving local knowledge.

LEARNINGS ABOUT FUTURE NEEDS

- Future construction within the settlement needs to be built to withstand environmental variables. Construction with and on poor quality soil leads to erosion during heavy rains. There need to be additional design considerations for ensuring the structural integrity of the earth and foundations of the structures.
- Infrastructure solutions need to be paired with social-behavioral interventions aimed at supporting the dignified and safe practice of menstrual health management for girls. This includes sensitisation around MHM and educational forums on sexual/reproductive health for boys and girls in order to prevent stigmatization and misinformation around MHM, STIs, and general hygiene. Women and girls do not want to exclude men and boys from the conversation; they just do not want to be the ones responsible for educating them.
- Those who lack MHM supplies such as buckets, soap, towels, and sanitary products feel excluded from using the Mini and its features. Menstruators feel shame being seen traveling to a Mini with their MHM supplies in tow, which has prevented some from utilizing the space.
- In order to regularly maintain the space, materials for cleaning must be provided to Mini supervisors, who may otherwise become frustrated and discouraged.
- It is important to menstruators in a humanitarian setting that the space is seen as a durable and long-lasting structure. Psychologically, permanence imparts value. Temporary/makeshift structures are prevalent in the settlement and are prone to rapid degradation due to high use volume, mismanagement, and the lack of income to maintain or repair them. The more durable the materials, the longer a space can be used without worry of the site being compromised.

“

When I am going to school I can access any Mini within the community to bathe and change, rather than coming home.

MENSTRUATOR, ARIWA II