



Global Campaign News – Issue #73

Updates from India, and new resources from the Lancet

20 November 2006

Welcome to the *Global Campaign News*! The *Global Campaign News* is a forum for international exchange on microbicide activities and information with an aim to build a more informed and integrated movement for microbicide development and other prevention options against HIV and STIs. This and previous issues of *GC News* are available online at <http://www.global-campaign.org/gcarchives.htm>

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Advocacy in Action

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For the past five years the Global Campaign for Microbicides has been supporting the work of a growing civil society-driven advocacy initiative in India. Representatives of NGOs like Dr. Radium Bhattacharya, (President, Indian Network of NGOs and the Director of the Gujarat AIDS Prevention Project), and individuals such as health advocate and journalist Bobby Ramakant, have worked closely with Global Campaigner Megan Gottemoeller and PATH in India to raise awareness around the need for female-initiated HIV prevention methods and bring together community representatives, policy makers, researchers and journalists from all over the country. These champions recognized that while male condom use may be increasing among men with casual sex partners, condom-use in primary partnerships in India is extremely low. In one study, conducted by the National AIDS Research Institute of India, 90% of the positive female participants had sex with only one person – their husbands¹. Microbicides and female condoms could clearly play a role in filling the prevention gap.

The efforts of this advocacy initiative resulted with the First Community Stakeholder's Meeting on Prevention Options for Women in India in the fall of 2002. With dire predictions about the future of the AIDS epidemic in India in the forefront, participants of the meeting articulated the urgent need for HIV/STI prevention methods which account for the realities of women in India. Community participants recognized that India has enormous research and manufacturing capacity and that civil society has a critical role to play in demonstrating the need for both the government and the private sector to invest in the development of an affordable female condom and microbicides – not just for India, but for the world. And as the Indian government proceeded to coordinate microbicides clinical trials with foreign institutes in their backyards, community representatives would also need to actively engage with policy makers and researchers to ensure that rights, ethics and community empowerment would be an essential element for sound research and effective introduction. By the end of the flagship meeting it was clear that community leaders had a mandate to organize themselves and take on a focused advocacy strategy.

Developing partnerships with national and regional governments, researchers, providers and donors was a crucial next step for civil society leaders. In fall 2003 GCM and PATH linked up with the prestigious Indian Council of Medical Research to convene a meeting of over 80 high-level politicians, public health experts and community leaders to forge these partnerships. By the end of the meeting the group committed to working more with provincial

¹ Spread of HIV infection in married monogamous women in India. R. R. Gangakhedkar, et al
JAMA. 278(23):2090-2;1997.

groups through the formation of a multi-sectoral taskforce on microbicides that would focus on policy and research—this later became the National Working Group on Microbicides (NWG).

In the three years since these pivotal discussions, the landscape of HIV/AIDS and the research around HIV prevention has changed dramatically. The National AIDS Control Organization of India now estimates 5.2 million infections in the nation, with females comprising approximately 40% of this group.²

India now houses four microbicides clinical trial sites, although results from these trials are not expected for three to five years. Efforts to develop other female-initiated prevention methods are also underway. With guidance from the Female Health Company, Hindustan Latex Ltd. has taken on the task of producing a more-affordable female condom and is looking at ways to pilot increased access and scale-up of the product.

2006 marked the kick-off of the National Working Group on Microbicides – the multi-sectoral taskforce that was envisaged by community leaders, policy makers and researchers in 2003. Under the guidance of Jeffrey O'Malley, the current Country Director of PATH office in India, and Dr. Amitrajit Saha, the first of a series of regular consultations on how to accelerate the introduction of new HIV prevention technologies through policy was held. Participants at the meeting recommended that the group examine the potential for private sector involvement, intellectual property rights, regulatory barriers and the role of civil society, while recognizing the need to balance expectations with raising awareness and stimulating demand for a product for which we do not yet have a proof of concept. The group also stressed the need to convey to policy makers, the impact of a partially-effective microbicides on the HIV epidemic and the need for rectal microbicides. A follow-up meeting on lessons from the introduction of past technologies in India was held later in the year in partnership with IAVI.

As the NWG convenes dialogues with national policy makers, the Global Campaign will facilitate the expansion of a microbicide advocacy movement that would focus on the concerns of the grassroots in India around issues such as product development, the involvement of communities in trials, research ethics and introduction. GCM will be taking steps to work with civil society groups to establish how to best structure a self-sustained campaign that will meet regularly to prioritize concrete activities. This campaign would work in partnership with the NWG and other existing networks to connect the voice of the grassroots to policy influencers. In the months to come GCM will support the grassroots, civil society and the NWG by adapting and developing advocacy tools specific to India.

For more information go to <http://www.global-campaign.org/india.htm> or contact Paramita Kundu (paramita@pathindia.org).

New Resources

Lancet series on global trends in sexual behavior

<http://www.thelancet.com/collections/series/srh>

On 1 November, the Lancet published an excellent series of articles on-line on sexual and reproductive health that provide context for the microbicides field. The series highlights the global burden of ill health in a variety of key areas: every year, 340 million new patients acquire gonorrhoea, syphilis, chlamydia, or trichomonas, more than 120 million couples have an unmet need for contraception, 80 million women have unintended pregnancies, and an estimated 19 million women undergo unsafe abortions; 70,000 of them die as a result. As well as the series articles, the collection includes comments and original research.

Also on this website, you can listen to a press conference that took place on 30 October in London during which *Lancet* Editor Richard Horton introduced the series and some of the authors present key findings.

Series

Sexual and reproductive health—a matter of life and death

² National Consultation on HIV Estimates/Surveillance, India 2004. Policy and program implications. HIV estimates – 2004. http://nacoonline.org/facts_hivestimates04.htm (last accessed October 26, 2006)

The increasing influence of conservative political, religious, and cultural forces around the world threatens to undermine progress in sexual and reproductive health, according to the first paper in the Series. The greatest challenge to sexual-health promotion in almost all countries comes from opposition from conservative forces to harm-reduction strategies, such as supplying contraception to sexually active young people and providing safe, legal abortion services.

Sexual behaviour in context

The second paper in the Series presents the results of the first ever global survey of sexual behaviour. There are a number of findings that go against common beliefs, including the fact there has been no universal trend towards earlier sexual intercourse.

Family planning: the unfinished agenda

Europe, rather than the US, should take the lead in revitalising global commitment to family planning, according to the third paper. The authors argue that family planning should have a higher priority than investment in HIV prevention and treatment in most poor countries, because population growth poses a greater threat to development.

Unsafe abortion: the preventable pandemic

When abortion is made legal, safe and easily accessible, women's health rapidly improves, according to the fourth paper in the Series. An estimated 19 million unsafe abortions take place every year. Women should have access to safe, legal abortion services as a fundamental right, irrespective of where they live, state the authors.

Global control of sexually transmitted infections

While HIV prevention must remain a major public health priority globally, the control of other sexually transmitted infections must not be neglected, state the authors of the fifth paper in the Series.

Sexual and reproductive health for all—a call for action

Sexual and reproductive health for all is an achievable goal - if cost-effective interventions are properly scaled up; political commitment is revitalised; and financial resources are mobilised, rationally allocated, and more effectively used. The final paper in the Series represents a call to action and focuses on what needs to be done to achieve universal access to sexual and reproductive health services by 2015.

Comments

Reviving reproductive health

Horton R - 04 November 2006 (Vol. 368, Issue 9547, page 1549)

Putting sexual and reproductive health on the agenda

Glazier A, Gülmezoglu AM - 04 November 2006 (Vol. 368, Issue 9547, pages 1550-1551)

Cairo after 12 years: successes, setbacks, and challenges

Langer A - 04 November 2006 (Vol. 368, Issue 9547, pages 1552-1554)

Sexual and reproductive health: rights and responsibilities

Shaw D - (DOI: 10.1016/S0140-6736(06)69487-7)

Sex, politics, and money

Thomas G - (DOI: 10.1016/S0140-6736(06)69488-9)

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