

# FEMALE CONDOMS WORK!

## SUCCESSFUL STI/HIV AND PREGNANCY PREVENTION STORIES

### The example of South Africa

**People know about female condoms. People are using them and keep on using them, and most of all, they are enjoying them.**

South Africa is an example of a country in real need of STI and pregnancy protection, especially for women. It has a generalized HIV epidemic with an HIV prevalence of 17.5%, the fourth highest rate in the world. Most of those infected with HIV are women (54%) and the HIV prevalence amongst pregnant women reaches 37.4% in some provinces<sup>1</sup>. Unintended pregnancy rates are high too. A recent study cited 59.7% of women having had an unintended pregnancy, despite contraceptive prevalence being about 65%<sup>2</sup>.

The female condom was first introduced into South Africa in 1998. This was a limited introduction with some supplies going to only 19 sites around the country. But since that first introduction knowledge about, support and demand for supplies has increased dramatically. Between 1998 and 2010 more than 28 million first generation FC1 female condoms were distributed in South Africa and since 2010 more than 15 million FC2s. Today, all Primary Health Care facilities are receiving FC2 supplies for distribution, together with hundreds of NGOs and other informal distribution sites.

Since 2003 a **successful Public – Private partnership between the Government of South Africa and the Female Health Company** through its technical assistance programme (SUPPORT) has been providing a wide variety of support to the National Department of Health, NGOs, business and local communities to ensure people know about female condoms and know where to get them and how to use them.

### People know about female condoms...

*“It isn’t that women and most men don’t know about female condoms. They do. And now we have to make sure they get them, because when we don’t they really complain and it gets really difficult to say we just don’t have them” (February 2013, Provincial STI coordinator Department of Health).*

From 2004, SUPPORT has been providing on-going training assistance to provincial Departments of Health throughout the country. This has ensured

that all Provinces have been able to train their service providers in Primary Health Clinics, family planning clinics and hospitals in the promotion and use of condoms – both male and female. The SUPPORT training aims at integration of the female condom into the services for STI/HIV prevention and family planning. **The emphasis is on a generic training where attention is given to a wide range of sexual health issues such as contraception, gender relations, counselling, negotiation skills, and male and female condoms.** Over the past five years thousands of health professionals have participated in SUPPORT’s integrated training and have been enabled to further counsel their clients and to support them in making choices about prevention methods amongst which is the female condom.

**SUPPORT’s training assistance has covered all sectors** not just government facilities. Hundreds of NGOs and other non-governmental agencies have also been provided with training and support with transformational results.



*In February 2013 a group of 28 South African taxi drivers are gathered together in the Taxi Association Office in Pine Town, KwaZulu Natal. They are here for an information session organized by SUPPORT about STI prevention and male and female condom use. The men feel relaxed and ready to listen. There is fun and laughter and many questions arise when female condoms are mentioned. Most of them have never heard of it before let alone seen or used them. How can we talk about them with our partners? Will she put it in? Won’t they be shy? Do women like them? Do men like them? Will it hurt? Is it safe? Then one taxi driver suddenly reveals that he regularly uses female condoms. Then another says the same and then both of them start to explain that the female condom can be exciting and safe and most of all pleasurable! The result: all their colleagues want to try female condoms.*

## People are using female condoms and keep on using them...

The 750-fold increase in female condom supplies to South Africa is a demonstration by itself that female condoms are becoming popular amongst men and women in the country. Primary Health Clinics and NGOs in all provinces cite the constant, ever increasing demand they experience from people choosing female condoms as their preferred choice of protection.



*"Every day people come and ask for supplies, they say. We have to juggle around supplies from different sites to ensure that we do have supplies available. But it is a constant battle"* (November 2012, District HIV Coordinator).

With the constant demand for female condoms throughout the country, there has been increasing pressure on Provincial Departments of Health to provide ever-increasing supplies. This in turn puts pressure on the capacity of provinces to manage supplies, which have often been limited by National Department of Health constraints. **SUPPORT has provided technical assistance to Provincial Departments of Health on supply management, logistics, storage and data capture of supplies.** Crucial to this was the integration of female condoms into the Logistics Management System, which is able to inform the National Department on supply status and need in provinces.

And systematically, the **National Department of Health has responded:**

*On 9th August 2006, National Women's Day, at a SUPPORT assisted launch of female condom education, information and communication materials, the National Department of Health (NDOH) announced that the distribution of the female condoms should be increased to facilities and include the non formal sites through NGOs. Today, this has led to provinces having guidelines to all facilities to ensure that clients receive adequate supplies (December 2012, Provincial HIV Directorate).*

## People are enjoying female condoms...

*"After having struggled with male condoms, I'm very happy my girlfriend and I switched to FC2 female condoms. It feels like there's no condom at all. Sex is great again"* (September 2012, Jonathan Phosa, Johannesburg).



**The key to encouraging female condom use has been ensuring people enjoy using them.**

Moving the reputation of the condom from a noisy, plastic bag contraption to a sensual, loving and enjoyable experience has been the turning point in female condom history in South Africa. In 2010, the Female Health Company introduced FC2 female condoms. Made of a soft, silky-feeling synthetic nitrile that warms quickly to body temperature, these female condoms have become very popular amongst men and women across the country.

SUPPORT has provided assistance to all provinces in the development of linguistically and culturally appropriate materials about male and female condoms. **SUPPORT's own flip charts on insertion, information leaflets, DVD and Sexy tips for Negotiation have been key in ensuring people have accurate and sensitive knowledge about female condoms and how to use them and enjoy them.**

### The success of the female condom in South Africa is based on:

- A collaborative public-private sector partnership between FHC and the National Department of Health.
- A wide-ranging training programme for men and women that has encompassed all aspects of reproductive health across all sectors – government to NGOs and business etc.
- A focus on capacity building by government departments through support in logistics, supply management, monitoring and evaluation and ensuring that demand for supplies is transmitted to policy makers.
- A responsive National Government which supports increased knowledge of prevention methodologies and use.
- A spreading of knowledge to both men and women using linguistically and culturally sensitive media that encourages pleasure with protection.

## The example of Kenya

### Using collaboration for getting people to know about female condoms and to have a choice

It is estimated that around 1.6 million people or 6.2% of Kenya's 38.6 million population are living with HIV, the majority of whom are aged between 15-49 years<sup>3</sup>. Also in 2010, 44% of pregnancies occurring in Kenya were unplanned<sup>4</sup>. Knowledge of STI and pregnancy prevention methods is poor which is partly thought to do with the whole myriad of agencies working independently in the country promoting different messages and guidelines (ibid).

Female condoms were introduced into Kenya in 1998 and between then and 2005 only 2.5 million female condoms were distributed in the country. Yet in 2012, all this changed. 1.7 million female condoms were ordered for the year and the Muthaa Community Development Foundation, supported in a partnership with the Female Health Company, started a widespread and specifically tailored education campaign about female condoms.



## Getting people to know about female condoms



*On the 12th of September 2012 a special vehicle drives through Nairobi. It is the Global Female Condom Day Truck. Peer-educators from the Muthaa Community Development Foundation jump off the truck, show female condoms to an excited crowd of men and women and give information on the use. "We are excited today to have Muthaa Foundation to come promote the correct use and distribute the female condom to our community. We should use it to curb the spread of STIs and HIV in our region" (Esther Saruni, Coordinator Kajiado County, National AIDS Control Council).*

The Muthaa Community Development Foundation, working with SUPPORT, started a **programme of education aimed at addressing all sectors of Kenyan society** from government, to education institutions to NGOs, local communities and at-risk populations. Muthaa Foundation's focus is on getting the right message across in the best way. Their **approach is targeted at understanding and adapting the message to address the needs of specific groups** – that is, understanding the main reasons why people look for prevention methods. Is it because they want to prevent transmissions of STIs, or because they want to avoid pregnancy, or both? They have an understanding of the barriers that people might face in bringing up condom use, an openness to discuss these barriers and a willingness to find solutions on how they can be overcome or diminished.

### National Government Departments

Muthaa Foundation started its campaign at the heart of influence in the country by assisting Kenya National AIDS & STI Control Programme (NAS COP) to begin an education process that will transform their services. In a workshop facilitated by Muthaa Foundation, NAS COP started integrating the female condom into the country's health services by adapting a version of SUPPORT's integrated condom training manual to become the basis for staff training in 2013 in line with the new Kenyan Condom Strategy.



Targeting another government department – the Kenyan Revenue Authority – Muthaa Foundation has trained employees for the government's tax department about female condoms.

*"I am married but when travelling I sometimes have another woman. I experienced the risks of having unprotected sex myself and since then I use condoms and it is good to also have female condoms now, because they give another sensation. I also started using them with my wife. As my wife is in her menopause we are both very happy about FC2 being lubricated"* February 2013, tax officer John Kamau who started to use female condoms as soon as they were available).

### Educational institutions

In 2012, together with Population Services International (PSI) Kenya the Muthaa Foundation has facilitated sessions for over 4,000 university students in the Rift Valley, Central and Coast provinces. Furthermore students were trained as peer-educators to provide support and information on condom use in their universities.

*"It is always hard to talk about condom use. Our boyfriends don't like to use them. Having more information on the female condom we feel empowered to negotiate about condom use. We can tell now that it will excite them to use it and that it will be fun"* (November 2012, participating students, Wanjiku, Akoth and Mueni).



### Sex workers

To make the information about FC2 more accessible to the Swahili speaking population of Kenya, the Muthaa Foundation has developed education materials, including an animated video, in the Swahili language which is made available to organisations such as HOPE Worldwide that reach out to at-risk populations like sex-workers. Muthaa Foundation has trained a group of peer educating sex workers. Together with Service Health Providers the peer educators will educate sex workers in Nairobi and Rift Valley about female condom use. Having another prevention option available besides the male condom gives sex workers the courage to negotiate safe sex with their clients.

*"Most of the time they don't dare to ask the client to protect himself. But they do dare to protect themselves with a female condom"* (December 2012, peer-educator Zawadi).

The key to Kenya's success in achieving widespread knowledge of female condoms:

- Including all sectors in the female condom education campaign from government, to education institutions to NGOs, local communities and at-risk populations.
- Successful collaboration between bodies such as the Muthaa Community Development Foundation and the Female Health Company. Muthaa Foundation has created partnerships with PSI, HOPE and many other local organisations.
- Developing specifically targeted education and information materials that answer the questions and provide the motivation for the particular group being worked with.

### About the female condom

*This FC2 Female Condom, produced by The Female Health Company, is a strong and flexible nitrile sheath, 17 centimetres long, with a flexible ring at each end. When the closed end is inserted into the vagina, the open end remains outside and covers the vulva. The protection provided by the female condom against pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, is approximately equal to that provided by the male condom. The female condom is currently the only HIV prevention method that women can initiate and control. The FC2 can be used, unlike the male condom, with both oil and water based lubricants without the risk of breakage.*

According to UNFPA estimates only nine donor-provided male condoms were available for every man aged 15 – 49 years in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2011 and one female condom for every 10 women aged 15 – 49 years in the region (UNAIDS report 2011).

### About SUPPORT

SUPPORT is a team of health professionals that is specialised in FC2 female condom programming and training. SUPPORT assists organisations and professionals who want to increase the use of FC2 female condoms.

SUPPORT is a division of The Female Health Company.

- [www.supportworldwide.org](http://www.supportworldwide.org)
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Support



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