

Would people actually use microbicides

Quotes from potential users

“If they can put a man on the moon, why can’t they make something we can use to protect ourselves from HIV?” – peer educator Uganda, 1991ⁱ

All over the world, women continue to ask “why can’t we have something that we can use to protect ourselves from HIV and other STIs?” There is overwhelming evidence that women in a wide range of settings are very interested in microbicides. The driving force behind the Global Campaign for Microbicides is the goal of meeting this urgent need.

How it all started...

“I came to the issue of microbicide research through my work on sexuality and violence against women in the late 1980s. As I listened to women and to the frustrations of HIV prevention workers, it became increasingly clear that condoms simply were not an option for many women. Women told stories of being abandoned, ridiculed or beaten for raising the issue of condom use with their partners...

Given these dilemmas, I formulated a simple question and took it to every AIDS expert I could locate. I asked ‘is it scientifically possible to imagine a vaginal product that would kill or block HIV transmission but would not kill sperm?’ The responses were enticing; I was frequently told that it was attainable but it was upsetting to learn that the idea was not being pursued.” – *Lori Heise, Founder of the Global Campaign for Microbicides*

Here we have sought to capture some of these women’s voices. This is just a small sample of the many conversations that women – including trial participants - have had publicly about the need for microbicides and why they support the idea. We have also included men’s perspectives.

The Campaign has always championed the importance of social and behavioural research into women’s needs, desires and preferences. This research is essential both to ensure that products meet women’s needs and that they are in formulations that women will enjoy using. We have compiled a short overview of the literature on microbicide acceptability for those who wish to know more

What women say about microbicides:

“A woman can ask (to use a microbicide), if she has to protect herself...a woman can tell her husband that ‘Since you don’t use condoms, I will use this (microbicide)’.”

– Asha, 29-year-old married woman, Pune, India ⁱⁱ

“I’m scared for my health. If protection is possible for women, I wouldn’t have to depend on my husband to wear protection. I could make decisions for myself.”

– Virginia N’doke, rural wife and farmer, KwaZulu Natal, South Africa ⁱⁱⁱ

“We need a healthy future, we need a healthy generation, and if we can have another option of protecting ourselves that can only be a good thing.”

– Angelina, Kenya ^{iv}

"I feel strongly that a microbicide is going to assist us women. We'll be able to do things our way now. Now it's going to be women coming with their own options."

- Ntombi Khoza, Soweto, South Africa v

"Us women are being blamed for the spread of AIDS, rather than men. Now we really like the idea of the gel because it is a challenge to men."

- Focus group participant, Tanzania vi

"We have children who are growing up. They should stay alive. We are scared for them."

- Zimbabwean woman vii

"I am a huge fan of microbicides, because it fills me with hope for the future. Microbicides will offer women more choices to help us take charge of our sexual health."

- Georgina, young woman, Ghana viii

"In my country...women cannot wait to get hold of this new development which is microbicides gel. The women feel at last this is their chance to take charge of their lives by directly doing a behavior change that they control and enjoy. I think for us in Africa, this is a meaningful development that can transform women's lives."

- Florence Mbidzo, Zimbabwe ix

"A microbicide for me translates to sexual choices and freedom."

- Toju Cline-Cole, Nigeria x

"To prevent disease, like HIV/AIDS and other sickness, I would use it."

- Teenage girl, Soweto, South Africa xi

"This is the time to forge ahead and not relent in our efforts. We call for more funding for microbicides research and advocacy. We have a collective responsibility to ensure that African women get what they want and deserve."

- Bernice Heloo, Ghana xii

"We are happy to hear about such a thing [the gel] because people have been wracking their brains to find a way to protect themselves against this disease... Therefore it is great how you have progressed with your project, we are happy to hear that such things are being developed."

- Focus group participant, Tanzania xiii

"It's so important that this product comes out as quickly as possible."

- Winnie Ssanyu Sseruma, Uganda xiv

What women in trials say about microbicides:

"On the first day, I was surprised because I did not feel anything. I just felt like I did before [using the gel]."

-Phase 1 trial participant, Zimbabwe xv

“Not only will it protect me from HIV and AIDS, it will also give me a security to be in control of my life and my key to open up doors for me in the future.”

– Joanna Molgmang, Soweto, South Africa xvi

“The study is good because it is helping us women. If it is found that the gel protects [against HIV] then women will have saved themselves.”

- Phase III trial participant, Tanzania xvii

“I like it because it is on trial to see if it can protect against HIV/AIDS...[It] is one way to help us women to protect ourselves against HIV/AIDS infections.”

- Phase 3 trial participant, Tanzania xviii

“I wanted to know my [HIV] status and get STI treatment and pap smears. And I wanted to help other women, because I know women who’ve been affected...I would like to be in another trial.”

- Zanele, Phase III participant, Soshanguve, South Africa xix

“It helped so many people to be on this thing. We got tested, and I know some of the women I came with found out they were HIV here. They are now getting help.”

- Nomusa, Phase 3 participant, Durban, South Africa xx

“If it is revealed that it protects then it will help us because women are powerless. For example, a man may refuse to wear a condom. Therefore if this gel will protect [against HIV] then you will have to use it.”

- Phase III trial participant, Tanzania xxi

“I’d say it brought my husband and I more closer.”

- Phase I participant, South Africa xxii

What men say about microbicides:

“With a problem like AIDS it is important that research is carried out because we in our community are being killed. Therefore the search for medicine or prevention is a very good thing.”

- Focus group participant, Tanzania^{xxiii}.

“In the beginning I had problems with the gel, it was actually not a real problem but it was only in my mind, I did not understand the gel but later when we kept on discussing about it I realized that there is nothing wrong with it, and that it can actually save our lives... everybody should agree with its use. It was very helpful...she used to complain of pain after sex, since we started using the gel those problems were solved.”

- Nel, focus group participant and partner of a Phase III participant, South Africa xxiv

“My wife was motivated to join for her protection. It was an attempt to protect herself from this AIDS that is out there. She was fighting that. That is why she joined. Maybe she will gain something better. She is aware that I am very afraid of it and she is too.”

- Motaung, focus group participant and partner of a Phase 3 participant, South Africa xxv

What women and men tell researchers:

- In a South African study, 80% of men from STI clinics, universities and in the general population said that they wanted female partners to have HIV and STI protection, and 77-87% of them said that they would prefer them to use a microbicide (Ramjee G. et al, 2001).
- 100% of participants in a Phase I trial in South Africa and the US said that they would recommend the gel to other women (such as a friend, sister or daughter) as a way to protect against HIV (Morrow K. et al, 2003).
- Among cohorts in a Phase I study in India, Nigeria and Uganda, 60% said that they found the gel very easy to use and over 80% of women said that if it was available, they would buy it xxvi.
- 83% of women in a safety trial in Malawi, Zimbabwe, India and Thailand reported that they liked how the product felt (Bentley M.E. et al, 2004).
- In focus group discussions in Zimbabwe, the majority of men said that they would let their wives use microbicides within the context of a trial (Van de Wijgert J. et al, 1999).
- In an eleven-country study conducted by the European Union, 68% of Kenyan women and 58% of Brazilian women said they would pay twice the price of a condom for a method they controlled if they had to (Hill R. et al, 2000).
- A study conducted with middle and lower-class women in Brazil showed almost half were willing to pay up to \$5.00 per application for a microbicide if they had to, 15% up to \$3.00, and 30% would pay \$1.00 (Hardy E. et al, 1998).

A brief review of the literature on acceptability

Bentley M.E., Fullem A.M., Tolley E.E. et al (2004), Acceptability of a microbicide among women and their partners in a 4-country Phase I trial. *American Journal of Public Health* 94(7):1159-64.

Darroch J.E. and Frost J.J. (1999), Women's interest in vaginal microbicides, *Family Planning Perspective*, 31(1):16-23.

Hardy E. et al (1998), Women's preferences for vaginal antimicrobial contraceptives IV: Attributes of a formulation that would protect from STD/AIDS. *Contraception* 58:251-55.

Hill R. et al (2000), Vaginal Microbicides for the prevention of HIV/AIDS: assessment of the potential market. *International Journal of Pharmaceutical Medicine* 14:271-278.

Mantell J.E. et al (2005), Microbicide acceptability research: current approaches and future directions, *Social Science and Medicine*, 60, 319-330.

Morrow K.M. et al (2007), Willingness to use microbicides is affected by the importance of product characteristics, use parameters and protective properties, *Journal of AIDS*, Vol. 45, No.1, 93-101.

Morrow K.M. et al (2003), The acceptability of an investigational vaginal microbicide, PRO 2000 Gel, among women in a Phase 1 clinical trial. *Journal of Women's Health (Larchmt)* 12(7): 655-66.

Ramjee G. et al (2007), Perceptions of vaginal microbicides as an HIV prevention method among health care providers in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, *AIDS Research and Therapy*, 4:7.
<http://www.aidsrestherapy.com/content/4/1/7>

Ramjee G., Gouws E., Andrews A. et al (2001), The acceptability of a vaginal microbicide among South African men. *International Family Planning Perspectives* 27(4): 164-70.

Van de Wijgert J., et al (1999), Men's Attitudes Toward Vaginal Microbicides and Microbicide Trials in Zimbabwe. *International Family Planning Perspectives* 25(1): 15-20.

Veldhuijzen N. et al (2006), Preparing for microbicide trials in Rwanda: Focus group discussions with Rwandan women and men, *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 8(5): 395-406.

- ⁱ Workshop on 'Women's Economic and Physical Vulnerabilities: Implications for HIV Prevention' at the USAID HIV Prevention Conference, Washington DC, 1991.
- ⁱⁱ Tolley E., Eng E., Kohli R, et al. Examining the context of microbicide acceptability among married women and men in India. *Cult Health Sex* 8(4): 351-69, 2006.
- ⁱⁱⁱ From 'In Women's Hands', documentary film, GCM.
- ^{iv} BBC TV Inside Out documentary, broadcast 19th September 2007
- ^v From 'In Women's Hands', documentary film, GCM.
- ^{vi} Focus group participant FGD-MZA-COM-W-08-021106. From social research as part of MDP Phase III Clinical Trial of a Vaginal Microbicide Gel conducted by S. Lees, Social Science Coordinator, 15th February 2007.
- ^{vii} See Bentley M.E. et al, 2004.
- ^{viii} Presentation at a student event on microbicides, King's College London, 10th May 2007.
- ^{ix} AMAG listserv posting, 29th June 2006.
- ^x Personal Communication.
- ^{xi} From 'In Women's Hands', documentary film, GCM.
- ^{xii} AMAG listserv posting 1st February 2007.
- ^{xiii} Focus group participant FGD-MZA-COM-W-08-021106. From social research as part of MDP Phase III Clinical Trial of a Vaginal Microbicide Gel. conducted by S. Lees, Social Science Coordinator, 15th February 2007.
- ^{xiv} BBC TV Inside Out documentary, broadcast 19th September 2007
- ^{xv} See Bentley M.E. et al, 2004.
- ^{xvi} From 'In Women's Hands', documentary film, GCM.
- ^{xvii} Trial participant TC1002F-NW-69013Z-24. From social research as part of MDP Phase III Clinical Trial of a Vaginal Microbicide Gel conducted by S. Lees, Social Science Coordinator, 15th February 2007.
- ^{xviii} Trial participant TB1028B-NW-71068D-4. Ibid.
- ^{xix} 'Microbicide trials – what's in it for participants?', IRIN Plus News: <http://www.plusnews.org> accessed on 06/07/2007
- ^{xx} 'When microbicide trials go wrong – Part 2', IRIN Plus News: <http://www.plusnews.org> accessed on 16/10/2007
- ^{xxi} Trial participant TC1002F-NW-69013Z-24. Ibid.
- ^{xxii} See Morrow K.M. et al, 2003.
- ^{xxiii} Focus group participant FGD-MZA-COM-M-02-191006. From social research as part of MDP Phase III Trial of a Vaginal Microbicide Gel conducted by S. Lees, Social Science Coordinator, 15th February 2007.
- ^{xxiv} From qualitative evaluation of the informed consent process in the Carraguard Phase 3 trial, S. Abbott & B. Friedland, PIs.
- ^{xxv} From qualitative evaluation of the informed consent process in the Carraguard Phase 3 trial, S. Abbott & B. Friedland, PIs.
- ^{xxvi} Malonza I.M. et al (2005), Expanded Phase 1 safety and acceptability study of 6% cellulose sulfate gel. *AIDS* 2005, 19: 2157-2163.