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, 1991

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

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

“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

“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

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.
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“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

“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

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

- Zimbabwean woman

“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

“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

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

- Toju Cline-Cole, Nigeria

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

- Teenage girl, Soweto, South Africa

“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

“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

“It’s so important that this product comes out as quickly as possible.”

- Winnie Ssanyu Sseruma, Uganda

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
“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 Moligmang, 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

“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 xxii

“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 xxiii

“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 xxiv
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


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


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For info contact: info@global-campaign.org. Updates available at: www.global-campaign.org/download.htm.


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.


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


xvi From ‘In Women’s Hands’, documentary film, GCM.

xvii Trial participant TC1002F-NW-69013Z-24. From 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.


xxi Trial participant TC1002F-NW-69013Z-24. Ibid.


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.