

## INTRODUCTION

The female condom is a woman-initiated family planning method that also prevents women from HIV and other STIs. It has no side effects. Studies report a high satisfaction rate by both women and men who have used the female condom. The potential for increased use of the female condom and its positive impact on public health is therefore substantial. Despite the fact that the female condom has been in production for 15 years already, it is not widely available for an affordable price yet.

The female condom can play a major role in:

- Fighting the increase of infections of HIV/AIDS amongst women and girls
- Reducing the high number of unwanted pregnancies
- Avoiding the high costs and limited availability of AIDS treatments

## PELVIC MODELS

Another area of work for UAFC is the female condom demonstration model. Participants of the ICASA conference in Dakar and many others have stressed the importance of demonstration models for the promotion of female condoms. Pilot countries of UAFC will receive 20.000 dark skin models for IEC and promotional purposes.



Image:  
light skin demonstration model

## FEMALE CONDOMS: A LIFE SAVING ALTERNATIVE

Female condom use could vastly reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV. So what's stopping women from using them? Lucie van Mens, of the Universal Access to Female Condom Joint Programme and Ilze Smit, of the World Population Foundation, consider the issues.

[Read the article](#) in Health Exchange

## UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO THE FEMALE CONDOM JOINT PROGRAMME

To gain universal access to the female condom an impressive programme has been set up in not even two years time. Four partners joined hands, two country programmes have started, a large number of advocacy activities were undertaken, and R&D activities took place to reduce the price and promote choice. Starting from scratch, the programme has been able to raise a fair amount of funding. This clearly indicates the appealing rationale behind the programme: there is only one method available now which women can use, that prevents them from unwanted pregnancy and HIV as well as other STIs: the female condom!

The programme undertakes a mixture of activities to ensure that women can exercise their sexual and reproductive rights. It combines three components: research and development; large-scale programming at the national level in three selected countries; and international advocacy, linking and learning. The Joint Programme wishes to prove that the female condom can make an impact when introduced on a large scale.

To achieve access to the female condom for all, the UAFC Joint Programme is initiated by four organizations:

- [Oxfam Novib](#)
- [World Population Foundation \(WPF\)](#)
- [I+ Solutions](#)
- [the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs \(DGIS\)](#)

The donors of the UAFC Joint Programme are:

- [The Hewlett Foundation](#)
- [DANIDA](#)
- [the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#)
- [NORAD](#)
- [SIDA](#)

For the large-scale female condom programme in Nigeria UAFC Joint Programme works with Society for Family Health (SFH) and in Cameroun Association Camerounaise pour le Marketing Social (ACMS).

## LAUNCH OF THE INTERNATIONAL PLATFORM ON FEMALE CONDOMS

The feminisation of the HIV pandemic, the large unmet need for contraception, and the slow and insufficient progress towards meeting Millennium Development Goals 5 and 6 on maternal health and halting and reversing the spread of HIV show the urgent need for access to female condoms. The Universal Access to Female Condoms (UAFC) Joint Programme works to make female condoms available and accessible for all by urging for more investments on large-scale female condom programmes, research and

Joint strategies are needed to make the female condom accessible, such as collaboration between South and North, cooperation between donors and NGO's, and active engagement with the private sector. Therefore the UAFC Joint Programme launched an International Platform. At the International Conference on AIDS and STI's in Africa (ICASA) that was held in Dakar, from 2nd until the 6th of December, the launch of this platform took place on December 4th.

The purpose of the Platform is to broaden and strengthen the support base for female condoms, to share knowledge and expertise on female condom programming among actors, and to solicit explicit commitment. It provides the opportunity to initiate joint advocacy activities on the female condom. The platform will consist of fifty participants, with influence in the field of HIV/AIDS and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, knowledge on female condoms, and/or previous experience valuable for future female condom programming. The membership should be diverse and geographically spread. All members must endorse the vision, must be willing to share all relevant know-how they have about the female condom, and must express the intention to coordinate their efforts with those of the other members.

Working principles of the platform will be:

- evidence-based advocacy;
- commitment to the female condom as a commodity, to the UAFC Joint Programme and to the international platform;
- willingness to share experiences, learn lessons, and take responsibilities.

The international platform will physically meet twice in the period 2008-2010. Further exchange of information will be realised through the website, knowledge base, e-alerts, web-discussions, telephone conferences etc.

## BURST TESTING OF FEMALE CONDOM



## RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

An important component of UAFC is Research and Development. The two objectives are to promote choice and reduce the cost for female condoms. At this moment, two manufacturers of female condoms have their product on the market: the Female Health Company (FHC) with Female Condom 1 and 2 and Medtech with the women's condom also named Reddy condom. Production and packing sites from the FHC in London and Kochi India and the Medtech plant in Chennai have been visited by UAFC staff. The quality control procedures have been discussed and will be used as reference for assisting pilot countries in setting up their own quality control laboratories for female condoms.

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