

Expanding Access to Female Condoms in Africa

In 2005, only 13.9 million female condoms (FC) were available for distribution, while 6 to 9 billion male condoms were distributed worldwide. In response to this inequity, the UNFPA (the United National Population Fund) launched the Global Female Condom Initiative to scale up female condom programming in at least 23 countries.

In 2007, 25.9 million FC were available worldwide (almost doubling the 2005 supply) and about 11 billion male condoms were distributed. FC now comprise about 0.2% of the world's condom supply.

The goals of the Global Female Condom Initiative are to:

- expand access to FC as a dual protection method to prevent both pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections including HIV.
- Integrate female condom programming as an essential part of national HIV/AIDS policy guidelines and reproductive health (RH) programmes.
- Lay the social and political foundation for female-initiated prevention technologies still in the pipeline, such as microbicides.

UNFPA works collaboratively in its selected partner countries with representatives from government institutions, NGOs, donors and social marketers to create five-year national strategy plans for scaling up FC access, as well as male condom distribution. Each plan describes how the country will move from uncoordinated and targeted condom distribution to a generalized distribution. It moves in a careful, step-wise fashion to avoid either:

- creating public demand that cannot be met because supplies aren't consistently available (resulting in "stock-outs") or
- having unused supplies that sit in warehouses due to lack of the effective distribution networks, provider education and social marketing programs required to get them accepted and used in target communities.

In Nigeria, for example, UNFPA began collaboration in 2005 with the Federal Ministry of Health to implement a UNFPA Female Condom Initiative. Over 30 registered national RH and HIV/AIDS NGOs were trained in FC counselling and distribution and linked to sustainable supplies of stock for their programmes. These NGOs are now distributing 76% of the FCs used in Nigeria. The social marketing organizations currently engaged in distributing most (about 80%) of all male condoms used in Nigeria are planning to launch marketing of FCs as well.

These social marketing organizations (including Population Services International, DKT International, and Marie Stopes International) play an important role across Africa. In 2006-07, UNFPA signed several collaborative Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) that allowed for delivery of UNFPA condoms to governments that distributed them through these organizations.

African countries enrolled in the Condom Initiative in 2006-07: Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, DRC, Cote d'Ivoire, Senegal, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ethiopia and Eritrea.

African countries targeted for enrollment in 2008-09: Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Niger, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Rwanda, Mauritius, Botswana, Madagascar, Swaziland, Comoros, Seychelles, Mauritius, Lesotho, Mozambique, Ghana, Gabon and Congo-Brazzaville.



Expanding HIV prevention options, especially for women
www.global-campaign.org



How can advocates make a difference?

In Zimbabwe, where distribution of female condoms has expanded rapidly in the past year, women's groups collected more than 30,000 signatures from women demanding access to the female condom. As a result, the government initiated importation of the female condom.

In Ghana, the Society of Women against AIDS in Africa (SWAA) in Ghana, launched a programme to improve women's health rights through the introduction of the female condom. They successfully raised awareness of FC in two high incidence areas and tackled obstacles to FC use. While these activities still need to be extended into more districts, regions and communities, a total of 127,500 female condoms have been distributed to date through sales, community meetings and free distribution by SWAA/Ghana and collaborating organizations. Over 10,000 people have been directly reached through female condom training programmes.

What steps can we take now?

Strong advocacy for the female condom, from the community level upwards, is needed to stimulate demand and increase access and availability. You can:

1. **Develop an advocacy campaign** to demand that your government:
 - include female condoms in its commodities purchasing plans.
 - support the effective introduction of female condoms within and across HIV prevention and reproductive health programs.
2. **Advocate for the inclusion of female condoms** in your country's
 - National strategic plan submitted for PEPFAR funding.
 - Country Operational Plan submitted to Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria.
 - Ask that your government request to be included in UNFPA's Female Condom Initiative and Comprehensive Condom Programming Initiative.
3. **Contact the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) mission** in your country and demand that they help you gain access to the female condom (Tanzania is currently receiving female condoms from USAID; Rwanda, Uganda and Kenya are not.).
4. **Join the Prevention Now! Campaign.** One of the goals of Prevention Now! is to link with existing female condom campaigns, such as those in Argentina, Ghana, Zambia and Zimbabwe, in order to support and catalyze efforts to increase FC access. For more information, see www.preventionnow.net.
5. **Contact the Female Health Foundation** Team Leader, Katy Pepper at katypepper@femalehealthfoundation.org. FHF works in partnership with UNFPA and provides technical assistance to governments, INGOs, NGOs and other agencies. They provide assistance, guidance and support with advocacy including linkage to others working in the same field/area; updated information on FC promotion and use; technical information on female condoms and guides on programming with the female condom.
6. **Stay in touch with the Global Campaign for Microbicides'** Eastern Africa coordinator, Pauline Irungu, at pirungu@path.org. The Global Campaign's goal has always been to amplify demand for more and better HIV prevention options, particularly for women. We are now increasing our efforts to mobilize advocacy for access to the female condom, especially in countries hardest hit by the HIV pandemic. For more information, please see the Global Campaign website at www.global-campaign.org.

GCM is a diverse network of advocates and nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) working to expand HIV prevention options and encourage ethical research that involves civil society.

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